

Shadowing Reflection EPPSP Phase I

Date: Phase I – Monday, March 15th, 2021

Student Name: Caroline Rico

Name of person you shadowed: Dr. Gregory Baker

Position: Associate Principal

School/Corporation: South Elgin High School, School District U-46 (South Elgin, Illinois)

Summary:

During my EPPSP Phase I Spring semester, I had the opportunity to shadow Dr. Gregory Baker, an Associate Principal of South Elgin High School. Since I currently teach in a self-contained classroom (Kindergarten to 3rd Grade), this experience broadened my experience working with and observing an administrator working with high school teachers during a New Teacher Meeting.

During this school-wide New Teacher Meeting, I was able to see many strategies to engage school teachers and staff in creating a community and meeting culture of connectedness, transparency, and overall care. Prior to the meeting, my classmate (who I shadowed with), Dr. Baker, and myself were able to discuss some specific questions about why he became an administrator, what his process and journey was to get to his current position, as well as advice for us as future administrators. The exact questions asked and Dr. Baker's answers can be seen at the bottom of this write up.

A classmate, Melony Boyd, supported in making the connection with Dr. Baker and shadowed with me. Ms. Boyd and I were able to discuss and debrief throughout our experience – comparing and contrasting our breakout rooms, etc. It was a great blessing to have a connection with an administrator in the Chicago Area. Dr. Baker even mentioned that he previously had a position in a Proviso school, which is the high school that my K-8 school district feeds into! Our teaching and leading community reaches beyond what we may realize – how incredible.

Reflection:

My opportunity to observe Dr. Baker allowed me to see, in real time, the impact of culture and community being built initially and then carried on overtime as a leader. It also opened my eyes to recognize how important it is to do with *all* staff members, not just teachers. This is something that keeps coming back throughout our class readings, group discussions, and now my shadowing. In my current position, I am constantly working with non-certified staff such as aides, nurses, etc., so I know from experience how crucial these positions are to our schools. However, as an administrator, Dr. Baker developed a meeting time that was applicable

to both certified and non-certified staff, and was still wrapped around the core focus of supporting the success and well being of scholars *and* staff (NELP Standard 6.1). Dr. Baker had shared that his goal was to impact and reach students at a larger scale. This monthly meeting could have easily been “just another meeting” to review the new district protocols, discuss curriculum, or intervention strategies. However, Dr. Baker truly took advantage of this time with his staff and utilized this sacred time to connect and impact the many staff (nurses, special education teachers, history teachers, technology teachers, etc.) who reach many students each day. Through this connection, staff were able to think critically and in a solution-based way to discuss and consider things like ‘district protocols, discuss curriculum, or intervention strategies.’ The following is a rundown of some important meeting takeaways. I have highlighted the most important pieces as I observed and participated through my ‘administrator lens.’

- Know Your Staff – This New Teacher Meeting took place on a Monday afternoon – the last thing for a new teacher to do on a Monday after having students all day. Whether all his meetings are this way, or whether he recognized this, Dr. Baker’s energy and meeting metaphor of ‘laundry’ was light hearted, gave the staff opportunities to find common experiences, and integrated his message – Maslow *before* Bloom.
- People First – From something small like, indirectly thanking participants for sharing in a group by replying, “I appreciate that,” or acknowledging the challenges his staff are facing. The structure of the meeting and how Dr. Baker utilizes it is purposeful and gives staff space to collaborate in break out rooms, share within a whole group, and time to think on their own. Dr. Baker even embedded 5 minutes at the beginning of the meeting for greetings, posting in the chat, welcoming people verbally, and by playing music. These types of small leadership actions during a meeting demonstrate to your staff that they come first – that you are working to fill their buckets, even in the smallest ways!
- Engage/Connect and Follow Up – When in breakout rooms, Dr. Baker had assigned teams three tasks: Introduce yourself, come up with a team name, then work through and answer a google form of questions related to his previous discussion (he also reviewed the questions before sending staff to breakout rooms). He followed up by popping in to listen in on team discussions. When he popped into one room, the team did not have a name picked out, he simply said, “I can’t wait to see what you come up with.” Then about 5-10 minutes later checked back into the room to discuss with the team. This was a great read of engaging and

also knowing the staff – plus actually following up! It allowed space for the team to take initiative while still holding them accountable.

Overall, my experience observing Dr. Baker demonstrated a skillful leader engage, communicate, and reflect with new teachers and staff to create a community that focuses on the improvement and well-being of students and staff.

Q&A with Dr. Baker –

Why did you go into school administration? *Dr. Baker:* I wanted to impact larger systems, as a classroom teacher I was only able to impact a small part of the school community. Now, I am able to reach students at a larger scale and in more depth.

What's the most rewarding aspect of your job? *Dr. Baker:* The students! The students are the most important and rewarding part of my job. I enjoy helping students to be their best selves.

How did you select your current placement? *Dr. Baker:* After being a department chair for 3 years, previous assistant principal, this position seemed to provide the experience that I need to become a school principal. This position was also of interest to me, because of the various administrative responsibilities: supervising students, supervision of assessments, post secondary planning, and supporting in the dean's office with discipline. This position seemed to encompass much of the experience I wanted to gain.

How was the interview process? *Dr. Baker:* The interview process was in 3 parts, a screening interview, finalist interview, and cabinet interview.

What was the hardest part of your job? *Dr. Baker:* The hardest part as an associate principal is following the lead and vision of a principal, when you sometimes don't agree with their vision. As their assistant your job is to follow their lead and try to mitigate what you would agree or think is right while maintaining in the seat of serving your supervisor.

What advice would you give us as future administrators? *Dr. Baker:*

- ✓ Talk to people that do the work
- ✓ Start thinking about a position that allows administrative experience in something you enjoy or enjoyed about teaching
- ✓ Spend time learning more about discipline and support of students