Moving to the Other Side of the Desk

It was a spring day just a few years ago when my principal and superintendent called me in for a chat. They told me that they thought I would make a good administrator. Little did I know that this chat would change the course of my career in education. It was only a couple of weeks before this that I had told my principal that there was no way I would want to do his job. But now here I am, a teacher on administrative assignment, completing the coursework for my administrative license. Who would have known?

Taking the Plunge

Around the same time as my chat with the principal and superintendent, I asked my principal why he went into administration. I still did not see how all of the hours, meetings, stress, angry parents, discipline problems, and staff conflicts could be worth leaving my comfortable classroom. His response was that he was able to be involved in influencing the education for a whole building of students—not just one classroom. Now that was something to think about.

Would I be able to make a difference for hundreds of students in one year instead of just the ones who were in my classes? Would I have the wisdom and stamina to work through all of the problems and challenges that would come my way? Would I even know what I was doing?

I did not anticipate that I would ever move to the other side of the desk and become an administrator; I was just beginning to get comfortable with my job as a sixth-grade science teacher after spending a decade at home with my children. I eased back into education as a substitute teacher—a job that ended up being full-time for most of a school year. I then was hired as a classroom teacher and spent the next three years teaching with a wonderful sixth-grade team. At various times others had told me that I would make a good principal, but I did not believe them.

I guess it was a combination of things that made me take the plunge: the aforementioned chat, my husband’s encouragement to try something new, and the curiosity to see if I could really do it—and once there, if I wanted to do it. There were times as a classroom teacher when I thought about how I might do things differently if I were in charge. Now that I have transitioned to a position of administrative leadership, I have the opportunity to see if I can do things differently for the benefit of our students and staff.

It’s a Good Fit

I have spent the past 2.5 years juggling family, work, and graduate school responsibilities to earn my master’s degree and initial licensure. I will spend the next two years completing state requirements for full licensure.

What I am learning on the job is due in large part to my mentor. The principal began by including me as an observer while she handled the day-to-day discipline issues. I would sit in her office while she talked with students and parents. That experience gave me a glimpse into the many demands on a principal’s time. I believe that every teacher should be able to shadow a principal for a day or two. They would be amazed at what an administrator must deal with. With the exception of evaluating staff, my mentor includes me in all decisions that need to be made on a day-to-day basis.

Now that I have been involved as part of the administrative team for two years, I am beginning to see that it is a good fit for me. My transition to this side of the desk has been a journey in self-discovery.

It turns out that I am trying to make a difference for many students at one time. Even though there are many days that are mentally and emotionally draining, the challenge of the job draws me back each day. I sometimes even feel that I know what I am doing! The combination of my graduate work and my hands-on experience has prepared me to want to learn all I can about building leadership. I am exploring ways to elevate student achievement and build learning communities. I also am reading about middle school reform and deciding how to best implement changes that will work with our community, staff, and students. There are so many different things to consider when you are able to be involved in shaping a school culture.

I am finding that I am comfortable with the idea that I may spend the rest of my career working to meet the needs of students in a rapidly changing society. As school leaders, whether as administrators or teachers, we must be prepared to nurture our students and help them be prepared for the world they will face after they leave our buildings. In order to do that, we must find the right place for ourselves and believe that we will make a difference.

Joanne Brookover is an aspiring principal from Windham, Ohio. Her e-mail address is joannebrookover@mail.sparcc.org.

“I believe that every teacher should be able to shadow a principal for a day or two. They would be amazed at what an administrator must deal with.”
The President's Challenge starts with you.

Get your school moving!

From the traditional physical fitness test to our exciting new physical activity programs, the President's Challenge is all GROWN UP and has something to get students, teachers, and parents at every school moving. Find out how your school can be active, be healthy, and be part of the President's Challenge!

The President's Challenge
Physical Activity and Fitness Awards Program

501 N. Morton Street, Suite 203 - Bloomington, IN 47404
1-800-258-8146

www.presidentschallenge.org