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COVID-19 Best Practices & Innovations Brief: What Mississippi Teachers Need from Leadership During an Emergency Teaching Situation

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honest communication builds trust and buy-in; leaders must be willing to admit mistakes and describe adjustments throughout the response and recovery process (Bishop et al., 2015). A second component is frequency of contact. Leaders must communicate with stakeholders often to share information, promote engagement, and ensure the community knows what is expected of them (Field, 2020). A third component is consistency of message; a leader must make sense of the situation for stakeholders in consistent ways (Duhé, 2005).

Emotional Intelligence

Crises demand emotional intelligence from leaders, which is central because crisis situations often lead to increased stress and potential trauma for school communities, including leaders (Ingenito, 2004). Leaders are called on to maintain emotional control in the face of this stress because this can impair judgment and decision making (Boin et al, 2013). At the same time, emotional intelligence allows leaders to recognize community stress and provide a positive, reassuring stance to promote the ability of stakeholders to cope (Bishop et al., 2015). An outlook that translates problems into opportunities and promotes resilience consistently relates to better outcomes during a crisis (Bishop et al., 2015; Kennedy-Paine et al., 2013). Empathy is also an important factor, as leaders must understand the needs of students, families, and staff to direct appropriate supports (Zener, 2013).

Effective Supports K-12 Mississippi Teachers Identified

While the administration of any certain Mississippi district or school administration may not have changed during the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for effective leadership in the form of decision making, communication, and emotional intelligence methods became crucial to the wellbeing and educational needs of students, teachers, and families. In an open-ended question on the statewide survey, results showed that K-12 teachers tended to use the term *leadership* when they viewed their school officials as effective in their responses to pandemic situations. Conversely, teachers tended to use the term *administration* when they viewed those officials as having ineffective responses, indicating a true perceptual difference of effectiveness and focus. Mississippi K-12 teachers responded favorably to leaders who:

- provided sincere, face-to-face forms of communication instead of solely relying on emails and text messages,
- remained available and connected by being present and circulating among teachers and students,
- shared decisions made with staff and teachers prior to notifying families and community,
- implemented various communication avenues to help teachers feel less isolated,
- made decisions with teacher input particularly if those decisions impacted teaching and learning,
- provided communication to clearly express responsibilities and expectations for students and parents,
- demonstrated that they were human and also affected by the stress of the pandemic,
- handled the moment well but also planned for the future.

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