Adverse Situations

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Unfortunately, this is a situation that I may find myself in on more than one occasion working in the Baltimore City school district. Because many of the school buildings were constructed before 1990, many of their systems are breaking down during times when the systems are stressed the most. Although certain common steps are required in every emergency, some crises demand independent, split-second decisions determined by the challenges that arise at that moment (Rinaldi, 2017). In other words, there are some emergencies that require administrators to think on their feet. This is such an emergency. I interpret this to mean that while serving as an administrator for a school, no one can plan for everything. I also believe that not every plan can work for every emergency.

The main decisions to be made is whether or not to close my school building immediately while district vendors are contacted to begin work on the school’s air conditioning system. To inform my decision, I need an accurate temperature reading in each classroom. I also need any guidance the district offers about the closing of schools’ buildings. However, despite tremendous needs, many of our schools lack the funds to renovate or modernize their obsolete and crumbling facilities (Filardo, 2019). This means that, although I will need repairs within a day or two, I probably will not get them. Our district maintenance budget is stretched to the limit already. Emergency repairs are high on the list; however, we often cannot get them in time.

Our district lacks the basic resources necessary to make repairs in a timely manner. From this, we can infer that a school without a working air conditioning unit should be closed until it gets one. However, as mentioned in the text, our district lacks the basic resources we need to make repairs in a timely fashion. More likely than not, our building will need to remain closed for a minimum of three days to ensure the central air conditioning unit is fixed and works properly.

With regards to staffing, I will need them to identify any space within the building that is cool (cafeteria, gymnasium, locker rooms, etc.) and large enough to hold a significant number of students. I would then require that teachers begin moving with their students into these sections of the building for the continued safety and monitoring of these students. It’s important that the students are always monitored by staff while on the campus. This will ensure their safety and ensure that the building and school property are not damaged in any way.

Our district policy states that school buildings can be closed if the overall temperature outside is greater than 90 degrees and the humidity is over 95%. Further guidance from our board of directors includes the closing of buildings if classroom temperatures register greater than 93 degrees before 12 noon. Because we are a K-8 school and the temperatures did not rise before 12 noon, I would shy away from closing the building immediately. More than half of the school day has gone, and students can be corralled into certain sections of the building which are cooler than others.

Community stakeholders to be included are parents of students at the school and, of course, staff members in the building. I would utilize the Global Locator system to notify parents of the situation in the building and that school will remain in session for the rest of the day or until it is impossible for the continued safety of the students and staff to remain open. I would send several calls to parents to make them aware of the situation because I will need their support if I am to close the school for students. I would also use the Global Locator to make community members aware if the school is unable to open for the next day, so they can take the needed steps to ensure the safety of their children.

My solution is to move my students and staff members to large, cooler sections of the building for the remainder of the day. I would also introduce large fans and box fans into those locations to ensure the students and staff remain cool. I would welcome district vendors to come in and assess the building’s central air system. If the school needs to close, only then would we use the Global Locator to notify parents that the school will close and remain closed until the unit can be fixed or replaced.

Closing is a last resort. School is an integral part of the community and central to ensuring that students maintain a continuum of learning. This policy is also integral to maintaining the health and welfare of my staff. No one wants to work in conditions which are less than desirable. I believe this action is in-line with district policies.

References

Filardo, M., Vincent, J.M., & Sullivan, K. (2019). How crumbling school facilities perpetuate inequality. *Phi Delta Kappan, 100*(8), 27-31.

RINALDI, R. (2017). Preparing for the Worst. *American School & University*, *89*(6), 18–20.