

When leadership and policy making collide: The Valley View Middle School experience

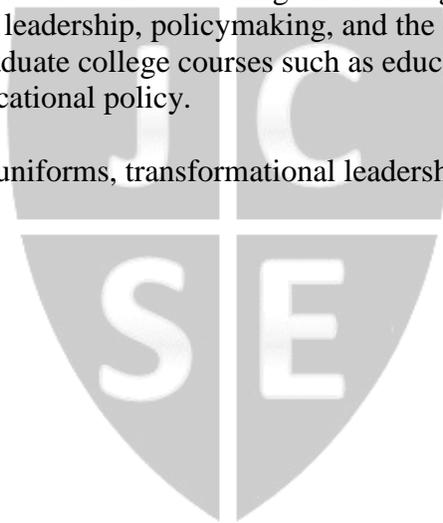
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ABSTRACT

This case demonstrates the multifaceted nature of the school uniform debate. It shows how conflicts and tensions between stakeholder groups develop and persist when policymakers and school leaders allow hidden agendas and communication barriers to subvert the decision- and policymaking processes. In particular, the case demonstrates what happens when a school improvement initiative is not adequately vetted and instead cultivates conflicts that distract teachers and students from their core tasks—teaching and learning. The case can be used to explore and understand school leadership, policymaking, and the change process, particularly when they are addressed in graduate college courses such as educational leadership, organizational theory, and educational policy.

Keywords: case study, school uniforms, transformational leadership, social justice leadership, policy implementation



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INTRODUCTION

The debate on school uniforms as an effective tool to influence change in school has continued unabated since the 1990s. Proponents and opponents marshal arguments to support their beliefs about the role uniforms should play in children's education. For the most part, teachers overwhelmingly support them, students overwhelmingly oppose them, and principals and parents are divided. The discourse has been vociferous, discordant, and at times misleading. Those who advocate uniforms speculate that they reduce socioeconomic distinctions among students, improve the learning environment by reducing discipline problems, help students focus on learning instead of what they wear, increase attendance, reduce absenteeism and truancy, increase school safety by discouraging gangs and decreasing victimization, help students develop self-esteem, and create a community of learners (Brunsma, 2002; Diko, 2012; Han, 2010; Jeynes, 2007; Vairo, Marcus, & Weiner, 2007). But perhaps most controversial is proponents' argument that school uniforms contribute to student achievement. Opponents, on the other hand, emphasize the lack of empirical evidence linking uniforms to student achievement and say that contrary claims are anecdotal and unreliable (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 1998; Brunsma, 2004, 2006; Yeung, 2009). They also invoke the Constitution and argue that mandatory school uniform policies violate First Amendment rights of free expression and individual liberty (Alexander & Alexander, 2012; Jeyes, 2007). Lastly, school uniform opponents argue that they are financially burdensome, especially for parents with several school-age children (Caruso, 1996; Kommer, 1999).

DISTRICT AND SCHOOL BACKGROUND

Valley View County is a rural district that is 292 square miles and has a population of 29,235, of which 73.3% are White, 21.6% are Black, 3.1% are Hispanic, and the remaining 2% are either Asian, American Indian, or multiracial. According to estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau (2009), the median household income is \$41,154, with 19.3% living below the poverty level. The county's economy is supported and sustained by retail, wholesale, and manufacturing businesses, but the school district and a state prison are among the largest employers. Of the state's 73 school districts, Valley View is small, with five elementary schools, one high school, and one middle school—Valley View Middle School (VVMS). Constructed in 1968, VVMS has 685 students, 68% of whom are White. Gender proportions are 52% male and 48% female. VVMS serves students enrolled in grades 6–8, of which 48% qualify for free and reduced lunch. There are three administrators (1 Black and 2 White) and 43 teachers (84% White) responsible for implementing the school's new uniform policy (see Appendix B). There are 601 parents who have one or more children attending VVMS.

CASE NARRATIVE

The conflict with the school uniform policy at VVMS arose when Frank Becker, principal of VVMS from September 2007 through January 2011, asked Superintendent David Grover to consider the idea of mandatory uniforms. Realizing many parents at VVMS were angry with the school's stagnant D grade and knowing that Becker had worked in another district with a successful mandatory uniform policy, Grover put the idea on the board's June 2010 agenda—the last board meeting before the new 2010/11 school year began. When asked by the

school board chairman, Larry Miles, whether the policy was properly vetted, Grover indicated he discussed it with Becker, who believed a majority of teachers would support it because of the increasing number of discipline problems. Neither man had discussed or given much thought to how the policy would affect parents and what their reactions would be. In fact, as it turned out, they were among the few district officials who had discussed the policy to any great extent. Becker had raised the idea in a faculty meeting, and after getting no opposition from VVMS's 43 teachers, he called Grover and discussed the idea with him.

At the June 2010 board meeting, Becker presented the rationale for the policy. Since he had a track record of turning around failing schools and was highly regarded by four of the five board members, they asked only perfunctory questions. As such, four of the five board members voted for the policy, and only one, Mary O'Hare, voted against it, as indicated in Table 1 (Appendix A). O'Hare said the idea seemed plausible but believed not enough research had been conducted to determine whether the policy would work at VVMS. She further proposed tabling the decision until the next board meeting, but the other four board members, with urging from Larry Miles, argued otherwise; that evening they voted to adopt the policy.

The next morning The Valley View Chronicle, the local newspaper, carried a headline that read: "Board Adopts Uniform Policy for Valley Middle." The article described the policy and the board's decision to make it a pilot program designed to reduce behavioral problems and improve the learning environment at VVMS. According to the article, the board members promised to evaluate the policy's effectiveness at the end of the 2010/11 school year. At that time they would decide whether to modify and restrict the policy to VVMS, adopt it at Valley View High and the five elementary schools, or discontinue it and return to the traditional dress code. The newspaper indicated that only one board member opposed the uniform policy because of insufficient research and that the policy would be implemented that September, the beginning of 2010/11 school year. Parents would be encouraged to purchase uniforms from Wal-Mart, Target, and other area retailers.

Since no notices were sent home about the proposed policy, and the Chronicle carried no articles that addressed its adoption, many parents and the Valley View community were unaware the policy was being considered. That summer and fall, surprised parents wrote letters to editor, called or visited Becker and Grover several times in their offices, and petitioned the school board members to reverse their decision. Their protest, however, went unheeded.

Opposition against the policy persisted during the spring semester of 2011. Led by Meredith Hansby, its outspoken president, the PTA was vocal and unyielding in their opposition to the policy. But at its June 2011 meeting, and based largely on evidence from VVMS's annual school survey that showed 95% of VVMS's teachers supported the policy while 86% of the parents opposed it, the board refused to acquiesce and instead voted to continue the policy at VVMS. Several board members expressed concern about the validity and reliability of the school survey because there were reports that many students had completed and returned the survey before their parents saw it. Instead of assuaging parents' anger with the policy, the survey results emboldened the small group of parents led by Meredith Hansby. They continued their opposition until the board at its March 2012 meeting directed Dr. O'Brien, the new superintendent, to conduct a study to determine whether the policy had impacted student attendance, discipline, and achievement. The study was to be completed in three months and in time for the board's June 2012 meeting, at which time the findings would be presented and a final decision made. Dr. O'Brien then asked two university professors to conduct the study and present their findings at the board's meeting in June.

At the June 2012 board meeting, the researchers presented evidence that student discipline, attendance, and achievement had improved but could not conclusively say whether the policy was the sole contributing factor. What they did show conclusively was that while parents overwhelmingly opposed it, teachers overwhelmingly supported it. At the end of their presentation, 12 parents spoke against the policy, while two parents and one teacher leader spoke for it. After the parents' presentation, O'Brien recommended the policy be permanently discontinued at VVMS and not be considered at any other Valley View school. The decision on whether to adopt or discontinue the policy was now the board's. Should members support O'Brien's recommendation and in so doing placate a small but vocal group of parents? Or should they vote to continue the policy and accept the research findings, especially the evidence that showed teachers' overwhelming support for it? If the board voted to continue the policy, what should Radburn, VVMS's principal, and Dr. O'Brien do to ensure its success? What should VVMS's teachers do if O'Brien and Radburn do not enforce the policy?

DIVERGENT VIEWS: SCHOOL OFFICIALS VERSUS TEACHERS

In spring 2012 Earl Radburn was serving his first year as valley view middle school's principal. He had served six years as assistant principal before Dr. Patricia O'Brien, Valley View County's new superintendent, fired Frank Becker and appointed him to the principalship. While he did not articulate it, Radburn had always believed VVMS prior dress code was satisfactory and saw no need to replace it with a mandatory uniform policy. And while he did not share Dr. O'Brien's views on many other school issues, he did support her indifference towards the policy adopted by the board in June of 2011.

Dr. O'Brien was elected in November 2010 with strong support from valley view community's conservative voting majority and assumed her duties in January 2011. Before deciding to run for the superintendency, she had taught 11th and 12th grade English for nine years at valley view high school. With persistent urging from friends and colleagues who respected and loved her, she decided to run for the superintendency shortly after earning her doctoral degree in educational leadership at one of the state's top universities. Her decision was partially influenced by her deep conviction that valley view district's poor academic performance was due partly to poor leadership by Superintendent David Grover. Many in the community also believed he had lost his enthusiasm for the job. O'Brien believed that she could convince teachers, parents, and the community to support her views about the district's problems evident in the D grades most schools in the district received during the past three years.

While campaigning after the uniform policy was adopted, she followed a middle path on the uniform issue. When asked about the school board's decision to implement the policy at VVMS, her response was noncommittal. She repeatedly characterized the issue as controversial, complicated, and in need of an objective, unbiased study. On November 4 of 2010 she won 65% of the votes cast.

Shortly after taking office in 2011, O'Brien fired Frank Becker, the 12-year veteran principal at VVMS. The rationale she articulated in public was the school's stagnant academic performance indicated by a D grade for four consecutive years. But many people in the district believed she fired him because of his roles as catalyst and chief proponent of the uniform policy, and equally because he held liberal views in a county with a conservative majority (In the 2008 presidential election McCain and Palin won the district with 84% of the votes.). Recall too that Becker, with the support of then superintendent David Grover, had approached the valley view

school board and sold them on the idea of the uniform policy. He had argued that uniforms would help improve the learning environment by reducing the number of dress code violations and would help focus students' attention more on academics than on who wore the latest designer clothes.

O'Brien visited Radburn on a cold January morning in 2013 to discuss two issues: VVMS's academic performance and the uniform policy. After exchanging pleasantries she told Radburn she would continue working with him to do whatever it takes to improve VVMS's academic performance, including ardently seeking state and federal money. She said she would also hire an additional discipline resource teacher and would support his idea for an afterschool tutorial program. What she was not willing to do, however, was to accept that a uniform policy could result in the changes advocated by Becker and Grover. She said the research she read showed no valid relationship between wearing uniforms and attendance, discipline, and achievement. Radburn saw this last statement as veiled support for his lukewarm enforcement of the policy. After all, hadn't she fired Becker because of his role in the policy's formulation and adoption? And, as everyone knew, wasn't she in discord with the four board members who supported Becker's proposal to initiate the policy? At the end of the 30-minute meeting, Radburn reflected on what O'Brien said about the policy, but felt conflicted because he knew that while O'Brien and the parents, albeit a small vocal group, were strident in their opposition to the policy, 93% of VVMS's teachers supported it. In fact, this would become a major topic at his Thursday staff meeting.

At that meeting Radburn summarized the discussion he had that week with a group of parents who vehemently opposed the policy. He said the parents had made it pretty clear that they were frustrated with the policy and wanted the district to do something about it. He also told teachers about Dr. O'Brien's visit and her desire to see student achievement improve at the school. At that moment, Dan Levy, a science teacher, raised his hand and said, "We support the uniform policy because it is beginning to work and would like it to continue indefinitely." His comment was immediately supported by Mary Turnbull who said, "It makes more sense to keep uniforms because they make teaching a lot easier for us, which in turn will help to move the school from a D to a B or A status." At that point Radburn asked for a show of hands on how many wanted to discuss their position on the new uniform policy before addressing other issues. Thirty-five of the forty-three teachers present raised their hands! As teachers slowly lowered their hands Radburn said, "While the uniform policy may be a good idea in theory, I don't believe students' learning will improve by relying on it to significantly increase the school's grade. What is needed instead is sustained attention to quality instruction, an afterschool tutorial program, and more parent involvement. Now I know that several of you have strong feelings about the policy, and I believe it may help with some students, but I don't believe we should regard it as a panacea."

TEACHING NOTES

This case demonstrates the multifaceted nature of the school uniform debate, showing how conflicts and tensions between stakeholder groups and individuals develop and persist when policymakers and school leaders allow hidden agendas and communication barriers to subvert the decision- and policymaking processes. Particularly, it demonstrates what happens when a school improvement initiative is not properly vetted and as a result instigates conflicts that distract teachers and students from their core tasks—teaching and learning. College courses that

examine educational leadership, organizational theory, and educational policy can use this case to explore transformational leadership, social justice leadership, and the policy implementation process. Principals and other school practitioners could use it to reflect on the multifaceted nature of the school uniform debate as well as the intricacies and reality of implementing and enforcing a school uniform policy.

Different scholars (Brunsma, 2004; Caruso, 1996; Diko, 2012; Han, 2010, & Yeung, 2009) have argued and demonstrated that the discourse on school uniforms is volatile and divisive. Metaphorically, the argument is an iceberg. On the surface it seems simple and innocuous, but the reality below is vastly different. The theoretical, policy, and practical dynamics are broad and deep with numerous implications for stakeholders. Among the theories and frameworks with which education scholars, practitioners, and graduate students can examine the discourse on mandatory school uniform policies, three are highly relevant to this case—transformational leadership (Antonakis, 2012; Bass & Riggo, 2006; Burns, 1978; Leithwood, et al., 2005), social justice leadership (Furman, 2012; Houson, P. D., & Blankstein, 2012; Marshall & Olivo, 2010; Perreault, G., & Zellner, 2012; Theoharis, 2007; Zachrisson & Johansson, 2010), and policy implementation (Anderson, 2010; Fowler, 2009, 2013; Louis & Miles, 1990; Honig, 2006b; Mitchell, et al., 2011; O’Toole, 2000). The following synopses and lists of questions could be used to discuss implications for research, theory building, policy formulation, and leadership practices. Professors and students may wish to visit the sources in the reference to review or study those they find interesting or relevant to their area of study.

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Several theories, including transformational leadership (TL), explain the scope, breadth, and dynamics of leadership (Mann, 2013; Northouse, 2013). Avolio, Walumbwra, and Weber (2009) refer to TL as “new-genre leadership,” which “emphasize[s] symbolic leader behavior; visionary and inspirational messages; emotional feelings; ideological and moral values; individualized attention; and intellectual stimulation” (p. 428). In addition to individualized attention and inspirational messages, TL theory holds, according to Bass (1997), that leaders are most effective when they stimulate followers’ intellect or “question old assumptions, traditions, and beliefs, stimulate in others new perspectives and ways of doing things,” practice idealized influence or “display conviction, emphasize trust, take stands on difficult issues, present their most important values, and emphasize the importance of purpose, commitment, and the ethical consequences of decisions” (p. 133).

TL theory posits that when leaders’ behavior and actions are ethical and moral, their plans, decisions, and relational behavior in turn inspire and motivate followers to behave and act in ways that transform their professional and personal lives. Transformed lives ostentably result in transformed organizational cultures that, help create learning organizations (Senge, 1990) and increase the likelihood of sense-making (Spillane, 2002) and double loop learning (i.e., reevaluating and reframing goals, values, and beliefs based on experience, Argyris, 1991). In addition, according to Leithwood and Associates (2005), the moral dimension of TL is further underscored when it pursues three goals: “(a) helping staff members maintain a collaborative, professional school culture, (b) fostering teacher development, and (c) helping teachers solve problems together more effectively” (p. 9–10). Educational leaders who pursue these goals advocate and practice instructional leadership that reflects key tenets of TL, and, in so doing, significantly influence and facilitate effective instruction and deep learning.

The VVMS case is about the ineffective adoption and implementation of a uniform policy. But it is also about ineffectual leadership behavior exhibited by members of the district school board, the superintendent, and VVMS's principal. TL, with its focus on ethics, morality, and new-genre leadership dispositions and behaviors, is not evident in how Valley View School Board adopted the policy and how the superintendent and principal implemented it. The case could be analyzed and discussed using the both the principles and practices of new genre-leadership and TL. Questions that could facilitate reflections and discussion on the VVMS case include the following:

1. To what extent was the leadership behavior exhibited by Superintendent O'Brien, Frank Becker, and Earl Radburn consistent or inconsistent with principles and practices of new genre-leadership?
2. How could the Board, O'Brien, and Radburn use idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration to raise their level of ethical aspiration and the ethical aspiration of teachers and parents at VVMS?
3. What hidden agendas in this case prevented O'Brien and Radburn from exhibiting behavior consistent with transformational leadership? How did their hidden agendas undermine their chances for exhibiting the moral and ethical tenets of TL?
4. In what ways did O'Brien and Radburn fall short of achieving the three TL goals identified by Leithwood and his associates?

SOCIAL JUSTICE LEADERSHIP

Social injustice impedes and thwarts the letter and spirit of democracy (Wood, 2005) and the Constitution (Fabre, 2000; Young, 2006), both of which attempt to define and articulate the tenets and values of a just society. Unjust policies subvert and undermine societal norms and values, especially equality, equity, and justice. Accordingly, social justice leadership (SJL) is concerned with influencing individuals and groups to be mindful about, articulate, and correct social inequalities in organizations, especially schools (Brown, 2006; Jean-Marie, et al., 2009; Marshall & Oliva, 2005; Riehl, 2000; Theoharis, 2007). Leaders committed to social justice are change agents who mitigate and eliminate unjust policies as well as discourage and modify the behavior of individuals whose ignorance or uncaring attitudes and behaviors facilitate and perpetuate a policy's deleterious effects. Marshall and Oliva (2010) say the following about SJL:

[Social justice leadership] reconnects with emotional and idealistic stances. It supports leaders' impulses to transgress, to throw aside the traditional bureaucratic rationality and the limiting conceptualizations of leadership. For instance, social justice leaders are outraged with funding formulas that leave rural districts floundering. Social justice leadership supports their search in their work lives for joy and a sense of community and the pursuit of democratic ideals when their relationship-building activities create bridges...for marginalized families and their children. It supports educational leaders seeking strategies for developing and implementing antiracist curricula, for preventing homophobic and sexist bullying, for intervening when tensions over religion or immigrant status heat up. It supports their search for ways to critique leadership styles and schooling structures that prevent women and minority participation... In this way,

social justice leaders build their capacities to walk the talk in order to move beyond that which is just philosophical, just rhetoric, and just short-sighted, quick-fix policy. (p. 10)

Similarly, the role of leaders who are committed to social justice obligates and (a) makes them responsible for ensuring that all individual and groups participate equally in the educational process, (b) commits them to fair and equitable distribution of resources, (c) challenges them to ensure the physical and psychological safety of every individual in their care, and (d) binds them to the social justice tenet that everyone under their charge is entitled to experience self-determination, interdependence, and “a sense of their own agency” (Bell, 2013). Social justice leaders in schools know that fairness, equity, and high regard for others are norms and values that undergird and help define their role as well as partially define a school’s vision, mission, and functions. School leaders who are committed to socially just policies and practices positively impact schools where the academic achievement gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged students are wide and seem intractable, schools where disadvantaged students fall further and further behind peers whose socioeconomic background augment and enrich their intellectual capital, a valued capacity that is prized, praised, and nurtured in academic settings. Pounder et al (2002) eloquently captured the rationale for the urgency for transformative social justice leadership, especially in schools where uniform policies have polarized and factionalized administrators and teachers, when they wrote:

Literally millions of students, every year, are not served well by our schools. Schools across our nation in districts large and small with different resources and different student populations are failing to educate, failing to nurture, failing to develop, failing to protect, and failing to include all students... [T]he students who are affected most are typically from marginalized groups (e.g., students of color, students with disabilities, low-income students, girls, and gay/lesbian students). p. 271

Policymakers and educational leaders are trying to address these failures through national and state reform initiatives brought about by No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (see the Race to the Top provision), and most recently the national Common Core Standards Initiative (<http://www.corestandards.org/>). But these regulations will not suffice unless educational leaders develop the cultural competency and proficiency articulated by Carmella, Ott, and Robles (2013). The authors developed a cultural proficiency leadership rubric that interrelates five essential elements of cultural proficiency—assessing culture, valuing diversity, managing the dynamics of difference, adapting to diversity, and institutionalizing cultural knowledge—with six phases of cultural proficiency. The six phases comprise a continuum consisting of cultural destructiveness, cultural incapacity, cultural blindness, cultural precompetence, cultural competence, and cultural proficiency, which is futuristic in nature. Since the roles of manager and leader are interrelated and as the authors claimed, “It is at cultural competence a standard is deemed ‘met’ and is measurable” (p. 94), school leaders must also become managers who execute, administer, and supervise the daily affairs of their schools in a manner that welcomes and respects differences and concomitantly sustains a culture of social justice. In other words, when leaders are culturally competent and manage the dynamics of difference, they do the following:

Encourage diverse opinions and perspectives and facilitate conversations across cultures and viewpoints in productive, noncontentious and nonpolarizing ways. They engage in ongoing dialogue between and among groups to help the organization develop a customer-service orientation and challenge the status quo by promoting organizational flexibility to meet diverse customer needs. [They also] embrace risk, make decisions, and take action, which may not be popular with dominant cultures. They anticipate criticism; persist in the face of criticism, inertia, barriers, or reversals; and accept personal and professional consequences for their advocacy for underserved students and stakeholders. (Carmella, et al., pp. 101-102)

Culturally competent leaders possess and use knowledge, skills, and dispositions consistent with the duties, responsibilities, and goals of SJL. As a relatively new organizational role, SJL has taken on added importance because of the disconnection between well-intentioned, well-articulated goals and policies and their execution and implementation (Jean-Marie, et. al., 2009; McKenzie et al., 2007). Clearly, at VVMS the controversy over the uniform policy presented many opportunities for both O'Brien and Radburn to demonstrate cultural competence and SJL. We believe the following questions could trigger reflection on their behavior as culturally competent and social just leaders:

1. In what ways did O'Brien and Radburn's behavior reflect cultural competency? Cultural incompetency?
2. Where on the cultural proficiency continuum would you place them? Why?
3. In what ways did they practice SJL?
4. How could they have exhibited the SJL behaviors and dispositions articulated by Marshall and Oliva?
5. Specifically, how should they have dealt with the small but vocal group of middle class parents who attempted to obstruct the policy and who disregarded the professional judgment of VVMS's teachers?
6. How could O'Brien and Radburn have used the uniform policy to "create a sense of community" and promote a culture of social justice at VVMS?
7. How did their opposition to the policy contradict the goals and ideals of cultural competency and social justice?

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Public policy focuses on the definition and construction of problems and issues, why and how policy actors attach meaning and importance to them, the ways "policy choices arise and are articulated, [and] the ways policy entrepreneurs initiate and advocate specific policy options, seek political support for their intended goals, and challenge the presuppositions of competing interest groups" (Mitchell, 2011, p. 8). But, as Harold Lasswell (1936) aptly put it in his seminal work, on a simple and practical level, policy is "who gets what, when, how." However, as the concept is derived from various disciplines and fields of study (e.g., political science, public administration, sociology, history, education, etc.), there are many multifaceted definitions of policy. Fowler (2013) defines policy as "the dynamic and value-laden process through which a political system handles a public problem. It includes a government's expressed intentions and officials enactments, as well as its consistent patterns of activity and inactivity" (p. 5). Herman (1984), on the other hand, views policy as "courses of purposive actions...directed towards the

accomplishment of some intended goals.” In the context of education, Firestone (1989) posits that “policy is a chain of decisions stretching from the statehouse to the classroom and is a byproduct of [many] games and relationships; no one is responsible for the whole” (p. 23).

Public policy describes, mandates, and guides decisions and behaviors with the expressed purpose of achieving predetermined goals. Public policies also “set direction, reflect existing cultures (or establish new ones), and allocate resources and values (Reagan, 2012, p. xvii). Legislators, boards, city councils, and courts usually promulgate and ultimately codify public policies into statutes, laws, rules, and regulations. In reality a public policy—be it on federal, state, or local level—is a manifestation of decisions and expressions of substantive and enduring values held by policymakers and stakeholders. For example, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 and the reauthorization of ESEA that resulted in NCLB are examples of federal policies that expressed values of equity and equality through education. An example of a state policy is Florida’s A++ Plan, which in 1999 through a new grading scheme established a system of accountability for Florida’s districts and schools. Two local policy examples include, first, a local school board’s decision to reduce or eliminate resources for educational programs that were not improving student performance and, second, a school’s decision to initiate a uniform policy officials perceived would increase student outcomes. The first example expresses and promotes the values of economic efficiency and frugality, and depending on who is asked, the second either expresses and promotes the values of school safety and socioeconomic parity or disregards and undermines the value of individual liberty. In the VVMS case the board could require students to wear uniforms that could ostensibly help facilitate student academic performance. But whatever types of policy are made—be they curriculum, resources, or distribution (Reagan, 2013)—it can be argued that their tacit, if not espoused, aim is to adhere to principles and values of rationality, efficiency, and equity.

Another key aspect of public policy is the process that involves identifying policy actors, estimating their positions on an issue, assessing their power, and finally assessing the priorities of each actor, remembering that given limited resources, actors may decide not to deploy their resources, even if they have a strong position (Fowler, 2013). As such, public policy is also about power and the stakeholders and actors who have it, use it, and at times abuse it. Conversely, policy is about stakeholders and actors who do not have power but wish to acquire it, use it, and perhaps abuse it. Ultimately policy is about power, influence, and the processes by which resources are allocated; interests are articulated, defended, protected, and promoted; and the way their execution and implementation affect change—rapidly, slowly, or not at all. According to Mitchell (2011), power is also about processes, or as he puts it, “the often suppressing processes of organizational and institutional change, and the processes by which political power and influence are created, allocated, and exercised” (p. 1).

After a policy is formulated and adopted, it must then be executed and implemented. Simply put, the policy must be put into action. Policy implementation is defined simply as the process by which a policy is transformed and executed to achieve its intended goals and purposes. The study of policy implementation is active and flourishes (Honig, 2006b; O’Tool, 2000), and over the years many scholars have underscored the importance of implementing policy effectively (Bardach, 2006; Fowler, 2013; McLaughlin, 1995; Peters, 2012). Cooper et al. (2004), for example, asserted that “policies, like laws, are neither self-explanatory nor self-executing. Policies, no matter how well designed, must be implemented successfully to achieve the intended effects” (p. 84). This assertion holds true for all types of education policies—curricular, methodological, resource-related, and distributional.

Policy implementation, a multifaceted process, can be complicated by how a policy was initially formulated and adopted. Different scholars have proposed and discussed ways of understanding the policy implementation process through different conceptual lenses. Some theorists see it as a top-down process where policymakers develop the policy and then pass it down to a variety of actors and stakeholders to implement (Matland, 1995; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984). Others see it as a bottom-up process where the challenges, issues, needs, and concerns of stakeholders are articulated and eventually put before policymakers to deliberate and debate during legislative hearings and committee meetings. Eventually a majority of policymakers are influenced into formulating and adopting a policy that addresses stakeholders' needs and concerns (Lipsky, 1980). Honig has suggested that while policy implementation could be regarded as a top-down or bottom-up process, its dynamics could be better understood if the "interrelated influences" of policy, people, and places are carefully examined and understood (Honig, 2006a).

In an attempt to reconcile policy implementation conceptualized as a top-down or bottom-up process, Matland (1995) proposed four policy implementation paradigms that are used to explain and clarify conflicts and ambiguity inherent in the policy implementation process. The paradigms are low conflict-low ambiguity (administrative implementation), high conflict-low ambiguity (political implementation), high conflict-high ambiguity (symbolic implementation), and low conflict-high ambiguity (experimental implementation). Other scholars have conceptualized policy implementation as a dynamic process in which success is contingent upon various interrelated factors. For example, Louis and Miles (1990) suggested that problems with policy implementation can be divided into three categories: program related (e.g., lack of planning and contradictory goals), people related (e.g., resistance and negative attitudes), and setting related (outside pressures and insufficient resources). Each category focuses on issues, conflicts, and ambiguities that arise during the implementation process. Furthermore, Fowler (2009) explicated some common problems of implementation and asserted that the "ultimate success of every implementation depends on how well its leaders can identify and cope with the problems of each" (p. 298). In turn, Ingram and Schneider (1990, as cited in Matland, 1995), characterized successful policy implementation as one of the following: "agencies comply with the directives of the statutes; agencies are held accountable for reaching specific indicators of success; goals of the statute are achieved; local goals are achieved, or there is improvement in the political climate around the program" (p. 154).

Other researchers and policymakers have identified other essential conditions that contribute to successful policy implementation (Braun et al., 2011; Cranston & Kimber, 2012; Matland, 1995; Mischen & Jackson, 2008). For example, Cooper et al. (2004) highlighted the importance of value consensus among all key stakeholders—"those who craft the policy and those responsible for implementing it" (p. 91). Similarly, Fowler (2009) posited that "successful implementation depends on developing and maintaining the will and the capacity of the intermediaries—individuals and agencies who must cooperate in order to implement the policy" (p. 271). She has suggested that at the site level, the intermediaries—principals and teachers responsible for implementing the policy—should possess requisite knowledge, skills, and experience that facilitate policy implementation, irrespective of conflicts and ambiguities inherent in the policies.

The intersection and interrelatedness of policy, people, and places can be viewed as the crucible of policy implementation because it is where stakeholders make sense of the implicit and explicit intents of policies and where relational behavior creates the dynamics and milieu

within which stakeholders make critical decisions about the relevance and applicability of the policy to their personal and professional lives, the culture of their schools, and the lives and well-being of their students. It is also where stakeholders' dispositions, attitudes, belief systems, and values influence their individual and collective decisions to accept and implement a policy in whole, modify and implement it in part, or sabotage and eventually reject it. More recently, Coburn (2001), Spillane (2004, 2002) and other researchers (Anagnostopoulos & Rutledge, 2007; Burch, 2007; Coburn, 2005; Coburn & Talbert, 2006; Ingle, Rutledge, & Bishop, 2010; Guthrie, 2010) have explored policy in this context, focusing on the process people use to make their experiences meaningful. These scholars have documented and highlighted how school actors—principals and teachers, alike—develop their understanding of how policy influences “what they do and do not do in implementing policy” in schools and classrooms (Spillane et. al, 2002, p. 733). As Evans (2007) puts it, the importance of sense-making, especially as it relates to educational leaders, “lies in the assumption that meanings they make of educational issues and situations determine how they will define and respond to them via their actions and decisions” (p. 160).

Regardless of their classification—social, educational, or governmental—policies are seldom, if ever, implemented as policymakers intend. Some are implemented partially and incorrectly and consequently miss their articulated and tacit goals of rationality, efficiency, and equity. In fact, Fowler (2009) reminds us that “many official policies are never implemented at all,” and that “with other stages of the policy process, school leaders must think about what they are doing and plan carefully” (p. 270). In the context of this case study, the following questions could be used as prompts for reflection and discussion:

1. Discuss the value conflicts that some educators might feel when implementing a school uniform policy. What were some of the value conflicts evidenced during implementation of the VVMS uniform policy?
2. Reflect on the various phases of the VVMS uniform policy process, specifically the policy formulation, adoption, and implementation phases of the process. What errors were evidenced during each phase?
3. Assess the implementation of the school uniform policy at VVMS. What criteria would you use and why? What is your assessment of the unsuccessful implementation process used at VVMS?
4. As the superintendent, how would you strategically create conditions or manage “policy, people, and places” for successful policy implementation?
5. Assume that you were going to lead the implementation of a uniform policy for the entire district. Identify the resources that you would need and develop a plan for gathering them.
6. Explore the political, organizational, and socio-economic issues that might arise during the implementation of the Valley View uniform policy (see Appendix B). How might these factors enhance or impede policy implementation?
7. How might you prepare for resistance to policy implementation? Identify specific ways to head off or minimize resistance.

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APPENDIX A

Table 1

Characters and their position on the uniform policy

Name	Role	Position on the Policy
Frank Becker	VVMS Principal 05-09	For
David Grover	Superintendent 00-09	For
Larry Miles	Board Chairman	For
Mary O'Hare	Board Member	Against
Meredith Hansby	PTA President	Against
Dr. Patricia O'Brian	Superintendent 09-present	Against
Earl Radburn	VVMS Principal 09-present	Against
Dan Levy	VVMS Science Teacher	For
Mary Turnbull	VVMS English Teacher	For

APPENDIX B

Valley View Middle School Uniform Policy

The style and parts of the uniform will be determined by the Valley View County School Board and listed in the Code of Student Conduct. All students shall conform to the adopted standard. The following items are approved for wear under this program:

1. Students will wear a polo type (shirt with a collar) that meets the following criteria:
 - *Without logos (Logos for school sponsored teams or activities may be worn only with the approval of the principal).
 - *Having a maximum of four buttons with the top button at or above the collarbone. Only the top button of shirts may be unfastened.
 - *All solid colors EXCEPT white will be allowed. No prints, stripes, multi-colors or layers allowed.
 - *Fit should not be too baggy or too tight and should not ride up above the pant waistline nor extend below the top of the thigh.
2. Slacks, shorts, skirts, or capris are allowed. Colors will be kaki, black, navy or gray
 - *Only cotton type fabric, NO denim.
 - *Traditional four pockets or less, NO cargo pockets. *Hemmed to the top of the knee or below
 - Fit should not be too baggy or too tight and shall be secured at the waist either by fit or belt, such that it does not sag below the waist especially during movement.
3. All other rules under the Code of Student Conduct regarding the appropriate wear of clothing for school will still apply under this program. Shirts, pants, slacks, shorts, or skirts will be sized appropriate to the size of the individual.

This program may be amended during the school year to allow the program to be enforced fairly and equitably. Parents will be notified of changes by newsletter, report card, progress report, email, district/school website, marquee and/or the media prior to changes taking place.

NOTE:

- I. Outerwear- jackets/sweaters/coats- will not be used to cover inappropriate clothing.
2. Exceptions to the dress code during the instructional day need to be administratively approved for school-sponsored activities.
3. Students will dress appropriately at all school related activities that occur after the instructional school day.
4. Appropriate dress for yearbook pictures and graduation based upon tradition are as follows:
 - a. Senior portraits: drapes for females, tuxedos for males, provided by photographer
 - b. Graduation: Every senior will wear traditional gowns and mortarboards; red for females, gray for males. Students will purchase gowns from the school vendor.
 - c. Exceptions to the dress code must be because of an extended handicapping condition, documented by a physician, and presented to the school administration.

Specialized Class Attire

- I. Appropriate sun protection may be used during outdoor class activities. (This does not include class change)
2. Upon approval of the building administrator appropriate safety attire may be designated for use within the class area only.
3. Attire for physical education classes must meet these requirements: modest (walking) shorts and t-shirt or approved PE uniform. Shorts must be worn as designed; the waistband is not to be rolled. Tennis shoes are required.