**Chapter 12: Becoming Policy Advocates in the Education Sector**

***Policy Advocacy Learning Challenges and Exercises***

***Excerpted from the book***

**POLICY ADVOCACY LEARNING CHALLENGE 12.1**

**Connecting Micro, Mezzo, and Macro Policy Advocacy to Protect a Student’s Ethical Rights**

Alison came from a loving household with parents who supported her. As a result of the trust she developed with them, she came out as a lesbian and introduced them to her girlfriend Caroline. Both seniors in high school, the two girls were excited to attend the upcoming homecoming ball, and they naturally wanted to go together. Although Alison’s parents were proud that their daughter had found happiness and was brave enough to share it with the world, they worried about the fallout she might experience in her school. Despite her parents’ warnings, Alison decided to list Caroline as her date when she RSVP’d for the event.

A week later, the student homecoming coordinator, a classmate of Alison and Caroline’s, approached the girls in the cafeteria. She proclaimed that she did not agree with their “chosen lifestyle” and that students were allowed only to bring dates of the other sex. The pair refused to comply and said they would not change their plans to arrive to ball together. The next day, Alison and Caroline wore matching gay pride T-shirts to school. After the homecoming coordinator noticed this act of defiance, she informed the school’s principal about the girls' intentions. He immediately called Alison and Caroline into his office. Not only were they prohibited from going together to prom, but they were also suspended from school for violating the dress code. During periods of suspension, students are not allowed to participate in any school-sponsored events or activities. As a result, Alison and Caroline missed their homecoming ball.

**Learning Exercise**

1. How could a case advocate have assisted with Alison and Caroline’s situation?
2. What are some of the challenges an advocate might encounter in addressing this controversial issue?
3. What were some of the federal policies the school administration neglected to follow?
4. How can a school social worker initiate policy advocacy at the district level, or beyond?

**POLICY ADVOCACY LEARNING CHALLENGE 12.2**

**Connecting Micro, Mezzo, and Macro Policy Advocacy to Promote Quality Education**

Ms. Lopez is a school social worker working with a 10th-grade student named John. His mother comes to school asking for help in transferring her son to a new charter school in the neighborhood. John’s mother expresses that she is concerned that John is falling through the cracks and not getting the attention he needs in school in order to perform at grade level. John is very shy and tends to disappear in a big class size. John has had minor behavior problems and is a C-average student. The mother expresses that when they lived in another district with a smaller class size, his grades were better. The mother is scared that John is starting to regress and isolate. He is now at risk of failing.

The mother has attempted to enroll her son at the new charter school and has been told that her son does not meet the qualifications for acceptance. She is confused because it was said that there are still openings at the school and they are accepting new students. The school social worker agreed to contact the charter school and follow up. Ms. Lopez was informed of the same information. John does not meet the grade requirement and his behavior and attendance history do not make him a good candi­date. The school social worker tried to advocate for the student, but to no avail; she was concerned about this, so she did a little bit of a research. She found that the charter school has the right to set the requirement and criteria for acceptance in her school district and state. The California Department of Education (2011) states that in general, charter schools are not mandated to follow most district, state, or federal guidelines. Further research showed that this particular charter school has a reputation for targeting and accepting students who are high performers and college bound. In fact, there was a transfer of the school’s high-performing students to the charter school when it first opened recently. Ms. Lopez informs the mother of this. The mother is outraged, but she has no choice but to keep John at the same school. The mother has limited income and cannot afford to send John to a school outside the neighborhood.

**Learning Exercise**

1. What could the school do to prevent losing their high-performing students to a charter school?
2. How could John’s mother advocate for him? How can Ms. Lopez and the school help advocate for John?
3. What impact would the student/family’s ethnicity have on the advocacy efforts?
4. Is it legal for the charter school to exclude certain students from their school?
5. What can local schools and districts do to prevent losing their high-performing stu­dents to charter schools from a policy perspective? How can they increase inclusion?
6. What is the responsibility of the state/federal government in this process? How can it be more equitable?

**POLICY ADVOCACY LEARNING CHALLENGE 12.3**

**Connecting Micro, Mezzo, and Macro Policy Advocacy to Provide Culturally Sensitive Education and Services**

Linda was a social worker assigned to a public high school in the heart of Chinatown. This was no ordinary academic institution; rather, it was designed as a transfer program for non–native English speakers who were either recent immigrants or had failed out of traditional schools. Because of its location, the majority of students were of Chinese descent. Many felt a special connection to Linda, as she was the only social worker who shared their nationality. When parents were not showing up to parent–teacher conferences, Linda prodded the school to schedule these meetings later in the evening in order to accommodate the busy schedules of mostly restaurant workers. When a teacher reported that a student had disrespected him in class, Linda explained that the student’s eva­sion of eye contact was actually a sign of respect in China. When a student brought up her interest in nursing, Linda linked her with a volunteer candy-striping program at a nearby hospital and paired her with a supervising mentor at the facility.

Lately, Linda has been feeling overworked and underappreciated. She is fre­quently called upon to serve as a translator during meetings, although her fluency is in Mandarin, not Cantonese and other dialects. Her office is always packed with students who need her help with various school-related issues, such as scheduling, classroom conflict, and college preparation. Furthermore, students have turned to her for counsel in out-of-school matters, such as disagreements with parents, relationship advice, and career aspirations. When Linda told her supervisor about her overwhelming caseload, her boss responded sympatheti­cally but reminded her that “everyone is in the same boat.” Linda loves her stu­dents, but she is not sure whether she is physically and mentally able to keep up with all her duties.

**Learning Exercise**

1. How is Linda an example of an effective case advocate? Is there anything she should be doing differently to manage her caseload?
2. What are some ways that Linda can engage in policy advocacy to improve the situation at her school?

**POLICY ADVOCACY LEARNING CHALLENGE 12.4**

**Connecting Micro, Mezzo, and Macro Policy Advocacy to Promote Prevention**

Averting Truancy

A school social worker (Mr. Jones) is working with a ninth-grade student (David) who is truant and at risk of failing. He’s had multiple absences since the seventh grade but has not been flagged until now. He is failing multiple classes and now on the list to be processed for the Student Attendance Review Board (SARB). As defined by the California Department of Education (2012), SARB comprises members from different organizations providing ser­vices to families and youths. It focuses on helping truant students by determining the cause of the truancy and addressing needs through available school and community resources.

A pre-SARB meeting is held to discuss the student, his history, and possible sup­ports. Mr. Jones attends the meeting to support David and his father. The meeting reveals that David’s problems started in fifth grade when his mother died. His grades and his attendance started deteriorating. He started complaining of being sick and asked to stay home. The paternal grandmother watched David and his two younger siblings while the father worked two jobs to make ends meet. He attended a few parent–teacher meetings but missed most of them. The grandmother was not able to attend either because of her age and some mobility issues. David had to stay home from school to help when his grandmother was sick. Both the father and the grandmother have shared some of the information with a teacher in the past. The grandmother’s health has dete­riorated over the past two years and David has had to stay home more to help out. The family has very limited resources and is trying to cope with the situation.

The SARB team was not aware of this information. Mr. Jones had been asked to meet with the family for a thorough assessment and to coordinate with the team for possible resources.

**Learning Exercise**

1. Are teachers trained on how to respond to community and family issues students bring into the classroom? What support could the school offer the family? What can administration do to respond early to such issues?
2. Who could the school partner with to support David’s family?
3. What impact does the student/family’s ethnicity, race, SES, and so forth have on identifying a student in need of services? How about access to resources?
4. What policy changes can the local school or the district engage in for early identification of student support service needs?

**POLICY ADVOCACY LEARNING CHALLENGE 12.5**

**Connecting Micro, Mezzo, and Macro Policy Advocacy to Promote Affordable and Accessible Education**

Foster Children and Schools

Joe is a 14-year-old foster child who has been moved to a different foster home four times in the last year. The last two moves were emergency moves and the new foster parent does not have his school records. The foster mother tried to enroll him in a Southern California school but was told he could not be enrolled because the school records were missing. She was told to come back when she had all his records. She went home and tried to ask Joe about his school history. Joe remembered the last two schools but was unclear about the others. Joe lived in different cities and even went to a school in another state at one point. The foster mother finally contacted child services and asked for his records. The social worker told her that she was still gathering his records but that he should be allowed to enroll because of the AB 490 law. The foster mother did not know what this was, and so the social worker met both Joe and the foster mother at the school to assist with enrollment. The school registrar was not aware of this law either and had to check with the principal and the district office to proceed. Joe was finally enrolled after a week, even though the records were still not available.

**Learning Exercise**

1. Should Joe have been enrolled in school the first time he went?
2. What should administration do to improve knowledge regarding existing and new policies?
3. What can child protective services agencies and schools do to respond better to foster children’s needs?
4. What responsibility did the foster mother have in advocating for Joe?
5. What is the responsibility of school staff regarding knowing and understanding school policy? How are they made accountable?

**POLICY ADVOCACY LEARNING CHALLENGE 12.6**

**Connecting Micro, Mezzo, and Macro Policy Advocacy to Promote Care for Students’ Mental Distress**

Daryl is a ninth-grader who has been referred to the dean of discipline multiple times due to classroom disruption, verbal altercations with the teacher and peers, refusing to do his work, not turning in his homework, not being in uniform, sleeping in class, shoving classroom furniture, and many other infractions. The teacher has stated that he seems angry all the time and has a short fuse. The dean has suspended him from class, as well as from school, several times, but the behavior continues. The teacher is frustrated and has started complaining about the lack of support and how the other students are affected by his constant disruption. The teacher talks to the dean almost every day to complain about Daryl and the situation and has started talking to the school counselor about him; she has mentioned wanting him out of her class and transferred to another teacher. The counselor has done a little investigation and alerted the school social worker, Ms. Silva, about the student.

Ms. Silva asked the teacher to send Daryl to her the next time he was in class or before she sent him back to the dean. It took several days, but Ms. Silva finally met with Daryl. Daryl refused to talk to her and asked if he was in trouble. Ms. Silva told him he was not in trouble and explained her role in the school and the services she offers. Daryl continued to be suspicious of the social worker and asked if he could go back to class. Ms. Silva agreed and asked if she could talk to him briefly once a week. She also gave him a business card and asked him to make sure to ask for her next time he got in trouble. Daryl responded by saying, “Whatever; it makes no difference who I see. I’m on my way out anyways.”

Ms. Silva decided to find out more about Daryl, so she sought out the dean and the counselor. She found out that Daryl had a history of barely passing his classes and had several fails. He also had multiple absences. His records showed that his elementary school grades had been significantly better and that the decline started in sixth grade. When Ms. Silva asked if the counselor knew anything about his personal life, the counselor stated, “Not really. This is his first year at this school, and I don’t really know him. I have a lot of students assigned to me and I’m still trying to get to know all of them, especially the ninth-graders.”

Ms. Silva then decided to meet with the dean to discuss Daryl. The dean recognized Ms. Silva but had not had many interactions with her. This was Ms. Silva’s second year at the school and she had tried to familiarize all the staff with her role and responsi­bilities, but it had been very challenging. Ms. Silva had been assigned to coordinate and provide mental health services at the school. She saw students individually and in groups and linked them to additional services. She had attended several staff meetings and sent memos explaining the services, but she had been inundated with a heavy caseload, so it had been difficult to connect with all the school staff.

After reminding the dean of her role, Ms. Silva proceeded to ask about Daryl. The dean explained the nature of her contacts with Daryl as well as his mother. She told Ms. Silva of the behavior problems and the multiple suspensions. She also stated that Daryl’s records showed problems from the previous middle school and that she knew from the first referral that Daryl might become a frequent referral. The dean shared that it was difficult to schedule a meeting with Daryl’s mother and that she seemed to want to help Daryl but was frustrated with all the problems he was causing. The dean had never met the father—and Daryl refused to talk about him. All the dean knew was that Daryl had two young siblings and spent a lot of time with them. She also shared that she was looking into an opportunity transfer for Daryl if the behavior continued.

Ms. Silva asked if the dean would be willing to try out a few interventions before going that route. She asked the dean to let her know the next time Daryl was referred to her for a behavior problem. Ms. Silva offered to collaborate in exploring ways to work with Daryl and turn the situation around. She also informed the dean that she had met Daryl and offered him her services but that he had been wary of accepting them. The dean agreed to talk to Daryl’s mother to get her consent for Daryl to avail himself of the services.

Ms. Silva left the dean’s office with a plan of saying hi to Daryl in the halls and meeting with him weekly just to check in. She also wanted to make sure that the teacher was aware that she was available for support and that she would let her know when Daryl was referred to the dean again. Ms. Silva wanted to make sure to be pres­ent at the next meeting with the dean to help advocate for services rather than having Daryl transferred to another school.

**Learning Exercise**

1. How could Ms. Silva advocate for Daryl? Other students with discipline issues? Ninth-graders transitioning from middle school?
2. Do the student/family’s race or ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or other demo­graphic factors impact the tolerance level and response to discipline issues?
3. How could the school social worker improve the identification of students with mental health needs and make sure they receive the services they need? What policy advocacy work is needed to make sure that this becomes an automatic process?
4. Are any federal, state, or local policies being violated by any school staff?
5. What policy/program advocacy can Ms. Silva engage in to increase the mental health services at the school?

**POLICY ADVOCACY LEARNING CHALLENGE 12.7**

**Connecting Micro, Mezzo, and Macro Policy Advocacy**

Opening Schools to Surrounding Communities

It is the first day of a new school year. Ms. Valdez, a school social worker, has been assigned to implement a grant received by a local school cluster to simultaneously provide services to students and create a wellness center in a local high school. Administrators and a few community agencies that already provide services in the school have planned the program. A new principal has now replaced the principal who helped to write the grant.

The summer prior to the school year, a space at the high school was identified, and it was to be cleared so that it would be ready for the new program for the fall. Summer passed and school started. The space was still full of supplies and furniture the previous program had left behind. Ms. Valdez was introduced to the new principal and the six assistant principals who jointly manage the school. Ms. Valdez was given the task of creating a program following the mandates of the initiative but was not given any instruc­tions on how to do so. She also had to deal with suspicions from school staff who did not know who she was and what her role was going to be. Ms. Valdez had been assigned from the district office and had not been chosen by the school administrator. The teach­ers had not been fully involved in the planning and did not fully understand the grant.

Ms. Valdez was at a loss as to where to start. She decided to work on the physical space and at the same time get to know the school. Ms. Valdez and her interns worked on clearing the room of unwanted items and salvaging furniture to furnish the office. She did this with the help of the MSW interns assigned to her. At the same time, Ms. Valdez started meeting with as many school staff as she could on an indi­vidual basis. Her goal was to get to know them and their understanding of the pro­gram. She also wanted the staff to become familiar with her and learn her role in the school. She did the same with all the different community agencies that provided services on campus, whether they were part of the initiative or not. She eventually set up a structure that encouraged outside agencies to check in at the wellness center and work with her when providing services to the students.

Ms. Valdez learned about the school and the community culture when she decided to do this. She learned of different facts and issues unique to the school as she got to know the school and the staff:

* The school and the community are a closed system.
* Faith-based organizations play a key role in this community.
* There have been several administrator turnovers over the years.
* There have been many programs that have come and gone over the years.
* The school had very limited participation in the actual program development and implementation,

although it took part in the planning.

* The school has its own vision of how to develop and implement the program that differs from that of

the district.

Ms. Valdez was now faced with three major tasks:

1. Deal with the above issues to pave the way for the program
2. Align herself with multiple stakeholders to get buy-in and support for the program
3. Create an infrastructure to foster strong collaboration, start the delivery of services, and streamline access to the services

The three tasks were the focus of the work for the first academic year. Ms. Valdez and the interns worked on building their relationship with the students, the school staff, and the community agencies. By the end of the school year, students were receiving services at school or linked services in the community. The students were either referred by the teacher or by other staff or self-referred. Unfortunately, parent participation was still at a minimum when school ended. Things were by no means where they should be, but at this point most of the school staff and the majority of the community agencies were familiar with who Ms. Valdez was. The wellness center had become a functioning resource center.

**Learning Exercise**

1. Who should have been involved in planning, program development, and imple­mentation?
2. How can Ms. Valdez work on aligning the school staff’s vision and the district’s vision for the initiative?
3. What could Ms. Valdez do to increase parent participation?
4. How can Ms. Valdez generate stakeholder participation and buy-in at this point in the implementation?
5. Is there any policy-related work that needs to be done or incorporated in the implementation to promote sustainability?