School Function Field Trip and Analysis

Michael Ricke

South Dakota State University

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Dr. Katherine Bertolini

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Event Description and Stakeholders Present

I attended a volleyball match at a local school district. Being a football and basketball coach, I’m usually not too excited about volleyball, but this event was different. This particular volleyball match was the first event that would be held in this school districts brand new athletic facility. In November of 2011, the school district’s voters approved a $14.5 million renovation and addition to the existing middle school/high school facility. A big part of the new construction went toward the addition of a state of the art athletic gymnasium for the high school. It was the third time the school had gone to the voters to get the bond issue approved. The first two times the issue failed because there was concern about whether or not facility was needed, and if the size of the new gym was appropriate for the needs of the school. Ultimately the bond issue was approved and construction began in June of 2012. This volleyball match was going to be the first opportunity for the general public to see the new athletic facility.

I arrived early (approximately 5:15) when the freshman were playing because I wanted to get a seat where I could interact with the most people. I immediately noticed that the Athletic Director high school Principal were there supervising the activity. I also observed the Superintendent, elementary Principal, middle school Principal, and three members of the school board were in attendance. I have been to a few volleyball games over the years, and I know what the “typical” crowd looks like – this crowd was not typical. There were many different stakeholders from the community in attendance and many of them had no connection to anyone on the volleyball team. There were business men and women, farmers, parents, grandparents, members of the city government, and even the
mayor. I saw people at this volleyball match that I hadn’t seen in a school sponsored event in years. They were there to see the new facility! They didn’t keep an official attendance for this athletic event, but when I spoke to the athletic director, he estimated that there were probably about 800 people in attendance.

Benefits of Event and Unintended Consequences

I observed people as they were entering the facility for the first time. Most of the people had a look of amazement when they first entered, but you could tell that there were some people who were intentionally withholding judgment until they could take a closer look. Remember, there was a lot of disagreement in the community about the need for this new gymnasium and this would be the first chance for the tax payers to seem what they got for their money. The superintendent was “working the crowd” throughout the event and when he stopped to visit with me, he told me about all of the positive comments he was getting from those in attendance. He had many people tell him how impressed they were and how happy they were that the project was finally completed.

This event almost seemed like a bonding event for the community. Sporting events are places where people gather to support a common cause. On that night it seemed like the volleyball match was secondary to the community event that seemed to be taking place – supporting the final product that the community members came together to approve almost two years before. In their book The Principalship, Ubben, Hughes, and Norris write:

“Research about first-rate schools has shown two things about resource and facility management. In first-rate schools, resources are allocated to maximally support instructional and curricular improvement. Also, good schools are invariably clean
and safe and physically attractive both inside and out." (Ubben, Highes, & Norris, 2011)

I got the feeling that the new facility was something that the entire community could take pride in. By listening to the comments people made and watching the way we were interacting with each other, I could tell that there was an excitement about all of the things that the new facility had to offer. I thought it was a nice touch that throughout the night, the administration had taken the liberty to put messages on the new video board thanking the community for their support and funding of the entire building project.

Critical Assessment

I have personal knowledge of this school district and I know the history of the previous bond issues that did not pass. In the time leading up to those failed votes, there was a lot of dis-trust and tension between the school administration and many members of the community. There were many people in the community who felt like the school was misleading the community when they said that the new athletic facility was needed and was a “vital” part of the renovation process. I attended several community meetings leading up to those failed votes. Rather than bring the community together to accomplish a common goal, the meetings seemed to pit one group against another and really split the community into two parts.

Before going into the last bond election, the administration involved the community from the beginning. They set up committees that helped with the design and funding of the facility. They actively sought out community input instead of giving them the final project and asking for the money. The response to this approach was much more positive. The
community really seemed to buy into the project and the support was overwhelming. In his book *The Moral Imperative of School Leadership*, Michael Fullen writes “The best case for public education has always been that it is a common good. Everyone, ultimately, has a stake in the caliber of the schools, and education is everyone’s business.” (Fullen, 2003) I think that once this school district recognized that the community simply wanted some input in what was being done, things progressed in a positive direction.

This project was interesting and rewarding. It was nice to see a community come together like this one did. Even though there were some rough patches, the community ultimately came together for the common good of the school. This event was their first chance to come together, see, and celebrate what their hard earned money had built and what they had accomplished as a community. In case you were wondering all three volleyball teams won their matches – kind of like the icing on the cake!
References
