

DEBORAH JEWELL-SHERMAN AND THE RICHMOND PUBLIC SCHOOLS (A) and (B)

Teaching Note

Overview

Deborah Jewell-Sherman began her tenure as superintendent of the Richmond Public Schools in August 2002, with the objective of turning around the school system's dismal academic track record. Although preliminary data showed that she was on her way to meeting the goals of her performance contract, in August 2003 an e-mail message calling for her ouster had been passed to members of the School Board and City Council. This was just one distraction she would face while trying to raise student achievement in the 27,000 student district, the second lowest performing district in Virginia. Other distractions included community outcry over a new plan for bus transportation, controversy over her chief financial officer's failure to report a \$2.2 million surplus, schools being closed due to the possible presence of the Washington, D.C.-area sniper, and negotiations with the city over budget cuts due to the state's revenue shortfall. In the (A) case students learn about these distractions, as well as the challenges Deborah Jewell-Sherman faced with regard to her core mission: raising student achievement.

The (B) case details Jewell-Sherman's actions after she received a vote of confidence from the School Board in October 2003. Her first order of business was to invite Strategic Support Teams from the Council of the great City Schools to conduct a review of the school system. The end result of the visit was a report that included a number of recommendations that seemed to affirm her change agenda. To put these recommendations into action, Jewell-Sherman enlisted the assistance of the University of Virginia's Partnership for Leaders in Education (PLE). The major focus of assistance from PLE came in the form of training in project management and use of the Balanced Scorecard. These processes were designed to help organizations identify goals, define strategic objectives for meeting those goals, and define measures for determining whether progress was being made. Classroom discussion helps students see what actions might be taken during the initial phases of a turnaround effort.

Topical Areas

This case provides students with an example of leading change in a large organization. Issues present in the case include change implementation, management skills, organizational change, organizational problems, and turnaround leadership.

Objectives

- Explore large-scale organizational change initiatives
- Diagnose the challenges facing an organization in need of turnaround
- See the action plan of a turnaround leader

Student Assignment

Reading

Deborah Jewell-Sherman and the Richmond Public Schools (A)

Deborah Jewell-Sherman and the Richmond Public Schools (B)

Study Questions (A)

1. What are some likely sources of resistance when trying to turn around a school system?
2. What causes a school system to be low-performing?
3. What distractions and challenges did Jewell-Sherman face during her first year as superintendent?

Study Questions (B)

1. What do you see as the primary focus of Jewell-Sherman's initial turnaround effort?
2. On what levels and in what ways does lack of alignment manifest itself in a school district?
3. Would you have used outside organizations, such as the Council of the Great city Schools or the Partnership for Leaders in Education, to drive the initial phases of this turnaround effort? What are the advantages and disadvantages to doing so?
4. What is the difference between effectiveness and efficiency? What are examples of each in a school system?

Time Allocation for 60-minute session

5 minutes	Introduction to case
25 minutes	Address Study Questions (A)
25 minutes	Address Study Questions (B)
5 minutes	Update on Deborah Jewell-Sherman and RCPS