

 **VIGNETTE: Why Assumptions Matter: Getting on the Same Page**

Purpose: Stakeholders in a magnet program may hold conflicting views, assumptions, and beliefs about the purpose of the magnet program and their roles. Without an open discussion of these beliefs and assumptions, stakeholders may act in ways that unintentionally undermine the success of the program. Reflecting on this vignette can help highlight the importance of ensuring that all your stakeholders begin the program with common assumptions about its purpose.

Source: Interview with Michelle Ungurait, Director of Magnet Programs for Guilford County Schools, NC, October 20, 2008.

Discussion Questions

1. How is the Andrews High School situation — where many stakeholders held differing aims for the same program — similar to or different from your experiences?
2. Why might it be useful to develop a school-specific logic model in addition to working with an overall program logic model?
3. What are some assumptions and beliefs about your own magnet program that are important to share with stakeholders? Why?
4. What alternative assumptions or beliefs might some stakeholders possess? How might that impact implementation of your magnet program?



Why Assumptions Matter: Getting on the Same Page

Background: *A diverse group of stakeholders may support a magnet school because each is attracted to its particular magnet theme. However, this common interest does not guarantee that the group will share a theory of action that connects this theme to magnet program goals. Michelle Ungurait, the Director of the Magnet and Choice Schools in Guilford Public Schools, NC, describes how this dynamic played out with one magnet school in her district. She explains how developing a school-specific logic model will get all stakeholders on the same page in the future.*

In 2007, our district was awarded a federal Magnet Schools Assistance Program (MSAP) grant to develop six new magnet schools. As part of developing our evaluation plan, we worked with researchers from The Education Alliance at Brown University to design a logic model for the district's magnet program. This has been really helpful for focusing the evaluation and for guiding implementation of program activities this year.

But when we first applied for the grant, we didn't have a separate logic model for each of the six schools that were ultimately awarded MSAP funds. In hindsight, we realized it would have been beneficial to develop a school-specific logic model with our stakeholders during those early project planning meetings.

One of our new MSAP schools, Andrews High School, has an aviation theme. Over the years, a number of aviation ideas and projects were developed in Guilford County, some focused on creating a center for aviation and others on developing an aviation academic program. So we have many, many community partners, and a really diverse group of folks who support the program, like: TIMCO Aviation Services, Federal Express, our local regional airport, and the Piedmont Triad International. These are really valuable partners that we need to involve in this program at Andrews. But each had different aims for the program, so we didn't begin with a common vision and goals. In fact, stakeholders didn't necessarily understand the MSAP objectives, and why they were funding us to create this magnet program.

For example, some community partners don't want the program housed at the high school — but that school was written into the grant proposal. Some partners wanted to conduct all four years of the program at the airport. And so, as district personnel, we tried to explain to them why we centered the program in this particular high school, and why there was community support for it to be in this high school. We talked about reducing isolation of minority groups in specific schools and the role of MSAP funds in meeting that objective. If we had begun with a logic model, I think everybody would have understood the original intent of the funding right from the start. I think with the logic model that Andrews Aviation Magnet is designing right now, all the stakeholders will understand what is expected of them and what the desired outcomes are to benefit our students overall. This way, it will feel like all of us are using the same playbook and getting on the same page.