The Intermediate Unit’s Board of Directors acknowledged that they demonstrated a “lack of oversight.” This lapse in oversight is having serious repercussions within the education entity and the community it serves. Most noteworthy is the involvement of the state auditor general’s office in determining how much money the former executive director can be paid for accrued sick and vacation days. In addition, the Intermediate Unit’s board declared that the former employee is ineligible for the retirement incentive he was awarded.

Further fueling the public’s perception of the former executive’s payout was a letter written by a member of the intermediate unit’s board and read aloud at a meeting of one of the member school boards that indicated that few of the board members knew the terms of the former executive director’s contract and were not aware of the provisions in his successor’s contract.

The dilemmas facing the former and current executive directors of the intermediate unit, the administrative staff, the board of directors, and the 20 member school districts and their boards of directors and the community has placed the entire entity under the collective microscopes of all taxpayers whose dollars support the IU as well as member school districts.

The process of untangling this complicated mess and answering questions regarding the ethical and professional behaviors of individuals in leadership roles within the educational community will not be an easy task. Reputations will be tarnished, the memories of acts of goodwill and kindness will be replaced by mistrust.

Keeping the Trust

While this scenario brought to the forefront the shortcomings of an established education agency, other school districts can learn valuable lessons related to the ever-present need for ethical and responsible operations.

Education entities must have safeguards in place that prevent unethical behaviors and internal monitoring systems that assure that those in positions of leadership and authority do not break the sacred trust they have with their constituents.

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