



Reasoning with Ethics

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A Project of The School for Ethical Education | www.ethicsed.org

Ethics in action creates character.

Use this blog to:

1. Lead class discussions in social studies, civics, ethics, or advisory classes.
2. Teach students skills to analyze cases with core ethical values.
3. Recognize skills in support of SEE's Tri-Factor Model of ethical functioning.

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Homeless Camps on School Property

One result of COVID has been the increase in homeless encampments in parks and on school property in Seattle. One middle school property as of April 23 was hosting 40 separate shelters. This has led neighbors to recognize an increase in crime, litter, and debris associated with drug use, and responses by emergency personnel to the property. With Seattle schools reopening to in-class learning, student walking routes took them right through the homeless encampment.



While neighbors, school parents, and the city were seeking to relocate the homeless, representatives of the Seattle School Board “demanded” the homeless be undisturbed. These School Board members believed it was not justified to traumatize the homeless with a relocation. The City then deferred to the School District as it was their property and responsibility to determine its use. Unlike the City, the School District does not have the programs to provide any services to the homeless on their property.

SEE has raised the complicated ethical questions regarding the homeless in the past. In this case, you have the needs of the homeless population and the dangerous behaviors often associated with their encampments pitted against the goal of maintaining health and safety for children going to and in school. The author recalls a personal experience with a large, homeless Viet Nam veteran who suffered serious medical issues entering his school and seeking to use the restroom. The reality of a man that no school personnel could have controlled entering a school restroom was sobering for all who were there.

Students are asked to define if and why (or why not) this circumstance defines an ethical dilemma. If they were the Superintendent of Seattle Schools, what course of action would they pursue? What core values would govern that action?

Supplemental Link

KOMO News, Homeless Camp next to School (1:43)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kK9BZnXH7Qw>

K5 News, Homeless on School Property (2:42) (April 23, 2021) -

<https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/homeless-encampment-near-broadview-thomson-school-bitter-lake-seattle/281-9affac37-d961-43ba-a3e0-b79bd9c8645a>

Mynorthwest.com, School board members demand Seattle not sweep school property of homeless-- <https://mynorthwest.com/2745058/rantz-school-board-members-demanded-seattle-not-sweep-homeless-encampments-from-schools/>