

School Administrators Association of New York State

# Vanguard

WINTER 2017

Vol. 46 No. 1

Exploring  
Educational  
Leadership



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**GETTING  
THE JOB  
DONE**

**LEADERSHIP**

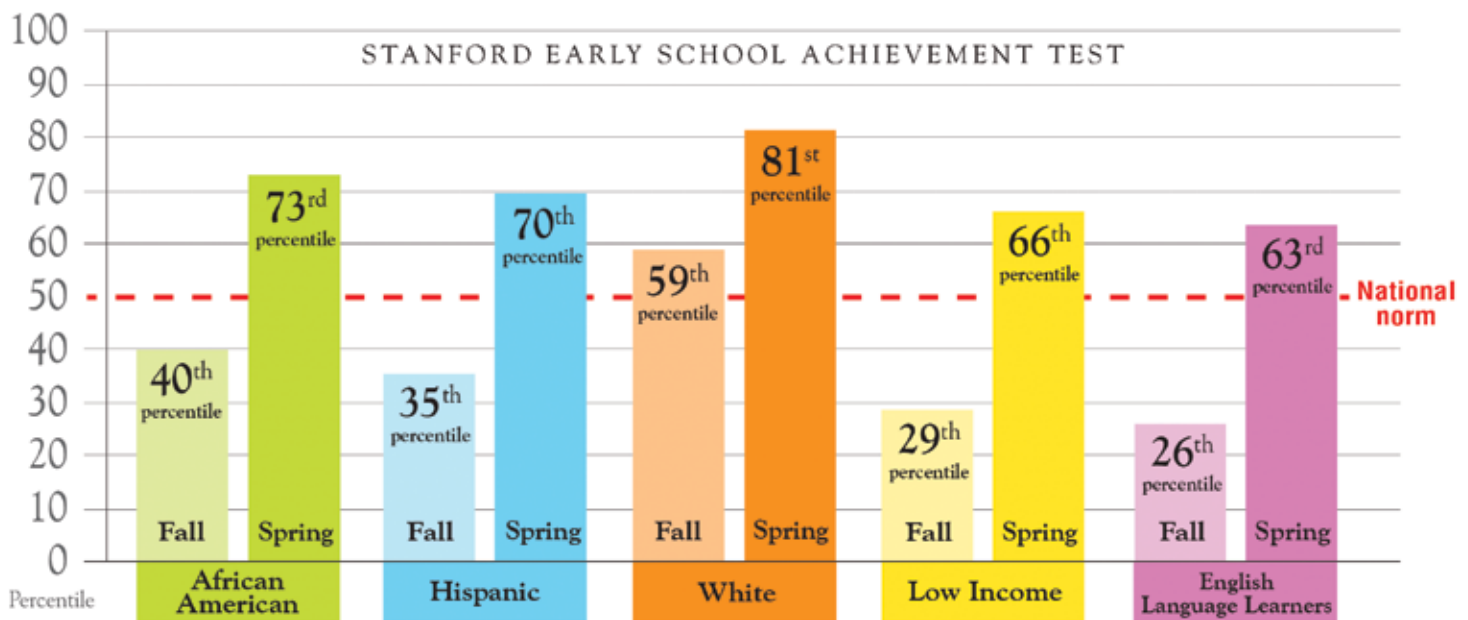
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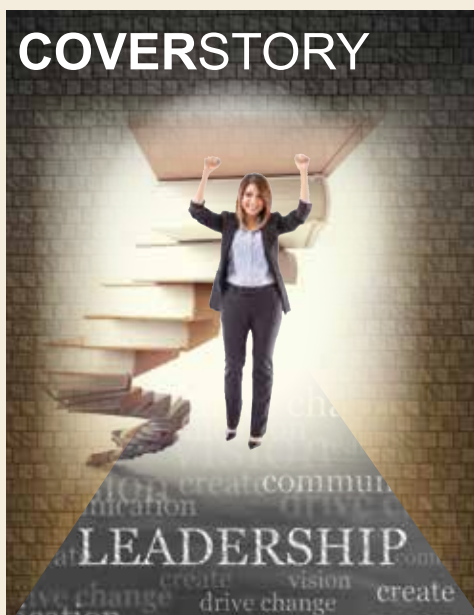
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# Contents

Feedback:  
A Critical Skill for  
New Leaders | 5  
by Peter DeWitt, EdD



Leading Change: | 9  
The Transformation of  
Poughkeepsie High School  
by Kim M. Smithgall

## COLUMNS

President's Message | 1  
Book Review | 15  
FYI | 16  
Trade Talk | 48



formerly *The Journal*

Fair Winds and Following Seas: | 19  
Navigating the First Years of School  
Leadership  
by Joseph Sapienza

The Journey Begins: | 21  
Your Road to the Principalship  
by John P. Sawchuk

Embracing Parental Complaints: | 25  
Practice TEA Time  
by Jim Dillon

Mentoring Developed Me | 29  
as a Leader  
by Maureen A. Patterson

Charting a Course | 33  
Through Your First Years of  
School Leadership  
by Timothy P. Martin and  
James F. Cameron

The Duties of Principalship | 37  
by Lynnda M. Nadien

Magical Phrases: | 41  
Using Words That  
Connect Us with Parents  
by Jessica Zimmer

Sponsor Spotlight: | 45  
TRUST: The Key to  
Education Reform  
by Bruce H. Crowder

# Vanguard

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## Practices

from practitioners

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A message from  
**Dr. Paul Fanuele**

SAANYS President  
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**Strive for Efficiency:  
 Streamline your Tasks,  
 Goals, and Routines**

The job of the educational leader has increased in complexity over the years. The demands are endless and the hours in the day seem to be shrinking. The only way to get the job done is by having aligned tasks, goals, and routines. This issue of *Vanguard*, "Boots on the Ground – Getting the Job Done," shares best practices on how we can survive the workday. Educational leaders need to be as efficient as possible in order to be effective and accomplish work goals with time left for personal goals. I will provide three proven ways we can increase our efficiency, which will enable us to find quality personal and family time. These three ways include streamlining our tasks, aligning our goals, and creating a morning routine.

**Streamline Our Tasks**

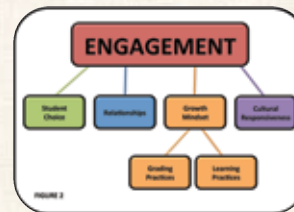
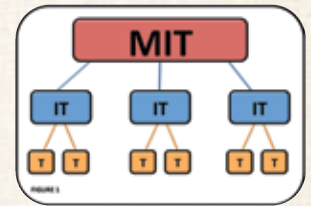
The best way I have encountered to streamline the myriad of tasks an administrator might have is to organize the tasks by importance. Each day I try to focus on my most important task or MIT. Sometimes I have more than one MIT but the trick is to keep it to as few as possible. Blogger, Leo Babauta suggests having no more than three. If you have multiple MITs, make sure one of them is linked to a bigger aspiration or goal. By linking your MIT to a goal, you will align your everyday tasks to bigger life or work goals. This will guarantee progress on your goals.

Another way of thinking of MITs is as the large rocks that fill up your jar. If you place minor tasks or small rocks in the jar first, you will spend time reacting to fires and completing inconsequential tasks. Instead, by placing the big rocks in the jar first, you will be proactive and have time for the important tasks. If you do not place the big rocks first your jar will fill up leaving no room for your MIT.

Since you want to concentrate on the big rocks, the best time to focus on your MIT is first thing in the morning. I keep a Post-it attached to my computer with my MIT written on it. When I arrive at work each day I cannot log in to my computer without seeing it. This helps me stay focused and serves as a visual reminder if (when) I get sidetracked on non-MITs. Morning is our most productive time of day, especially if we have a planned and consistent morning routine, which we will review later. Since morning is our most productive time, we should not waste it on checking email. Although it is a necessary component of our work life, we can check email after we have made progress on our big rocks, or MITs. If our MIT is aligned to our bigger goals, then each day we will experience progress.

**Align Our Goals**

One way to streamline our goals is to utilize the MIT concept to create a goal hierarchy. Duckworth (2016) discussed goal hierarchies of famous people in *Grit*. My administrative staff and I have combined some of Duckworth's ideas with the MIT philosophy to create goals at Arlington High School. We have three levels of goals. It starts with the most important task or MIT on top. Beneath the MIT are connected mid-level important tasks or ITs. Below the ITs are connected low-level tasks or just Ts (see figure 1). In short, we have a most important task, a few important tasks, and a few tasks (MIT - IT - T). At the top of the AHS goal hierarchy (our MIT) is student engagement. We have four ITs (our important tasks) connected to engagement (student choice, relationships, cultural responsiveness, and growth mindset) and some additional Ts (our tasks) connected to each IT (see figure 2).



This system helps us use common language to align our goals into achievable chunks, allows us to display our goals in an accessible manner, and allows us to keep our focus on our goals throughout the school year. As long as we are working on our tasks (Ts) and important tasks (ITs) we are able to put our bigger rocks in the jar. Admittedly so, it is hard to keep the small rocks and minutiae from entering the jar. Our MIT goal system helps us but is not foolproof, especially during busy times of the year (which seem to be constantly recurring). This is why focusing on our MIT first thing in the morning and having a morning routine are essential.

**Create a Morning Routine**

Regardless of whether you are a night owl or an early bird, all of our days begin in the morning. Since our willpower and self-control are highest in the morning, we need to take advantage of this fact and create a morning routine to gain a leg up on our day (Lee, 2014). There are plenty of examples of famous people who have implemented morning routines. One of my favorite examples is Benjamin Franklin. He not only coined the importance of rising early, he also took it a step further by asking himself every morning, "What good shall I do today?" (Lee, 2014).

*continued*

Strive for Efficiency

continued

Franklin's question aligns well with the idea that we should express gratitude throughout the day. Gordon (2012) posited that the human mind cannot be both thankful and negative at the same time. Negative thoughts create negative energy. Focus on positive energy and express gratitude early in the morning to ensure a positive start to your day.

We should also begin our day by accomplishing something as soon as possible. A simple example of this is to make your bed. We will gain a sense of accomplishment and have the added feature of hindering a premature return visit to bed. Also, try taking a cold shower. There are many health benefits to a cold shower including reduced stress and fatigue, and an improvement in mood and memory (Gayomali, 2015). Try it, I dare you.

Elrod (2016) believed that our morning routines should include silent time. We should start our day with quiet time for reflection and visualization of a successful day. Many people meditate for a few minutes before they start their day. Perhaps a cup of coffee without any distractions would do the trick. Elrod also advocated for finding morning time to read and exercise.

Pete Carroll has expressed the importance of meditation for his football players and also shared Elrod's belief in the value of visualization. Carroll, coach of the Seattle Seahawks, stressed visualizing previous success to breed future success. Wide receiver Doug Baldwin possesses a mental "highlight reel" to put him in a positive mindset whenever doubt creeps in (Delehanty, 2014).

If you are an owl and have a difficult time in the morning, try adding only a couple of these ideas to your morning routine and move the others to the evening. Write your goals down for the next day before you go to sleep. Assign an MIT at night so you can wake up knowing what you plan on accomplishing. Make your bed at night and sleep on the couch. Just kidding on this one and checking to see if you are fully engaged in this article. Remember engagement is my MIT.

A message from

Dr. Paul Fanuele

SAANYS President  
2016-17

One final piece of advice to consider adding to your morning routine is to create a "to don't" list. Your MIT will act as your "to do" list but you should also remind yourself of your LIT, or least important task. Tom Peters believed that focusing on what not to do can help you accomplish what you want to do. Our "to don'ts" could be a behavior we want to stop, like trying to solve a colleague's problem before fully listening to his/her issue or staying in our office too much during the day. Having an LIT can be just as important as having an MIT.

Conclusion

The job of educational leaders today is increasing in complexity with each passing day. We care too much for the well-being of our students and staff to sit back and let issues go unresolved. In order to be successful we need to be as efficient as possible on the job. Streamlining our tasks and aligning them with our goals will help us stay focused on what is important and increase our efficiency while tackling our challenges. Incorporating an MIT into a well-thought-out morning routine will jump-start our day with the positive energy needed to be successful. Now, if only it could happen without a cold shower.

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FEEDBACK:

# A Critical Skill for New Leaders

By Peter DeWitt, EdD

*He needs to take into account all the time it takes to carry out the actual details of his big visions. He dreams big, but the rest of us live out the nightmare of the work.*

*- Anonymous Teacher*



At some point we were all new leaders. Some of you reading this article may be knee-deep into your first year, or getting ready to start your first experience as a building leader. **Building leaders often find themselves in the middle of district initiatives and the needs and wants of the teachers they work with on a daily basis.**

Leadership is often complicated, but when we get it right, it can have a big impact on student learning and teacher growth. Leadership at its best, can bring a whole school community together.

Unfortunately, one of the most important elements of leadership is often ignored, or becomes one-sided, and that is feedback. Leaders often feel it's their job to provide effective feedback but they don't believe, or aren't always open to, accepting feedback of the stakeholders in their school community.

In a recent Finding Common Ground blog (DeWitt, 2016), readers were asked what feedback would they offer to their leaders if they could. The response was fairly overwhelming, and the comments provided were both positive and negative. Many of the respondents mentioned that they are not normally asked to provide feedback to their leaders. Leaders take note, whether you are a veteran or brand-new, ask for feedback, and do something about the feedback provided.

Most of the issues that teachers wrote about dealt with communication and vision. For example, one teacher wrote, "Communication implies two-way dialogue. Our principal is good at getting information disseminated however staff NEVER has a chance to share issues and concerns. When we have tried, she brings in Human Resources."

A teacher from the UK wrote that her principal,

"Communicates his vision for the school in the long term. Nearly a year into his headship and I have no idea what he actually

wants the school to be like in five years time. He uses the school motto, which I still do not remember but it is plastered on walls. He does not underpin values within the school."

That type of feedback offered by the teacher from the UK could go a long way to helping a principal understand they have a lack of clarity where their vision is concerned, which will only lead to increased frustration on the part of staff. Unfortunately, not all leaders, or people in general, take kindly to feedback, which is sad because it could help them grow as leaders and teachers.

### THANKS FOR THE FEEDBACK

I was a principal for nearly eight years, and worked with a great staff that provided me with feedback that I liked, and other feedback that I wished I never heard. From a building perspective, the feedback we receive from staff and our school community is typically the only feedback we receive. Although many building leaders are working to change the consistency and authenticity of the formal observation process with their teachers, the formal observation process from central office to building still has a long way to go. Building leaders are sometimes left up to their own devices to understand what they need to improve on because some districts are too overly concerned with test scores and compliance, as opposed to real learning opportunities. Given that sad commentary, building leaders really need to work with their teachers as opposed to against them.

Feedback is essential to our growth as leaders and teachers, and we need to find ways to open up the lines of communication so that we all receive and provide the most effective feedback. Unfortunately, not everyone is open to feedback. For example, one teacher wrote, "My principal is not a democratic leader. In fact she is very controlling and when someone disagrees with her she becomes

We need more new leaders to understand that they don't need to know everything already, and that's why feedback is so vitally important.

vindictive and critical."

Over the years I have done a great deal of research on feedback because I work with John Hattie, and feedback is an important element of his visible learning research, which encompasses well over 1,500 meta-analyses involving more than 300 million students. Feedback, which is considered an influence on learning, has an effect size of .75, which is well over the hinge point of .40 which researchers agreed long ago equates to a year's worth of growth for a year's input. It is one of the six influences all leaders should be focusing on in their daily practices (DeWitt, 2016).

Through Hattie's research we have learned that there are three types of academic feedback we need to know in order to improve teaching and learning. Those three types of feedback are task, process, and self-regulation. The levels of feedback we provide are contingent on the level of learning that the teacher or students already have before we give it. For example, new learning requires task-level feedback, and a high degree of proficiency requires self-regulation feedback.

### THE ART OF RECEIVING FEEDBACK

However, as important as feedback is to give, it's also hard to receive. In *Thanks for the Feedback: The Science and Art of Receiving Feedback Well*, \*even when it's off base, unfair, poorly delivered, and, frankly, you're not in the mood (Penguin, 2014), Stone and Heen's research shows us that there are three feedback triggers we give off when we receive feedback. Those three feedback triggers are truth triggers, which means the feedback is untrue; relationship triggers, which means that we don't think the person



giving it to us has any credibility; and identity triggers, which means the feedback is destroying the identity we have created for ourselves.

Additionally, Stone and Heen have found in their research that there are three types of feedback we hope to receive, which are appreciative (You worked hard! Great job!), coaching (Here's a better way to do it), and evaluative (Here's where you stand).

Over the years that we have all led, we have hopefully been in tune with the teachers, students and parents around us, and have learned a great deal from their personal stories but also the feedback they have given to us. Personally, I have always felt that most of the school community that surrounded me wanted me to be successful as a leader, so their feedback was invaluable. Unfortunately, I did not always know that when I began my leadership career because I was concerned that I had to know everything already. We need more new leaders to understand that they don't need to know everything already, and that's why feedback is so vitally important.

**WHAT DO NEW LEADERS NEED TO KNOW?**

So, what does this have to do with the advice we would give new leaders? A great deal, because being a leader means we have to begin by asking for, giving and receiving feedback. It begins with listening to what people are saying when they are talking to you. Listening sounds really easy, but the reality is that the principal's office can be a revolving door of people who want something from you, and merely walking down the hallway to go to the bathroom becomes an impossible venture because people stop to talk with you and share their issues or successes. Many times leaders half listen in order to quickly solve an issue before they hear the whole thing.

For example, one of the most important comments that came through the survey I conducted was,

He thinks he listens but every time you start talking to him, he interrupts to tell you what he thinks about the topic. It's his first

year in the school and he isn't taking the time to get to know the people or why things look the way they look at this time. If he could stop talking long enough to hear from the community he leads, it would be a great benefit to him.

The comment from the teacher above complements something that Governour principal Vicki Day said to me, which is,

New leaders need to step back, listen, and build relationships. Listen to what teachers, staff, and parents are saying. Step back and be reflective in your practice. To this day, I do not have all of the answers, but I listen and support, question, inquire, and grow with every single person in the building. It's about collective teamwork and collaboration that can bring the entire school forward to new levels and avenues for all to grow and learn.

Day is referring to the need to move together collaboratively. In Hattie's research we know that collective teacher efficacy has an effect size of 1.57, which can have an enormous impact on student and adult learning in a school. However, new leaders need to understand that they do not have to be the lead learners. What they need to do is set up a dynamic where everyone can share their collective expertise.

My friend Simon Feasey, Head Teacher (principal) at Bader Elementary School in Thornaby-on-Tees, UK, writes,

So that a drive for collective expertise be established and valued from the off, I would instigate a conversation around norms for collaboration such as those suggested by Laura Lipton and Bruce Wellman: equity of voice; active listening; respect for all perspectives; maximise time and attention.

For new leaders, it's important to remember that when you create stakeholder groups, or ask for input from staff, that you actually listen to it and look for what Feasey suggests

as equity of voice. One teacher in the survey wrote something that is always very frustrating to teachers, and often happens at the building and district level. They wrote, "Our admin thinks they are getting input when solving a problem, but they normally already have an answer they want and are just trying to convince us that it's right."

When leaders do that, they chip away at the credibility of the process and their own credibility as leaders. Feasey believes that we must have,

An appreciation that change invokes a sense of vulnerability. So, an open discussion with all around what Brené Brown terms 'leaning into discomfort' and embracing change. Critically, though, that change should be driven through 'power with' rather than 'power over' others.

It's something Lisa Meade, Hudson Falls School District director of pupil personnel, and SAANYS' 2015 Middle School Principal of the Year, has focused on in the past. The need to change and improve takes work. Meade says,

Change can be hard and perhaps even more so for adults. Arriving to a new school as a student, teacher, or as a leader requires a certain amount of courage. People may not understand your intentions at first. Some will want to assume the worst while others (hopefully more than most) will not. It can be a steep learning curve to figure out how all the people and pieces of a new place fit together. So piece-by-piece, interaction-by-interaction, I've tried to be genuine and consistent. I've accepted that building the capacity I had (after ten years) will need time to rebuild here.

**IN THE END**

When we are put into a leadership position our first thought is that we have to change the way the school is run. I believe the most important aspect of leadership is to listen and get a sense for the school culture, and how to make the school climate more conducive to building the collective efficacy of teachers and students.

It means listening to families and engaging them in what they want out of school.

ICLE senior fellow, author and former high school principal Eric Sheninger agrees. Sheninger wrote to me saying,

The key to first year success is not changing things quickly just for the sake of change. It is critical to make astute observations on the current school culture. Equally important is allocating time and creating pathways to elicit and listen to feedback from all stakeholder groups. These simple strategies will help to articulate the what, why, and how when the time is right to implement needed change.

New leaders need to understand that their job is to foster a school climate where students, teachers and families feel valued. They do that through stepping back and listening to the feedback offered by

those stakeholder groups so they can get a sense for how to move forward. Internationally recognized leadership expert Andy Hargreaves provided these points for new leaders to consider. They are:

- Take time to understand the past
- Openly acknowledge the value of the best of the past
- Meet with your predecessor unless they did something illegal or corrupt
- Act as if you can trust people, until you can't
- Affirm core values
- Establish in a clear but low profile way codes of conduct about how you will do business together.
- Say what you bring, what you will need help with, and what they can offer

Leadership has a great deal of power, and that power should be used to bring people together through building bridges as opposed to segregating them through building walls.

PETER DEWITT, EdD, is the author of several books, including the best selling *Collaborative Leadership: 6 Influences That Matter Most* (September, 2016, Corwin Press/Learning Forward), and the forthcoming *Collaborative Leadership: A Collective Efficacy Approach to Improving School Climate* (Corwin Press, 2017). He runs workshops focusing on Visible Learning, Instructional Coaching, and Collaborative Leadership in the UK, North America, and Australia.



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**LEADING CHANGE:**

# The Transformation of Poughkeepsie High School

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By Kim M. Smithgall

Here's the scene: It's a few days before the start of school. If you're a typical principal, you're likely involved with the flurry of tasks – both expected and unexpected – that need to be accomplished to ensure a smooth opening day for your students and staff. In the midst of all the last-minute activities, the district's new superintendent drops by for a visit, asking if you would consider moving from your position leading the middle school to become the high school principal...that is, principal of a school repeatedly identified as failing by the state and one that had recently experienced a cheating scandal with its Regents exams. Welcome to Phee Simpson's world.

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Poughkeepsie City School District superintendent Nicole Williams and Poughkeepsie high school principal Phee Simpson can chuckle about the scenario now. “At the time, Mrs. Simpson was very happy to be the principal at the middle school and not as excited to take my offer of going to the high school as a principal,” Williams mused. “She made me promise that she could go back to Poughkeepsie Middle School at the end of the year. I said I thought we would be having a very different conversation at the end of the year.”

Williams was right.

The superintendent saw Simpson’s potential to capitalize on leadership skills to make profound, positive changes for students and staff at Poughkeepsie High School.

Simpson delivered...and continues to lead as a relentless visionary.

### MEETING THE CHALLENGES HEAD-ON

The positive changes likely seemed a long way off when Simpson – a Poughkeepsie alumna – first assumed the helm at the high school nearly four years ago, though.

“Mrs. Simpson took over a very difficult assignment. The 2012-2013 data showed that the high school was failing for the previous eight years; that’s how it became a receivership school,” Williams explained.

The school – and the district as a whole – was characterized by challenging demographics, including a poverty rate above eighty-six percent and a minority student population nearing ninety percent (the highest ratio in Dutchess County).

Two months after taking a deep breath and starting her new journey, Simpson read an article about a literacy initiative led by Sue Szachowicz at Brockton High School in Massachusetts that helped dramatically improve student performance on all fronts.

“Brockton’s demographics were similar to ours, only Brockton had three times as many students as the almost 1,200 at Poughkeepsie High School,” Simpson recalled. “I was excited about the possibility of using Sue’s work; we knew that Common Core was coming, which would require reading across all content

areas. I felt this was something we could use and something that would be sustainable because we were running out of SIG [School Improvement Grant] money.”

### OH PLEASE, NOT ANOTHER INITIATIVE ...

The literacy initiative required teachers in all academic areas to incorporate active reading strategies – even in such classes as math, music, and physical education classes. In Poughkeepsie, the initiative is called Mission Literacy and implementation was non-negotiable, just as it was in Brockton. (Note: see the fall 2016 *Vanguard* article, “From ‘Cesspool’ to Model School: Brockton’s Fight for Student Success,” for details on Szachowicz’s efforts in the Bay State.)

“I’ll be honest: there was push-back,” said Nancy Dingee, a special education and math teacher at Poughkeepsie High School. “This was just another initiative coming down the pike for us to try. As teachers, we were saying, ‘We’ve done this, we’ve tried this already.’”

Simpson was ready for the resistance. “Failing schools are often trying a lot of different things; they’re looking for a panacea to be a quick fix,” she said.

Mission Literacy was not going to be a quick fix; it was going to take a lot of focused effort. “I promised the teachers that I would not add another initiative after this literacy initiative,” Simpson said. “We’re only going to get better around this practice; we were not going to add in something else new. This is *it*.”

Simpson started just as Szachowicz did – using a PowerPoint presentation to highlight student achievement levels. “I showed them who we were and what we needed to achieve because we had set some goals for ourselves as a district. I wanted to be sure that we were going to increase our graduation rates, increase our attendance rates, and decrease our student suspensions,” Simpson said.

She asked English teachers for assistance in showing faculty in other academic areas how to teach active reading strategies to



students. Simpson then partnered with Szachowicz (who had retired from Brockton by that time) and current Brockton educators to refine the initiative and develop an implementation timeline. There were two literacy “rollouts” during Poughkeepsie’s inaugural year, beginning in January.

Dingee described those first few rollouts as “bumpy,” as would be expected with a new instructional approach. However, the new approach was easy to grasp. “Every step was broken down very well in the PowerPoint presentations – what annotating looks like, how to look for context clues. We do that as teachers across the board, so there wasn’t much difficulty for teachers,” Dingee said. “It did take a little time to get buy in from everyone. And for the students to buy-in, we really had to believe in the initiative as teachers.”

That didn’t take long to happen, as there were some impressive results within just six months.

“When we got the Regents scores, I began to win over a majority of the staff. Our English and science Regents scores went up double-digits and math scores went up five percentage points,” Simpson said. “And we had a five percent increase in our graduation rate.”

The transformation had begun... and teachers like Dingee became champions for the cause. She proudly joins Poughkeepsie administrators in presentations locally and nationally to discuss the positive changes that have taken place in the district. “I am one of seven children who graduated from Poughkeepsie City School District. That’s one of the reasons I’m so invested in the district,” Dingee commented.

**LITERACY AS A FOUNDATION**

The recurring literacy work formed the foundation for Poughkeepsie's success and paved the way for Simpson to introduce and carry out other impactful activities, some of which were directly tied in with Mission Literacy and some that were more broad-based.

As was the case with Brockport High School, every Poughkeepsie classroom and instructional area (even the gymnasium) had to display the Mission Literacy chart, which details the knowledge and skills required of students in the areas of reading, writing, speaking, listening and reasoning. Simpson added a requirement for educators to also display SMART charts and data walls, further reinforcing a focus on shared ideals for educational excellence.

The acronym in SMART charts stands for specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound; it's another strategy Simpson advanced to help engage students and improve the instructional process.

"In Poughkeepsie, teachers have these charts up in the classroom to outline what students are learning for the day," Simpson explained. "So, you would see the learning objective, the overarching question for the academic unit that is being covered, and a breakdown of how the daily lesson will be taught. With this, students know what to expect every period throughout the school day."

Use of the charts has migrated to all of the schools in the district. "Mrs. Simpson was the key factor in spearheading this for the district," Williams said. "We struggled with having high-quality lesson plans, but now we have a tool that's easy to use in every classroom, whether you're a pre-K teacher or a teacher in an advanced placement class."

School leaders also smartened up, so to speak. "We all have thirty-, sixty- and ninety-day SMART goals and we check to make sure we're hitting those goals. And if not, we look at what the impediments were and how we can incorporate the goals into our next sixty-day cycle," Simpson said.

The required data walls are unique to each teacher's needs and

can relate to any type of expectations or other goals to be achieved. "They can be whatever the teacher wants to measure and report — attendance, grades, classroom behavior, etc.," Simpson explained. The commonality comes from the fact that the data walls are, again, displayed in every classroom and are non-negotiable.

**INSPECT WHAT YOU EXPECT**

Simpson found it helpful also to take Szachowicz's advice on continually monitoring instruction and compliance. "Sue emphasized inspecting what you're expecting," Simpson said.

This took a few different forms in Poughkeepsie. When Mission Literacy was beginning, Simpson asked every teacher to turn in student work for review — work that exemplified high, medium and low literacy achievement levels. "That was something like fifteen pieces of work from each of the ninety teachers in the building," Simpson said. "It was my job to look at it and let the teachers know if they were giving good feedback so the students could then make corrections to their work and improve it."

The inspection activity helped educators grow and improve, while also signaling an even stronger emphasis on instructional leadership (versus operational leadership — i.e., simply putting out fires and maintaining a learning environment).

"All of these activities happened in a progression at Poughkeepsie High School," Simpson said, adding that they built on each other and became the new normal.

With encouragement and support from Williams, Simpson also introduced "Focused Instructional Learning Walks." During these walks — which now occur district-wide — administrators visit and observe a minimum of three classrooms per day and use a detailed rubric (titled "noticings and wonderings") to describe the rigor and relevance of the instruction occurring in the class, whether students were being asked to use literacy strategies and higher-order thinking skills and the level of pupil engagement. The rubrics allow teachers to receive feedback quickly and to

feel supported and empowered by instructional leaders to improve their practice.

**A GREAT CULTURE SHIFT**

As Poughkeepsie's educators felt more comfortable with Mission Literacy and the ever-expanding focus on cohesive instructional strategies, there were huge shifts in the educational environment.

"There has been a tremendous change in the culture," Dingee commented. "Before, people did their own thing and there was no consistency. Now we're one cohesive group. Mrs. Simpson really stresses that: we're in this together, we're going to accomplish this together so our scores are her scores and vice versa."

Williams concurred, "When we talk about that culture shift, one of the first things we had to do was break down the barriers, the silos, so we would all understand what good instruction looks like," she said. "We now have a high school where classical music is playing as scholars — we call our students 'scholars' — are walking from class to class. That's 1,200 scholars going about their business in a very intentional way. It's amazing the cultural shift that I've seen at the high school and it's spreading across the district."

Students have noticed the shift, as well. In fact, a senior who is the student liaison to Poughkeepsie's board of education made note of this at a recent board meeting. "He said when he was a freshman, the school was more about trying to keep the building under control and trying to get the kids to class and now it's more of college-going culture," Simpson recalled. "I was so happy to hear that children are starting to see Poughkeepsie High School as an institution of learning and that we're trying to prepare them for the 21st century."

**CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**

The shift continued as Williams and Simpson collaborated with district and school staff members to raise expectations for students. The efforts were accompanied by several new staff "nonnegotiables" and additional

pupil supports – all of which helped move students from wondering if they had any postsecondary options to pondering which of their postsecondary options to choose.

“We know that we’re at eighty-six percent poverty, but that should not define our trajectory. We’re debunking the myths that children in poverty cannot be successful,” Williams said. “It’s important to expose our young people to college on a regular basis and we have to start with pre-K. So, if you go into any classroom in the district, you’ll see more ‘nonnegotiables.’ You’ll see college pennants showing where the teacher went to college and you’ll see bios of every teacher. It’s a culture of high expectations.”

**THE PAST IS HISTORY**

Poughkeepsie’s past – when failure was acceptable – is over. Simpson has used her leadership skills to create a school where students are expected to strive for the advanced Regents diploma, which requires passing more courses than what is mandated for earning a regular Regents diploma. The Regents diploma is now considered the “default” diploma.

To help ensure that students find success in this new culture of high expectations, Simpson engaged with staff to create a continuum of schoolwide supports for students. Called “Operation Graduation,” the continuum places pupils in one of three tiers: tier 1 (color-coded green) if they’re doing well and are on target to graduate; tier 2 (color-coded yellow)

if they have enough credits, but need to improve performance on Regents exams and tier 3 (red) if they’re deficient in credits and Regents exams. The intensity of support increases at each level. For example, level 1 students have quarterly monitoring of their grades.

Pupils in tier 2 are part of the school’s adopt-a-scholar program. “Teachers act as mentors to students in the yellow category. They check in regularly with the scholars, advocate for them and help them study for Regents exams,” Simpson explained. These students also take advantage of peer tutoring and Regents review classes.

The individual connections have helped keep Poughkeepsie pupils on track to graduate, along with the more intensive supports at the red level, which include weekly meetings with guidance counselors, credit recovery classes and extra tutoring.

To help students further envision their futures, Poughkeepsie High School has opened its doors to the Dutchess County Regional Chamber of Commerce. The chamber maintains a career action center in the school building. “Chamber staff work directly with our students to help them get internships, do job shadowing, fill out employment applications, write resumes and explore careers,” Simpson said. “They also bring in speakers for career fairs. We have all that happening right in our building.”

**TODAY’S SCENARIO**

The scenario has certainly changed in Poughkeepsie. The high school is no longer in receivership and student achievement continues to improve. Simpson has set a seventy-five percent graduation rate as the goal for the class of 2017. The district goal is to be in the top ten percent of all districts in the state by the year 2020. With leaders like Simpson – who relentlessly carry out a mission of empowering staff and supporting cohesive, high-quality instruction – there’s no doubt that Poughkeepsie City School District will reach those goals...and then begin setting new ones.

KIM M. SMITHGALL is an award-winning communications specialist and freelance writer, designer, and photographer.

**LEADERSHIP RESOURCES**

In addition to Sue Szachowicz’s literacy initiative, Poughkeepsie City School District educators have relied on two books by Paul Bambrick-Santoyo to guide continued efforts to transform the district:

- *Leverage Leadership: A Practical Guide to Building Exceptional Schools*
- *Driven by Data: A Practical Guide to Improve Instruction.*

**MISSION LITERACY...The Scholars' Perspectives**

When Phee Simpson first introduced Mission Literacy at Poughkeepsie High School, the teachers weren’t the only ones who resisted. Students were right there with ‘em.

“Oh, the students hated it at first,” mused Nancy Dingee, a math and special education teacher. “They hated it because it was mandated across the board. They said, ‘This has nothing to do with math; this has nothing to do with physical education.’ But now, it’s routine; it’s a natural progression in the school year. As teachers, we say we’re going to do our literacy initiative and students

respond with, ‘Okay, give us the charts and articles...We’ve got this.’”

Poughkeepsie High School senior Dorothy Belton agreed. “When Mission Literacy was first introduced, it was a long process because teachers had to go into great detail on how to construct a perfect essay,” she said.

Later, Belton came to understand the advantages. “With the literacy rollout, all of the teachers are expecting the same things for essays. Before, you might write a mediocre essay in science and then a brilliant essay in English. The literacy initiative means we know what to expect in every class, whether it’s physics, music, or math.”



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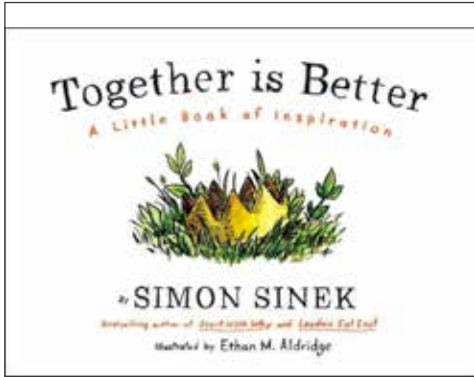
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## Together Is Better

Simon Sinek

This edition of *Vanguard/Practices* asks us to share some of the best lessons

we've learned in leadership. Over the last few years of my career as an administrator, I've realized that some of my focus was a bit backward-thinking. Early on, I'd worry about the wrong things and in the wrong order. The more I grew as a leader, I realized that fundamentally, I had to figure out what I stood for and why. That knowing became the heart of my work moving forward and allowed me to find my voice.

In 2010, Simon Sinek spoke about knowing your "why" in his Ted Talk, *How Great Leaders Inspire Action*. To date, the clip has had over 30 million views and it's for good reason. He counsels leaders from all kinds of organizations to be clear in their own why. "People don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it. And what you do simply proves what you believe." That phrase (and multiple viewings of the Ted Talk) helped me clarify how I saw my role as a leader.

As a follow-up to his books, *Start with Why* and *Leaders Eat Last*, Simon Sinek released a picture book for grown-ups

entitled, *Together Is Better*. I stumbled across the book by accident and have found it the perfect pick-me-up for school leaders.

Each section of the story is organized around a theme in leadership.

The leadership lessons are embedded quotes within a story about three friends who live "in a place that is fine." One day, on the playground, these three friends try to approach the king of the playground in a different and courageous way.

Through their journey, we are reminded to make decisions based on purpose and not just getting by. Whether you are a new administrator or a seasoned one, lessons within will prove to be helpful reminders for your work. By the end of the story, the three kids have shown us (through powerful words and adorable pictures) that leadership can look different and the real work is winning over the hearts of those we lead...and not just their minds. "The greatest joy a leader has is to become the one who helps others find the vision they are looking for (p.107)."

### Contents

- 1 | Hello
- 3 | Start Here
- 23 | Go Alone or Go Together
- 35 | Find a Vision
- 51 | Persevere
- 75 | Temptation
- 83 | The Return
- 107 | Be the Leader You Wish You Had
- 117 | A Little More



**BOOK REVIEW  
BY LISA MEADE**

Director of Pupil Personnel Services  
Hudson Falls Central School District  
2015 NYS MS Principal for SAANYS/NASSP

BOOKREVIEWS

# F Y I



## OPINIONS

"You cannot fix a problem you don't know exists. Spend time outside of your office to find where your system is clogging up - then fix it."

by Malachi Pancoast

"We find comfort among those who agree with us – growth among those who don't."

by Frank A. Clark

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## WHAT'S THIS?



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# Fair Winds and Following Seas: Navigating the First Years of School Leadership



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By Joseph Sapienza, EdD



Wishing someone fair winds and following seas is a nautical blessing or wish of good luck. It refers to ideal sailing conditions: winds that will take you where you want to go and waves to push you along. These sentiments are often shared with a sailor departing on a new voyage.

**The world of school administration for a new leader is quite the maiden voyage, marked by unpredictable seas, the occasional squall, and a few high-pressure systems.** However, it also provides novice leaders with the opportunity to chart a course, skipper a collaborative crew, and discover new territory.

Based on the lived experience of a third-year educational leader, here are some strategies to assist you in navigating your own maiden voyage.

**1. Develop relationships:** Yes, you've probably heard this a thousand times. Why? Because it is perhaps the most referenced piece of advice given by veteran school administrators (and for good reason). It is important to note that these relationships are not created and maintained through regular meetings and other formal professional gatherings. Rather, they are built upon the times you've stopped into a teacher's classroom to see how their children at home are doing. They are created by the times you invited a student into your office for no other reason than to discuss last night's playoff game. They are maintained by the times you've called a parent to compliment them on what a wonderful son or daughter they've raised. School leaders are in the business of people, which is a business of investments. One of the many is an investment in not only your stakeholders' lives as they relate to school, but also their lives as a mother, father, sister, brother, human being. An investment in people's lives outside of the building will certainly pay dividends inside of it.

**2. Presence:** In theory, the ideals of good relationship building seem pretty simple. A phone call here, an office visit there, etc....However, once you've spent a day, a week, a year in the fast-paced world of school leadership, these tasks seem a bit more formidable. Here are some implementable ways that you can add relationship building to your daily schedule. Make the rounds. Those who start the day in the office are bound to end it in the office. If you're an early riser, a great time to be around your hallways and in your classrooms is just before the first bell. What better time to connect with students about what they did the day before or what's coming up today. It's also a great time to check in with faculty and staff members. Have you ever had lunch with your students in the student cafeteria? Less structured times such as lunch offer prime opportunities for school leaders to

engage in the things that make being around children and adolescents awesome. From time to time, skip the email and go see someone instead. Relationships are strengthened via face-to-face connection, not WiFi.

**3. Personal Touch:** In the era of social media this may not be an easy question for many, but when was the last time you sent a handwritten note to someone? Instead of (or in addition to) retweeting that great lesson from yesterday, why not drop a quick note into that teacher's mailbox? Why not send a quick acknowledgment to your paraprofessionals for the job they do with your students? How would a student react if they got a note from the assistant principal regarding their performance in the school play? Such individualization represents the fact that something stuck out to you as important. Moreover, it was so important that you took the time to sit down and memorialize it in writing.

Have you ever taken the time to read your invitations to parents/community members for school events? They are formal, I'm sure, but are they inviting? Exciting? If you received such an invite, would you attend? Technology provides alternative methods for reaching out to your families and communities. E-vites (online invitations) and student-directed video invites are engaging ways to build community interest and continue to develop relationships. Again, they represent a message of value and pride for the great things happening in your building.

**4. Connect with students:** One of the most startling realizations for a novice administrator may be their newly adopted concept of time. It goes by too quickly and often seems as though there's never enough of it. With that being said, time to connect with students is something that should be a regularly occurring event on your calendar. Ever play soccer with your elementary students during recess? If not, pick your sport, some comfortable shoes, and get out there! Ask your middle school student what video game he/she is currently playing. Watch the reaction. Explain to your high school students the struggles

you experienced in a particular higher-level course. Observe their raised shoulders lower as anxious feelings leave the room. Shared experience = connection = trust.

**5. Talk less. Listen more.** Stephen Covey rightfully argued: "Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply." As new leaders, we have the urge to know the answer, solve the problem, and/or control the situation. The sooner the better. What sometimes goes unnoticed is the impact of such an approach on our interactions with others. Some advice: Slow down. Breathe. We'll get to the answer, but first take the time to understand, value and show genuine interest in what others have to say. Listening is one of the greatest gifts you can offer someone. Effective listeners are patient, don't interrupt, and aren't afraid of moments of silence. Yes, silence is sometimes the gateway to a solution. As new leaders, we are afforded the pleasure of working with some brilliant minds who have been doing this for a long time. Be sure to receive – don't just transmit. Let people do their thing. Sometimes it's better to have eyes open, ears open, mouth closed.

The captaining of a ship is a test of leadership, management, and people skills. A destination must be determined, course plotted, and heading maintained. So too does school leadership include similar obligations. Whether it is your maiden voyage or hundredth trek to sea, remember to make a commitment to your crew as you steer the sails of educational leadership. Wishing you fair winds and following seas.

## REFERENCE

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JOSEPH SAPIENZA, EdD, is the Curriculum Associate for Pupil Personnel Services, 6-12, for Jericho UFSD.

The Journey Begins:

# Your Road to the Principalship



---

By John P. Sawchuk

It is without a doubt the most important step you will take in your career.

**You must do a self-evaluation of what is important to you.** Identify what you consider your core values for they will guide you from your very first day to your last. For me, it was being proactive, being a problem solver, and being responsive and inclusive.



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### FINDING THE RIGHT FIT

When searching for a position, you must research the district you are applying to. Do your core values match the existing leadership? It will be critical to your success. A clear sense of who you are and why you are doing what you do creates a principal with a solid foundation on which to build a productive career. Whenever you have to make a tough decision, you will call on your internal core values to help you make it. Your core values will provide you with the confidence that you are being true to yourself and the vision you have set forth.

### THE JOURNEY BEGINS

As important as it is in knowing yourself and sharing what is important about you as a leader, it is equally important to understand the expectations of your supervisor. Determine their style of leadership and expectations, and then exceed them. Work to be an excellent communicator. This does not always come naturally to people. I know it didn't for me. I took classes on public speaking to overcome my fear and constantly had to make visible lists in order not to forget my daily tasks I needed to accomplish. I was determined to improve my skills. Early on I realized I would never become that eloquent speaker I had come to admire so much, but that I could be a straightforward, no-nonsense communicator people would respect. Throughout my career as an assistant principal and building principal, I have come to realize the most important aspect of leadership is information. Providing your supervisor with accurate information in a timely and efficient manner is indispensable, whether it is on a discipline issue, parent concern, safety issue, or community issue. The information you provide gives your

school leader the information they need to make a good decision. It shows others that the leader has the pulse of the school, is a problem solver, and is never caught off guard. You will find out quickly that your supervisor will be very appreciative of this skill.

### MOVING FORWARD

As an individual who has always been goal oriented, I naturally gravitated to working closely with staff and students on school improvement plans. I immersed myself in the process and quickly understood that it was the key to school improvement. Working with our central office administrators, we focused on accountability for everyone involved. We launched new summer planning sessions to establish goals and close learning gaps. We looked realistically at where we were and where we wanted to be. Continual improvement became a permanent objective and considered a renewal process. We adapted a factual approach to decision making. Decisions were based on analysis of data and information. A new environment was created that revolved around data analysis. New programs were created to improve our graduation rate, passing rates, and mastery levels on Regents exams.

### WORKING SMARTER

Time is your most valuable commodity. There is rarely enough of it. Some time is under your control

and some time is imposed on you. In order to control your day, you must be a good planner. Each day of work as principal I arrive ninety minutes before our first bell. (A thirty-minute ride to school allows me to organize my thoughts.) I write out all of the things I feel I need to accomplish on my poster board paper that is on my wall. As principal, first and foremost you must be able to multitask, carry on multiple conversations at once, and make several decisions every hour, all the while having to deal with constant disruptions. You get better at this as you gain experience. Some helpful hints are to keep important contact information at your fingertips (principals, superintendent, police, etc.) and keep phone log/notes on your cell phone. Inside your desk you should have budget info, at-risk information on students/staff, project files, crisis plan, safety plan, etc. Creating and maintaining a highly organized system will be an important lifesaver on the job.

### MAKING IT WORK

As I enter my last year as principal, I look back with great satisfaction on what we have been able to accomplish. However, I wish I was better at balancing my life and work commitments. What I learned too late in my career is that you need to take care of yourself first. As a husband and father, I wasn't always there for my family and I know I will never be able to get that time back. I didn't always take care of myself physically, which caused a great deal of stress. It is possible to perform this job well and still have a fulfilling personal life. The key is balance in your approach.

JOHN P. SAWCHUK, PhD, is the principal in the East Greenbush Central School District and will soon complete his nineteenth and final year as an administrator.

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# Embracing Parental Complaints: Practice TEA Time



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By Jim Dillon



Has this ever happened to you? It's 5:00 pm and you are packing up to go home after an exhausting day. Your secretary has left and the phone rings. You debate whether to answer it but do so. On the other end of the line is the angry voice of a parent. You take a deep breath and brace yourself for a stream of emotional words about something someone in your school either did or didn't do. As you regret picking up the phone, you mentally put this complaint into a familiar category: their child was bullied, the teacher/coach was unfair or mean, etc.

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You also realize that your investigation into the complaint must wait until the next day when most of the people involved will either have forgotten what happened or have fuzzy recollections. When the parent finally finishes, even though you are tired and doubtful about the accuracy of what you have heard, you now must respond. Unfortunately, however, this initial response will instantaneously make all of the difference between the situation getting better or worse, regardless of the content of the complaint.

Knowing how crucial a school administrator's response is to parental complaints and how easy it is to be misinterpreted, I have tried to condense my advice, based on forty years of experience, into a short and memorable phrase that can fit on an index card that can be placed near a desk phone. Regardless of who is on the other end of the line or the nature of the complaint, school

in productive conversations and what ones fail to do so. Learning to listen and communicate more effectively is an acquired skill that requires an investment of time, and, if necessary, rehearsals and role-playing with colleagues.

If school administrators question the value of improving their communication skills, they should review research from the medical profession. The amount of malpractice litigation against doctors has little to do with their competence and more with how they communicate with patients. Malcolm Gladwell summarized the research: "But in the end it comes down to a matter of respect, and the simplest way that respect is communicated is through tone of voice." Therefore, as much as school administrators might be feeling and thinking that a complaint is a nuisance and the parent is off base, they must convey that the phone call is

welcomed, appreciated, and that the parent is respected. This takes practice and it starts by learning to say "thank you" for receiving a complaint – the very last thing they want at the end of the day.

#### **T : THANK THEM FOR CALLING.**

There are three legitimate reasons for thanking parents for their complaint:

#### **1. Thanks for caring enough to call:**

Even the most critical complaint is driven by the parents' desire to make things better for their child and to correct what they think is a problem in the school. School administrators who initially respond with a thank-you immediately reframe a negative situation into a positive one; that is, they turn a problem into an opportunity.

Parents often expect resistance and are prepared to fight a school administrator who has the authority and responsibility to protect their child. Thanking parents for their phone call can

defuse a potentially contentious exchange with them. Once parents realize that they don't have to fight, they are more likely to settle down and share a clearer and more accurate description of the content of their complaint.

#### **2. Thanks for the trust they have**

**in the school:** Underlying even the most negative complaint is a tacit trust that the school cares and will try to resolve the problem. If parents thought calling the school wouldn't do any good, they probably wouldn't call. School administrators who recognize and affirm this trust underscore the importance of parents and school staff working together in good faith to solve the problem.

#### **3. Thanks for helping school**

**administrators do their job:** This type of thank-you recognizes the reality that a school administrator cannot do it alone. Without that explicit statement, parents might expect school administrators to snap their fingers and fix any problem in the school.

School administrators need information from many sources to assess and address problems. When they thank parents for bringing an issue to their attention, they are in effect saying, "Let's be a team and work together on this problem." A school administrator can also simply state, "I need your help to help your child." Reiterating gratitude at the end of every conversation by saying, "Thanks again for calling," ensures that it will be remembered in a positive light.

#### **E: EMPATHIZE WITH THEM**

Empathizing is not agreeing. Too



administrators would be wise to always "practice TEA time" with parents.

Let's unpack each component of my advice:

**Practice:** Effective school administrators have developed the discipline that allows them to respond in a way that overrides reactions that would, otherwise, be unduly influenced by fatigue and events earlier in the day. These administrators have developed the discipline to respond rather than just react to what is said to them. How do they acquire this discipline? Practice.

Practice means not leaving communication to chance. School leaders should invest time in learning about what strategies engage people

often school leaders start to question or take issue with the content of the complaint and fail to respond to the emotion that the parent is experiencing. Parents by their nature have to be emotional about their child; if they aren't, who is? School administrators should "listen" to the emotion, leaving the content of the complaint on the back burner, until parents feel that they are heard and understood. Parents need to know without doubt that the school cares about their child. Listening with empathy is the best way to manifest caring.

Many school administrators discount a complaint because parents are emotional and not rational. Although a torrent of emotion can bury a nugget of truth in the complaint, simple statements like "I can hear how upsetting this is to you" or "If I was in your shoes I would probably be upset too" help parents settle down and share the content of their complaint in a clearer and hopefully more accurate way.

**A: ACKNOWLEDGE/ASK**

It is easy for school administrators to forget that from the parents' perspective they are in a one-up position. School administrators who acknowledge that it is difficult to call school affirm parents and reduce their anxiety. School administrators should also acknowledge their commitment to taking the complaint seriously while also explaining the potential difficulty involved in investigating it.

These acknowledgments set the stage for asking a very important question that should guide follow-up actions and communications: "What outcome would you like to see for your child?" School leaders might forget to ask this question because it appears too obvious: of course, parents want the problem to be resolved in their favor. The problem with not asking this question is that parents might not have had the opportunity to think about the outcome they want or could have an unrealistic outcome in mind. It is always preferable to discuss and explore possible outcomes ahead of time, rather than arguing afterward if the outcome



hankful



mpathize



cknowledge

doesn't meet the parents' expectation.

Asking this outcome question is especially important when the complaint is about bullying. Without exploring outcomes ahead of time, parents might assume that the only adequate

solution is to severely punish the student who they know for certain bullied their child. Since punishing the student accused of bullying requires evidence that is difficult to obtain, school administrators, therefore, face very limited options in meeting parental expectations. However, if parents state that they want the bullying to stop and for their child to be safe in school, administrators have much more latitude in achieving those outcomes.

**Time:**

Giving undivided time and attention to parents is the best way to demonstrate caring and concern about their child. Parents also need the certainty of when to expect a return phone call. A twenty-four-hour rule of getting back to parents is highly recommended. School administrators, even if the investigation is not complete, can brief parents on what they have done and still need to do. Within a week following the completion of the investigation, school administrators should provide parents with a written summary of all actions that the school has taken in response to the complaint.

When parents know that school administrators care about their child and are committed to keeping students safe, they are more likely to understand and support the outcome and more importantly have continued confidence in their school.

School administrators who "practice TEA time" don't need to say "trust me" to parents, because everything they say and do makes them trustworthy.

Without an overreliance on punitive actions as a response to the complaint, here are a variety of actions that can achieve the outcome of keeping a student safe:

- Checking in with the student who was bullied frequently during the day
- Speaking to the student accused of bullying even if it can't be proved
- Communicating with teachers and paraprofessionals to be alert for signs of bullying
- Enlisting the help and support of bystanders
- Citing all the other initiatives occurring in the school to promote respect
- Enlisting the help of social workers or school counselors

JIM DILLON is the author of *The Peaceful School Bus* (Hazelden), *No Place for Bullying*, and *Reframing Bullying Prevention* (both by Corwin) and a children's picture book, *Okay Kevin* (Jessica Kingsley Publishing). He is also a consultant for Measurement Incorporated.



# Mentoring Developed Me as a Leader



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By Maureen A. Patterson, EdD

“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

– Maya Angelou

**Mentoring developed me as a leader.**

Retirement has given me time to consider what I learned and accomplished over my career, but more important, what I needed to know and do in order to be a forward-thinking, influential leader. Who I knew, though, is what made me a leader of heart and fairness.

From the beginning of my administrative career, fortune was given to me in the form of mentors. My first administrative position was actually a return to a BOCES where I had been a special education teacher before venturing to a public school system. Although new to the administrative title, and now with an expanded role beyond my single classroom to multiple programs across the county, I was welcomed to the administrators' table of questions, problems, and decisions. Determining student programs, hiring and assigning personnel, and creating professional development were key responsibilities that had to be immediately implemented. I couldn't wait to begin; yet I realized challenges existed, and time would not be allotted for first acquiring the skills. An inexperienced leader must acknowledge the unfamiliar and seek help navigating.

Leadership training for this novice meant being enveloped by a team of administrators, previously my bosses, who made it their business to develop in me the needed skills. Priorities were established and expectations outlined. They modeled strategies for effective listening and dialogue, and set up opportunities for me to work with teachers, agencies, and families. Mentors set the stage for my experiences, promised to relay their intellect and history, and allowed me to practice, take risks, and sometimes fail, and often achieve. They established a trusting relationship, and directed me where to find the resources and answers without being overpowering. They defined the mentor-mentee relationship.

My first three years as a BOCES administrator were spent learning about programming from a supervisory perspective, and engaging with educators, including those in special and vocational education. Employment with BOCES allows for immersion in the big picture of education — coordination of services across districts and counties, collaboration with agencies and colleges, and communication with families about alternative classroom and career options. So much to learn

and fortunately, I had mentors to guide, remind, and redirect me. My mentors prevailed, sharing their own experiences and errors, and providing honest feedback. They modeled how to be a presence in the classroom, how to facilitate, rather than overrun, a meeting, how to lead from a moral



compass, and how to communicate. Mimicking their intense involvement with and commitment to teachers, students, and families became a mainstay of my administrative career — in essence, they mentored me to become a mentor.

Imagine these situations — how does a mentor support a neophyte administrator?

What happens when you testify in Family Court about a student with disruptive tendencies, and he returns to school with a stolen vehicle and a weapon aiming to harm you? Your mentors step between you and the student, and demonstrate how to talk him down until the police arrive. What happens when a member of the teaching team is killed tragically in an accident, and another succumbs to a frightful illness? Your mentors stand beside you as you console the staff, and later help you reconcile the realities.

What happens when several teachers are vying to teach a new instructional program and you

have to make the placement? Your mentors listen to the reasoning for the decision, and allow you to rehearse how you'll inform the one who gets the position, and those who don't.

Returning to BOCES as an administrator came by invitation and interview. The director of special education was one who had a legacy of mentoring long before he retired, and it was an honor to be welcomed back. As the lead administrator, he modeled kindness, thoughtfulness, responsiveness, and frankly, brilliance as a "teacher's administrator." Working with his guidance allowed me to learn, and then practice observing, listening, advising, and questioning teachers. In essence, he encouraged administrators to pay attention — not just set expectations and conduct evaluations — to teachers, and to regard what students needed as the priority for all decisions. His soft-spoken style of leadership, aka mentoring, provided detailed commentary, and rather than simply telling, he questioned. He asked about situations, reactions, and solutions, helping me learn how to be reflective and insightful. Mindfulness, empathy and integrity were the foundation of his leadership. I intended to become the same type of leader and mentor.

When I accepted an elementary principal position in another district, I was again fortunate to be surrounded by mentors. This time, a district-level supervisor and principal colleagues provided the necessary support to transition from special education administration to learning the details of elementary curriculum and assessment. The principalship allowed me to explore at a building level the research-based elements of learning, teaching, and leading. I was given permission to embrace change, and not wait an arbitrary time before creating a learning community in a high-poverty, and at the time lower-performing, school. District mentors asked me questions and provided suggestions to ensure that proposed interventions would be appropriate, and that my leadership could guide the carefully chosen efforts. There was even a team

of parents who shared their deepest dreams and fears for the school and their children, and the list I wrote at

Social media provides another opportunity for mentoring. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and even email offer space for educators to be connected, to learn from and teach each other. A technology-focused mentor who bridges knowledge and experience with support enriches our profession.

In a recent conversation, I asked a couple of mentees to define mentoring. Their answers were consistent – relationship, trust, and support. Mentor-mentee

relationships evolve with commitment and credence. Mentors design opportunities without safeguards, provide feedback with intention, and encourage reflection for growth.

It is clear why being a mentor is a primary component of my identity today. I was mentored, and so I do the same. Mentors gave me affirmations and advice. Mentors stopped me

the first meeting was enacted within the first three years. Success came from collaborating with stakeholders to create a school that was responsive to students' needs, and developed staff, students, and families who were accountable for the results. Mentors watched, provided ideas and discreet warnings and assurances, and even adopted some of the concepts for their buildings. In the meantime, I was no longer the new administrator, but now one who could coach and guide. I was becoming a mentor for others.

As I transitioned from principal to assistant superintendent, mentoring came from sources in the district and beyond – administrators in similar positions in other districts, SAANYS committee colleagues, and even fellow students from my doctoral program at Teachers College, Columbia University, who to this day are a sanctuary for asking questions and seeking options. Some mentors have been professors, others were friends and colleagues, and still others were educational experts; all are individuals I trusted to be honest, considerate, and creative in their responses.

Over the years, I, too, have mentored and advised from my roles as professor, administrator, teacher, and friend. The conversations, whether as mentor or mentee, yield understandings and encourage learnings. A conversation, an interview, a lesson, even an interaction at a workshop can provide the opportunity to mentor. The need for a guide does not end in the first years of our administrative experiences.

“Mentors set the stage for my experiences, promised to relay their intellect and history, and allowed me to practice, take risks, and sometimes fail, and often achieve.”

from making impetuous decisions. Mentors reminded me that judgment can be clouded if not for the lens that a mentor can provide; that time enhances scrutiny; and that action needs to be based on wisdom combined with passion.

When I became an administrator, I realized that a mentor (or more than one) would be key to developing me as a leader with characteristics that persevered beyond the business of managing a staff or a school, to one who would emulate and understand coaching others with a purpose. Mentoring led me to more meaningful levels of leadership that paid attention to others and worked to build their capacity, as well as my own.

## New administrators should:

1. **Find a mentor (or let one find you) – look for characteristics that exemplify the leader you want to be**
2. **Be open to feedback – both criticism and praise guide your development**
3. **Inquire and pay attention to the questions and resolutions – observe with an open mind and ask without always knowing the answer**
4. **Share practices, successes, and defeats in a collegial way – find opportunities to dialogue and network**
5. **Take advantage of all professional opportunities – conference, workshop, webinar, book study, networking, conversation**
6. **Be a connected educator – use Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, email**
7. **Be a mentor – reward someone with your intellect and talents**

MAUREEN A. PATTERSON, EdD, is a retired assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and assessment in the Liverpool School District and an adjunct professor at LeMoyne College.

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Take it from a seventeen-year veteran and a three-year newly tenured building leader: you will spend a lot of time taking advice in the beginning. We would suggest acknowledging all that everyone offers and then begin to explore your new surroundings. Lead with integrity, ethics, and passion, and you will enhance your building, district and community.

**LEARN, EXPLORE, AND THEN RESPOND**

Every school has its own climate and culture, climate being the day-to-day fabric and culture being the tapestry over time. It takes time to learn the genetic makeup of a building and the many layers that exist. Along with a building’s climate and culture, there are many subcultures that exist (Kruse, 2009).

New administrators who come from within the ranks of a building have the luxury of understanding the climate and culture. Of course, the longer they have been in the school, the greater understanding they will initially have. This understanding can be an essential element in developing your leadership style. Candidates who have risen through the ranks may have trouble finding balance. Striking this balance between colleague and leader is a delicate journey. Based on the previous position in the building, there is an established comfort with stakeholders. Therefore, a great opportunity exists to cultivate talent and ideas before you even take the position. However, keep in mind implementing change takes finesse and time.

For the leader who joins the administrative team from the outside, understanding the existing atmosphere becomes even more important. Staff members will be sizing up the “new boss,” and wondering what big changes are coming and if their world is going to be turned upside down. Keep in mind, people are not always comfortable with change, and the possibility exists

that you earned the position over an insider. In any instance, there is bound to be uneasiness. The time and energy dedicated to understanding the current reality that is the climate and culture of your new building will pay dividends over time.

**CULTIVATE THE SHARED VISION**

A principal, central office administrator, or the board of education will be providing the vision for the new administrator. It is important to realize that many staff members have been in their positions for many years and may have participated in the vision development.

Understanding where to focus your energy as a new administrator needs to be clear and realistic. Discuss the vision and create a plan to achieve and sustain it. A written vision can reduce varied interpretations, which may limit misunderstandings later. Monitoring the progress regularly and focusing on the initial vision should not remove flexibility. There are bound to be forces that challenge the vision, and adapting the plan may come into play. Similarly, the best laid lesson plans may need revisions to meet the objective; so may the plan for vision. Where are we today? Where do we want to be tomorrow and beyond? Like climate and culture, we must consider benchmarks to assess where we are now. We cannot begin to improve or truly understand our trajectory of improvement without understanding the here and now. Whether it is student achievement, curriculum implementation, technology innovation, or extracurricular expansion, a progressive vision is essential. Developing a plan based on data is critical to fostering the next generation of learners. All stakeholders must be included in the process and be endowed to nurture and encourage the tenors of the vision.



**EMPOWER & SUPPORT**

A “new staff program” is a nonnegotiable. If one does not exist, create one, regardless of your level in the organization. For example, if a new assistant principal is hired, the principal should immediately include him or her in the new teacher program. We believe the new teacher program should include all nontenured teachers, part-time teachers, leave replacements, and long-term substitutes. Teachers new to the building who have transferred from within the district should be invited. Contracts may challenge this, but there are creative ways to include the more senior members of the committee. Inviting tenured staff provides the added bonus of veteran perspectives. By including the new administrator in the program, great things are accomplished. It creates an open dialogue with all new staff that will be fostered beyond the committee. It removes the notion that the new administrator is special or too busy to participate, while fostering collegial understanding. The dialogue becomes building specific and driven by the building vision and stakeholders. It provides a level of camaraderie and connection with a group of teachers who need it the most.

New teachers are a valuable resource. Fresh out of college with innovative ideas and enthusiasm, these teachers must begin to build trust in their environment. New teacher committees are a great way to cultivate that trust and build the educator/leader relationship. According to David Cutler, “New teachers must feel confident in expressing doubt or admitting mistakes to experienced teachers.” This allows the teacher to begin professional dialogue and personal self-reflection in a safe, nurturing environment.

As time moves on, the new administrator can take ownership of the meeting and begin to lead the new team. With all new staff working together, the climate and culture begins to take a new direction. We have found the greatest success with our new teacher program when the principal or assistant principal



provides the direction with input from the new teachers on the committee. Introducing new topics each year helps keep members engaged in the dialogue as some members may be on the committee up to four years. This model can be replicated at every level in the district.

### COMMUNICATE AND ENGAGE

The twenty-first century has brought with it a plethora of outlets for communication. Texts, emails, tweets, posts, blogs, and the like are all means in which we can instantly communicate. Understanding the power of the digital footprint is critical in maintaining positive dialogue. The beauty of these platforms of communication is the availability to think and revise before we send. There is no reason for transmitting a message that can become a challenge for a school district or community. On the contrary, nothing can take the place of a solid verbal communicator. Parent meetings, board meetings, community venues, informal discussions, and many other in-person forums require a level of poise, confidence, and reassurance that establishes the first impressions of the school or district.

As twenty-first century leaders, we must foster the skills of communication, collaboration, critical thinking and problem solving. The average adult in the United States spends ten hours per day in front of a screen (Howard, 2016). Teenagers and tweens, most recently coined as "screenagers," spend only slightly less at six to nine hours respectively (Shapiro, 2015). This does not include the time on a device for homework or schoolwork. We are leading in an age where our constituents want their voices heard and acknowledged with as many likes, shares, and retweets as possible. We must provide these opportunities to our staff and students. The multimedia age is conditioning people to be heard, acknowledged, and validated as quickly as possible – more the reason to think before you click.

It is important to set up expectations for yourself and your office team with a communication plan. You should schedule times to check

emails and return phone calls. We let all stakeholders know that phone calls and emails are returned within twenty-four hours. Our support staff answering phones knows that parents seeking immediate attention may be best talking with our school-based support team of guidance counselors, social worker, or school psychologist first. If the expectations are established, adhered to and publicized in the proper forums, this will lead to more effective and collaborative dialogue throughout your organization.

### REFLECT, REVISE, AND REJUVENATE

By constantly asking yourself, "Would I have wanted my child in my school today?" you set a barometer for personal and professional understanding. Sharing this reflective practice with staff each year at initial and closing faculty meetings reinforces the true reason we are here. Furthermore, asking to substitute a different setting for "school," such as class, office, stage, court, field, bathroom, cafeteria, and hallway, personalizes the reflection. It empowers people to become self-conscious and provides a level of ownership for growth. This simple reflective phrase can become a beacon for school improvement and a measure of success in your new assignment.

Time and energy are the two greatest resources that highly effective school leaders and successful organizations consider at every turn. We all want to have the greatest impact we can in our halls, classrooms, cafeterias, faculty meetings, and the like. In the beginning, we think that change is inevitable and all people want to be better. Therefore, we have grandiose action plans with multilevels of intervention. Initiative is necessary, but initiatives can be our downfall. School initiatives can come rapidly. Many people will offer initiatives, but it takes a leader to stick around and ensure its success. Without the school leader's attention, the initiative may only become a drain of time

"Time and energy are the two greatest resources that highly effective school leaders and successful organizations consider at every turn."

and energy. "Is 'more' really more?" (Schmoker, 2017).

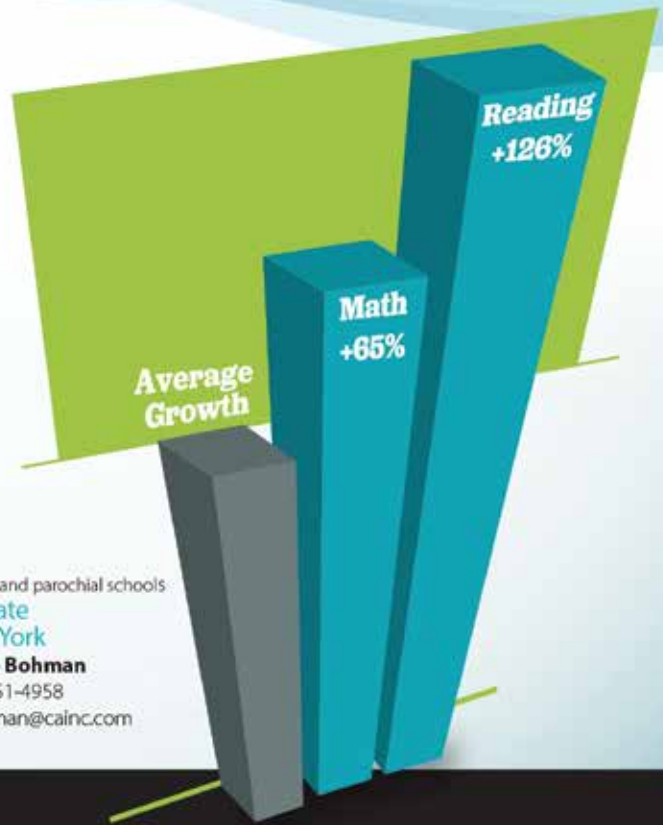
Always be reflective and be aware of the need to rejuvenate yourself and your staff when the times come. You must always wear your school pride on your sleeve, be consistently smiling, and forever grateful, for what we do. As an educational leader, your influence goes far beyond the walls of your building or boundaries of your district. Leading with integrity, ethics, and passion will have the greatest impact on students, staff, and community.

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- TIMOTHY P. MARTIN is the principal at Islip Middle School and JAMES F. CAMERON is the assistant principal at Islip Middle School.

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# The Duties of Principalship



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By Lynnda M. Nadien, PhD

The "duties" of the principalship extend far beyond the classroom and/or the building. As a principal for the past decade, **the complexity of the "job" has become more intensified**. As a leader, you are not only relied upon by your staff to solve instructional issues, you are in many instances relied upon to solve issues related to personal problems of staff members, social and emotional issues of children and their families, and perhaps issues of custody, divorce and separation, and in rare cases issues of child abuse or neglect.

As a leader, I have learned never to complain, as this is a career and as complex as it may be, depending on the day, my main goal is to protect and serve our children. Usually, law enforcement is called upon to protect and serve; however, it is the principal's job as well. The other day at dismissal, and I mean literally at dismissal, approximately one thousand feet from our school doors, a house was up in flames. It was not just any house, but the house of one of our fifth-grade students.

What do we do? Immediately I announced to hold all of our walkers, and my staff knew we had to take action, which included maintaining calm and dismissing our bus students, daycare students, and some staff. Did we know this included traffic control, and allowing police and fire department vehicles through the circular driveway, while parents are in cars on the street picking up children? Well, somehow we managed to exceed our usual dismissal practices by four to five minutes, but the team, led by the principal, managed to get this done.

Trust me, this is not part of our job description, nor is it written in a practicum textbook. It takes special people who are thinkers and sort of "street savvy" to survive a situation such as the one described above. If I had to give any advice it would be to never allow fear to take over, and never show your fear. You cannot cry or break down when you have a ten-year-old looking at you who knows the house is his, it is burning wildly, and his dad and dog are still inside.

The good news is, we survived that day and the family will be all right. Today, during the lunch periods, I practiced with my third-grade groups for our annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. celebration. We sang along to YouTube videos



that included Kate Smith's rendition of "God Bless America" and the Morehouse College Choir singing "We Shall Overcome." This minirehearsal was documented in photographs and sent up via Twitter. Again, this preparation is an "out of the box" type of "duty" for a principal; however, much of what we do is "outside of the box." What it does do is empower children to perform and become proficient as performers, and teaches them the history of the civil rights movement in songs and pictures. Plus, they love visiting the office as it has become an office in which they learn, as opposed to a location for disciplining or negativity. Again, this is a way for the principal to teach and stay involved with a schoolwide celebration, as opposed to just greeting the parents on the day of the event. Usually, I call this the unorthodox approach to the job; in addition to putting out fires, keeping children safe, teaching them old spiritual tunes, and preparing them for public speaking opportunities, I completed two observations, submitted seven midyear evaluations, checked email, made sure all the snow was removed from the circular driveway, and was on site during our breakfast program. Yes, somehow, you can do it all in a day!

None of this happens overnight! A leader must cultivate the climate and support the positive attributes of the school. A leader must have a strong support system in place which includes teachers, parents, and children. A leader must show that they are genuine in any situation and will seek solutions to problems based on prior experiences, and what is right as per school policy. A leader can never believe that with experience, your job as a learner is complete. The strongest and most effective principals never stop learning, never stop thinking, and never give up on themselves.

This too is ongoing as some days you question your abilities. You ask



yourself: what could I have done better and was my decision making up to par? For the past twenty years I have been keeping specific anecdotal records of all daily occurrences which include phone calls, meetings, the weather, or just writing down a phone number. This has allowed me to follow up where applicable with parents or agencies, and has allowed the school to notate incidences or situations which we may be asked about at a later date.

Rereading the anecdotes is true comedy at times, as it is hard to believe what can happen in a day. Luckily, as the principal you have an opportunity to make a troublesome day better the next day. You have power to change a child's life, and make a teacher a better instructor. You can step back and quietly seek a time in which you made a positive change and the school benefited from that change.

My main advice is to decide if this career path is right for you! The principalship can be lonely and isolating although you are always surrounded by people. Many times you are the sole decision maker or you have confidential information and you must make that critical decision, without assistance. You need to be a role model, you need to stay healthy, you need the right people on your side and there when you need them.

If you believe the principalship is about prestige and being on a pedestal, think again. You will never last unless you can cultivate a strong working environment that includes teaching teachers and making children

know they can succeed even in the face of adversity. You need to remain mentally strong, and always think about the next best move you can make and how that will impact teaching and learning.

Don't allow negativity to sway you; when you have an idea, write it out and always have a blueprint in your mind of what may work. Don't allow other colleagues to "bully" you, as there are many people who will negate much of what you plan or believe may work. This is a trap for any good leader, to be stripped of your own productivity. Do whatever you can to get that "swag" back! Take minibreaks, definitely take time to close your door, and value that quiet time. This has happened to me over the years and for the first time I believed that



my productivity was hindered as the closest people to me had a hidden agenda, thus impacting what our school needed to accomplish.

Once I realized much of that negativity may have been my fault for not taking immediate action, the situation changed for the better and new people arrived to make our team strong again. So, with this notion in mind, focus on the power that you do have, which is positive power. Never let the position go to your head, and plan to leave your ego at the door. When you realize the "job" is multidimensional, and you don't know it all, you will be successful. Be open to planning, and also to seeking the assistance of your teachers and your students. Ask them

what they need, and make sure they ask you what you need. Fight the fear of being wrong, or failing, as you can never succeed without at least suffering a few failures.

The great part of being an educator is that you will always have the opportunity to make it right the following school year. Keep track of your daily work, measure what works and what does not, and have the sense of mind to make legitimate changes. We know that change does not happen overnight, but with earnest effort, all changes are for the betterment of student achievement. If that is your legacy as the principal, you can become a proud and accomplished leader!

LYNNDA M. NADIEN, PhD is the principal at Uniondale UFSD.

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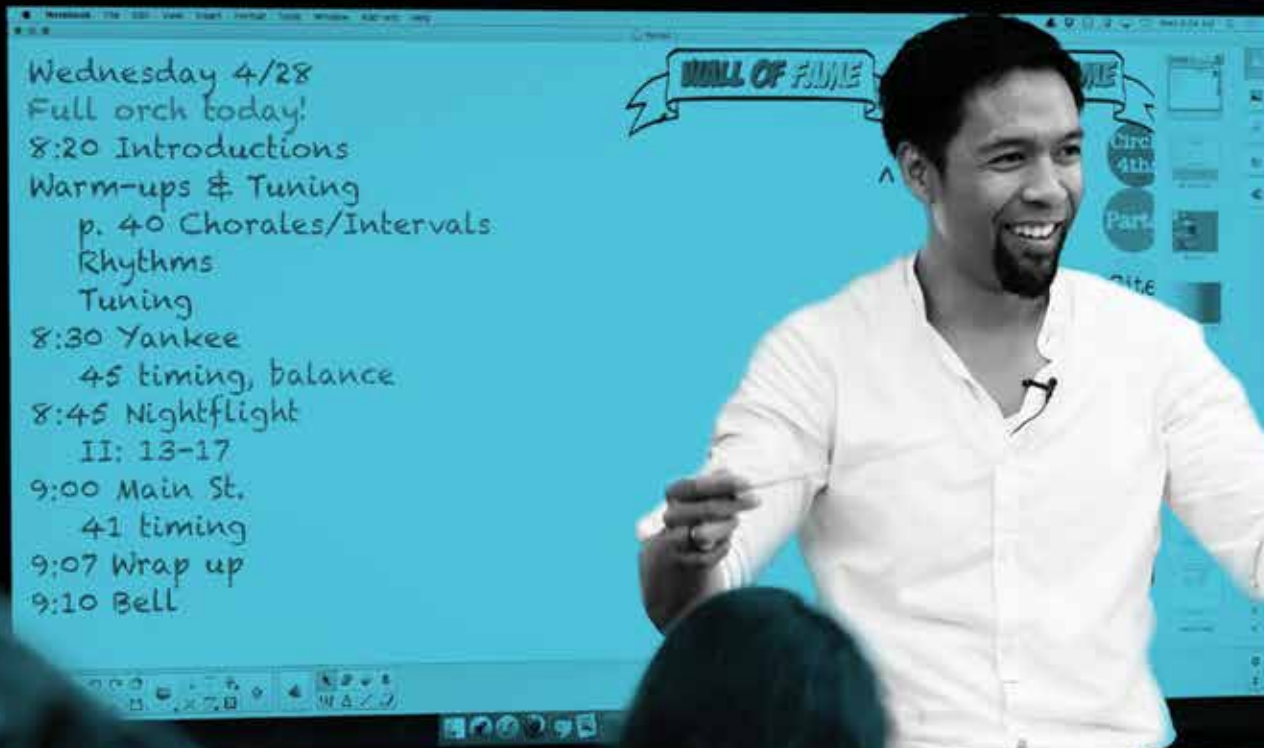
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# Magical Phrases: Using Words That Connect Us with Parents



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By Jessica Zimmer

Developing positive relationships with parents is one of the most challenging and rewarding roles as a school administrator. In my role as an assistant principal in an elementary school, I am continually striving to successfully build and maintain these relationships. Through reflection, **I have learned some important phrases that I use in every conversation, meeting, phone call,** and presentation that connects me to the families of my students.

**SAFE, HAPPY, AND LEARNING**

I tell parents that it is my job to ensure that our students are always safe, happy, and learning. If they are not, for any reason, I will do everything possible to remedy it. Sometimes it means mediating a struggling peer relationship. Sometimes it means changing a schedule so that there is more supervision at recess. Sometimes it means working with the reading teacher to brainstorm intervention strategies. Using this phrase tells parents that I have their children's best interests at heart.

Earlier this year, a mother reported that there were some students who were bothering her daughter on the afternoon bus line. The student was afraid of being labeled a "tattletale." Together, we decided that she would be a "helper" to our younger students, guiding them to stay on line, helping them to tie their shoelaces, and reminding them how to sit safely. This responsibility helped her to feel safe and happy so that she could be available for learning.

**DON'T PUT YOUR HEAD ON THE PILLOW...**

These are truly the most magical words a school administrator can say to a parent. At the beginning of the year, my principal and I welcome parents at the first PTA meeting. Since it is a lengthy meeting and parents can only "hear" so much, I explain to them that they should never go to bed at night if they are concerned about anything that their child shares with them after a day at school. While I can never promise to answer an email or phone call right away, parents know that I will take care of the situation or provide information as quickly as possible. It may seem that making this statement would create never-ending phone messages and emails, but I have found the opposite to be true. Once parents understand that they can share their concerns and have them acted upon, they tend not to contact me unless it is something that truly worries them.

One evening, I received an email from a parent about an incident on the bus with his little one. I replied by the end of the evening that I would

look into it first thing in the morning. I was surprised when he sent another email, thanking me for my quick response. This parent had learned that his concerns were important to me. It went a long way in building a positive relationship with his family.

Parents also know that they can always come in to meet with me by appointment or that they can stop me in the hallway at any time to share information with me. I have found that the more time passes between parents having concerns and me assisting them, the more likely that I am to end up with them being angry or upset. While I am very busy, people come first, especially when it comes to our students' families.

**I UNDERSTAND...**

Being a parent is challenging. There is so much information for parents today and so many debates about what the "right" thing is to do. When I contact parents about a concern that I have, they will often share that they are struggling with similar things at home or that they are not sure how to help their children. In these cases, it is important that I show them understanding.

I once contacted a parent because her son was having difficulty transitioning from recess into the cafeteria for lunch. The parent reacted by breaking down into tears. She knew that he was struggling and was embarrassed about his behavior, not only as a parent but as an educator herself. It would have been easy for me to judge her or tell her what to do. However, my response was, "I understand. We can't always control what our kids do when they aren't with us. What can you tell me about your son that you think will help the situation?" Together, we created a plan of action and the mother felt supported, rather than judged. The next time I had to call to share a concern, she knew that we would work together to help her son.

Sometimes we do not get the response we expect when we contact a parent. One of my younger students had been struggling with self-control. One day his teacher was absent and he had a very challenging day. Knowing that the teacher would be out the next

day, I told him that we could make a positive phone call home if he made better choices. The next afternoon, we were both excited to call his mother. He told me that she was away, so we practiced the message he would leave on her voicemail. Imagine my surprise when the mother answered and yelled at me for bothering her. I apologized, telling the mother that I understood how challenging it was to navigate both the workforce and motherhood. The phone call ended on a positive note. We do not always know where parents are or what they were doing when a phone call or email arrives. If we do not get the reaction that we expect, it is important that we show understanding, even when it is not easy to do.

**THE OTHER DAY I SAW YOUR CHILD...**

I am "out and about" through the building as much as possible during the day. I challenge myself to interact with as many students as possible and get to know them as individuals. This can be very challenging, but it goes a long way toward building positive relationships with parents. If I can share an anecdote or information with parents, they feel as though I truly know their children.

For example, a student was being bothered on the bus. The mother explained that her daughter was such a good girl and she did not understand why another child would bother her. I immediately told the mother about a time when her daughter helped a classmate in the cafeteria. The mother was stunned that I not only knew her daughter, but could share a specific anecdote. The rest of the conversation was easy; she knew that I recognized her daughter as being a positive member of our school community. She trusted that I would make the situation better.

**HERE'S HOW I WILL HELP...**

My philosophy is that I am always a teacher and I teach important skills to my students. When I make phone calls about discipline issues, I tell parents how I will work with their children to make better choices in the future. Rather than assigning recess or lunch detention, I say, "With your



permission, I would like to spend John's recess time tomorrow working on a plan..." No parent has ever declined this offer.

One of my youngsters was jumping on top of other students on the afternoon bus line, despite my numerous attempts to redirect him. I finally called his mother, explaining that I wanted to help him to be safe and to make friends with the other students. The next day, the boy spent his recess time with me creating posters to hang in the gym to

remind everyone of the rules. We had a positive conversation and his behavior improved.

Another time, I had a group of students who were hurting each other during a game at recess. We spent the next day's recess period talking and realized that their conflict was caused by their differing views about the rules of play. We created a list of rules and shared them with the lunch monitors. The students walked away better

equipped to resolve conflicts peacefully.

After each of these incidents, the students went home and shared with their families how much they enjoyed making our school a better place. The students still missed their recess periods, which is a possible consequence for misbehavior, but they also learned valuable skills. Their parents understood that I was there to help and guide their children, rather than to simply punish them.

Families need to feel that their children are being well cared for in school each and every day. The words that we use, along with our actions, make all of the difference in connecting our school with our families. Those connections are invaluable in creating the partnerships between school and home that help our students to thrive and succeed.

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JESSICA ZIMMER is the elementary supervisor at Wantagh Elementary School.



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TRUST:

# The Key to Education Reform



By Bruce H. Crowder, EdD

Similar to those who labor in the education field, I am aware of the hard work our public school administrators and teachers are doing as they implement new learning standards that exceed any that may have come before. **It is a new and necessary era for education with reform that has to prepare our students not just for today, but for the future.**

The shift from process and skills now centers on deeper understanding in all subject areas. In addition, the emphasis on content knowledge is paramount.

Accommodating such shifts in reading and mathematics is no easy task. At the heart of this reform is the need for a modified or new curriculum. Much of what was used yesterday in the way of instruction, course work, and assessment will no longer be applicable.

The early impact of hastening this reform has been disheartening. With little time for educators to make the intended shifts, a horrific accountability system fell on their heads. It is almost impossible for anyone to imagine any system being able to withstand such a terrible blow and continue providing necessary services.

However, I find our educators gaining strength in their understanding and control of the features and elements that relate to developing an education system that meets new expectations and more. It has taken time for this to happen due to its complexity and other requirements, such as access to appropriate content which contains the rigor necessary to align with new standards. This is a journey, not an event, which will take at least five years of diligence, support, and trust to accomplish.

*"The people when rightly and fully trusted will return the trust."*

– Abraham Lincoln

#### **TRUST AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL**

In all likelihood there will be little, if any, interference from the federal government in the affairs of education in the states with a new administration that does not support the notion of common learning standards, much less a system of national accountability. There may be other fears, but they have not evolved as yet. However, the intent to improve our schools has focused on academic standards and accountability in which both became highly politicized, and the term "accountability" has become synonymous with testing. Therefore, the future of American public education becomes a state matter, and this may bode well for education.

#### **TRUST AT THE STATE LEVEL**

When it was decided that new standards would become the basis for educating our students, the decision

was made by the Board of Regents with its best intent of bringing education in line with the demands of college and career readiness. The impetus for common standards came from the National Governors Association (NGA) and state commissioners of education with the intent of establishing a single set of clear standards for all states. In addition, access to federal dollars tied to the standards appeared inviting with the caveat that there be a related system of accountability to ensure the funds were used appropriately. The carrot and stick idiom was the impetus to put a new education system into place in the blink of an eye. Administrators and teachers were on the outside seeking a semblance of reasonableness to what was taking place, but to no avail. They were never trusted to be a part of this great endeavor that could only be accomplished with their leadership and expertise.

Matters worsened when accountability rested squarely on testing, and only one test, to determine the quality and status of an administrator or teacher. While educators tried to respond to new mandates related to new standards and accountability, there was little in the way of support from the state. The coup de grâce came from the governor when he moved accountability to an untenable position for educators. To openly insinuate that there just had to be bad teachers out there was more than anyone could take. With no bond of trust coming from the state's trustee for education and the governor, this reform was on the verge of not being sustained.

#### **TRUST AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL**

When injustices fall on those who are respected, there can be no other response than to resist. This is where the community has taken a stand regarding a reform about which it knows so little and in which new standards, assessments, and accountability appear to be more harmful than good for children. This is a serious concern for education in New York State. While accountability as first implemented is on hold, the testing continues in a lacuna that borders on meaninglessness.

Community members, and parents in particular, wonder about the condition of education at this moment. Questions arise: What are these standards? Why are they necessary? How will they help the nation, state, community, and my child? Why the testing? How will it help improve learning? How will it support our administrators and teachers? How much testing is necessary?

*"Education is not preparation for life, education is life itself."* – John Dewey

#### **TRUST AS A VEHICLE FOR CHANGE**

There is a Turkish proverb that says, *"When you are going down the wrong path, and you know it, stop!"* Changes to mandates by the Board of Regents have stalled those initially implemented to rush testing and accountability. However, it is unclear as to what the current hiatus is designed to do. Without a joint analysis of what has and is happening in public education, educators could find themselves in the same situation prior to the hiatus. Maybe this is not so bad, but it's not good for those who work and learn in our schools.

So, how might a joint, trusted endeavor begin? To avoid doing more harm, let's consider the following:

**Accountability**, to be successful, must be designed to support effectiveness. For public education it should rest squarely on indicators that serve to measure student growth and simultaneously provide valued insight for its continuation.

**Testing** outside of the classroom, to be effective, must be limited, purposeful, and timely. And, it should only be viewed as an indicator for that moment in time. When the length and complexity of a state elementary-grade reading test (i.e., grades three through five) appear to exceed that of an English Regents' exam, it becomes an issue.

**State Learning Standards**, to be successful, must be examined carefully by all those affected to determine appropriateness and continued emphasis on learning for present and future growth

of all students. Of particular significance is the interrelationship between standards, curriculum, and testing which ideally should exist within an integrated web.

**Content Learning**, to be successful, must be based on what is essential to be learned. Here is where an examination of cultural literacy is important, along with the value of general knowledge related to subjects, courses, and the world at large.

As the reform, often referred to as standards-based, continues, the awesomeness of the challenge may only happen within a culture of trust. Therefore, this needs to be a statewide movement to harness the best of what is currently taking place.

**TRUST AND TIMING**

As I continue to work with administrators and teachers, I feel their pain. While parents and communities support their schools, there is an underlying force that

mistrusts the state and its decisions to lead this reform. In addition, that mistrust has begun to affect students, as well. There could not be a more important time for those considered leaders to understand the situation and act on it.

Agendas for building trust at all levels must begin immediately. Time is on the wing. It would be helpful for an agreed upon agenda to put forth a common discussion that is open, receptive, and seeks truth. All levels of engagement need to be a part of such a discussion to find and bring forth understanding and actions that are good and supported.

It may have to begin with the state. A meaningful place to start would be a trusted endeavor with educators and community to bring forth a testing system that meets the criteria presented above. To attempt to continue with the current system will do nothing to support reform, nor to ensure trust. By initiating a serious move to address one of the most perplexing problems with

the reform, the Board of Regents would send a message of hope.

Our support for a strong public education system rests at the heart of our well-being as a state and nation. It is something to cherish, support, and continue to improve. Our public schools develop informed and engaged citizens, which is necessary for a democracy. This has been and continues to be a primary mission of educators. New York State sits atop the nation when quality counts, while also realizing there is more to be done. Let the work begin to demonstrate the power and effectiveness of the trusted many to move a reform which is rewarding for all.

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## MCGRAW-HILL EDUCATION

LaVonne Patane  
585-441-4192  
Lavonne.patane@mheducation.com  
Mheducation.com/prek-12

McGraw-Hill Education is a learning science company. We help educators and students drive results by delivering technology that harnesses an understanding of how the mind works to make each learning moment more engaging, efficient and effective. We bring a unique combination of high-quality content and personalized technology that's been proven effective – woven together with an understanding of the science of learning.



## OSC WORLD

Mike Richez  
516-247-5321  
michel.richez@oscworld.com  
oscworld.com

Digital fly monitors social media (Twitter, Instagram) in real time to alert schools when potential harmful content is made. Using GeoLocation (latitude/longitude mapping) and filtered terms/acronyms, data is tracked, analyzed, and ranked for potential threats (bullying, fights, weapons, self-harm), assisting in keeping students and staff safe.



## MEASUREMENT INCORPORATED

Thomas Kelsh | (518) 427-9840 ext. 206  
tkelsh@measinc.com  
mi-schoolservices.com

Measurement Incorporated's Program Evaluation and School Improvement Services Division designs and conducts rigorous formative and summative evaluation studies of all NCLB initiatives. Our highly skilled professional development staff offers training in instructional strategies, leadership development, RTI, and bullying prevention.



## THE READING SOLUTION

Elliott Reinert | 781-259-1803  
Elliott@thereadingsolution.com  
thereadingsolution.com

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## RENAISSANCE LEARNING

Kelly Heismeyer | 800-338-4204  
answers@renlearn.com | renlearn.com

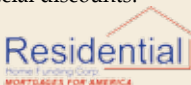
Renaissance Learning is the world's leading provider of computer-based assessment technology for PreK-12 schools. Adopted by more than 70,000 North American schools, Renaissance Learning's software provides daily formative assessment and periodic progress monitoring technology for reading, math, and writing.



## RESIDENTIAL HOME FUNDING

Richard Melnyk | (518) 429-3633  
rmelnyk@rhfunding.com | rhfunding.com

Our mission is simple. Residential Home Funding Corp.'s goal is "to be the lender of choice for our customers by providing both diversified and competitive mortgage financing options with excellent customer service." With a diverse customer base that includes first-time home buyers as well as high net worth individuals, Residential Home Funding Corp. can provide the appropriate financing to meet any customer's specific needs. The Mortgage for Champions Program was developed as a special thank-you to the heroes of our community and offers special discounts.



## SMART TECHNOLOGIES, INC.

Kathy Glenn  
403-407-4044  
kathyglenn@smarttech.com  
smarttech.com

SMART Technologies Inc. is a leading provider of technology solutions that enable inspired collaboration in the classroom. SMART products create more engaged learners, and help them develop essential skills and prepare for the future.



## THE BREAKTHROUGH COACH

Jill Pancoast  
904-280-3052  
jpancoast@the-breakthrough-coach.com  
the-breakthrough-coach.com

The Breakthrough Coach consulting team works with education leaders to adopt proven business management techniques to the educational environment at both the building and district levels.



## ZANER-BLOSER AND THE SUPERKIDS READING PROGRAM

Tracy DiDio  
518-466-3497  
tracy.didio@zaner-bloser.com

Christian Standerwick  
917-202-6290  
christian.standerwick@zaner-bloser.com  
zaner-bloser.com

SuperKids reading program is a core reading program designed for kindergarten through second grade that looks like no other and works like no other, with a cast of characters that children love. Happily Ever After is a motivating, literature-based reading readiness program.





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# All IN

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

OCT 22-23, 2017 THE OTESAGA COOPERSTOWN NY



# SAVE THE DATE

## OCTOBER 22-23, 2017

DETAILS COMING SOON - VISIT [WWW.SAANYS.ORG](http://WWW.SAANYS.ORG)







***What better place than Cooperstown, the town baseball calls home, to celebrate teamwork and collaboration? How do we get everyone on the team and working together in new ways to ensure wins for ALL of our students?***

**A CALL FOR ANNUAL CONFERENCE PRESENTERS**  
**SUBMISSION DEADLINE | MARCH 31, 2017**

Today we are challenged more than ever to reinvent and broaden our repertoire to meet the needs and tap into the strengths of students from a tremendous diversity of backgrounds, experiences, and cultures. Schools are seeking strategies that acknowledge differences while insuring equity for all students. The collaboration, teamwork, and willingness to open our own minds to the real actions that this balance requires is central to meeting this challenge.

This year's conference theme, ALL IN, focuses on what we need to do differently and together to meet the challenges of this tumultuous time in our society. We are seeking practitioner workshops that focus on the many aspects of this all important goal of ensuring that our schools truly function as communities whose primary goal is the safety, well-being, and achievement of all students.

**PLEASE NOTE THAT PREFERENCE IS GIVEN TO PROPOSALS FROM MEMBER PRACTITIONERS.**

*Presenters associated with a commercial enterprise must agree to have their company or organization participate as a corporate sponsor and must present with a SAANYS member.*

**PRESENTERS ARE REQUIRED TO REGISTER FOR AT LEAST ONE DAY OF THE TWO DAY CONFERENCE.**

*Presenters will be responsible for the cost of Sunday registration (if attending on Sunday), meals, housing, and travel.*

**IMPORTANT Information items prior to your submission:**

- Your workshop will be scheduled for Monday, October 23.
- Workshops are 75 minutes in length.
- You may present alone or with a partner or team. Teams may include teachers.
- Workshops should be built around activities that promote active participation and interaction with attendees.
- Workshops need to identify 2-3 'takeaways' that are practical applications that attendees can readily implement in their schools.
- Powerpoint slides and workshop materials will be posted on the SAANYS website following the conference.
- Hardcopy handouts are optional.

**Download the WORKSHOP PROPOSAL form at [saanys.org](http://saanys.org).**



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