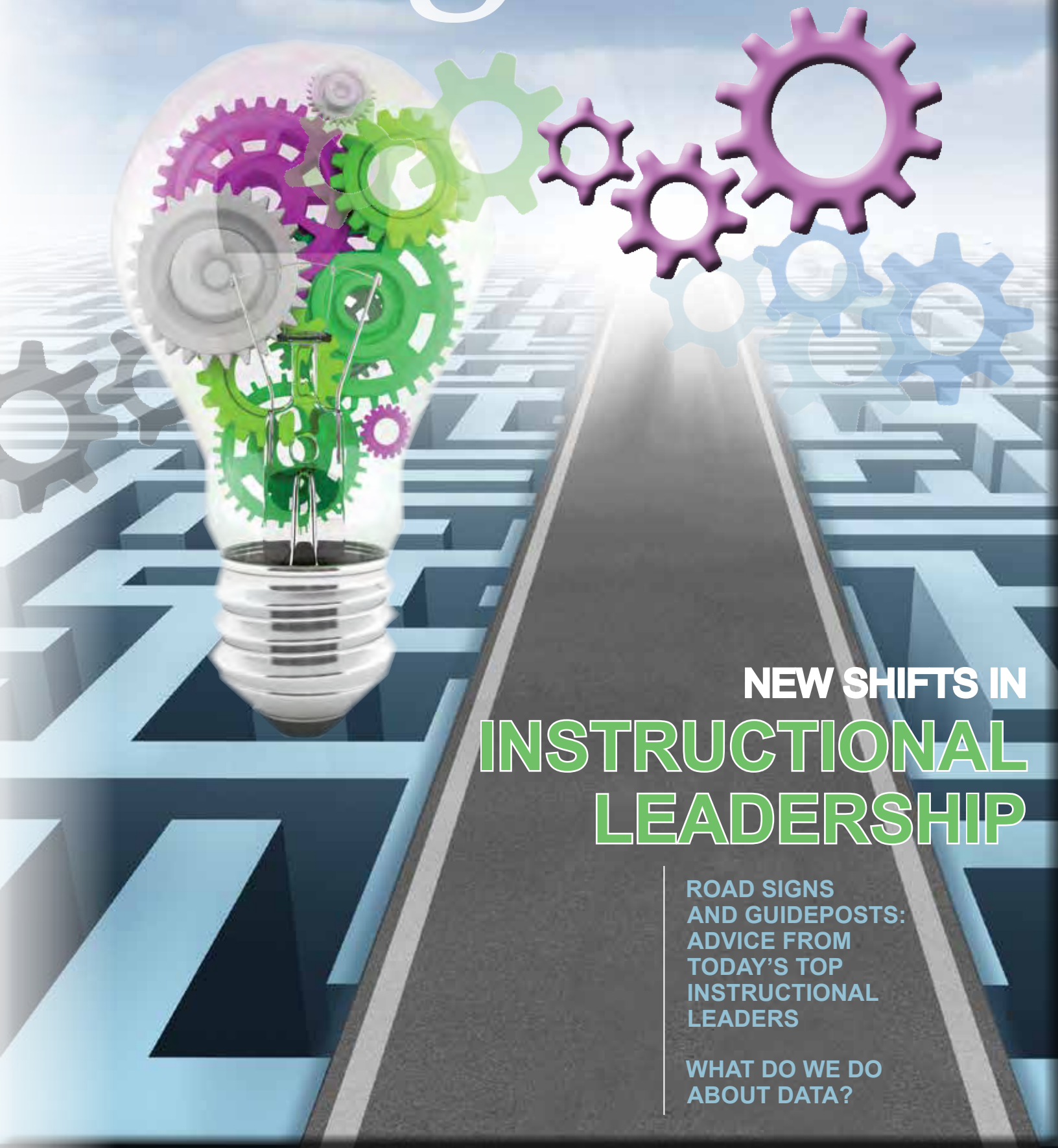


School Administrators Association of New York State

Vanguard

WINTER
2015
Vol. 44 No. 1
Exploring
Educational
Leadership



NEW SHIFTS IN INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

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Vanguard

WINTER
2015

Vol. 44 No. 1

Practices
from practitioners

This magazine is published
three times a year by the
**School Administrators Association
of New York State**

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**No Map?
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In a David Mammona article entitled, "How Great Leaders Thrive in Tough Times," he writes, "It's simple: tough times breed great leaders. If you look at many of the famous leaders throughout history, you'll notice they became famous because they navigated through seemingly impossible times."

If you ask anyone who is a member of an educational stakeholder group, the one thing they will all agree upon is that monumental changes are occurring in education in seemingly impossible times. As a leader, you are being asked to manage this epic, seemingly impossible change.

What type of leader will you be? Will you be a high-impact leader, a transformational leader, an instructional leader, an uplifting leader, a leader who is a change agent- or a lead learner who has a high emotional quotient? My guess is that the ultimate goal of any leader is to be defined as an effective leader; tough times may breed great leaders, but it is far from simple.

The intent of this issue is to support you as you sort through all the latest educational terminology, shifts, and regulations and wrestle with the million dollar question on your path to effective leadership: "What is one to do?" My response: "What is the data telling you to do?"

Regardless of the differences in our school districts, we all have data, and Peter DeWitt's article, "What do we do about data?"

helps us look a little deeper at its use and importance. Are you insisting that each time two or more of your staff members get together to discuss students, they bring data? Regardless of the grade, no matter the content, whatever the discipline; we can always ask the following questions: Based on the data, what are we doing that is working and how do we know? Based on the data, what are we doing that is not working and how do we know? What are we going to do to sustain the positive results? What are we going to do differently if something is not working? (Based on Results First Training).

What are we going to do differently if something is not working? This is the toughest one of those Results First questions to answer. Creating an environment that allows the answer to that question to be discussed in a supportive, open manner will allow staff to match student needs to an achievement plan.

What data are you using in your school district? How are you using the data to improve student achievement? Do you have a system in place to ensure essential data is brought to the table, discussed, and actionable steps are put into place?

This issue provides a magnitude of information and strategies to assist you in developing a data collection system that guides discussion to better predict academic success for students. From the insights of the authors of *Using Data To Focus Instructional Improvement* to the practical advice from colleagues, including this year's administrators of the year, you're sure to walk away with the tools you need to guide your path as an instructional leader. In the words of our 2014 High School Principal of the Year Annie Metcalf, "What is your north star?"

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ROAD SIGNS AND GUIDEPOSTS:

Advice from Today's Top Instructional Leaders

By Kim M. Smithgall

Ask 50 researchers or education professionals across the country to define instructional leadership and you're likely to get 50 different descriptions. Ask the same of New York's four principals of the year for 2014, however, and some common road signs emerge.

Perhaps most interesting – and refreshing – is the fact that **the common characteristics described aren't the minute, step-by-step actions often prescribed in today's educational landscape.**

Instead, the state’s most highly respected leaders find success by living and operating within a few broad philosophies:

1. Have a vision for your school and share that vision widely;
2. Build relationships and instill a culture of trust and community;
3. Support teachers;
4. Continue growing and learning;
5. Be creative and courageous; and,
6. Be thankful.

DEFINE AND SHARE YOUR VISION

Tony Sinanis, principal and “lead learner” at Cantiague Elementary School in the Jericho Union Free School District, recently had a last-minute request to speak about school branding at a workshop taking place in his building. As he walked through the hallways on his way to the session, he randomly caught a couple of fifth-graders and asked them to join him, letting them know that he was going to ask them in front of the crowd, “As a principal, what do I believe in and what do I stand for?”

For some administrators, this would be a big risk...not for Sinanis. “They all said that I stand for kids and I believe in making school fun, but learning is the main focus,” he commented, adding that he consciously made a decision to share his vision from the day he interviewed for the principal position. “If your kids can verbalize what you stand for and your staff can verbalize what you stand for and believe in and your community can verbalize what you stand for, you’ve established the

“What is your North Star? Can you define it? Do others know what it is? If so, all your decisions will be easy from that point.”



Tony Sinanis | Jericho
NYS Elementary School
Principal of the Year



Diane Mitchell | Clarkstown
NYS NASSP Middle School
Principal of the Year

Principals of the Year
SAANYS Annual Awards Program



Richard Wiesenthal | New Paltz
NAESP NYS Middle School
Principal of the Year



Annie Metcalf | North Collins
NYS High School Principal of the Year

culture you want, whatever that may be. For me, it’s being child-centered.”

Diane Mitchell, principal at Felix Festa Middle School in the Clarkstown Central School District, concurred, adding, “If you come in without a strong goal or vision for your school, it’s going to be very difficult. You need to know where you want to go, where your values are, and then put a plan in place to see that it happens.” North Collins Jr.-Sr. High School Principal Annie Metcalf simplifies it: “What is your North Star? Can you define it? Do others know what it is? If so, all your decisions will be easy from that point.”

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AND A CULTURE OF TRUST

Building relationships and creating a culture of trust may seem like a no-brainer for anyone in a management position. However, for New Paltz Middle School Principal Richard Wiesenthal and other top instructional leaders in New York, successfully carrying out the philosophy takes

commitment and a constant awareness of actions.

“For me, my career has been based on relationships,” Wiesenthal said. “I’ve found that you always have a better shot at making changes and offering ideas or suggestions to people you have a relationship with versus those you don’t.”

Wiesenthal recalls being in seventh grade with a friend and seeing two gentlemen walking down the hallway. “I remember the two of us trying to figure out which guy was the principal and who the other guy was...I had already been in the school for two years and had no idea who the principal was.”

Wiesenthal is proud to be a different kind of principal, estimating that he spends 99 percent of his day directly interacting with students, staff, and families; he’s constantly

visible and this helps build relationships and trust from all constituent groups. “As I walk around the building, I might stop in to see what’s happening in a math class. I’ll follow up with a phone call or note to some parents, saying I loved sitting with your kid in class today. They’re waiting for more, but I say, ‘That’s it; it was a great experience.’ That creates a certain relationship with parents,” Wiesenthal commented.

Wiesenthal, his assistant principal, and many teachers in his school also tend to spend their lunch periods or planning periods with students. “I would say my office has 12 to 15 students in it during lunch each day – by choice. Everyone’s welcome to come,” he said. “We always try to make it a meaningful 40 minutes. We talk about school or watch Ted Talks, for example.”

Students in each of the three grade levels at New Paltz Middle School also take a three-day trip every year, providing further



opportunities for developing relationships between staff (including Wiesenthal) and the students. After more than 20 years of such trips, Wiesenthal still receives letters from former students commenting on how impactful the trips were. “I’ve been here a pretty long time and have hired most of the staff here. My teachers get it that we’re here to develop relationships with kids and understand them and get to know who they are, and they are here to get to know us. That’s what we’re really about in New Paltz.”

Similar relationships with teachers and families also help to form a foundation of trust. Said Sinanis, “I can pretty much tell you the names of the spouses of every one of my teachers and can tell you what they’re doing over the holiday break. I can tell you the names of students’ younger siblings who are not in kindergarten yet. I can pretty much connect every kid to his or her parent because I have spent time observing these things.” Like Wiesenthal, Sinanis is very visible in the school and consistently shares information about school activities via social media outlets, such as Twitter and Instagram.

“Being transparent builds relational trust with the community because they can see what you’re doing and if you’re putting it out there, clearly it’s something you believe in,” Sinanis said. “When we had a dip in test scores in a couple of areas, we had no pushback and no questions from the community. I think that’s because we’ve amassed social capital, because relational trust exists here. The community trusts in what we’re doing because I work so hard to tell our story, whether it’s Twitter or video updates that the students do every week.”

SUPPORT TEACHERS

Building relationships with teachers also occurs when administrators make it a priority to support these professionals. In nomination materials for middle school principal of the year, one teacher wrote: “Teachers are valued in Dr. Mitchell’s building.

She observes, supervises, and evaluates teachers, providing feedback that helps professional growth and student learning. Her door is always open to staff. Dr. Mitchell makes sure each staff member and department receives the resources that are needed to support the needs of the programs that they teach. All are supported and morale is always high.”

This is such a great compliment in a time when fiscal challenges often lead to shortages in resources and when new mandates can contribute to stress and low morale if not handled with insight and a caring attitude. Mitchell said she defines instructional leadership as “fostering teachers to constantly be improving...and setting opportunities within the building for both students and teachers to be constantly stretching and moving forward in a positive way. In education, if you’re not moving forward, you’re moving back.”

She achieves this forward movement by always striving to converse with teachers on a professional level. “I try to analyze and be open in a positive, non-judgmental way,” she said. “I truly believe that people go into education with the desire to be the best they can and by fostering that positive relationship, they’re going to be successful.”

This respectful relationship building was especially important for

Mitchell, as she moved from being a colleague with teachers to being in a supervisory position.

Metcalf also uses respect as the basis for supporting her teachers. “I work with brilliant, creative teachers and I’m sure there are brilliant teachers in every school district across New York,” she said. “Knowing this, for me, instructional leadership is more about listening, observing, supporting – really, it’s leadership from behind. The first

Mitchell said she defines instructional leadership as “fostering teachers to constantly be improving...and setting opportunities within the building for both students and teachers to be constantly stretching and moving forward in a positive way.”

thing I looked at when I came to this school was creating a culture that was safe for teachers and students, while at the same time setting very high expectations for performance. So, with those high expectations, of course, comes some angst and you have to be there with a close ear to what they need – is it more technology, is it a workshop, do they need more literature that’s going to feed their knowledge about pedagogy?”

In most cases, it’s as simple as asking the teachers what they want and what they need and finding a way to deliver, Metcalf said. She adds that her own excitement about daily successes is another form of support. “The concern and caring for my faculty and students helps me be a good instructional leader,” she said. “My excitement is tangible

“My teachers get it that we’re here to develop relationships with kids and understand them and get to know who they are, and they are here to get to know us.”

when teachers are successful. There’s nothing more thrilling for me than being in a classroom where the kids have really taken over and are constructing their own learning

and are teaching each other and the teacher is doing a phenomenal job of facilitating that learning.”

When Common Core Learning Standards and other mandates are introduced, Metcalf shares the burden with her teachers, rather than just passing it on. “I try to walk shoulder to shoulder with the teachers and continually assure them that we’re in this together,” she explained. “I tell them that all we have is today and what we’re going to do today is what



we're going to do, then we're going home, enjoying our families and coming back tomorrow to have at it again – just like every district in the state."

CONTINUE GROWING AND LEARNING

As the self-designated "lead learner" in his district, Sinanis is in a perfect position to speak to the importance of continuing to grow and learn in an administrative position (the subject of his doctorate work is examining how principals use Twitter and other social media for their continued professional development).

"One of the biggest issues and challenges that instructional leaders face is the lack of professional development. You become a principal and suddenly you're supposed to know everything. In many cases, you're not the one going to workshops; it's all about your staff, which is great, but if you don't have sound professional development and if you don't keep learning and growing and if you're not current in research, practice, and theory, how are you going to impart that on your staff?" Sinanis asked.

He models being a lead learner. "I try to learn every single day," he said, adding that it may be 20 minutes on Twitter or connecting with other educators using Google Plus if time doesn't permit a full workshop.

Wiesenthal puts equal emphasis on being a lifelong learner, comparing it to the need to keep up on new medical breakthroughs. "In the old days, doctors used to use leeches to bleed people to lower their blood

pressure and for other conditions. Would you do that today?" he said. "You have to keep up on what's going on in education. I'm a big reader. I get up pretty early on weekdays and the same time on weekends and one of the things I value is that I have a library upstairs in my house, so I read for two or three hours before

my wife is up and around on the weekend."

Mitchell also considers continued growth to be vital, both for her and her staff. When she chose to study instructional leadership, it was a very conscious decision. "I could teach myself finance, the managerial aspects if need be, but curriculum – those aspects of being an instructional leader – are key in any administrative position," she commented. "I wanted to be able to really look critically at the different components of instruction to help teachers improve...and that's an evolving and ongoing process for me."

To help teachers, she makes professional development a priority. "We learn together," Mitchell said, citing examples of teachers teaching each other, as well as professional book clubs operating in the district.

BE CREATIVE AND COURAGEOUS

When considering principals' characteristics, being courageous might not be among the top ten attributes that come to mind. For Metcalf, it's essential. "In 20 years, this is the largest piece that I have garnered from my experience – that without courage, it's easy to ignore those things that are going to be really difficult – for example, to have the conversation with a teacher who perhaps needs a teacher improvement plan or to consider not granting tenure to someone who, despite all the resources and support, doesn't perform well in the classroom. I never

anticipated how much courage it takes to be a strong leader who is truly advocating for student success and stellar instruction."

Creativity is another cornerstone of success in instructional leadership, said Mitchell. "This is a particularly difficult time budget-wise for schools, so it's very easy to get depressed," she said. "But we need to be very creative and think outside the box and use the resources that we do have to keep moving forward."

BE THANKFUL... EVEN IF IT'S TERMINAL

In asking the principals of the year for any final insights, here's what Mitchell had to say: "You can't do it alone so build a community of support systems; use the talent, use the knowledge of the people you work with. Most people are more than willing to work cooperatively and to share their knowledge. There's value in capitalizing on the talents of others."

Sinanis advised maintaining balance. "And by balance I mean that you're learning on the side, that you're going to school or you're spending time with your family or that you're going to the gym," he said. "Balance looks different for different people, but you need to have balance because it gives you perspective on kids and staff and parents."

Wiesenthal summarized by saying, "I recognize that I'm a lucky guy. I get to be doing what I love every day."

"I remember what a wonderful mentor said to me when I said I wanted to study to be a school administrator – well, if you have the disease and it's terminal, I guess I'll help you," Metcalf mused. "I would just say to nurture your passion. If you're passionate about this, you'll be a wonderful instructional leader."

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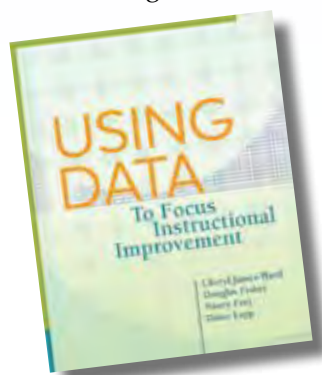
About Data?

By Peter DeWitt, EdD

Data can be such a complicated topic in schools. In some schools, teachers and leaders work together to find their strengths and weaknesses at the classroom or building level. Unfortunately, in other schools the discussion about data is not always positive. In these days of increased accountability **the topic of data is only going to get harder for leaders**, especially if Chancellor Tisch and Governor Cuomo get their wish to change the state evaluation system to one that gives state testing more weight.

Regardless of the issues that schools can't control, using data to drive instruction is an important method to support and improve instructional practices for teachers, which means learning opportunities for students. In *Using Data to Focus Instructional Improvement* (ASCD, 2013), Cheryl James-Ward, Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey, and Diane Lapp build a very important case as to why leaders and teachers must use data, and also provide a holistic and easy to digest road map for getting there. In this interview with *Vanguard*, James-Ward et al. provide answers to the diverse questions that come up when conferring about data.

What are the biggest mistakes that schools make in regard to data?



Cheryl James-Ward:

“Most schools believe that they are using data as well as it can be used. This is probably the biggest mistake because it leads to missed opportunities to deeply improve learning for all students. The goal of data is to improve student learning and to ensure what we as educators do has the greatest possible impact on learning. When teachers and administrators fail to look at lots of data and ask lots of why questions, it often leads to tangential next steps. This in turn can generally derail our opportunity to get to root causes, which are critical to improving learning and the learning environment.”

“The second biggest mistake that schools make regarding data is to ignore the indicators or brush them aside by finding excuses or justification for why the data is not favorable. Our goal

as educators is to seriously consider the information, identify root causes, and generate through lots of questioning targeted and immediate next steps to address the deficiencies.”

James-Ward wants to make sure that schools don't continue to “wait to act on the information as if the issue will ‘go away.’ It does not. Instead it piles up and becomes multifaceted.” Ignoring or waiting for data to go away will not help improve learning in classrooms.

There are many reasons why school leaders and teachers should not ignore their data. Data, both hard and soft, tells us a great deal about our students and school climates. Using data effectively is important because it affects more than just instruction.

James-Ward:

“Effective use of data can positively affect the overall climate of the school and the larger school community. Because it is collaborative, transparent, targeted, and purposefully involves various stakeholders, it can lead to higher teacher and student self-efficacy and thus increased student growth – both academic and emotional.”

“Effective use of data leads to transparent discussions regarding staff and student strengths and weaknesses [in a positive school climate with a supportive school leader]. The transparent process leads to a culture of continuous improvement. When the whole process is transparent and built on becoming our next best selves, teachers and leaders are empowered to ask and answer difficult questions getting to the root cause and providing on-point next steps.”

LOOK PAST ACCOUNTABILITY AND MANDATES

Perhaps it's a Utopian view of data, but Doug Fisher believes that there are many reasons why data is helpful. Too often when we think of data our minds wander to account-

“Too often when we think of data our minds wander to accountability and mandates, but Doug Fisher wants us to think differently.”

ability and mandates, but Doug Fisher wants us to think differently. He has worked with many schools and I asked what they do differently in those schools than those that don't seem to use data at all.

Fisher:

“First and foremost, they're not afraid of the data. By that, we mean that people are not punished when they talk about data. Instead, data discussions are used to improve students' learning. In fact, this is the basis of the entire PLC model – looking at data with colleagues and then taking action on that data.”

“They [schools Fisher works with] collect a wide range of types of data. Student achievement data is important, but so are attendance, behavior, and climate. When data conversations focus on the complexities of a given school and the actions that can be launched to improve the organization, rather than “fix” a given teacher, whole school improvement is more likely to occur. That doesn't mean that there aren't private conversations about specific students and specific groups of students, but the instructional improvement we discuss in this book is a public plan with each stakeholder assuming his or her responsibility.”

“It really is about collective efficacy – which Bandura (1997) defined as a group's shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainments. When teacher teams, schools, or districts develop their collective efficacy, the data simply becomes a source of information that they use to develop and implement their actions.”

DATA CAN BE HARD AND SOFT

Earlier, Douglas Fisher mentioned hard and soft data. He differentiated between both by explaining:

“Hard data generally relate to things you can count – such as test scores, attendance, and behavioral incidences, both positive and negative. At our school, for example, we post the percentage of students in attendance each day on a large bulletin board for everyone to see. It helps keep hard data in front of all of us. We also post the number of community service hours completed in a public place and track suspensions in a private place. These are all examples of hard data being used to inform our team.”

However, as important as hard data may be, Fisher believes soft data is equally as telling.

“Soft data generally relate to things that include perspectives and beliefs. For example, we conduct climate surveys with students that include questions about how much they think their teachers care about them, their attendance, their achievement, and their success. In addition, we walk the school building each week looking for evidence that students are or are not welcome. For example, a teacher posted a new sign on her door that said, ‘We miss you when you are not here’ and we noted that as an example of a welcoming environment.”

“We think that performance matters, but getting at the root causes of the performance requires a more comprehensive review of both soft and hard data.”

“In too many cases, the data that are reviewed are all hard data types, and specifically student performance on tests. We think that performance matters, but

getting at the root causes of the performance requires a more comprehensive review of both soft and hard data. In other words, we need to make sure we’re asking why the data are the way they are.”

THE GRADUAL RELEASE

In the book, James-Ward et al. wrote about the Gradual Release Model. Said Nancy Frey, “We use a gradual release instructional framework as a way to create a common vocabulary for educators to talk with one another about their practices, regardless of content, discipline, or grade level.”

Frey explains further: “In a nutshell, it describes five instructional moves:

- Establishing purpose so that students know what is expected of them today, and the teacher is clear on what he or she will formatively assess today.
- Modeling and thinking aloud so that students have opportunities to witness how experts use concepts, solve problems, hypothesize, and affirm or disaffirm possible solutions.
- Guided instruction in the form of robust questions, prompts, and cues to scaffold knowledge and encourage students to use what they are learning. Importantly, guided instruction provides the teacher with formative data about what students know, do not know, or are using but confusing.
- Collaborative learning with peers to consolidate their understanding.
- Independent learning to apply and extend knowledge.”

Frey suggests, “All of these instructional moves should occur within each and every lesson, but the order in which they occur and the amount of time devoted to each are much more fluid than people often interpret. These are like dance steps; they happen rapidly, repeatedly, and in unique combinations. To take the analogy

a bit further, dancers use a common language to illustrate and discuss their choreography, whether they are dancing the waltz or modern jazz. Educators likewise need a common vocabulary to discuss their instructional practices and the data related to it.”

The key to assessing all of this is through the use of formative assessment. Frey says,

“Formative assessment is essential at each stage, and is a way for schools to discuss their practices and the ways in which they are checking for understanding throughout the lesson. Getting good at this schoolwide means engaging in learning walks and collegial observations in each other’s classrooms. We don’t mean high-stakes, evaluative kinds of measures. We’re talking about what all professions do. Professionals observe each other in practice and ask questions, trade ideas, and share proven approaches.”

Leaders understand that getting teachers to openly share their data is not easy, especially in the era of accountability.

Frey:

“Leaders need to model what it means to share data and discuss it by actively soliciting and sharing their own data. For instance, leaders should be collecting data on parent satisfaction and their perceived access to administrators. Another data source can be found at every front office – the visitors log. The principal can and should pick up the phone or send an email to follow up with visitors about whether any problems they had were quickly and satisfactorily resolved. Leaders can and should collect 360 degree data from teachers, students, and families on their perceptions. All of these can be shared with staff, and provide leaders with opportunities to show through their actions exactly why discussing data is so beneficial.”

**PRIVATIZING PRACTICE:
WE NEED TO MAKE
LEARNING VISIBLE**

James-Ward et al. wrote extensively about privatizing practice, which means classrooms are private places where teachers close their doors to the outside world. Diane Lapp offered some suggestions on how school leaders best foster a school climate that does not privatize practice:

“Every teacher wants to provide the best instruction for his or her students. How to get better and better at doing so involves continuous assessment of one’s practice. Unfortunately teachers are often not given such feedback because they are infrequently observed and offered both positive and next-step suggestions about how to help students meet the lesson purpose(s) through the tasks they assign, the modeling they provide, the instructional differentiation they offer, and the independence they promote. Such feedback is the key to teacher growth and student learning.”

“School leaders play a significant role in promoting collegial conversations about instructional practice. Before beginning the learning walks we describe in our book, the school principal and lead teachers or instructional coaches can secure a few videos illustrating exemplary practice. Then together with teachers at a particular grade or discipline they can analyze the videos and discuss effective teacher moves. They can conclude by offering a few suggestions that would make the instruction and learning even stronger.”

“Once teachers have such an experience they begin to realize that even the best teachers can continue to grow when provided targeted feedback from colleagues. They become less fearful of observation. The next step is for a grade level, discipline, or school to identify an area of instructional focus.”

After that is accomplished, Lapp believes that:

- Peers can then share ideas about how to accomplish it. Together they can identify times to be observed by colleagues and the school leadership team.
- Observations should be targeted on the area of agreed focus. At the conclusion, suggestions that will feed the instruction forward can be offered as well as praise for all the effective instruction that was observed.
- Little steps such as these push classroom doors open for observation and professional growth.

“The key is to build the idea that deprivatizing practice occurs through targeted professional development, collegial observation, and conversations that are intended to move every teacher’s instruction forward.”

IN THE END

When leaders enter the school building tomorrow, what can they change? Where do they start?

Lapp:

“Effective schools are places where students learn. School leaders need to remain focused on the primary reason for collecting data, which is to identify causes for successful learning as well as factors hindering learning. All data about the operations and climate of the school, the faculty, the instruction, the support staff, the administrative team, and the families and community should be viewed through a lens that consistently asks, ‘How is this affecting student learning?’

Patterns of strength and need are easier to identify when the focus of data collection remains very clear. Once areas of need have been identified the administrative team should move quickly to remedy the situation. The identification of solutions are easier to identify by asking the next question, ‘What changes need to

occur to ensure that learning gets back on track for all of the affected students?’”

Lapp cautions that,

“Additionally the administration team should encourage teachers to share instruction and experiences that are making positive differences for their students. For example, at our school, teachers are encouraged to email the entire faculty about positive growth experiences that are occurring for the students in their classes, and also to ask for help with a student they may not be reaching. Encouragement to do so by the administrative team sends the message that our collective focus is on student learning and we stand as a team ready to make this a reality for every student.”

Adds James-Ward:

“Moreover, using data effectively can be difficult to achieve because it requires: open collaboration, an ongoing commitment to targeted improvement, and a willingness to look deeply at both our practice and beliefs. It requires the courage to confront blindness, including willful blindness, and an unequivocal commitment to those we serve – students. In our book, Mario Marcus shows us that this must begin with the site leader asking lots of questions without placing blame, but rather with the intent to learn and improve.”

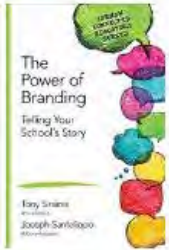
PETER DEWITT, EdD is an independent consultant/author working with schools in the U.S. and internationally for John Hattie as a visible learning trainer. He is an instructional coach with Jim Knight and student voice with Russ Quaglia. Peter is the author of three education books including *Flipping Leadership Doesn’t Mean Reinventing the Wheel* (Corwin Press, 2014) and *School Climate Change* (ASCD, 2014). He is the series editor for the Connected Educators Series (Corwin Press), and is working on a new leadership series with Michael Fullan, Yong Zhao, Pasi Sahlberg, Andy Hargreaves, Russ Quaglia and others for Corwin Press.

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This issue of *Vanguard and Practices* has asked us to examine the role of the instructional leader. You might use the title “instructional leader” or “lead learner” to identify your position, yet your responsibilities extend far beyond classroom walls. This has happened in administrative positions at both building and district levels. One principal who has redefined the role of public relations for school leaders is Tony Sinanis.



The Power of Branding by Tony Sinanis and Joe Sanfelippo

Tony Sinanis, principal and “lead learner” at Cantiague Elementary School in the Jericho Union Free School District, was selected as the 2014 New York State Elementary Principal of the Year by SAANYS and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP). Part of his work over the last three years has been in promoting his school through the use of social media including the use of the hashtag #Cantiague on Twitter.

Tony collaborated with Joe Sanfelippo, a superintendent in Fall Creek, Wisconsin, to write about one of the redefined roles of principals. Their book, *The Power of Branding: Telling Your School's Story*, is part of the Corwin Connected Educators Series.*

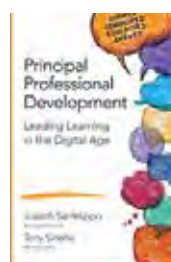
This book is 56 pages in length and is broken into seven chapters: “The Importance of Telling Your Story”; “Your Heart = Your Story”; “Building Your Brand and Preparing to Tell Your Story”; “Using Social Media to Tell Your Story”; “Giving Voice to all Stakeholders in the Storytelling Experience”; “Does the Brand Promise Match the Brand Experience?” and “It’s a Wrap.”

Each chapter ends with two takeaways and tips, which serve to provide concrete examples for administrators looking to expand their understanding of branding.

I had the opportunity to ask Tony about the genesis of this book (through Voxer) and he explained the book evolved through conversations with Joe Sanfelippo and his own work with branding. Tony and Joe had agreed to present on their work with branding at an edcamp, and their collaboration around the topic evolved from there. “What it boils down to is creating a space people can identify with. You think about the brand promise you are trying to create. You’re trying to evoke emotion in people. That happens through transparency, that happens through sharing, that happens through spotlighting all the wonderful things that are happening.”

Perceptions of schools in the press (and politics) have likely never been more negative. In chapter 1, “The Importance of Telling Your Story,” the authors of this book hold us to task to tell our own authentic story. The impact of telling our own stories holds great impact within a community. By pushing out the positives in our schools and districts, leaders have “the opportunity to define their space, provide an identity to those who live within the boundaries, and become a model for communities to support.” Schools are in need of community support now more than ever to counteract some outside perceptions, misinformation, and political forces.

For administrators who are ready to become the author of their school’s or district’s story, the “Using Social Media to Tell Your Story” chapter provides many concrete examples of other practitioners using the applications. What I appreciated most about this chapter was no one tool was prescribed. It’s not about the tool, it’s about the message. This chapter will help administrators gain confidence to choose a tool or two to experiment with in their practice.



Principal Professional Development: Leading Learning in the Digital Age by Tony Sinanis and Joe Sanfelippo

As a follow-up to their first book for Corwin Press, Joe Sanfelippo and Tony Sinanis have written a second book entitled, *Principal Professional Development: Leading Learning in the Digital Age*. It is due to be released in February 2015. Sinanis explains: “The second book is about how principals can use different tech resources and social media to learn and grow.” Corwin promises that the book will show school leaders how to discover solutions through social media connections.

The practice of being an administrator whose primary role is that of manager is defunct. Today’s leaders are always in a state of growth. We are required to know more and do more in many areas including instruction, best practices, and branding. We have expanded responsibilities. Our roles require us to seek new ideas and stay current in our field. *The Power of Branding* will strengthen your skills as an administrator outside your classroom and school walls while *Principal Professional Development* will surely enhance the skills administrators need inside their schools!

**The purpose of the Corwin Connected Educator Series is to teach educators who aren’t connected the power of all the tools at their fingertips. You can find out more about the Corwin Connected Educator Series at <http://www.corwin.com/connectededucators/>.*



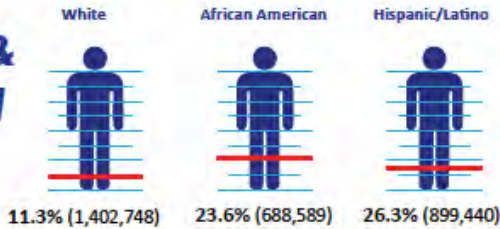
BOOK REVIEWS BY LISA MEADE

Lisa Meade is the middle school principal at Corinth CSD. You can find her on Twitter at @LisaMeade23.

New York State Community Action Association

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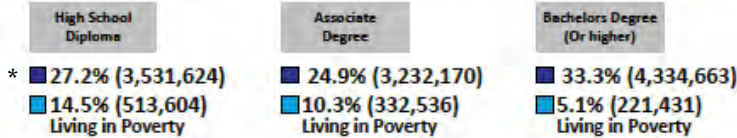
Race & Poverty



Education & Poverty



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Employment & Poverty

6.6% Unemployment Rate

Median Income
\$56,657

Living Wage for 1 Adult, 1 Child Household
\$49,048

Median Income w/High School Diploma
\$29,413

Hourly Wage for FMR, 2 BR Apartment
\$25.25



Health & Poverty

No Health Insurance

Employed 13.9%
Unemployed 31.7%



Free/Reduced Lunch Program

Eligible Children 54%

Gender & Poverty

High School Diploma Only



Median Income
\$34,444



Median Income
\$23,854

38.3% Families

Female Head of Household w/children living in Poverty

US Poverty Rate: 15.7% • NYS Poverty Rate: 15.6%

*The top numbers provided, next to the dark blue squares, indicate the total for each category, as a percentage of the entire population and the number of individuals. The numbers below, next to the lighter square, shows the percentage of all people in that category living in poverty and total number of individuals that indicates.

OPINIONS



"I never anticipated how much courage it takes to be a strong leader who is truly advocating for student success and stellar instruction."

— Annie Metcalf
2014 New York State High School Principal of the Year

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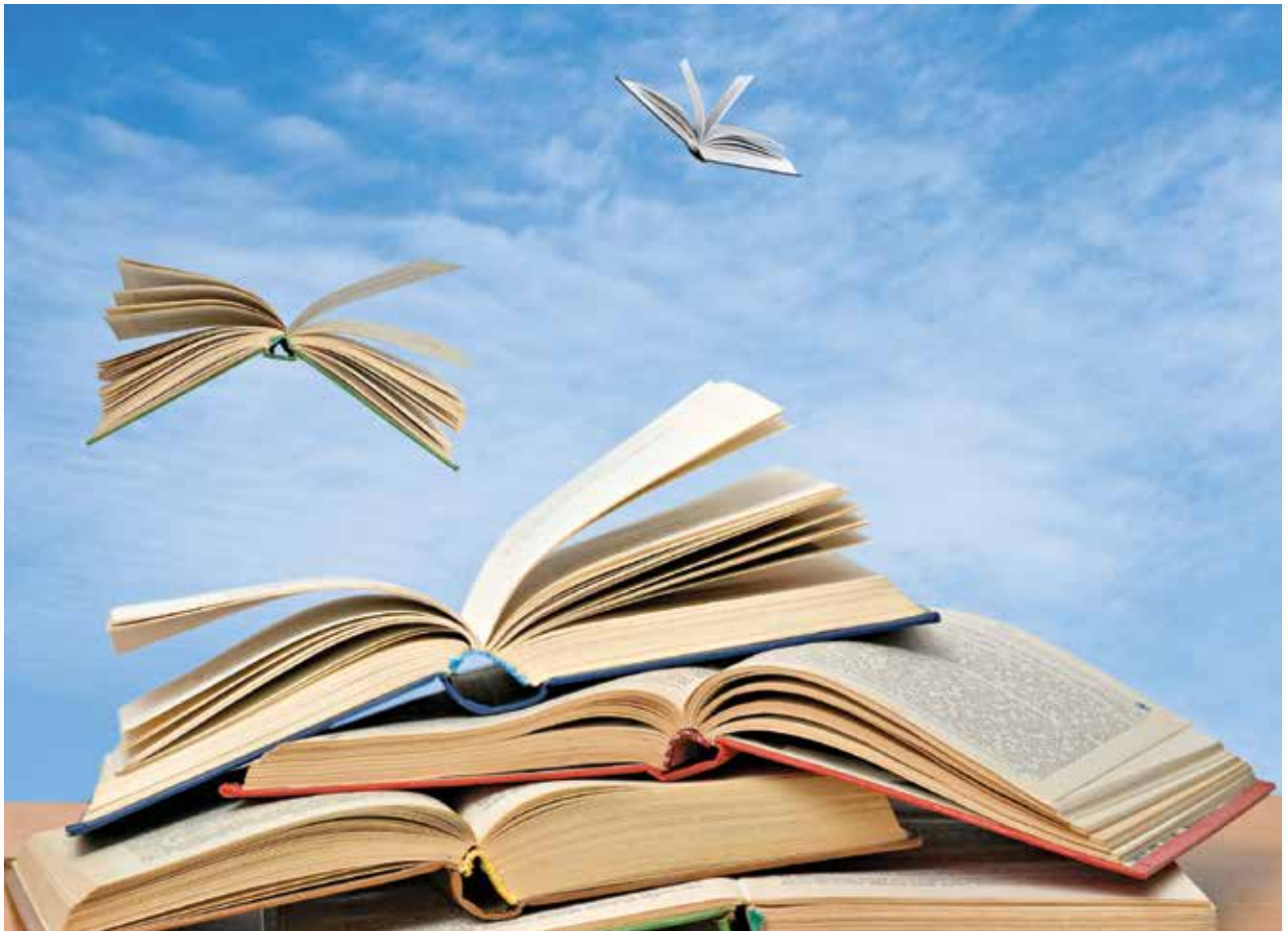


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The Evolved Instructional Leader



By Gina DiTullio

Over the last 20 years, I have worked in a variety of roles in education including classroom teacher, mentor, math coach, and school administrator. I have watched **the role of principal evolve from that of a manager to a true instructional leader.**

Principals all seem to have certain qualities in common, but the following traits set them apart as instructional leaders:

1. They know how to coach teachers as well as how to engage them in reflective practice;
2. They know how to build a school culture that supports and encourages a focus on collaboration and communication.

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

What exactly is reflective practice and how does one engage a staff in it? That is a good question to begin our conversation with.

Susan Imel defines it this way: "Reflective practice... involves thinking about and critically analyzing one's actions with the goal of improving one's professional practice. Engaging in reflective practice requires individuals to assume the

perspective of an external observer in order to identify the assumptions and feelings underlying their practice and then to speculate about how these assumptions and feelings affect practice." (1992). This is not easy. It requires a paradigm shift for many teachers who have never been asked difficult questions about their teaching practices - questions that caused them to look with a critical eye on their own practice with a focus on improving learning.

In my role as a program administrator, I wanted to find ways that I could encourage my staff to engage in reflective practice. As a classroom teacher, I engaged in reflective practice constantly, and

helped others engage in reflective practice while serving as a mentor and math coach, so I understood the power of developing this skill in my staff. One strategy I found to be successful was to establish monthly meetings where the teacher and I talked solely about instruction. Teachers were asked to bring plan books, assessment data, student work, and any other information that they thought would be helpful to guide the conversation. We discussed how students were developing with their knowledge and skills in the content areas and what data they had to support student progress; which students were struggling, which were not; what barriers seemed to be

getting in the way of learning and how we could put supports in place to remove those barriers; we looked at the plan book and talked about how they were using the data to guide the lesson progressions. I helped with lesson planning and unit planning, and we collaborated on assessing the curriculum



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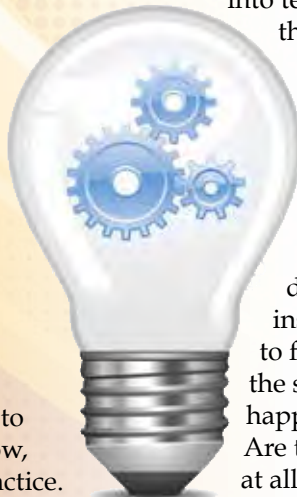
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and filling gaps in some of the programming. I was able to ask many questions of my staff during these meetings that helped them to reflect on the what, why, and how of their teaching practices, and it became a time that we both looked forward to.

As our relationships grew during these meetings, I wanted to provide feedback as well as questions more frequently to staff, so I began sending a quick email from my phone to the teacher when I would stop by a classroom to informally observe a lesson. This was not part of the formal teacher evaluation process, but part of my normal visits, where I would just pop in for five to ten minutes during a lesson. The email included one or two things that I really liked, and then one or two questions that caused the teacher to engage in a dialogue with me.

When I engage teachers in a formal evaluation, I always end the observation with suggestions, *but* I also include reflective questions such as, “What would have happened if...?” and “How would you compare this to...?” or “Which students did the best with this lesson? Other questions I ask are: “What did you observe that leads you to believe that?” “Which students did the worst with this lesson?” “Why did these particular students struggle?” “What supports would have made the lesson more accessible?” These questions help guide the post-observation conference so that we are engaging in a reflective dialogue about the lesson, rather than a one-way conversation where I am simply doling out my opinions.

In order to create a culture that fosters the teaching staff’s ability to engage in reflective practice, it needs to be modeled, used regularly, and understood by the principal or administrative team. This requires that the principal already possesses the skill and the ability to teach it and foster it in the culture of the staff. Teachers learn to ask questions about the how, what, and why of their practice.



They develop the ability to keep an open mind and consider the viewpoints and opinions of their colleagues and actually begin to seek out others for ideas and different perspectives on their teaching. This leads to another essential element of effective instructional leadership, the art of building a culture of collaboration.

COLLABORATION

There is a substantial amount of research that supports the idea that when there is collaboration, communication, and reflective practice in schools, good things can happen. However, historically teachers work in isolation from one another. DuFour describes the phenomenon in this way: “Schools often function as a collection of independent contractors united by a common parking lot.” This is still true of many schools today. The principal cannot develop a culture of collaboration if he or she has no understanding of what that entails. I have been witness to the power of collaboration when the structures to support it have been put into place effectively.

The work of DuFour was considered transformational at the time, and for all intents and purposes, still is. The concept of the professional learning community was not entirely new, but provided a much needed structure that helped to support teachers in the development of collaborative school communities. But just putting teachers into teams is not enough to reap the benefits.

PLCs can be extremely effective in changing a culture to one of collaboration with a focus on student learning. That means different things for different buildings. A skilled instructional leader needs to first assess the ability of the staff. What is currently happening in your school? Are teachers working together at all? If they are, what are



the structures that are currently in place and how can you build on those to support the PLC model schoolwide? What training needs to be developed and implemented and how is it best delivered? How will the administrative team support the PLCs and monitor them to ensure that the process is being implemented with fidelity? What is the end that you hope to achieve? In five years, where do you, the instructional leader of the building, envision your teams functioning? How will you get them there? How will you assess skill levels as they learn and support teachers in the process? All of these questions have to be answered and are going to be different depending on the school.

I have been part of the development of PLCs in two very different settings. The first was a low-performing, high-poverty urban elementary school and the second is the suburban, special education (BOCES) organization where I am still employed. In the first case, our teachers were all relatively new, with a few exceptions. No one was talking or collaborating. There was a very “every man for himself” culture that existed in the school and when I joined the leadership team as a math coach, I knew that had to change. The first step was to ask each grade level to vote on and elect a grade-level chair that would serve on the leadership team and represent their colleagues as well as to run the PLC meetings. The next step was to train just those team leaders in how to effectively run a meeting, how to use data to inform instruction, and other areas that we identified as skill deficits. We followed the initial training



training that outlined what was already being done, what was new, and what the expectations were for the staff. We used two faculty meetings, one in September and one in October, to accomplish this. Then it was up to the assistant principals to provide the direction and leadership at the PLC meetings in order to gather assessment data and develop action plans

To be an effective instructional leader, the principal also needs to be skilled in creating and supporting a collaborative culture that encourages teachers to engage in reflective practice. The instructional leader is more than just a manager. The instructional leader fuels the fires that inspire the staff and in turn, the students, to reach heights that they never imagined they could.

with a second training during a faculty meeting for the rest of our very large staff. Time that had previously been used to disseminate information at traditional faculty meetings was given up so that there was time for teams to meet and discuss instruction. Slowly, the culture began to shift from isolation to collaboration.

At BOCES, our teams were already meeting, but the discussions were not focused on student learning. We decided to do two days of

for the classrooms that were focused on improving student learning outcomes.

IN CLOSING

Now more than ever in education, the principal is not only required to engage in the more traditional tasks of management, such as discipline, budgets, operations, and safety, just to name a few, but also to be an effective instructional leader.

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GINA DITULLIO is the assistant principal at Creekside Monroe #1 BOCES.

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From Balance to Fusion: Considering Organizational and Instructional Tasks



By Larry Dake

As a building principal and instructional leader, I am always shocked when 3:30 p.m. arrives and it is time for students to go home. Where did all the time go? And more importantly, **did our staff use it effectively to challenge students and raise achievement?** If you're anything like me, you probably obsess over squeezing every possible value out of each minute of the day.

Additionally, you may have heart palpitations when you read that principals should spend “between one and three hours” in classrooms each day (NYS Metrics and Expectations, 2014: <https://www.engageny.org/resource/new-york-state-metrics-expectations>). Along with coordinating emergency drills, navigating the occasional shelter-in-place procedures, and other myriad responsibilities, how are school leaders supposed to balance organizational and instructional tasks?

While “balance” may be impossible, tasks may be “fused” together and reframed around instructional leadership. In this way, leaders can ensure that their time is being maximized toward the ultimate outcome – raising student achievement. Ultimately, we are not judged on how well our fire drills are conducted or how many PTA meetings we attend – although those organizational tasks are very important. Our utmost responsibility is to ensure that each and every student achieves to the greatest extent possible. By auditing our own time practices, looking to the research base,

and considering “fusion” rather than “balance,” school leaders may prioritize order to their professional – and by extension, personal – lives.

TIME AUDITS – A FIRST STEP

Taking stock of one’s own personal and professional time is a possible first step when considering organizational and instructional demands. When I first became a principal, I felt an enormous responsibility to “fix” everything and “prove” myself to staff. Six months into my first year, I began to realize that, while my intentions were pure, I was trying to be all things to all people. Moreover, the time demands I was placing on myself were overwhelming my ability to lead instructional change in the building. When I first audited my time, I was shocked to see how much was spent admiring problems rather than finding solutions. Slowly, I began to see my role more as “facilitator” and less as “fixer.” This shift was essential in attempting to fuse organizational and instructional demands. Additionally, it led to systems-level change within the building that helped reframe all tasks

through the lens of student achievement.

Important to this was reframing all tasks through a student achievement lens. For example, I began having biweekly meetings with our building’s head custodian. As fire inspections, lockdown drills, and Safety Team meetings approached, he and I would sort through items that needed attention and began problem solving before actual problems arose. We began asking questions such as “When bathrooms are closed down due to damage, how much time are students wasting in the halls waiting?” If students are in the halls waiting for a bathroom, they are not in the classroom learning. Naturally, the entire custodian team and faculty are involved in the solution; this further reinforces the “facilitator” role. Other scheduled meetings with main office staff, health office staff, Teachers’ association leadership, our PTA officers, and other groups has created a systems-level approach to remaining proactive and reframing all issues through a student achievement lens.

By reframing all challenges around student achievement, steps were taken to fuse organizational and instructional tasks. Ultimately, time audits revealed that I was spending more time on solutions and less on admiring problems. Focusing on student achievement goes to the heart of our jobs. Furthermore, when school leaders model this fusion, others are more likely to reframe issues themselves.

LEVERAGING LEADERSHIP FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT – THE RESEARCH

Unfortunately, instructional leaders only have so much access to students and staff. While it is crucial to continually challenge conventional thinking and the status quo, it is also essential to recognize that we and our staff have a life outside of school – one full of family and other responsibilities. Auditing time is a good first step toward recognizing where leadership can be leveraged to maximize student achievement. Fortunately for school leaders, two meta-analyses point toward areas

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where instructional leaders may leverage actions for increased student achievement. Two leadership actions with high-effect sizes may help school leaders target specific activities to assist with organizational and instructional fusion.

In *School Leadership That Works*, Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) highlight “situational awareness” as most impactful among their 21 listed leadership practices with a .33 effect size (effect size measures the impact of a particular dynamic – .33 is considered “moderately strong”). In summarizing several research studies, Marzano and his colleagues outline knowledge of formal and informal currents, concerns, and problems as imperative for effective school leadership. From a practical perspective, this makes sense. If a school leader knows their staff and keeps their finger on the pulse, they will be better able to anticipate potential problems and move more quickly toward solutions. Operating from a proactive perspective will not only save time in the short run, but also create time in the long run to invest learning alongside students and staff. Developing situational awareness entails building trust and helping staff identify key areas for improvement.

Australian researcher Vivian Robinson has also led efforts to identify high-leverage leadership practices in schools. Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008), in *Educational Administration Quarterly*, presented leadership’s impact on student outcomes and identified five dimensions: goal setting, strategic resourcing, curricular planning and coordination, promoting and participating in teacher learning, and ensuring a safe and orderly environment. The five dimensions are a powerful reminder that organizational and instructional tasks contribute to student achievement. Of these five dimensions, promoting and participating in teacher learning demonstrated an effect size of .84 (this effect size is considered very strong). When school leaders participate alongside teachers in workshops

(rather than checking emails in the back of the room), promote book studies among staff, and dedicate faculty meeting time to sharing best practices and analyzing data, they are carrying out Robinson’s identified high-leverage dimension.

These two practices – developing situational awareness and promoting and participating in teacher learning – highlight what Marks and Printy identify as “shared instructional leadership.” Marks and Printy attempt to find the sweet spot between transformational leadership, centered on trusting relationships, and instructional leadership, centered on student achievement. No longer were school leaders considered either transformational or instructional; rather, they proffered that instructional leadership itself can be transformational in boosting student achievement. These high-leverage practices are research based and can help school leaders fuse their organizational and instructional leadership responsibilities.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER: “FUSING” ORGANIZATIONAL AND INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Within day-to-day practice, the concept of “fusion” rather than “balance” may be more apt to capture a school leader’s challenge. Without strong systems in place to reframe organizational challenges through a student achievement lens, instructional improvement may be difficult to achieve. For example, if an organizational task such as mapping out IEP/504 testing accommodations is not properly done, students with those accommodations may find it difficult to achieve success. The organizational aspect of the task –



mapping out testing accommodations so as to empower all students to succeed – is a necessary first step toward increasing student achievement. They are not separate tasks to be “balanced” but two sides of the same coin. When school leaders reframe their organizational tasks through the lens of increased student achievement, even the most mundane endeavors take on new meaning. In this example, mapping out testing accommodations is crafted from “meeting legal mandates” to “empowering all students to be successful on a rigorous assessment.”

Reframing organizational tasks through an instructional lens may be the path forward as school leaders face an ever-increasing list of mandates and challenges. “Balance” implies that tasks should be weighed against one another and mutually exclusive decisions considered. “Fusion,” as an alternative mindset, may empower school leaders to reframe all of their tasks – from bully prevention to recess procedures – from an instructional standpoint. When students feel safe and enjoy a positive recess environment, they learn more. All organizational tasks – even the seemingly insignificant at first glance – are impactful for student achievement. By fusing these tasks within one mindset rather than attempting to balance them, school leaders will hopefully save time, empower better decision making, and help their students achieve more.

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Changing School Culture to Truly Reflect College and Career



By Ray McNulty

To paraphrase one of America's "all-time-great" philosophers, Woody Allen: "Not only [can't I comprehend the divine], but just try getting a plumber on weekends..."

Woody's poignant reflection showed that he understood **the mindset that many of us who are "college-educated professionals" perpetuate: undervaluing the roles that "working class" provide** — except when we need them. That diminution applies equally to the students in our schools who do not necessarily meet the "flip test" of traditional academic proficiency.

In any just, successful, and progressive society, intelligence is – and must be seen as – multi-flavored; it can take many forms and it can sometimes evidence itself in disarmingly different ways. We need to reconsider what our ancestors understood: there are different forms of intelligences and knowledge. We, as educational leaders, must rethink our notions about mindfulness in the world of work, especially the rapidly transforming world of today. We need to help our institutions and those whom they serve to rethink education’s and American society’s attitudes about careers, work, and working. There is no longer a “typical American” or, as demographics expert Peter Francese believes:

The average American has been replaced by a complex, multidimensional society that defies simplistic labeling.
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In fact, futurists like Francese predict the 21st-century world of work will center not on abstract academic knowledge or skillsets but on three kinds of work, all of which require cognitive skills that are ironically similar to those of Woody Allen’s “unlocate-able” plumber:

1. solving unstructured problems
2. working with new information (including complex communication)
3. carrying out nonroutine manual tasks



Acquiring those shifting skills and mindsets involves achieving not the narrower college or job readiness, but career readiness. Today’s truly “career-ready student” needs to be able to:

- access information
- influence socially
- be tech-savvy
- manage time
- engage and persist in achieving goals and objectives

Today’s career-ready student (or adult, because career readiness has no end point) navigates pathways that connect education and employment to achieve a fulfilling, financially secure, and successful career. And a career is not – repeat, not – the same as a job. It is much more. In fact, it is a lifelong undertaking. The primary aim of education, therefore, must not be merely to help students do well just in school, but also to help them to do well in the lives they lead after and outside of school.

This shift in mindsets will require a change in the culture that prevails in our schools and educational systems, a “university degree or nothing” culture that traditionally has been nurtured and sustained by – guess what? Administrators and instructional professionals who are themselves primarily products of a college education have perpetuated the myth of “college for all.” What was initially a noble notion has proven itself over time to be not only difficult to achieve – financially or otherwise – but also somewhat rooted in “old-think” when a college degree was a sure-fire passport to the upper middle class. As a result:

- the need for personalized learning has not been/is not adequately supported in current systems
- institutional barriers present formidable challenges to many students
- learning that incorporates real-life experiences (and doing vs. knowing) is undervalued and hence not part of traditional metrics

True, culture change can be leveraged in incremental ways. For exam-

ple, if we encourage students (and staff) to share, collaboration will become part of the culture. If we praise effort and perseverance, self-confidence and trust will replace fear of failure. If life- and career-focused learning is positioned as enhancing college preparatory learning, learning becomes more forward looking.

However, transforming school culture takes more than incremental shifts and impromptu modeling of positive behaviors and attitudes. Changing the culture of a school is not an easy task because usually the well-intentioned values and deeply rooted perceptions of adults in the educational system are firmly embedded and thus deemed sacred. They directly and indirectly define and sustain the school’s sense of mission – what a school needs to be and to do. Thus they determine school culture.

Transforming a school culture to more effectively address the needs of students in a changing society involves two core elements:

1. defining (or redefining) a clear and powerful school mission
2. establishing and embracing core values and beliefs that are “lived” every day and guide the school’s internal execution as well as its internal and external relationships

Consider, as a possible starting point, five core values focused on career readiness for students and staff to take personal ownership of:

1. **Be a student achievement champion.** Passionately advocate, mentor, and fight for every student, so they can access the knowledge and skills needed to fulfill each student’s goals and change their lives. Helping students to unlock their potential is an educator’s shared responsibility and privilege.
2. **Provide service and support** infused with understanding, respect, and empathy. Be a partner, not an adversary. Listen and care and, in doing so

create lasting and meaningful relationships.

3. **Be responsible and act with integrity.** Promptly acknowledge the needs of all students and colleagues and respond appropriately and effectively to each individual. Follow up and follow through.
4. **Collaborate to create better outcomes.** There IS strength in numbers. Value the ability, perspective, and unique talents of others. Embrace differences. A team is always stronger than one person.
5. **Surprise and delight.** Go beyond what is expected. Exceed expectations and create emotionally fulfilling experiences that result in consistently remarkable hospitality.

Moreover, and perhaps most damaging, far too many students think school is just plain boring, a perception that may or may not be accurate; but students' perceptions of school culture and curriculum are – deserv-

edly or undeservedly – their actual perceptions and thus very real.

The best antidote for addressing lack of student interest and engagement is academic motivation, which can be enhanced in several ways:

- **A future orientation.** Students are encouraged to have career goals and aspirations.
- **Engagement.** Schools leverage student interests and align learning with how students learn outside of school.
- **Relevance.** Schools show how learning prepares all students – not only the four-year college-intending students – for future opportunities and choices.

All of these elements are, of course, variables that form and shape school culture – for better or for worse. Too often they are a by-product of behaviors and structures in the past; it is now a culture that has fossilized and become out of whack with future needs and goals. That is why administrators and school leaders need, as a starting point, to observe,

measure, monitor, and address their schools' current culture – to “take the temperature” of their own institutions. This can be done through informal group and one-on-one conversations in which the leaders listen and learn what staff and students are saying and thinking. Parents can be another source of information. Simply taking the time to ask and listen can be a very helpful tool and technique for “change leaders.”

Another informal – but more quantifiable – way to measure “the mood” of a school is to use perception surveys that are completed by staff, students, and stakeholders anonymously and thus perhaps encourage more openness and candor than a face-to-face conversation or discussion with an administrator. One such survey that hundreds of schools in New York and across the country have deployed productively is the WE™ Surveys Suite (www.wesurveys.org) developed by the Albany-based 501(c)(3) not-for-profit Successful Practices Network (<http://spnetwork.org/>), an educational research and school support organization.

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This battery of easy-to-administer and nonthreatening perception surveys – WE Learn™, WE Teach™, WE Lead™, and WE Support™ – asks students, teachers, administrators, and stakeholders (such as parents or community members) to share their own perceptions on various aspects of the local school’s environment. Items are aligned across versions so, for example, staff and students respond to prompts structured in parallel and thus correspond to items in the other versions of the surveys. For example, the WE Teach™ survey asks teachers if the school has high expectations for all students. A parallel item in the WE Learn™ version asks students if they are expected to work hard at school. The surveys identify significant gaps or potential disconnects among responses across groups. School leaders can use the data collected from the surveys to identify areas that are potentially in need of further attention in addressing school climate and culture. Like other techniques and instruments that gather information about “perceptions” – public opinion polls,

for example – the WE™ Surveys do not psychometrically determine “the facts,” but they do help measure and quantify perceptions. And – as administrators already know – perceptions are typically reality for those who hold the opinions.

A recent addition to the WE™ Surveys Suite – WE Are Ready – focuses on teacher and student perceptions about the degree to which the school culture promotes and enhances career readiness. As discussed earlier, this new resource may be of particular value to schools that are seeking to be more inclusive and promote awareness of interests and postsecondary options for all students, including – but not only – the academically inclined.

Another resource for those school leaders seeking to develop more of a career-readiness culture in their schools is a recently launched online community of like-minded educators, the Career Readiness Institute (CRI) (<http://cri.spnetwork.org/>). Its purpose is to support and connect future-thinking educators and their stakeholders to recognize the urgent need to transform America’s existing

K-12 learning systems in ways that will better enable young people to transition into adulthood – college ready, life ready, and career ready – so they will become self-supporting, responsible citizens and lifelong learners in a rapidly changing and largely unpredictable future. Associate membership in CRI is free.

Education is for everyone. All students – academically focused or gifted in other ways – deserve the support and encouragement that will help them achieve their highest potential as self-reliant, caring, and responsible contributors to their community. Take up the challenge of transforming the school you lead into the kind of school your students need – a school that helps all students to learn, but also to “become.”

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Cultivate Leadership
to Multiply

Teacher Learning



By Paul M. Fanuele

What can a school leader do to create an environment of continuous learning? How can you build leadership in order to multiply learning? **A school leader has the ability to impact student learning by cultivating an environment conducive for teacher learning.** A key to developing this positive learning environment is to build leadership within the school in order to multiply learning.

The best way for a leader to multiply learning is to focus his/her leadership approach on what Liz Wiseman (2010) calls being a “multiplier.” Multipliers help the people around them to become more intelligent. They “invoke each person’s unique intelligence and create an atmosphere of genius – innovation, productive effort, and collective intelligence” (Wiseman, 2010, p. 10). An educational leader who is a multiplier follows the growth mindset concept by focusing on growing the intelligence and ability of others. They see their organization or school as full of talented people who are capable of contributing at high levels (Wiseman, 2010).

The idea of collaborative or shared leadership has been around for years. However, a focus on distributing leadership and the multiplier approach is vital as more and more reform is thrust upon educational leaders. Albert Einstein said, “The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them.” Wiseman agreed that solving these problems would be easier if we could tap into the intelligence around us. A multiplier empowers others and expands individual learning into collective learning. In order to develop opportunities for collective learning, a leader needs to focus on a growth mindset, model lead learning, and become a multiplier.

ity to help schools thrive during challenging times, take risks, and persist under difficult circumstances (see Fall 2014 *Practices*). A person with a fixed mindset believes that intelligence is fixed so learning is static and limited. A growth mindset orientation focuses on the development and progress of individuals. An individual can grow and change through effort and experience. A growth mindset in your building is a must in order to multiply learning.

MODEL LEAD LEARNING

The second step in multiplying learning is to become a lead learner. Michael Fullan (2014) refers to a learning leader as “one who models learning, but also shapes the conditions for all to learn on a continuous basis.” A lead learner can model a growth mindset and promote the collaborative culture needed to spread learning. An example of modeling lead learning is the establishment of book talks. The principal can lead these talks with the building staff. By being an active participant and organizing the sessions, the administrator is sending a clear message to the staff: we are learning together and our learning has not stopped. As a lead learner, the principal should facilitate the book talk sessions. The lead learner should not dominate the discussion but provide a framework to promote efficiency and collaboration amongst the members. It is important that a dialogue occurs with involvement from the staff and not a monologue from only the principal. Our last two book talks on Dweck’s (2006) *Mindset* and Pink’s (2009) *Drive* have been well attended and have positively impacted classroom instruction.

Another way to strengthen lead learning is to guide the learning of your administrative team. We utilize our weekly high school administra-

“An educational leader who is a multiplier follows the growth mindset concept by focusing on growing the intelligence and ability of others.”

tive cabinet meetings to discuss current literature. Our agendas contain a professional development segment to ensure that this important component occurs. Although I could lead the learning at these meetings, one of our practices is for each member of the administrative team to take a turn being the lead learner. This has been accomplished by jigsawing a journal article and by an administrator selecting and leading the discussion on a worthy topic. We are often on a time crunch and the issue du jour takes up precious time during meetings. As lead learners, we need to make sure our focus is on learning. There are times when all things need to stop to solve pressing issues, but lead learning must occur. The best way to ensure time for learning is to plan for it.

A great way to model lead learning is to plan a professional development segment at faculty meetings. This segment should not be a monologue from the principal. The principal and teachers work together to select and deliver the training. An effective way to ensure that a professional development segment happens at every faculty meeting is to have a department or grade-level volunteer lead the professional development at each month’s meeting. This could be a sign-up or simply a conversation with your staff. For example, our English department led an informative workshop on the six signposts to notice and note (Beers and Probst, 2013). The department coordinator, and some teachers and administrators, attended a fantastic conference in the summer led by Kylene Beers and Robert Probst. Administrators and teachers learning side by side at the conference followed Fullan’s (2014) belief of lead learning. It also made it easy to decide upon an appropriate topic to turnkey to our staff. On a side note, it was easy



FOCUS ON A GROWTH MINDSET

The first step in attempting to multiply learning in your building is to promote a growth mindset. Carol Dweck (2006) discusses the importance of a growth mindset and its abil-

to recognize and celebrate our English teachers on their effective use of instructional strategies.

This professional development model can also be duplicated on superintendent conference days. For example, we had administrators learning alongside teachers as they prepared and delivered professional development centering on Myron Dueck’s (2014) *Grading Smarter, Not Harder*. Two teachers and I led a whole group activity on creativity to begin our November conference day. We each took turns leading the activity. Prior to the conference day, we flipped a faculty meeting, asking our staff to watch two short video clips on creativity and reflect upon some questions. These questions helped to frame our discussion on creativity as well as the entire conference. After this segment, teachers and staff chose two workshops out of four to attend. Each of the workshops was led by a team of two administrators and two teachers. This was a great example of using the lead learner model to multiply learning.

BE A MULTIPLIER

The final step is for the leader to focus on the aforementioned leadership approach on being a multiplier. Leaders who follow a fixed mindset and believe that “people who don’t get it now never will” are referred to as “diminishers” (Wiseman, 2010). These leaders lock out the knowledge around them and stifle growth. In order to expand learning, the leader needs to be a multiplier by utilizing the intelligences of each individual and growing those intelligences into a collective one.

An administrator can take the growth mindset concept one step further by becoming a lead learner and multiplying learning. There are many ways to model lead learning and facilitate its growth in your building. Focusing on becoming a multiplier will enrich the development of your staff and enhance your school’s ability to solve the complex problems currently found in education.

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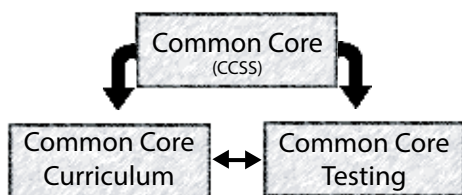
Shifting Education Paradigms



By Bruce H. Crowder, EdD

When then presidential candidate Bill Clinton planned his campaign in his strategy room in Little Rock, on the wall in large print was the statement: *The Economy, Stupid!* He had a tough race to win. But he knew what the hot button was. Today, as an educator with a mission, I am inclined to say, *The Curriculum, Sweetie!* I am looking forward to the **leadership that not only acknowledges the curriculum hot button, but acts on it.**

While the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) provide a powerful blueprint for learning, the curriculum is the powerful integrator to support text and material, lesson planning, delivery, and assessment of the learning. Just as the standards are common, it also must be common to assure equity of learning opportunity. How else are administrators and teachers able to collaborate and improve the learning process? So, the learning is clear both horizontally and vertically. Such a curriculum is there to guide the learning without taking anything from the talent and experience of the teachers using it. And, if there is a management system to house all key elements of a Common Core-based curriculum, its display and access are enhanced and enriched.



The scenario above paints a picture of the most critical shift needing to be accomplished if Common Core is to be implemented. As currently acknowledged, shifts in reading and mathematics inherent in the Common Core are a reality as exhibited in the first two rounds of NYS testing results. What is most interesting is the cry from the state to the field prior to the testing to expect poor testing results. Why, then, is anyone surprised with the outcomes from the first two administrations of the tests?

A bigger question remains: Why would those promoting Common Core and the need for new tests paint such a dismal picture of the results before they happened? What is even more questionable is the need for the teacher/principal accountability law which depends on such results at this stage. Having raised key questions for which no responses are forthcoming, the leadership challenge looms before us.

Common Core presents a challenge with fewer standards compared to previous attempts but

with more intense expectations. Therefore, the era we are entering requires dramatic shifts in leadership, instruction, learning, assessment, and, as already stated, particularly in curriculum. In addition, the power of technology to support and manage these challenges must be employed. Principals will have to step up to meet these challenges unlike any previous period of change.

The initial leadership challenge rests squarely on principals to bring clarity to the Common Core through the fostering of professional learning. Now that NYS has released a good portion of ELA and math test items from the 2014 testing, along with a few from 2013, teachers are able to connect the standards with the measures used to evaluate student performance. In fact, the standards in and of themselves are merely learning objectives or, as some see them, broad guidelines about what students should know and be able to do. When they are used to drive the development of assessments to measure the degree of student understanding, they become real. With a careful examination of the nature and formats of the new tests and related scoring rubrics, teachers will see the need for instructional shifts to bring their students to deeper understanding in reading and math. It takes an education leader to set up these learning opportunities for teachers. Access to loads of Common Core materials is not the same as head-to-head engagement with peers in reviewing data and sharing insights.

Without a doubt, the greatest leadership challenge is access and/or development of a Common Core curriculum. In fact, the developers of Common Core now strongly believe that curriculum is the key to implementing the standards successfully. This is where the principals' leadership is necessary to inform the public that Common Core is not a curriculum. The standards are designed to drive the development of curriculum. While the SED has made an endeavor to provide curriculum modules for reading and math, the modules primarily serve an

illustrative purpose. Without training in their use, they may be avoided or used poorly. In addition, the modules need to contain the nature and formats of the new assessments. If they are not there, they need to be created and embedded. Teaching students in one mode and testing them in another can only result in disappointing performance.

A related consideration to support implementation of Common Core is textbooks. At this moment textbook companies are behind the curve. While some would like to promote their textbooks as Common Core-based, studies are showing that they are not there. There is no quick fix for implementing Common Core. It is a fact that curriculum development may take from three to five years. And it is questionable that this can happen within a local district. To meet this challenge, talent, resources, and time are needed – but are expensive. Technology to manage such an endeavor is also necessary.

The lack of Common Core curriculum is the most critical factor. What was curriculum yesterday and related textbooks have to change, as does the way teachers teach. This is at the heart of the Common Core challenge. With the potential power and influence of Common Core to reshape American education, the necessity of curriculum and appropriate methods of teaching must be developed and made available.

But in staying with the curriculum leadership challenge, principals may have to use or create consortia to share talent and resources to get the process under way. This may include not only the development of new teaching materials, but also the refinement of those already being used. However, good curriculum has always been the most difficult area of education to create. In truth, most school districts substitute the textbook as the curriculum. However, that is not to say textbooks are bad. They may serve a purpose of supporting a curriculum. In this way the curriculum draws what is good and necessary from a textbook and allows for the creation of what is needed.

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curriculum, design and development of appropriate assessments are crucial. Where to begin? Leadership is the key to promoting an understanding of the new assessments. The past two administrations of Common Core testing have been abysmal, as stated earlier. However, the disconnect between teacher effectiveness and student performance may be the basis for serious harm to the reform. Student performance cannot improve as long as teachers do not understand what the tests require in the way of student skills and knowledge. Therefore, student preparation for doing well on the new assessments demands that they be given the skills and knowledge to complete them. To illustrate this matter simply, an analysis of the two years of released testing information shows that few students understand inferencing. They tend to confuse detail with inference. A simple review of the released testing information makes this matter patently clear.

While the SED has done well to release item-specific information for both the 2013 and 2014 testing

periods, it has not released a fuller dimension of the tests. For principals to lead grade-level teams in analyzing their testing results, the percent of correct multiple-choice responses is not adequate. This is also true of the extended responses, sometimes called the essays, which have a four-point scoring rubric. A mere display of mean scores leaves much to be desired. Principals need to be able to conduct distractor analysis when examining multiple-choice test items. This is where teachers can view the percent of students who opted for each item. Without this analysis, it is difficult to understand what made students respond the way they did. Was it a poor test item? Was it a matter of instruction? Was it a curricular factor? A similar concern relates to the extended responses in which the data needs to show the percent of students scoring at each level of the four-point rubric. This kind of analysis results in very important insight from which to make instructional and curricular adjustments.

There is no doubt that the nature of education and those that manage it will undergo dramatic change. However, working from the notion that each teacher is the curriculum is wrongheaded and naive. Common curriculum with observational criteria to monitor its implementation resides at the center of a successful education enterprise. Tracking instruction unrelated to a stated and distributed curriculum is an exercise in futility that may, in fact, result in positive observations, but not learning. The good news is that the current disconnect between teaching and student performance results can be improved. The cause for this to happen is a common curriculum, whether at the local, regional, or state level.

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One District's Journey: Embracing Data-Based Decision Making



By Sarah Vakkas and
Michelle Robinette

Trumansburg is a small rural district with enrollment just under 1,100 students K-12. The school campus includes three buildings (elementary, middle, and high) and there is a building principal in each building and a dean of students to support discipline needs as well as positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS). The director of instruction and special education for K-12 supports curriculum alignment, instructional and professional development needs, and RTI and special education programming within the district.

The Trumansburg mission lends itself toward data use for all: students and staff are encouraged to be self-motivated, confident, lifelong learners who work effectively toward personal and professional goals.

Trumansburg is in its third year of a K-8 RTI plan that continues to use multiple data points at least three times per year to identify students who need extra support, track progress and effectiveness of interventions, and provide teachers with actionable data that they can use to differentiate instruction. The district not only uses data from Renaissance Learning STAR Early Literacy, Reading and STAR Math assessments, but also gathers data from other norm-referenced probes and student work samples. This enables teachers to utilize assessments for multiple purposes such as providing parents with specific feedback and aligning report cards with Common Core State Standards.

DATA WISE:

In the summer of 2013, the administrative team at Trumansburg CSD was introduced to the Data Wise Improvement Process from the Harvard Graduate School of Education at their administrative retreat. Michelle Robinette, district data coordinator, had attended the weeklong institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in June of 2013. The team was asked to evaluate Trumansburg CSD on each step of the Data Wise Improvement Process using a Stoplight Protocol (green = we do this step consistently, yellow = we sort of do this step, and red = we don't really do this step). Discussion followed regarding which steps were strengths and which steps needed to be improved.

Next, the team was given the opportunity to examine district data using the Affinity Protocol. The administrative team looked for patterns and areas of concern in the data to identify a focus area or areas. While graduation rates continued

to climb and surpass many districts in the region, concern emerged regarding college and career proficiency rates on Regents exams as well as the rates of awarding Advanced Designation diplomas. While the high school had been identified as needing to write a Local Assistance Plan (LAP) because of the performance of a particular subgroup, the administrators decided that these areas should also be investigated since the subgroup typically did not exist for accountability, but had in the school year in question due to a larger cohort of students overall. Hence, the high school developed a LAP committee, and the data analyzed by the committee included data regarding college and career proficiency rates and diploma types as a whole and disaggregated by subgroups.

Similarly, the fifth through eighth grade middle school had been identified as needing to write a Local Assistance Plan because of the gap in performance between their students with disabilities and their nondisabled peers. A LAP committee was created for the middle school as well, and with the help of the SESIS coordinator from the local BOCES, not only was data analyzed regarding 3-8 assessments and RTI benchmarking data from STAR Math and STAR Reading, but also data was collected through observations in co-taught and self-contained classrooms regarding instruction.

Both LAP committees, the board of education, and the broader K-12 faculty were all introduced to the Data Wise Improvement Process over the next year, with focus on particular steps in the process as they were applicable. Teachers were asked to examine student data from NYS and STAR assessments, identifying more specific Priority Questions and Learner-Centered Problems, particularly in the areas of ELA and math. The Collaborative Learning Cycle from Bruce

Wellman and Laura Lipton's Data Driven Dialogue was utilized when examining such data with teachers as a framework for engaging teachers, exploring the data objectively, and integrating next steps. Teachers across multiple disciplines examined released questions from the NYS assessments and shared ideas for how to support the Common Core shifts in their classrooms. For example, a building-wide area of concern was identified at the middle school regarding analyzing an author's argument, and teachers from various disciplines discussed how they could support this skill with students through analyzing informational text, news articles, etc. with students.

NEXT STEPS/CONCLUSION:

Professional development continues to focus on curriculum alignment both horizontally and vertically. Based on the data driven instruction (DDI) work with teachers, using the data wise approach, professional development work can be individualized for the grade level and/or department. The information that the teachers are able to take away from these DDI conversations allows for their professional development work to be specific and intentional. In addition, we encourage our teachers to continually use student work protocols to inform instructional demands throughout the year.

Our continued and future planning includes:

- The district is currently reviewing the K-12 assessments through the Teaching is the Core Grant. The review team consists of teachers and administrators from all three buildings. Together they are creating an action plan that highlights needed changes regarding the amount of testing and quality of assessments administered at Trumansburg. Survey data from students and teachers has been critical.



The team will use its findings to create authentic assessments that align to the curriculum and that are embedded within instruction. It is the hope that literacy 9-12 assessments can be re-created to support authentic learning and inform instruction, ultimately eliminating some standardized tests.

- The district has begun to utilize aspects of each step with the board of education, administrative team, and various teacher teams when analyzing state assessment results, college and career readiness aspiration measures, and other district goals and priorities. Trumansburg is in the preliminary work of creating an interactive district dashboard that highlights and tracks growth around each district goal while embracing the Data Wise Process. The interactive dashboard will allow the administrative team and board of education members to have

regular updates and track our progress toward these goals.

- Trumansburg is in the planning phase to create a K-12 STEM program initiative that offers project-based learning with an increase in content integration opportunities. Creating opportunities to embed 21st-century skills into these programs – such as critical thinking skills, adaptability, technology application, resiliency, and confidence – is what we hope to build for our learners.
- After visiting the P-Tech model in an eastern region, Trumansburg is exploring all sorts of opportunities for their students that require a paradigm shift in the way we see public education. Ultimately connecting students to career opportunities through local business partnerships is an urgent component of this planning, as well as working with our

local community colleges.

Preliminary planning around skills mapping with our local businesses has been initiated.

In conclusion, Trumansburg wants to create opportunities that help students become ready for their world. We can do this by exposing them to a multitude of opportunities so they have an educational experience that is individualized and lays a strong foundation of 21st-century skills so they can succeed.

SARAH VAKKAS is the director of instruction at the Trumansburg Central School District.

MICHELLE ROBINETTE is the district data coordinator at the Central New York Regional Information Center.

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The 21st-Century Principal Role



By Amy Piper

Thinking about the role of a school principal brings about many images of what a school principal does throughout each school day. When broached by my school superintendent about taking over as the UPK to grade 4 school principal at Fredonia Elementary in western New York, many of these images went through my mind. I was currently the director of pupil services, as well as interim primary principal for Fredonia Central School District.

We were in the process of closing the primary school building and bringing all of the students to the main campus and re consolidating the makeup of our school as a UPK to grade 4 elementary. Grades 5 to 8 would become the middle school (formerly grades 6 to 8), and grades 9 to 12 would remain as the high school. I had spent the previous three years as the director of pupil services implementing a strong Response to Intervention (RTI) approach in the district with our teachers and students, as well as providing a great deal of professional development in setting SMART goals and progress monitoring students' achievement toward those goals.

I began as the Fredonia Elementary School principal in July 2010 with a positive mindset and hopes for a great start as a new administrator. I was quickly overwhelmed with the reality of the duties that actually exist, but no one mentioned! It took me a good two years before I felt like I had a handle on all of my roles and responsibilities (although they did seem to change daily!). I learned to lean on (and delegate to) the school psychologist and guidance counselor, and with the addition of the Common Core Learning Standards and APPR, had the support of our school superintendent and board of education to hire an assistant principal to help with the duties that a building of over 600 students brings on a daily basis.

I truly feel that the principal of a school should be the instructional leader. I have tried to implement this mindset by providing continuous professional development during our monthly staff meetings, teacher in-service days, and sharing relevant articles that supported our mission. When creating the master schedule, I added a weekly team meeting for each grade level (professional learning community) with an agenda that focused on the pacing of the ELA and math curriculum, student data to drive instruction, and building relational trust among teachers. I attend these weekly meetings, not to run them, but to support the grade-

level instructional leader in following the agenda and answering any administrative questions that may arise.

As an instructional leader, I have trained the staff in data driven instruction, and through the weekly team meetings and quarterly data analysis meetings, we discuss and formulate action plans for every classroom in our school. We started by creating pacing calendars in ELA and math, following the Common Core Learning Standards, in every grade level. We then created quarterly formative interim assessments that



aligned with the pacing calendar in every grade level. At our weekly team meetings, we discuss the pacing and review classroom formative data (exit tickets, etc.) to assess if students were mastering the standards for that particular week, or if re-teaching (by the RTI staff or in the general education classroom) was necessary. After the quarterly interim assessments are given and scored (done through peer review as a grade level), each grade level creates an action plan based on the results of the assessment. The teams look at the standards assessed, and evaluate whether the standards need to be re-taught, or if the question on the formative assessment needs to be "tweaked" to better assess the aligned standard.

Each classroom teacher then meets with either me or the assistant principal to review the results of the interim assessment for their students. We analyze the data and create an action plan that is specific to the needs of the students in each particular classroom. If the whole class did not indicate mastery of one or more standards, we determine the best way to re-teach this standard (through

bell work, differentiated instruction, etc.). If specific students do not show mastery on certain standards, but the majority of the class did, these students may be re-taught these standards during their Response to Intervention services (provided by a reading or math specialist in a 30-minute pullout session), as well as through differentiated instruction in the classroom.

We then hold quarterly data analysis meetings to review ELA and math progress for every student in the building. The data meetings are held in our conference room and rotate through the grade levels every hour. For example, we may meet as a kindergarten team from 8:30 to 9:30 a.m., and then first grade from 9:45 to 10:45 a.m., etc. The meeting is run by me, as the building principal, and the data team is made up of a grade-level teacher representative (which rotates every quarter), a reading and math RTI teacher, the school psychologist, and the school counselor. The RTI teacher for the grade level compiles all interim assessment data, progress monitoring data (from AIMSweb or other sources), and classroom assessment data onto a spreadsheet, which I project onto a screen for all to see. This spreadsheet is compiled before the meeting and shared with the teachers at a grade-level meeting prior to the data analysis meeting. We then go through the spreadsheets and take a look at every child's data, looking at established cut-scores for each piece of data, and determine whether or not the child needs more or less support to master the standards assessed. The RTI teachers are then assigned students at Tier 2 and Tier 3 with specific standards to work on in either ELA or math (or both). The classroom teachers review their grade level and classroom-specific action plans and ensures they match the targeted standards that should be addressed at Tier 1.

If there are students who have not shown progress through the Response to Intervention services, they may be referred to the Student Assistance Team. These meetings are held monthly, and follow a problem-solving model, including the referred

student's parent(s), classroom teacher, RTI teacher, special education teacher, school psychologist, as well as any related service providers. I also run these meetings, projecting the SAT form up on the large screen, and type in minutes from the discussion as the meeting progresses. After a plan is developed for the child, I print out the minutes for the teaching staff and parents and set up a date for a follow-up meeting to assess if the student responded to these new or refined interventions.

All of these processes and procedures have led to a decrease in special education population (from 16 percent as a district to less than 10 percent), as well as increased skills in reading and math in most of our classrooms. For example, in grade levels 1 to 4, over the past three years, the students are reading, on average, ten more words per minute at each benchmark period (using

AIMSweb standardized benchmark assessments). The teachers and parents have noted that they know which standards and skills the students have mastered and which standards and skills they need to work on. We also know where specific supports and resources are needed and when they can be removed and allocated elsewhere.

These practices are extremely time-consuming, but I can truly say that the time spent analyzing the student data, working on action plans with teachers, and formulating interventions with the student assistance team has led to greater student achievement, improved teaching practices, and

stronger parent communication. My role as an instructional leader has allowed me to help support these changes and makes my work much more meaningful on an everyday basis.

AMY PIPER is the principal at Fredonia Elementary School.



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Infusing Common Core into

PE and Health

By Nick Fitzgerald



Physical education and health are encore courses that promote many life long learning skills. They involve sound critical thinking concepts and the ability to teach students to cognitively understand how the material learned in school can be used beyond the walls of the gymnasium and classroom. Since the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) are based on developing students as confident and coherent critical thinkers, the physical education and health setting is extremely conducive for infusing the standards and shifts. In the South Glens Falls Central School District we took a proactive and collaborative approach to ensuring that CCLS was included in the curriculum across the district by focusing on the shifts in ELA and Math and the college and career readiness skills, specifically the speaking and listening components that accompany the standards.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CCLS TO PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND HEALTH

As most already know, CCLS is based off of the ELA and math standards and then evolved to social studies, science, and technical subjects as well. The shifts in ELA and math were essentially created as a guide for teachers to ensure that

the main concepts of CCLS were being implemented. Each shift has a distinct concentration on a different component and details what should be included when devising lesson plans.

Through a federal grant that was acquired we created summer curriculum workshops. In the last two years of the grant we focused exclusively on infusing the CCLS. As a district staff we looked at how physical education and health could help the classroom teachers at the elementary level and the content area teachers at the middle and high school levels reinforce the basic CCLS concepts. The district staff felt that the two discipline areas could be another avenue where students could indirectly hone their critical thinking skills, improve reading and comprehension, associate learning with life-long skills, and improve upon speaking and listening. Essentially our goal was to use what students learn in the physical education and health setting and apply it to other areas of their lives by tying in other disciplines such as math, ELA, science, and social studies. This will reinforce how to use those transferable skills in any discipline. In essence, assimilating that learning by taking skills and applying them in every aspect of education and life.

We also looked at sound and

conclusive research on how physical education aids in learning, cognitive understanding, and memory. The Neurology Institute for Brain, Health and Fitness in Baltimore conducted research that found exercise increases blood flow and promotes neurogenesis, which is a process that generates neurons in the brain. The Beckman Institute for Advanced Science and Technology at the University of Illinois found fit children are better at multitasking and thinking more efficiently, which are functions directly related to memory. Next, the Neurocognitive Kinesiology Laboratory of Illinois has completed research indicating that increased physical activity improves cognitive control, which essentially is the ability to pay attention and understand. Finally, the University of Western Australia finds increased participation in physical activity leads to the enhancement of cognitive functioning, memory, behavior, and academic achievement. The physical education setting is optimal for reinforcing learning concepts and memory.

The emphasis for our teachers is to look at the shifts and include some, if not all, when constructing lesson plans. In addition, physical education and health teachers can reach out to the grade level teachers for reading

materials, vocabulary words, math applications, and areas of social studies and science to associate with physical education and health.

THE NEXT STEPS

The district staff carefully broke down the shifts in math and science and compared them to the units and lesson plans in physical education and health. Each teacher looked at how they could infuse the basic components of the shifts to better reinforce the different discipline areas as well. Also, since physical education and health have a strong speaking and listening aspect in most of their lessons, it was important to highlight this area as well. The next important aspect was to include advanced rigor and relevance concepts into the physical education and health lessons. We created more in-depth questioning techniques to test the cognitive understanding of the material covered and how we could make that material relevant to not only their daily lives outside of school but also associate as much as we could to other subject areas. We also constantly include and promote reading and comprehension. While this is a daily ongoing task, it was important to look at this venture over time and ensure that we were not being too intrusive with adding the shifts but enough where we could measure the impact.

There are many examples of how we accomplished this and it would be prudent to just mention a few. At the elementary level, we looked at including more reading in each physical education and health lesson by posting rules and policies for the lesson on a board; using the Smartboard to illustrate the history of certain games and activities; grade-level vocabulary words in activities and games; and math concepts when there were scoring activities, or adding math components in other games. We also started to use more writing samples to allow the students to express themselves, explain what they had

learned, and ensure they cognitively understood the material. Our teachers used distinct moments in lessons to ask in-depth questions on the material, certain strategies for games, and the ability to associate the material to other disciplines. We also used groups in many lessons to promote students working together and improving upon basic speaking and listening skills. Online at saanys.org are lists by grade level and subject area of what we have integrated.

With one fourth grade lesson in particular the students played a game called treasure hunt. As the students entered the gymnasium there were certain rules already on the board that they had to read and understand before their warm-up so they could answer questions about what they read to reinforce the concepts. The teacher then used the Smartboard for a series of questions relating to cardiovascular activity. The students were then divided into groups where they had to take a dry erase board and figure out how to score the activity by the number of items they were able to retrieve during the game. Each item had a different value so they had to devise how they would add and multiply to obtain the final score. Each group also had to create a strategy on how to score and be as efficient as possible in using the scooter to go into a pile of items and retrieve them in an efficient and effective way. At the end of the lesson the teacher asked each student to write a quick paragraph

on how they used a certain strategy to best score in the game and that information was then presented in the next lesson.

Comparing this lesson to the shifts, one can see how many were being used: math – focus, coherence, fluency, and deep understanding; and ELA – informational text, staircase of complexity, text-based answers, and academic vocabulary. There was also speaking and listening components.

Another example

is a health lesson focused on body mass index (BMI). The teacher started the lesson by giving the students a reading sample of the history of BMI and how the formula was developed in order to calculate an overall percentage. The students were then given a number of examples to calculate BMI percentages. The students worked in groups and were given a handout that had the average BMI calculations for each country around the world. Each group then had to choose one country that had a larger BMI and one that had a smaller BMI than the United States and research the countries to give reasons why. The groups had to create a presentation from the research. This lesson in particular included almost all of the shifts: math – focus, coherence, fluency, deep understanding, application, and dual intensity; and ELA – knowledge of the disciplines, informational text, staircase of complexity, text-based answers, writing from sources, and academic vocabulary. This lesson contained math, health, social studies, ELA, and science. In addition, the students had to present in front of the class and also ask questions to the groups on the material presented, which focused on the college and career speaking and listening skills.

CONCLUSION

This is a task that will not happen overnight. Our teachers are constantly looking at lesson plans with CCLS in mind and how we can reinforce basic concepts of reading, math, comprehension, coherence, and critical thinking into physical education and health. Due to the large number of relevant units and activities associated with the two encore subject areas and the research found on exercise associated with memory and learning, we can help improve upon how students can increase the rigor of foundational learning concepts and assimilate them to not only things they do outside of school, but across all disciplines in the school setting as well.

NICK FITZGERALD is the director of athletics at South Glens Falls CSD.



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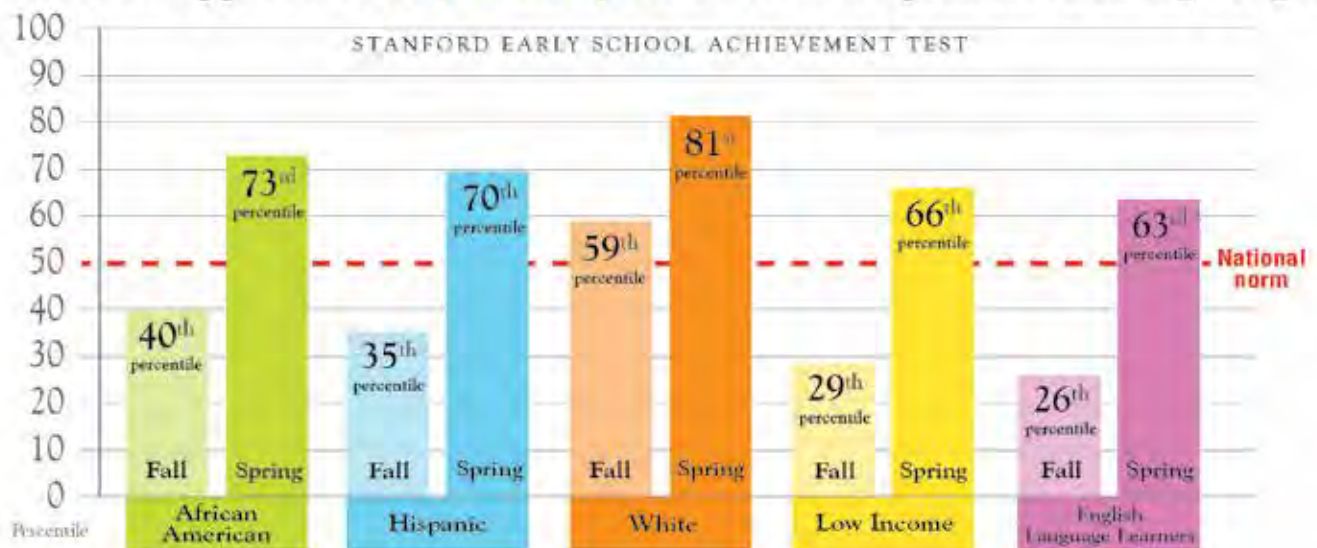
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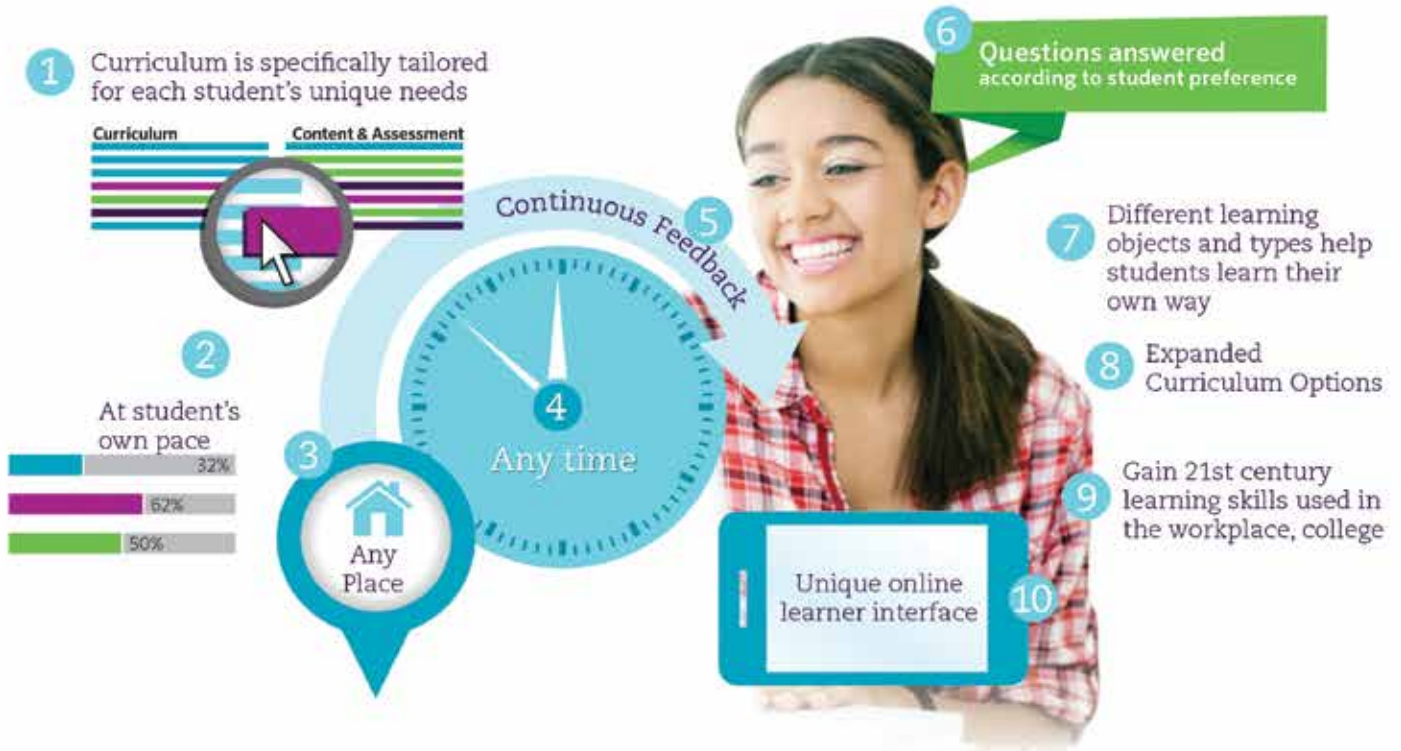
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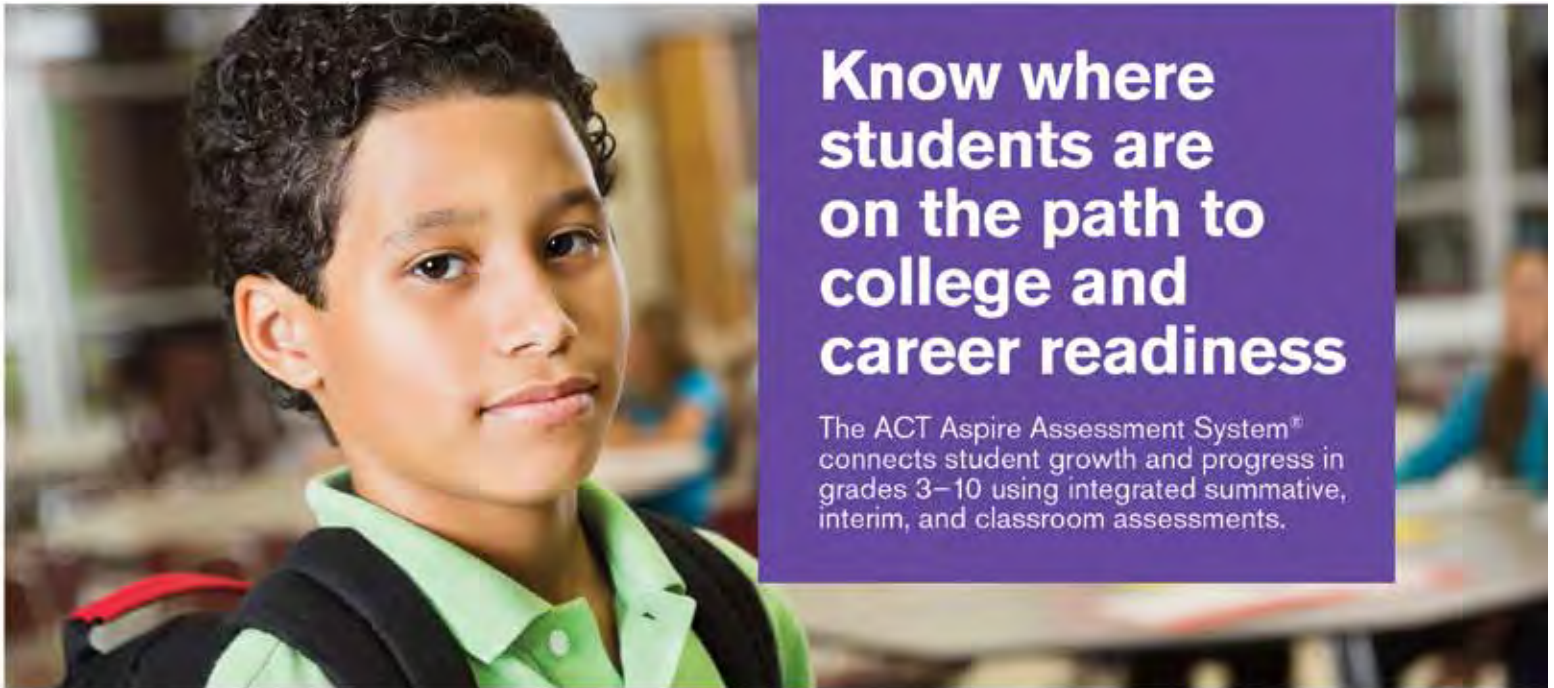


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