BEYOND SURVIVING TO THRIVING

COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP FROM PETER DEWITT | **BROCKTON'S FIGHT FOR STUDENT SUCCESS**

COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP
SIX INFLUENCES That Matter Most

PETER M. DEWITT

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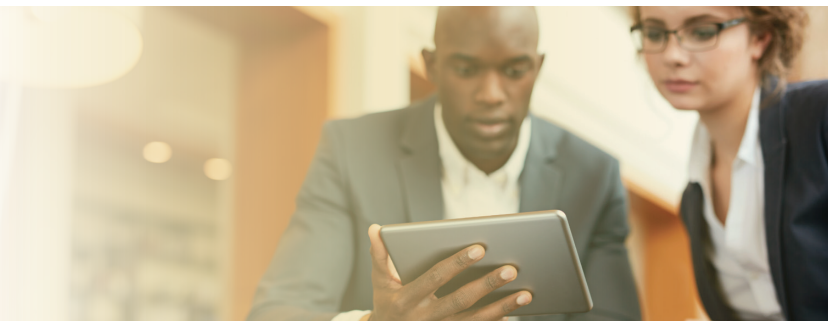
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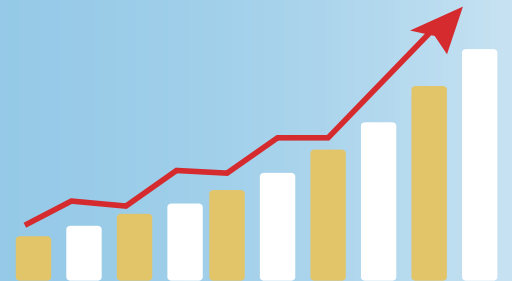
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A message from

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Beyond Surviving to Thriving

University of Connecticut women's basketball coach Geno Auriemma once said, "I don't want to survive and advance, I want to conquer and dominate." While this quote may be a little extreme for our purposes today, we, as educational leaders, need to focus on more than just survival since surviving represents a minimal level of achievement. Speaking to this issue's theme, *Beyond Surviving to Thriving*, I am going to speak about five behaviors that will assist us in remaining strong in our pursuit of a better educational system for our students. The five behaviors are demonstrating sustained effort, being vulnerable, building relationships, being brave, and embracing the action. These behaviors will enable us to do more than just survive and advance; they will help us thrive and maybe even conquer and dominate.

Demonstrating Sustained Effort

The first behavior is hard work and sustained effort. The fruits of effort were apparent during the summer Olympics. Like many others, I was captivated by the accomplishments of the athletes, particularly the U.S. women's gymnastics team and many of the U.S. swimmers. What made them so great? Many would say that they have natural talent, which may be hard to argue. But, is talent alone the answer? Angela Duckworth would say that grit played a major role in the athletes' success. What I like about her work on grit is her belief that effort counts twice. In other words, talent and skill are necessary for success, but it is effort when combined with talent that produces skill. And, when skill is combined with effort, achievement is attained. If effort counts twice, "then someone twice as talented but half as hardworking as another person might reach the same level of skill but still produce less over time" (Duckworth, 2016, p. 50). While this calculation provides a formula for the importance of effort, educators have known since the days of the one-room schoolhouse that hard work is the key to success.

Being Vulnerable

The next behavior to consider is vulnerability. Showing others your flaws and revealing that you are not perfect allows for collaboration and creativity to flourish. Vulnerability, according to Brene Brown, "is the birthplace of innovation, creativity, and change" (TED2012). Often people associate being vulnerable with weakness, but it is not. Being vulnerable is an indicator of a strong leader. It takes great strength to show others your shortcomings. The paradox of vulnerability, as specified by Brown (2012), is that it "is the last thing I want you to see in me, but the first thing I look for in you" (p. 113). A leader understands that since people look for vulnerability in others, it makes sense to show it. It opens up conversation and leads to creative solutions to our challenges. It is obviously to our advantage to be as creative as possible during this time of change. Madeleine L'Engle stated, "When we were children, we used to think that when we were grown-up we would no longer be vulnerable. But to grow up is to accept vulnerability...to be alive is to be vulnerable." I would add that in order to thrive we need to be vulnerable.

Being vulnerable allows the leader to build trust with others and cultivate relationships.

Building Relationships

Building relationships is another behavior successful educators use to thrive. John Hattie (2009) studied the three keys to building caring relationships with students. The same three keys apply to building relationships with adults. First, when building a relationship, make sure the person knows that they matter to you. Hattie would call this warmth. One of the best ways to show warmth is to be present and attentive when building relationships. Listen intently and let the person know how you feel. Second, be empathetic and try to understand how others feel. Make a connection to the individual and be willing to take a walk in their shoes. Finally, quality relationships take time to develop. We must be prepared to invest the time and energy to develop the relationship. Time builds trust, which helps to nurture the relationship. Adam Grant (2013) believed that a simple investment of five minutes to help someone in need will not only enhance the relationship, but it will pay dividends at a later date. It is also, quite simply, the right thing to do.

**Beyond Surviving
to Thriving** *continued*

A message from
Dr. Paul Fanuele
SAANYS President
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Being Brave

The next behavior to embrace is being brave. Merriam-Webster defines the verb *brave* as "to face or deal with something dangerous or unpleasant." I guess you can insert your own example of something unpleasant. I will focus on the definition of brave the adjective, which is "facing or enduring with courage." We need to be brave or courageous as we continue to enhance our educational community. Basketball coach John Wooden said, "Success is never final; failure is never fatal. It's courage that counts." I encourage you to continue the work you have already started as a leader in education. Let's be an influence on the changes that are taking place. Brene Brown (2015) said, "It often takes just a single brave person to change the trajectory of a family, or of any system, for that matter" (p. 59). I ask you to be that person.

Embracing the Action

In order to be that person, we need to embrace the action. We need to enter the arena and not be afraid to fail. We need to speak up and say what we believe is right for children and for education. Having a parking lot conversation or complaining session about the state of affairs will not suffice. It does not move us forward. Take action.

Theodore Roosevelt in his 1910 speech on citizenship encouraged individuals to get in the arena. He said, "It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better.

The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."

Education is a worthy cause. I know you feel the same. Continue to lead your schools and the State of New York as we enter the arena together.

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COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP:

Six Influences That Matter Most

By Peter DeWitt, EdD

Mindset. It's a word that comes up often in education. We have all heard, read, and researched the growth mindset (Dweck). Some of us have even explored the work of George Couros where he focused on the innovator's mindset. John Hattie, someone I work with as a visible learning trainer, has ten mindframes, which educators need to approach in their own learning so they can inspire students to do the same. **Mindframes and mindsets are profoundly important to our profession.**

What about a collaborative mindset? We hear so much these days about collaboration. We want our students and teachers to do it, and the word *collaboration* is part of the four Cs in those 21st century skills we have all been focusing on for well over a decade. A collaborative mindset is necessary if we are truly going to delve into collaboration with teachers and students, which means we need collaborative leaders.

Collaborative leadership includes the purposeful actions we take as leaders to enhance the instruction of teachers, build deep relationships with all stakeholders and deepen our learning together. It includes the managerial side, as well as instructional and transformational leadership, and is the greater whole of all of those parts (DeWitt, 2016).

Unfortunately, just like with the growth mindset and the innovator's mindset, we can truly believe that we are collaborating when in reality we are just trying to push our own agenda. A criticism of any mindset is that we often want the people around us to do it, without exploring whether we are doing it ourselves. When leaders do that they put themselves, and their initiatives, at risk of failure. As Instructional Coaching expert Jim Knight has written, *"If you insist they will resist."*

DO WE PRACTICE WHAT WE PREACH

Last year I wrote a blog for Finding Common Ground (*Education Week*) called *Why the Growth Mindset Won't Work*. The inspiration came from sitting in the front row as Hattie gave a keynote about his research, which is the largest meta-analysis ever done in education.

In the keynote Hattie said that the growth mindset versus the fixed mindset has a .19 effect size, which is well below its hinge point of .40, which equates to a year's worth of growth for a year's input. It was not the first time I heard Hattie reference Dweck's work, so I wanted to cover the topic in my blog. It went viral, and two months later Dweck wrote a blog for *Education Week*'s commentary

clarifying her work. The growth mindset is hugely popular around the world, but what Dweck researched and how it's used in schools are two different things.

What Hattie's research found is that we talk about the growth mindset but we treat our students in very fixed ways, which is why it doesn't have a large positive influence on learning. Teachers tell students to have a growth mindset but they put them in ability groups that may not be right for them, and those groups become a place that students have to remain in all year as their teacher is touting the need to have a growth mindset. It was at that moment when I heard Hattie speak about the growth mindset that I thought about the idea of collaboration. Do we talk about it in a different way than we approach it?

Over the last 2½ years I have worked closely with Hattie. I have done his work in Australia three times in the last year, and worked with him in New Zealand and the UK. I edit his papers and he sends me his research when it's published. I have dissected his work into bite-size chunks of 1,100 words at a time for my Finding Common Ground blog, which is no easy feat because it involves over 300 million students. And every time I came back to the idea of collaboration and whether we really practice what we preach when we use this very well-used buzzword.

IT BEGINS WITH LEADERSHIP

Unfortunately, not all school leaders want to collaborate as much as they want teachers to collaborate around the idea provided by the leader. It's like the old days of shared decision making. You are fine to be a part of the group as long as you are sharing in the decision I'm making.

> Instructional leadership is important, but collaborative leadership addresses bringing all the stakeholders in the school community together.

In my experience as a teacher, leader and educational consultant, I have found that there are four types of leaders. In *Collaborative Leadership: Six Influences That Matter Most* (Corwin & Learning Forward) I describe the four types of leaders as:

1. **Bystander** – This leader doesn't define any positive goals and they don't inspire stakeholders to collaborate. They have low growth performance and have low partnership qualities. Teachers work in silos and the principal remains in their office more than they make attempts to be visible.

2. **Regulator** – This leader defines the goal for the teacher and the school. Although they have high performance, they control the whole environment. These leaders know what idea they want to walk out of a meeting with well before they ever walk into the meeting. Unfortunately, they do not inspire true partnerships around the school as much as they promote compliance, which ultimately creates a hostile school climate where teachers wait to be told what to do.

3. **Negotiator** – Negotiators seem as though they are inspiring collaboration but what they do is define the goal behind closed doors, and then slowly make their way around the school or district and get people on board with their ideas. They create coalitions. This works just as long as stakeholders believe in the goal, rather than feel they have to achieve it because it's coming from the top.

4. **Collaborator** – This leader finds the perfect balance between inspiring stakeholders to collaborate and co-constructing building and classroom-level goals. They believe in a high level of transparency and honesty, and have a high level of performance because stakeholders feel as though they have a voice in the process.

As leaders, we have all spent our time as each one of the four. However, we need to make sure we spend as much time as possible in the role of collaborator. In order for all of us to effectively collaborate, we must have school climates that foster risk-taking, teacher and student voice, and we must try to include everyone within our school. As any leader with experience knows, that is not easy because not all teachers want to take a place at the table. However, what I have learned from Hattie is that some of that resistance comes down to self-efficacy. Hattie defines self-efficacy as "the confidence or strength of belief that we have in ourselves that we can make our learning happen."

When teachers come from a school where they have been micromanaged because the school climate focuses on compliance, teachers are less likely to have a voice and they often feel a low level of self-efficacy. Ashton and Webb define low self-efficacy as,

> "Teachers with low teaching efficacy don't feel that teachers, in general, can make much of a difference in the lives of students, while teachers with low personal teaching efficacy don't feel that they, personally, affect the lives of the students" (1986).

This can have an enormous impact on our school climate and focus on student learning. Collaboration, and building what Hattie refers to as collective teacher efficacy, which has an effect size of 1.57, is a way for leaders to help bring up those teachers with a low level of self-efficacy. That's not easy because we are often focusing on the wrong issues. Often in our school districts we are comparing one school against another, as opposed to giving leaders the autonomy to look within their school to build capacity among their teachers.

According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), best known for their role in the International Student Assessment (PISA), which ranks national education systems, we should not be comparing schools across districts or states as much as

we need to be looking at the variance between our teachers in need of the most growth and our teachers who are our high flyers.

Hattie cites PISA in *The Politics of Distraction* (2015) by writing, "The 2009 PISA results for reading across all OECD countries show that the variability between schools is 36 percent, while the variance within schools is 64 percent (OECD, 2010)." And this is one of the major reasons we have to have collaborative leadership as well as look at our collaborative practices and mindsets. Leaders need to help support a school climate where teachers can learn from one another, and not feel as though they're in competition with one another. This means that no longer can leaders spend most of their time in their offices or having faculty meetings that are often one-sided because they want to further their own messages.

In my research and training I have found that there are six of Hattie's influences where leaders should be spending a great deal of their time. Hattie started off his research with 138 influences on learning, and then two years ago added another 12 influences, and now he has found 195 influences on learning. Some of those influences have negative effects, and others have enormous positive effects on student learning.

6 OF HATTIE'S INFLUENCES THAT **ALL SCHOOLS CAN BENEFIT FROM:**

1. **Instructional Leadership** (.42) – Overall, in Hattie's research he has found that leadership has a .39 effect size (mixing together instructional and transformational), which just falls short of the .40 hinge point that has been found to represent a year's worth of growth for a year's input. However, when we look at just instructional leadership, the effect size goes up to .42. Instructional leadership seems to mean everything that goes on within the school building, and there is plenty leaders can do to take the structures they already have in place and use them as a format to focus

on learning and teaching. Instructional leadership is important, but collaborative leadership addresses bringing all the stakeholders in the school community together.

2. **Collective Teacher Efficacy** (1.57) We have learned a lot over the years about low levels of teacher self-efficacy, which means that we have adults in the school who do not believe they can make a positive impact on students. What we know about teacher-student relationships is that they have a .72 effect size which is well over the hinge point, so having teachers work through their low level of efficacy (which can be a result of their personal or professional experiences) is important. Collective teacher efficacy, which has an effect size of 1.57, is when we bring teachers together to focus on learning so they can all maximize that teacher-student relationship influence that matters so much.

3. **Professional Development** (.51) – We know that a lot of professional development has been compliance based, which has been a direct result of the accountability and mandates I mentioned earlier. We seem to have gone from a time when teachers could attend the PD they wanted without it having much of an impact on learning (Knight found we lose about 90 percent of what we learn in sit-and-get PD), to going to a time when every hour of PD was about a new initiative. We have plenty of opportunities to co-construct PD with staff and use some of our structures like faculty meetings to focus on a co-established goal to help make PD more effective, but we don't always take those opportunities.

4. **Feedback** (.75) – There has been a lot of research done around the power of effective feedback, and although some leaders are getting better at it, most don't give it their all, and we have teacher observation results to prove that. Hattie has three levels of feedback teachers can use with students,

and we can certainly take the lessons learned from the feedback research and use those levels with teachers. We need teacher observations and walkthroughs to be more powerful than they are, and it takes effective feedback to get us there.

5. **Assessment Capable Learners** (1.44) - Hattie has changed the language around assessment capable learners a few times. It started out as student expectations and then evolved into assessment capable learners. Some schools call these students self-directed learners. The bottom line is that, no matter the ability level of our students, we need to help them understand where they are, how they got there and where they're going to next (Hattie) so that they know what to do when they don't know what to do.

6. **Family Engagement** (.49) – What makes collaborative leadership a bit more effective is that parents are included in the dialogue around school, and feel as though they can work in partnership with the leader and school community. Too often we give parents the message we want them to have after the decision is made. Instead we have to do a better job of bringing them in and giving them opportunities to share their voices (2016).

IN THE END

Collaboration is important because it can help elevate those teachers with a low level of self-efficacy and help build a sense of collective teacher efficacy that Hattie's research shows is so important. As leaders, we need to stop thinking that collaboration is about teachers and students working together or that it means that stakeholders must comply with our goals. Collaboration is much deeper than that, and it begins with a unified definition of what it means. There are six areas where leaders can start, and they most likely already have the structure in place to where the conversations can begin.

Scan or visit to view the SAANYS webinar with DeWitt on collaborative leadership.

http://bit.ly/2fxGM0R

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PETER DEWITT, EdD, is a former teacher and principal, and now works nationally and internationally as an author and consultant. He works with John Hattie and Jim Knight, and does his own work around safeguarding LGBTQ students and collaborative leadership. His forthcoming book *Collaborative Leadership: Six Influences That Matter Most* (Corwin Press) was be published in July 2016. He can be found at www.petermdewitt.com.

SUE SZACHOWICZ'S STORY:

From "Cesspool" to Model School: Brockton's Fight for Student Success

By Kim M. Smithgall

"The steps are simple…but they're not easy."

That's how Susan Szachowicz describes the process that allowed Brockton High School in Massachusetts to move from an institution described by *The Boston Globe* as a "cesspool" to a model school lauded on the front page of *The New York Times* for its academic prowess and transformation.

The secret weapon in the process? Literacy.

Along with the unwavering commitment of a small group of educators to fight against a school culture where academic failure was perfectly acceptable.

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A LONG HISTORY IN THE BROCKTON RING

Szachowicz has a long history in Brockton, an urban area 25 miles south of Boston. She graduated from Brockton High School, did her student teaching there and returned to the school as a social studies teacher in 1975. By 1989, she added high school department head responsibilities to her teaching duties, then moved on to become housemaster (similar to a principal), associate principal for curriculum and instruction, and then principal before retiring in 2013.

The students there have long been known as Brockton Boxers — in recognition of the boxing tradition in the community (both Rocky Marciano and Marvin Hagler are Brockton alumni). Any lingering fighting spirit in the school, however, seemed to be focused on achievements on the football field rather than in the classrooms. In fact, when Szachowicz started teaching, the high school principal said students had a right to fail.

"And they were certainly exercising that right," Szachowicz mused.

DOWN FOR THE COUNT

In 1998, Brockton's failure rate on the state tests known as MCAS (Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System) was 44 percent in English language arts (ELA) and 75 percent in math; similar results were logged for the next three years. Pupils who didn't pass these exams would not be able to graduate — no exceptions.

High failure rates weren't uncommon for large urban districts with demographics similar to those in Brockton (more than 80 percent of Brockton High School's 4,200 students lived in poverty and a similar percentage were minorities; more than 50 percent spoke a language other than English at home). However, Brockton was truly down for the count — the lowest of the low-achieving schools and if this trajectory persisted, three-quarters of the students would not be getting diplomas.

When *The Boston Globe* article referring to Brockton as a cesspool was published, the Brockton district superintendent called a meeting. "There were administrators and others who he considered to be teacher leaders in the room," Szachowicz recalled. "The superintendent didn't have a plan, but he held up the *Globe* in the meeting and said, 'We can never be on the front page again with a story like this; we need to fix this.'"

Szachowicz begged, cajoled, and bribed (with food) her colleagues to collaborate and find a solution. "No one really wanted to be a part of it at first. The morale was so bad, so negative. We had 334 teachers on the faculty and you might as well have had 334 separate schools," she said. "Everybody sort of had their own little empire; we weren't really working together."

Eventually, 20 educators teamed up to form a restructuring committee. The group comprised mostly teachers and some administrators (department heads). It was co-chaired by Szachowicz (both a teacher and the history department head at the time) and the head of the English department.

"The principal wasn't on the committee and it wasn't top-directed," Szachowicz said. "We came together as a group, looked at the test scores we had and asked, 'Is this the best that we can be?' That was our driving question."

This committee transformed the school using a simple (but not easy!) process. "If you look at the big picture, there were four steps: empowering a team, focusing on literacy, implementing with a plan, and monitoring like crazy," Szachowicz said.

ROUND ONE: EMPOWER A TEAM

Brockton High School's restructuring committee had representation from all subject areas and this collaborative approach was a key factor in the group's success.

"I think one of the things we did best was including teacher voices — even the ones we didn't particularly want to hear," Szachowicz quipped. "It was important that everyone was

> "Stop trying to change the student; change the conditions under which they learn."
> – Dr. Sue Szachowicz

included. Even the naysayers would say that they didn't like what we were doing, but they were included in the discussions."

With a commitment to high standards and no excuses, the Brockton team pored over the MCAS data, eventually determining that improving literacy skills would increase student achievement in all subject areas. The committee members then led structured discussions.

"We asked groups of teachers three questions: what literacy skills do kids need to be successful on the MCAS exams; what skills do they need to be successful in your class; and what skills do they need to be successful in their lives beyond Brockton High?"

(As an aside: the last question was also presented to the local chamber of commerce president, who became an enthusiastic "corner man" and supporter of the school's transformation efforts.)

"The collaborative culture was absolutely essential," Szachowicz said.

ROUND TWO: FOCUS ON LITERACY

After many meetings and lots of feedback, Brockton teachers settled on four areas to concentrate their efforts: reading, writing, speaking and reasoning. Four different literacy maps were created to illustrate and define in easy-to-understand language what these terms meant. (Links to the literacy diagrams are on the bottom of this webpage: https://www. brocktonpublicschools.com/schools/ brockton-high-school/about-us/ mission-literacy-charts.) The literacy maps were posted in every classroom and area of the school — even the swimming pool area! They were a constant visual reminder for the entire school community of the growing commitment to completely transform the school culture.

"These literacy skills aren't trendy, they're not glitzy, and they're not a program that you buy off the shelf. But they're exactly what kids needed to be successful," Szachowicz commented.

And this focus on literacy would be part of every content area, not just English language arts. Now that plan ruffled some feathers.

One outspoken critic was a science teacher who wondered aloud if the English faculty members would be teaching his science curriculum in their classes since he was required to teach English language arts subject matter to his classes.

"Nobody likes change. I don't like change. I was in the history department and, God knows, we were steeped in tradition," Szachowicz said, adding that resistance often occurred because most teachers never learned how to integrate literacy skills into their classes; it was, plain and simple, a scary prospect.

"I'll use myself as an example. When I was in a teacher preparation program, I was never taught how to use reading strategies for kids. I would give students some difficult readings — primary source documents like the Federalist Papers, for example — and the kids would plow through them and then would look at me and say they didn't get it. I had no idea how to teach reading and my response would be, 'Well, yes…just read it again.' That was my solution."

Armed with this awareness, the restructuring committee made professional development in teaching literacy a top priority.

"It was about teaching the faculty how to teach it to the kids," Szachowicz explained. "I say this all the time when I'm making presentations or working with schools today: if you want to improve your schools, you need to focus on the adults, not the kids."

The committee created literacy workshops, complete with rubrics and scripts to ensure consistent delivery of information. Teachers developed the content and delivered it to their peers, which helped with buy in. The sessions would fit into the regularly scheduled, hour-long staff meetings and then repeated two weeks later in each department to integrate the teaching of literacy skills with their own academic subject matter.

Of the four main areas of literacy, the restructuring committee decided to tackle writing in the first year and then narrowed down that topic to initially cover how to answer open-response questions — a strategy/skill that could easily be incorporated into all academic areas. Teachers learned not only how to integrate the literacy instruction, but also how to use the rubrics to measure success.

ROUND THREE: IMPLEMENT A PLAN

"In order to carry out this kind of schoolwide change, we had to figure out a structured way of doing it. So, we used a calendar and assigned different departments dates when they would be integrating literacy. We spread it out over the course of the school year. For example, during one particular week in October, the history department would do the literacy initiative. Then a few weeks later, it would be another department and then a few weeks later, another department and so on," Szachowicz said.

In other words, this wasn't going to be another case of what Szachowicz calls "drive-by professional development," where teachers receive training, do an activity for a day and it never gets done again. "Unfortunately, that's more typical of what happens in schools today," Szachowicz said.

Brockton's repeated and ongoing literacy activities in all content areas served a number of purposes. "First, we could observe [through monitoring] that it was, indeed, happening and, second, it gave the kids repeated practice on the writing because we spread it out over the course of the year," Szachowicz commented.

As anticipated, the repeated practice caused some of the Brockton Boxers to begin entering the ring as resistors. "Many would say, 'We already did this in my science class.' My response was along the lines of, 'That's right, because it's that important for you to learn…so important that you're gonna hear it in every class,'" said Szachowicz.

And when parents complained to Szachowicz and up the chain of command about the literacy initiative (after their children came home grumbling), the response was always the same: "It's mandatory."

Including this type of consistent messaging in Brockton's plans and anticipating resistance were crucial elements in the efforts to shift expectations for student achievement, Szachowicz pointed out.

ROUND FOUR: MONITOR LIKE CRAZY

The monitoring component, mentioned earlier, was vital, as well. "This was the biggest challenge for us, besides the negativity, and I think every school making these kinds of changes will face a challenge with monitoring," Szachowicz admitted.

Brockton's monitoring included principal visits to the classrooms when the literacy instruction was taking place — informal observations only, which were decoupled from any formal teacher evaluation processes. The most valuable monitoring, however, occurred when teachers teamed up to review student work. This was an ongoing practice and served to ensure that every Brockton High School student was being held to the same standards.

Harvard researcher Ronald Ferguson, author of the study "How High Schools Become Exemplary," was amazed to see Brockton educators collecting and reviewing student work to monitor the program's fidelity.

"I had never seen that in another school," he said in a PBS documentary highlighting Brockton's transformation. "It's just a level of planning and meticulousness that you just don't see…the central ingredient is a small cadre of leaders who won't accept no for an answer. And it's a continuous improvement process where you're never satisfied, you're never finished, and it's understood that everybody's got to play."

...with data, support and persistence. The persistence paid off in big ways. "After one year of doing writing across the school, we cut the ELA failure rate in half," Szachowicz recalled.

And the following year, the failure rates were cut in half again. Even the most negative naysayers at Brockton High School had no ammunition left to use after that: the data showed success.

Remember the reluctant science teacher? He was also interviewed for the PBS documentary. After seeing the first-year results, he changed his tune. "I'm a science guy. If there's evidence to back it up or I see evidence or we gain evidence, I'm on board," he said. "And we have evidence that this system is working."

And the steady progress continued. Brockton High School has multiple times been selected by the International Center for Leadership in Education as a National Model School (Szachowicz is now a senior fellow at the center). The school was honored with a National School Change Award. And going beyond the prestige of these sometimes nebulous honors to something a little more concrete, the school continues to graduate hundreds of students who qualify as John and Abigail Adams Scholars, which means they can attend any Massachusetts state college for free — likely a life-changing advantage for students living in poverty.

For educators looking to make a similar transformation in their schools, Szachowicz offered some insights. "This takes time. Making change is about tenacity and if we did it, anyone can," she said, adding that the process doesn't have to be perfect to get started. "If you can just start something in school and start seeing some positive results, one thing just morphs into another — success brings more success. It doesn't have to be perfect to get started and if things don't go exactly right, you can fix it. It's about improvement."

For administrators in particular, Szachowicz stood firm in her advice that they must address resistance directly. "You can't let it fester," she said. "I was working with one principal who said he didn't think he could do that 'because I'm a nice guy.' Being nice and being a leader aren't exclusive. You can be nice and you can address a situation, but you must insist that the initiative be done. You don't have to be stomping your feet or screaming in someone's face, but handle it in some way. Sometimes that just means providing support."

Today, failure rates at Brockton High School are in the single digits and the dropout rate is just 1.1 percent. The percentage of students earning test scores in the "advanced" and "proficient" categories has skyrocketed. Brockton's Class of 2015 had 933 graduates, many of whom were not only the first in their families to graduate from high school, but also the first to go on to college.

And while it took about a decade to accomplish such a positive transformation, Brockton High (and other schools experiencing this kind of success) have reason to celebrate… at least for a short while. Raise your gloves above your head in victory, maybe play the first 30 seconds of the theme song from the "Rocky" movies…and then get back in the ring to continue fighting for students' academic success.

"After all, until we're at a one hundred percent passing rate, we're not the best we can be," Szachowicz concluded.

SUE SZACHOWICZ, senior fellow, International Center for Leadership in Education, is author of *Transforming Brockton High School: High Standards, High Expectations, No Excuses.*

Going the Distance...Even Among Book-burning and the Great Shakespearean Fiasco

While Brockton High School's transformation is a definite victory, Susan Szachowicz is also quick to describe some of the backpedaling and fisticuffs that were all part of the process.

"As you might expect, we had some missteps and challenges along the way," she commented.

She jokingly calls the restructuring team's first attempt to improve MCAS test scores "the great Shakespearean fiasco." The team reviewed a few years' worth of MCAS English language arts exams and found that there were always questions on Shakespeare. So, the team worked with teachers to integrate Shakespearean sonnets into the curricula...lots of Shakespeare.

You guessed it…the next year, there were no Shakespeare questions on the exam.

"We realized we couldn't be teaching to the test," Szachowicz said. "What you do with literacy has to fit within what you would already be teaching."

It was a minor setback for the team, but they endured, learned a valuable lesson, and moved on.

They also had to move on from the toughest group of staff members who were not willing to embrace the changes taking place in the school.

"They were outright nasty," Szachowicz recalled. "It was the end of the year and many people had been working very hard on the literacy initiative. The principal and I wrote nice thank-you notes to the faculty to let them know how much we appreciated their commitment to improving the school for our kids. With the thank-you notes, we gave them each a copy of the book, *I Read It But I Don't Get It* by Cris Tovani…because what teacher doesn't love a book, right? And this was a very cool one — all kinds of adolescent reading strategies."

When the teachers returned in September, the school was buzzing about a summer event that had taken place.

"One of our teachers had invited a large group of teachers to a summer cookout. As you might expect, I was not on the guest list," Szachowicz mused. "He said to bring the book that had been handed out so they could have a book-burning event. That's how negative some people were. So, we had some real resistance, but we persevered."

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The Profile of a Modern Teacher

21st century teachers are not experts in technology—
they are experts in habits of mind.

In a rapidly changing educational landscape, modern educators:

- Choose to be vulnerable
- See themselves as co-learners, not teachers
- Allow themselves to fail, often
- Don't wait until they're experts to introduce something
- Move into their students' world, even if it's foreign territory
- Run towards their area of weakness, not away from it
- Are comfortable not knowing what is going to happen
- Invite mistakes into their lives
- Dream big and ask "Why not?"
- Allow their students to teach each other
- Step outside their comfort zone
- Embrace change
- Feel secure asking their colleagues for help
- Model resiliency and perseverance
- Question everything
- Believe they can learn anything, given the right attitude and effort

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OPINIONS

"Politics and children do not fit together."

– Commissioner MaryEllen Elia, *at the SAANYS 2016 Annual Conference*

"The factor that seems to explain the most about great performance is something the researchers call deliberate practice … Deliberate practice is hard. It hurts. But it works. More of it equals better performance. Tons of it equals great performance."

– From *Talent Is Overrated* by Geoff Colvin as presented by Susan Szachowicz

at the SAANYS Annual Conference in October in her discussion of the massive literacy effort and collaborative practice used to turn around Brockton High School. (See story on page 9)

Practices from practitioners

Beyond Surviving to Thriving | FALL 2016 Vol. 45 No. 3

Social Media Club

Empowers Middle School Students Online

By Christopher Anderson

We don't have a choice on whether we do social media but how well we do social media.
   – Erik Qualman, author of Socialnomics

According to the Pew Research Center, over 75 percent of U.S. teens use social media regularly. Whether it's Facebook or Twitter, Instagram, or Snapchat, our students are immersed in two worlds, one real and one virtual. Along with parents and guardians, schools play a vital role in educating students on proper social media use. At Algonquin Middle School in Averill Park, New York, **we chose to embrace social media through the creation of a new, powerful student organization.**

WHAT IS THE AMS SOCIAL MEDIA CLUB?

The AMS Media Club is charged with creating a positive and informative social media presence for our school. Our goal is to share information about news, upcoming events, student accomplishments, and more to the students, teachers, and parents/guardians of the Algonquin Middle School community.

Under teacher supervision, students utilize school-owned devices to maintain Twitter and Instagram accounts with the opportunity to add more social media platforms in the future. No students have access to the account passwords and all posts are reviewed by the club advisor.

We approach posts as part public relations initiative and part character education. On the one hand, we use information from our school's weekly email, website postings, important announcements, as well as other newsworthy events as the content for our Twitter posts.

Based on our followers, we consider Twitter to primarily be a means of communication with parents and guardians.

On the other hand, students utilize our Instagram account to share school

highlights and events as viewed through their eyes.

Twice a week our Instagram account features "Humans of AMS." These posts spotlight one male and one female student for their accomplishments in the classroom, on the stage, on the field, and more.

On Tuesday, students post an inspiring quote to uplift our followers. On Throwback Thursdays, we post pictures from old school yearbooks. From former teachers as students to photos of the "A-V Club," it's a fun way to celebrate our school's history. Finally, we typically save Fridays for special circumstances and upcoming events.

WHAT ARE THE LOGISTICS?

The first step in getting our club started was creating an application that included expectations for the club and its members.

In order to fulfill our mission, we make sure to have permission before posting photos or videos of anyone. We also consult our school's "no photo list," which indicates when families prefer that their child not be photographed while in school, to ensure we are respecting the family's wishes.

Even if we do have permission, we also take care not to provide any identifying information. Beyond the club expectations, we expect our members to conduct themselves appropriately when using our school social media accounts as well as their own. We want club members to be social media role models in the Algonquin Middle School community.

The student response to the social media club was overwhelming. With more than 30 interested sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students willing to meet before, during, and after school, we had more students than we could use on a daily basis.

Rather than turning interested students away, we organized them into teams. As a result, students were responsible for creating content once every ten days or so. These teams were mixed grade groups so as to represent the various interests within the school.

In order to facilitate teams, we used the online tool remind to communicate the week's schedule and discuss possible content.

Almost immediately the students took ownership of the club. They would come during homeroom or lunch, brainstorm possible post ideas, and then go about bringing that content to our followers.

Thanks to the students' hard work and maturity, no post they suggested was ever overruled. Aside from adjusting minor grammatical errors, the content was almost completely their own. But more than content, it was the experiences they shared that they will remember.

Whether flipping through old yearbooks from 30 years ago or bragging about the accomplishments of their peers, the AMS Social Media Club was the talk of the school, both online and offline.

CONCLUSIONS

The best part of the AMS Social Media Club is that it empowers students to use social media in a positive way. The students take pride in their work in order to curate an informative, student-led social media presence.

As a result, our students of the month initiative gained more popularity, our parents know more about upcoming events and important due dates, and our students hold their head a little higher knowing their painting from art class has a few more admirers.

Thanks to the hard work of our students, the AMS Social Media Club enables more people to experience the very best of Algonquin Middle School.

CHRISTOPHER ANDERSON is a social studies teacher and technology integration specialist at Algonquin Middle School in Averill Park Central School District. You can find the AMS Social Media Club on Twitter and Instagram @APAlgonquinMS.

The Millennials Are Coming! Implications for

Practices in a Changing Workforce

By Larry Dake

"And she didn't even feel like she had to suck up, not even just a little," exclaimed my exasperated colleague. This senior district-level administrator was commenting on one of her many interactions with a young teacher in our district – a "millennial" long-term sub. This teacher, fresh out of grad school, had requested a district-owned laptop for work purposes so she could leave our building at an earlier hour and complete lesson prep at home. While my veteran administrative colleague was taken aback by the exchange, **it was a very natural question from the millennial teacher's perspective.**

Born between 1980 and 2000, the "millennial generation" began entering the workforce in 2002 and will continue to do so until 2022 (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). Set to comprise 50 percent of the workforce by 2020, this generation's dynamics are impacting workplaces during a time of already rapid change. School districts that recognize and embrace millennials – and correspondingly craft practices that reflect this generation's unique attributes – will be positioned for success in hiring and retaining top talent. In this article, I outline recent research on the millennial generation and suggest practical steps that districts can take to leverage this up-and-coming generation's strengths in the classroom.

MILLENNIALS – WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?

Labeled the "me, me, me generation" by *Time* magazine (2013), millennials have been derided in the popular press for being "convinced of their own greatness," "fame-obsessed," and "narcissistic." Others have labeled them self-important, disloyal, and impatient (Howe & Strauss, 2007). A close look at the research, however, reveals a much more complex picture.

Undoubtedly, millennials possess unique attributes and life experiences that make them different from their veteran colleagues. First and foremost, they have been immersed in technology throughout their lives (Brack, 2012). iPhones, social media apps, and Pokémon Go are natural extensions of their day-to-day existence. Beyond entertainment, however, this technological immersion has democratized knowledge to a previously unknown level. In the past, teachers and professors were the repositories of knowledge; they possessed the degrees and content specialties necessary to tell their students about the War of 1812, molecular biology, or Geoffrey Chaucer. Millennials, however, can access this knowledge on Wikipedia while waiting for the next subway car to arrive. Millennials have grown up knowing that any and all information is only one Google click away.

Authority figures are no longer needed as intermediaries to access information.

In addition, millennials are natural content creators and collaborators. An offshoot of their technological immersion, this generation was raised in an era of Facebook, blogs, and open source software. According to a 2008 Pew study, 59 percent of then-teenagers were creating online content and almost one-third were likely to create a blog in their lifetime (Dannar, 2013). Many millennials feel strongly about their voice and wish to share it with complete strangers. For the millennial generation, broadcasting viewpoints, dinner plans, and opinions is second-nature; platforms no longer exist solely for those in formal authority positions. This dynamic has strong implications for leadership as the millennials grow to dominate workplaces.

Finally, research suggests that millennials value "meaningful work" more than past generations. While traditional, extrinsic success measures still rank high among millennial values (particular when many are mired in debt), intrinsic values also rate highly among the generation. A 2011 study found that while only 12 percent of managers rated "meaningful work" as important, 30 percent of their millennial employees did (Brack, 2012). As part of valuing meaningful work, many research studies indicate that millennials seek greater work-life balance than past generations (Nolan, 2015). Taken together, the millennials' co-existence with technology, penchant for content creation, and desire for meaningful work have powerful implications for schoolwide practices.

Millennials, as a generation, do possess unique characteristics that warrant further attention by school leaders. As millennials grow to dominate workplaces over the next five to ten years, school leaders should be cognizant of the generation's overall dynamics and shape practices

to meet these needs. In particular, research on millennials points to three practices for future direction: expanding mentoring programs, incentivizing collaboration, and transitioning to democratic leadership models.

THREE IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

One area for practice consideration is mentoring programs and their expansion to encompass schoolwide norms and values. Many millennials were raised in a world that blurs the line between public and private content. Once hired as a schoolteacher, however, millennials cross over a very important line from private citizen to public servant. For many millennials, teaching's public nature was not widely considered upon entering the profession. It will be important, therefore, to shift from "mentoring" new teachers in curriculum, lesson planning, and assessing to including "onboarding" activities within their first few years. Emphasizing the district's mission, goals, and moral purpose will tap into millennials' strong desire for meaning in their work. Moreover, an emphasis on digital citizenship and social media pitfalls may assist millennial teachers in self-regulating their content creation, Facebook posts, and tweets. Extending these mentoring programs beyond the traditional day-to-day teaching activities has the potential to grow and retain younger, talented educators.

Moreover, research suggests that a strong mentor teacher meets millennial needs. A 2015 study (Clark & Byrnes) indicated that preservice elementary education teachers identified

student management and differentiation as areas for further improvement. These two areas encompass teaching's nuances; they can best be reinforced through modeling and practice. Expanding mentoring beyond the mandated one-year requirement to a multi-year, relationship-building endeavor has the potential to strengthen the millennial teaching core. The more ways districts can promote intergenerational communication, the better.

Additionally, districts should explore ways to incentivize collaboration. Many teacher contracts contain incentives for continuing education; they should also contain incentives for continuing collaboration. In a perfect world, this collaboration would occur naturally. However, in the teaching profession, there are centrifugal forces that push teachers back into their classrooms behind closed doors. Individual APPR scores, state-mandated growth scores, and content-specific course offerings are among these forces. Even the most well-intentioned educators can find themselves working in professional isolation.

Incentivizing cross-curricular projects, through meaningful stipends, is one possible way to promote collaboration. Administrators may act as gatekeepers for such projects, but such monetary incentives may unleash collaboration that would otherwise not occur. For example, an incentive for an English 10 and Global II teachers to co-plan and co-teach multiple units would open powerful cultural and literary lessons for students. This collaboration may happen haphazardly without incentive, but a monetary incentive may encourage it intentionally. Although implications for teachers in terms of record keeping, schedules, and grading will arise, such collaboration would undoubtedly be good for students and tap into millennials' natural desire for collaboration, meaning, and content creation.

Finally, and most importantly, the millennials' unique life experiences will have leadership implications for schools. As noted, millennials have been raised with the same access to information that authority figures have long-enjoyed. The key to millennial commitment will be the relationship they have with their

direct supervisor. Top-down, hierarchical leadership styles will not help this generation thrive in our classrooms. Rather, a mentoring approach to leadership emphasizing a reciprocal relationship will serve this generation well (Dannar, 2013). The millennial generation will demand a level playing field, transparency, and autonomy. School leaders will have to be good listeners and adept at putting their ego aside in order to build trusting relationships.

CONCLUSION

In a separate but related encounter, the same millennial teacher noted in the introduction asked her principal why her schedule had been changed in late August. The principal's initial reaction was hierarchical; as the principal, he determined the schedule. After

talking it through with the young teacher, however, the principal came to see that she was not questioning the decision, but rather was seeking additional resources for this new course. Millennial dominance in the workplace will be a fact of life very soon and traditional concepts around leadership and schools will be challenged. Therefore, it is up to school leaders – who often will have different life experiences – to consider these dynamics. By understanding the research and developing best practices in response, school organizations can tap into the millennial generation's potential to help transform our schools.

LARRY DAKE, PhD, is the assistant superintendent in the Union-Endicott Central School District.

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Innovative Spaces Transformed our
School Climate and Culture

By Michael Healey and Brita Donovan

Five years ago, we inherited a junior/senior high school that appeared to have lost its school spirit and pride. Walking around the school, one would be hard pressed to identify our vision, mission, school colors, and our school mascot. When asked why, students would commonly reply, "Because this is Galway."

Immediately it became clear that our goals/efforts to improve academic performance, student conduct, and student attendance would not be realized unless **our time and energy were first spent on improving our school's climate and culture**.

Reform efforts focused on safety, relationships, teaching and learning, and our institutional environment. The following are four examples of innovative school spaces that transformed our school climate.

JUNIOR/SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL ENTRYWAY

Speaking with our students and alumni, we realized that our mascot is the golden eagle; however, our branding included all types of eagles, bald, golden...no one knew for sure which school logo was the correct logo.

You never get a second chance to make a first impression. Everyone entering our building is now greeted by a 12′ x 12′ golden eagle – leaving no doubt what our mascot is. Our walls are golden yellow, our reception area is adorned with eagle blue seating – leaving no doubt what our school colors are. Flags of our international students and staff, combined with our "enter as a guest" and "leave as an eagle" signs, welcome all who enter our building. Pictures of our current students engaged in academic, athletic, and extracurricular activities line the walls.

APARC

With the goal of increasing our students' participation in advanced placement, advanced regents, and college courses we transformed a former science lab into a state-of-the-art room modeled after a college student union – we call it our APARC room. Complete with high-top cafe tables, a lounge study area, conference table, laptops, whiteboards, a smartboard, student textbooks, a refrigerator, and a Keurig – this room encourages student-centered learning. As our district transitions to a student-centered learning environment, our APARC room provides the independence students need to develop creative, critical thinking, and leadership skills required to be successful in college and beyond. Has it made a difference? Our data says YES – as an example, 18 percent of the class of 2015 earned an advanced Regents diploma, and currently an estimated 60 percent of the class of 2018 is projected to graduate with an advanced Regents diploma!

EAGLE LANDING

Five years ago, we asked a lot of our students – and learned that our rules were rigorous and our expectations were formidable, so much so that a rumor circulated that sparkly nail polish was now banned on campus! (It's not.) Once our students realized that this was the "new normal" at Galway, they rose to the challenge, meeting, and often exceeding, our expectations for student conduct. Eagle landing was our way of recognizing our students' efforts and providing them with a place to engage, de-stress, visit with friends, and play during lunch and after school. When driving into our school you will now see a community area complete with bocce ball courts, beach volleyball, a soccer field, basketball court, horseshoes, picnic tables, and eagle umbrellas. Eagle Landing is a source of pride and a place to gather for our students and community. Cell phones? They are allowed during the lunch period, but who needs them when there is so much to do!

HOMECOMING

After learning that our school did not have a homecoming, we went to work. We enlisted the help of every stakeholder group to transform our track area into a two-day homecoming event for our students, families, and community members. Activities included a fun run, dance, pep rally, beach volleyball tournament, alumni and youth soccer games, and culminate in a celebration to recognize our athletes and honor our alumni. This celebration takes place under portable lights and ends with amazing fireworks, transforming the space into a "stadium" feel. Homecoming is now the most anticipated event of the year by all.

Five years ago, we inherited a school that appeared to have lost its school spirit and pride. Walking around Galway today, one would be hard pressed to find a student who does not know our vision, mission, school colors, and school mascot. When asked why, students now commonly reply, "WE ARE GALWAY!"

MICHAEL HEALEY is a junior/senior principal at Galway City School District and BRITA DONOVAN is the director of curriculum, instruction and assessment.

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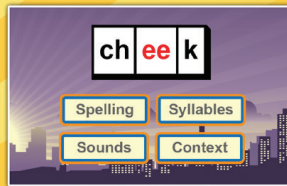
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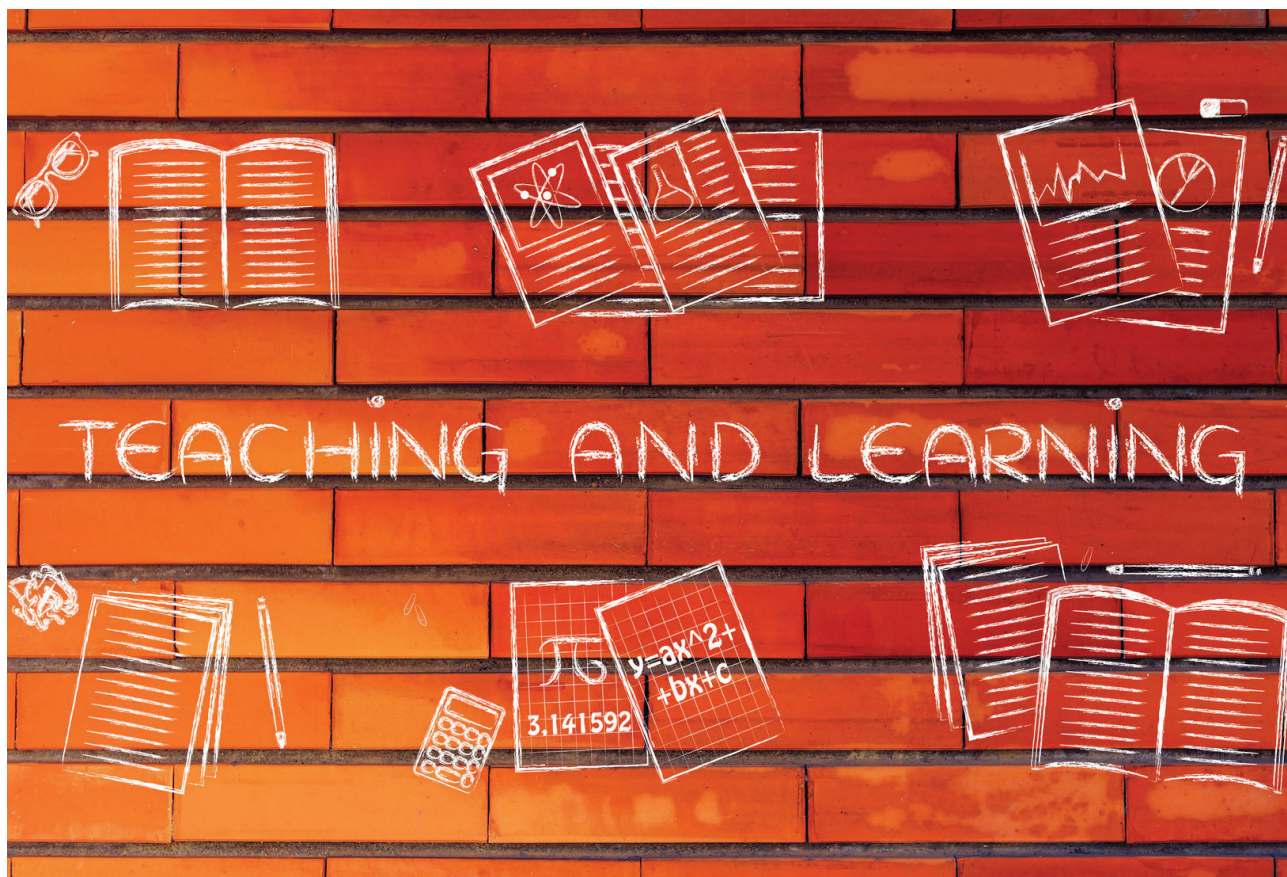- More feedback from teachers on higher-level writing skills

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Advancing a Collaborative Culture Through

Instructional Rounds

By Linda Rae Markert, EdD

So the story goes: A social studies teacher, math instructor, and college professor all walk into a... ninth grade science laboratory class of course! Oh, were you expecting a more colorful ending to this oft-used phrase to begin a certain type of joke?

All jesting aside, in educational settings at all levels, the practice of using instructional rounds has been found to be an enlightening tool for instructors who are dedicated to excellent teaching and also interested in improving their own pedagogical practices (Roberts, 2012).

Some school districts have actually attempted to require teachers and professional staff members to participate in instructional rounds. And, as you might imagine, these efforts have been met with varying levels of acceptance, and a fair amount of resistance.

In the Hannibal Central School District (HCSD), the process of conducting a series of rounds (voluntarily) over the course of several months actually served as a vehicle to foster a culture of collegiality and collaboration across several subject areas. Further, these classroom visitations served to build an esprit de corps among a group of individuals who previously had not worked together all that closely. In fact, upon completing a visit to a social studies classroom, one member of the instructional rounds team exclaimed, "Wow, that was an amazing class, and it's been years since I've even been in that corner of the building!"

During the 2015-16 school year, many hours of instructional rounds were conducted in Hannibal High School, primarily among a small group of teachers who agreed to visit each other and compare their own instructional practices with those demonstrated by their colleagues. In late September, several teachers were invited to participate in what was described as a pilot study, and six ultimately committed to participate for the remainder of the year. Although the scheduled visits were not designed or intended to provide feedback to the teacher who was doing the actual instruction, this ultimately became something everyone desired. We executed our classroom visits in teams of three, and our sessions typically lasted 30-40 minutes (although in practice they could be more like 15-20 minutes). And, while it was difficult to accomplish, team members tried to include a short block of time immediately after the visit for all to share their notes, insights, and reflections. Throughout the pilot study, the teachers made their visits to each other's classes during either their lunch break or planning periods – no additional class coverage was provided.

The instructional rounds were scheduled and facilitated by a SUNY Oswego faculty member who has studied this process, and amassed hundreds of hours of experience visiting and observing faculty members across the P-16 spectrum. She acted as an objective colleague who was not in any way involved with the district's formal APPR (Annual Professional Performance Review) procedures. Although the HCSD recently switched rubrics from the NYSUT Teacher Practice (New York State United Teachers) to Danielson's Framework for Teaching, the team collaboratively developed its own instrument for note taking during their visits. As we designed this tool, we deliberately avoided the use of words like *observe*, *observer*, *observation*, *evaluate*, *evaluator,* and *evaluation*. We instead used the words *visit*, *visitor,* and *visitation* to provide a clear, open-minded and nonthreatening context for our investigatory work together. We also decided to not include rubric-like language, and simply opted instead to record the extent to which, and how often, various behaviors and instructional strategies were noticed during the visit. Three readily apparent research themes found in our user-friendly form are student engagement, differentiated instruction, and formative assessment.

In our minds, these themes collectively comprised one of the essential elements required for teachers who want to conduct rounds in their school buildings – specifically, a problem of practice that focuses on the instructional core (City, Elmore, Fiarman & Teitel, 2009). We learned, through our review of *Instructional Rounds in Education*, "rounds has [sic] two primary learning goals that inform each other: 1. Build skills of network members by coming to common understanding of effective practice and how to support it. 2. Support instructional improvement at the host site (school or district) by sharing what the network learns and by building skills at the local level" (City, et al., 2009, p. 100). In this pilot study, the network consisted of the six teachers and college professor, who routinely kept the building and district administrators informed about their instructional rounds activities.

Students who were studying in the classroom venues selected for instructional rounds were naturally curious about why they were suddenly being accompanied in class by their teachers from other disciplines! We therefore devised a standard method for alerting them about the scheduled visits. Teachers each explained that several of their faculty colleagues along with a college professor would occasionally be visiting because we were actively trying to learn new skills and strategies from one another, just as students do when they work together collaboratively during class (see figure 1).

PILOT STUDY RESULTS AND NEXT STEPS

As noted above, one of several artifacts of the work we completed is a classroom visit guide for instructional rounds. As we designed this form during our first team meeting in October, the intended outcomes and thematic foci for our classroom

Figure 1: Students in an advanced Spanish class were observed teaching each other new concepts to promote collaborative learning during the team's instructional rounds pilot study.

visitations were identified. And, since each member of the team possessed a different area of expertise, we agreed that an overarching theme of "cross-disciplinary connections" should guide the framework for our visitation tool. All of us recorded what we referred to as "jog your memory notes" on this form, and we shared them with one another during several debriefing sessions held throughout the year. All six teachers expressed satisfaction with the pilot study, noting that they enjoyed, when possible, receiving immediate feedback from their colleagues after the visits had occurred.

Toward the end of the year, the pilot study's facilitator used a brief survey tool to allow the participants to describe:

1. new things they had learned about instructional practices being used by others during the study;
2. things they had either changed or modified within their own pedagogical strategies; and
3. general observations about the entire instructional rounds experience.

Here are a few of their specific discoveries and insights:

- "It was great to see students working hard at something other than reading and writing. I liked how some students were really able to articulate to me what they were doing and why. As an outsider to science and math, I learned a lot from those students (which shows their teachers are excellent!)." [Tenured ELA teacher, hired in 2007]

- "Collaboration for growth is empowering and builds trust and community! There is always something to learn from watching

others practice – for example: slightly different ways to approach or accomplish similar goals in the classroom; effective one-on-one strategies for moving kids forward when they struggle; and how to make connections to other disciplines." [Tenured science teacher with National Board Certification, hired in 1995]

- "The students are very interested in what we are doing. The juniors were curious as to why their physics teacher was visiting their U.S. History course. I learned a lot from the classroom visitations this year, but I would love to observe more junior-level classes, so I can actually see my own students in other situations." [Tenured social studies teacher, hired in 2003]

- "I have become much more aware of and sensitive to the workload that our students have. Each of the different curriculums has its own set of demands. I have also learned how to include visiting teachers (as participants) in my own lessons during the instructional rounds." [Nontenured special education teacher, hired in 2014]

- "After being exposed to one of our team members' work toward mastery mindset, I instituted a retake policy for formal assessments. I am also making a more deliberate effort to engage a variety of learning styles, and, thanks to observing another colleague, I have increased the differentiation in planning ways for students to have choices during their learning activities." [Nontenured mathematics teacher, hired in 2014]

- "Teachers benefit as they are able to gain feedback from their colleagues and not just from their superiors during formal observations. Being a visiting teacher during the instructional rounds has put me back in the mindset of being a student, and

has been quite educational and enjoyable." [Tenured foreign language teacher, hired in 2012]

These collective testimonials provide evidence that a collaborative culture has been advanced, at least for this team of high school teachers. The energy and creativity expressed in each statement might serve as a catalyst for what will be our next steps as we move through the 2016-17 school year. As we think about expanding the use of instructional rounds beyond the high school to include a comparable team of middle school teachers, a series of four essential questions will guide our thinking, and determine the level of support required to continue this investigative research. Specifically, as we move forward, we hope to ascertain the extent to which the intentional use of instructional rounds across subject areas, grade levels, and school buildings:

1. Creates (and perhaps sustains) vertical and cross-disciplinary learning communities.
2. Enables teachers to reflect on their practice and ultimately modify their own pedagogical strategies.
3. Provides avenues for innovative (and perhaps connected) formative assessments.
4. Improves our students' academic performance and also attends to their social and emotional well-being.

LINDA RAE MARKERT, EdD, is a professor in educational administration at SUNY Oswego.

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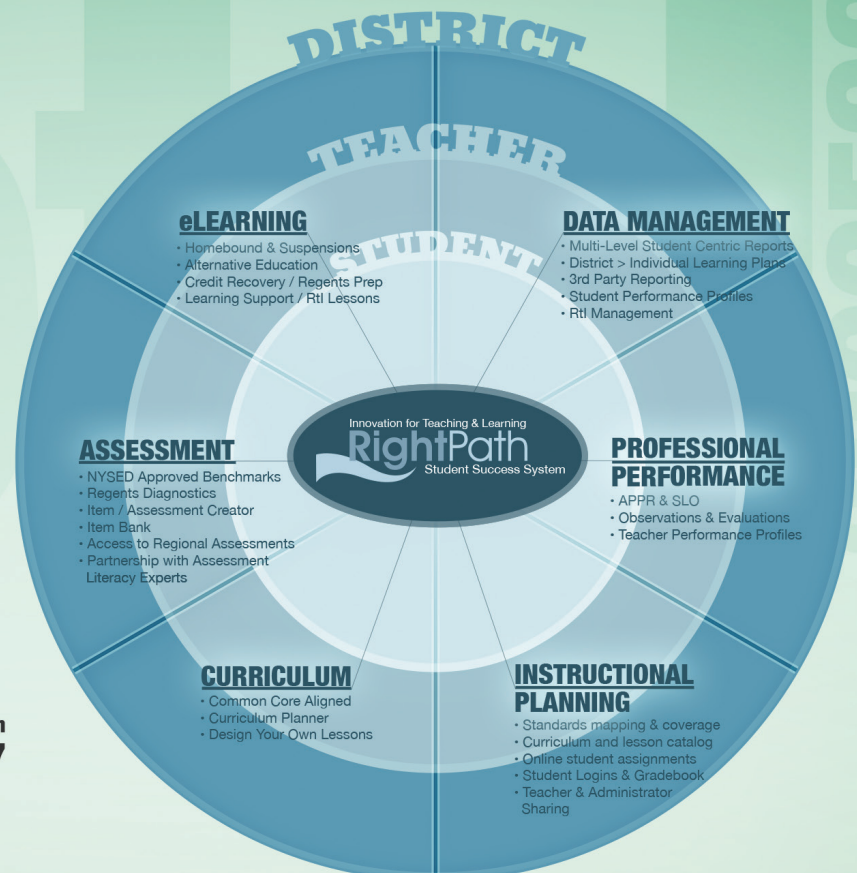
#SCSDFirstDay Campaign Boosts Staff

Community Engagement in Syracuse

By Karin Davenport

The Syracuse City School District is comprised of 30+ schools, 21,000+ students, and 3,000+ staff. Like many large urban districts, we struggle with a conundrum: **the mainstream media jumps to cover the negative news** coming out of our schools; yet we struggle to gain coverage for the good.

This year, as back-to-school season got into full swing, we decided to create a one-day campaign on social media – inspired by the one-day campaigns in Chicago's District 214. Our goal was to start the year on a good note, flood social media with good news about the SCSD, and encourage students, parents, and staff to interact with us online.

HOW DO WE DO THIS?

Beginning in early August, we created a series of graphics asking students, staff, and families to share photos of their first-day experience with us on Twitter, using the hashtag #SCSDFirstDay. We shared these images with district staff several times throughout the month of August and leading up to the first day of school. We also posted these images on Twitter regularly, in addition to creating a custom Twitter header with the #SCSDFirstDay call to action. To engage our existing Twitter followers with the campaign, beginning two weeks in advance of our first day, we individually tweeted our Twitter-active staff, calling on them to share their #SCSDFirstDay memories and to encourage colleagues to do so as well.

WHAT WAS THE RESULT?

Our #SCSDFirstDay campaign was an overwhelming success. Throughout the first day, we constantly retweeted, responded to, and liked submitted photos and tweets. We saw posts from students, parents, staff, administrators – even community organizations like our local library system and the mayor of Syracuse!

As the first day of school ended, we created an Animoto video slideshow of each photo submitted—as well as a Storify compilation of tweets submitted through the #SCSDFirstDay campaign, which our superintendent sent via email to all staff. We also shared these links on our social media channels, as well as via email, with a thank-you to staff who were instrumental in spreading the word about the campaign.

In the two weeks following our #SCSDFirstDay campaign, our Animoto video slideshow earned more than 1,000 views; our Storify timeline of tweets from the first day collected more than 1,700 in that same period. Statistically, we were overwhelmed at the impact of the #SCSDFirstDay campaign on social media!

On September 7 (the day of our #SCSDFirstDay campaign), we had 8,140 organic impressions on Twitter, compared to an average of 1,600 daily organic impressions in the 30 days prior. We also saw a 2.5 percent engagement rate among our followers that day, compared to our average engagement rate of 1.3 percent. Our tweets led to 18 link clicks, compared to our daily average of 4, and 9 replies, compared to our average of 1. We saw 17 retweets that day, compared to an average of 3… and we gained 66 new likes on September 7 compared to an average daily gain of 7!

While we did not encourage campaign posts on Facebook, we also noticed an increase in our analytics there—which we attribute to the #SCSDFirstDay buzz and people on Facebook searching for the SCSD. Our Facebook page saw a 95 percent increase in total page views compared to the week before school started, as well as a 205 percent increase in likes. Our overall reach spiked to 35,790 people, up 76 perccent from the prior week, and our post engagements spiked 213 percent!

The #SCSDFirstDay one-day campaign took weeks of planning and laying the groundwork. But after seeing the results – and the positive feelings the campaign generated for families and staff – we look forward to running similar campaigns for teacher appreciation week, graduation, and more.

Creating a sense of community is critical to any school district, and especially in an urban setting – where everyone is stretched to their limit – encouraging social media interaction can be tricky. Our #SCSDFirstDay campaign showed us that by promoting the positive – and encouraging our community to do so as well – we can motivate everyone to stay connected and involved while also creating our own channel of positivity highlighting our wonderful students and staff!

KARIN DAVENPORT is the communications specialist at the Syracuse City School District.

BACK TO SCHOOL '16

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What will your #SCSDFirstDay look like?
Tag us! @SyracuseSchools

What will your #SCSDFirstDay look like?
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What will your #SCSDFirstDay look like?
Tag us! @SyracuseSchools

The Importance of Positive

Climate and Culture in the Age of Mandates

By James F. Cameron
and Timothy P. Martin

As building-level leaders, we have spent a great amount of time mitigating the immediate implications that mandates have on instruction and curriculum. In our school we attempt to be proactive and try to determine the impact of these mandates. **We have found ourselves during this "reform revolution in education" to be less proactive thinkers and more reactive triage technicians.** We regrouped and retooled systems to deal with the onslaught of mandates and changes.

During all these changes, maintaining a positive school climate is essential to the learning atmosphere, student achievement, and staff morale.

Similar to other districts, our building climate and culture have been dramatically altered by external factors. These influences have swayed students, parents, teachers, and communities to protest many initiatives through the "opt-out" revolution. Refusing state exams has become the rallying cry against federal and state mandates and has left some to feel a lack of trust in the system.

Over the past five years there have been monumental changes to our educational system. We do not support or criticize these initiatives; instead, we hope to empower educational teams to become cognizant of the importance of fostering and enriching climate and culture. The culture of an organization "is like the air that we breathe: invisible, intangible, and absolutely vital" (Haberman, 2013).

"School climate" is used synonymously with "culture," "environment," "community," "morale," and "atmosphere." With increased legislation from local, state, and federal agencies, coupled with shifts in demographics, advances in technology, and fiscal constraints, understanding and assessing "school climate" is essential. "Climate" and "culture" have been used interchangeably in education, when in fact we find that they are distinctly different attributes.

Climate is most simply associated with the present or short-term atmosphere of the school building. Steve Gruenert describes school climate as the ethos, or spirit, of a school. It is closely aligned with the "attitude" of a school. We have seen the effect of increased accountability on staff and the collective morale of our stakeholders. Hoy and Feldman contest that climate is the preferred construct, when measuring the organizational health of a school (as cited in Busch, MacNeil, and Prater, 2009, p. 75).

Culture is most simply associated with the long-term aura of the school building. Gruenert discusses how people who work together over long periods of time create their own sets of expectations, which become unwritten rules passed on to each new generation of educators. These "rules" are incredibly influential on new teachers. New teachers bring with them an array of recently learned best practices. They assimilate into the existing culture (Gruenert, 2008). In an effort to support our newest teachers, we host monthly meetings to discuss climate, culture, expectations, and growth opportunities. We came to recognize that we were not spending enough time with our entire teaching community and we needed to have a broader understanding of staff morale.

School environments are multifaceted and consist of many perspectives that need to be measured. The unwritten rules and expectations are created and passed down through the collective personality created within (Gruenert, 2008).

We believe in challenging the status quo and do not accept "the way things have always been done" as enough. To be a successful change agent, we cannot discount efforts to bring about change by accepting current rules, regulations, or traditions of our school and/or district (SEDL).

In most school buildings there are subcultures that begin to exist through the unwritten rules. These subcultures are greatly influenced by peers, parents, colleagues, and the community. School leaders who are living through the current "Reform Revolution" must take time to identify and bridge the subcultures that exist (Kruse, 2009). We found that it was important to develop opportunities for dialogue between different staff members in order to redefine the subgroups.

This became helpful in airing concerns, differences, and similarities of the different groups. We created the availability of time through faculty meetings, the middle school team periods, and department times. By changing the dynamics of the subgroups teachers began to collaborate with others throughout the building, therefore, constructing a greater sense of community among the staff. Allowing people to stay within their traditional subgroups would have only perpetuated the current culture and climate. Thus, changing the subgroups is essential to influencing change to the culture and learning environment.

Fostering dialogue in an open and honest environment is necessary to shape trust and to improve. Developing surveys that can be administered to all subgroups (teachers, students, parents) and that address needs, feelings, and attitudes in an anonymous way will help begin the conversation. In regard to staff, this will bring the conversation back inside the school and out of the faculty room.

As school leaders, it is important to take the time to assess and respond to the status of our school's climate and culture. We truly believe that internal measures can be taken to repair the effects of the external factors.

The cultural and climatic roots of schools are more entrenched than school leaders. It can be argued that the people with the most long-term influence over culture are in fact the teachers. Parents and students can dramatically affect the climate of a building as they are school-level stakeholders for a minimal amount of time in comparison to teachers. Consider teachers who work a 30-year career for the same district versus a student who attends 13 years of schooling. Elementary students spend approximately six years in one building, middle schoolers spend three years, and high schoolers spend four years. Compare these numbers to a teacher who spends 30 years in the same building.

We realize that a great vision that addresses the needs of the students, community, and faculty will not necessarily be successful. Without buy-in, our vision becomes just another "mandate without meaning" (Haberman, 2013). Does this sound familiar?

Trusting in the honesty of our staff is essential to harvesting support from the faculty. Giving teachers the platform to share their feelings is the first step. We utilized premade surveys found online in a variety of formats and adapted our own survey.

One survey found online that has been used in many studies is the School Culture Triage Survey (Wagner, 2006).

Engaging the teachers in the tabulation and analysis of the data was important. A committee of volunteers from the faculty was created to assist the building leaders in the evaluation of data. This committee is being used to help prioritize the steps to take in improving the building's climate and eventually the culture. There are many things that your buildings do well and it is just as important to highlight the positives as it is to identify areas of need.

School leaders must demonstrate their willingness to solicit and listen to constructive feedback from the faculty they supervise. This very act reverses traditional supervisor to subordinate roles in the evaluation process, even if it is on a small scale. By collaborating with staff during this process, we developed a greater sense of trust, which is the foundation for a positive building climate.

At times our survey tool highlighted areas that were different than we preconceived. In this case, the team had to rethink and change their strategy. We found it beneficial to start small with our teachers and are progressing where possible. As we continue our study into school climate and culture, it becomes more and more apparent that "quick fixes" may exist but do not sustain over time. Therefore, at our school improving school climate and culture is a spiraling task that is continuously being addressed.

It is important to note that some schools may believe the initial area of focus is on students, and others may believe several stakeholders should be reviewed simultaneously. No matter where the review process begins, it is necessary to consider the reality and feasibility of addressing the amount of stakeholders at one time as it pertains to climate and culture.

Based on all of the recently passed legislative initiatives, there have been monumental shifts in attitudes and perceptions within school buildings. We found it beneficial to our environment to take a hard look within and around the community to celebrate our successes and identify our needs of improvement. External factors will always be a reality and will play a significant role in what is required of schools. Education is ever changing and the most recent examples of external factors include the Every Student

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Succeeds Act of 2015 and the findings of the NYSED Common Core Task Force. It remains to be seen how these factors will impact climate and culture, but it is up to local stakeholders to come together to determine the best ways to accomplish these tasks.

Effective school leaders and teachers should never be satisfied with the status quo. We must constantly seek opportunities to implement best practices, techniques, and resources to enrich the educational experience for students and staff. As the current climate of college and career readiness has school systems across the country regularly evaluating and analyzing the curriculum, the prominence of the educational atmosphere cannot be overlooked. School climate and culture have a direct correlation on student success.

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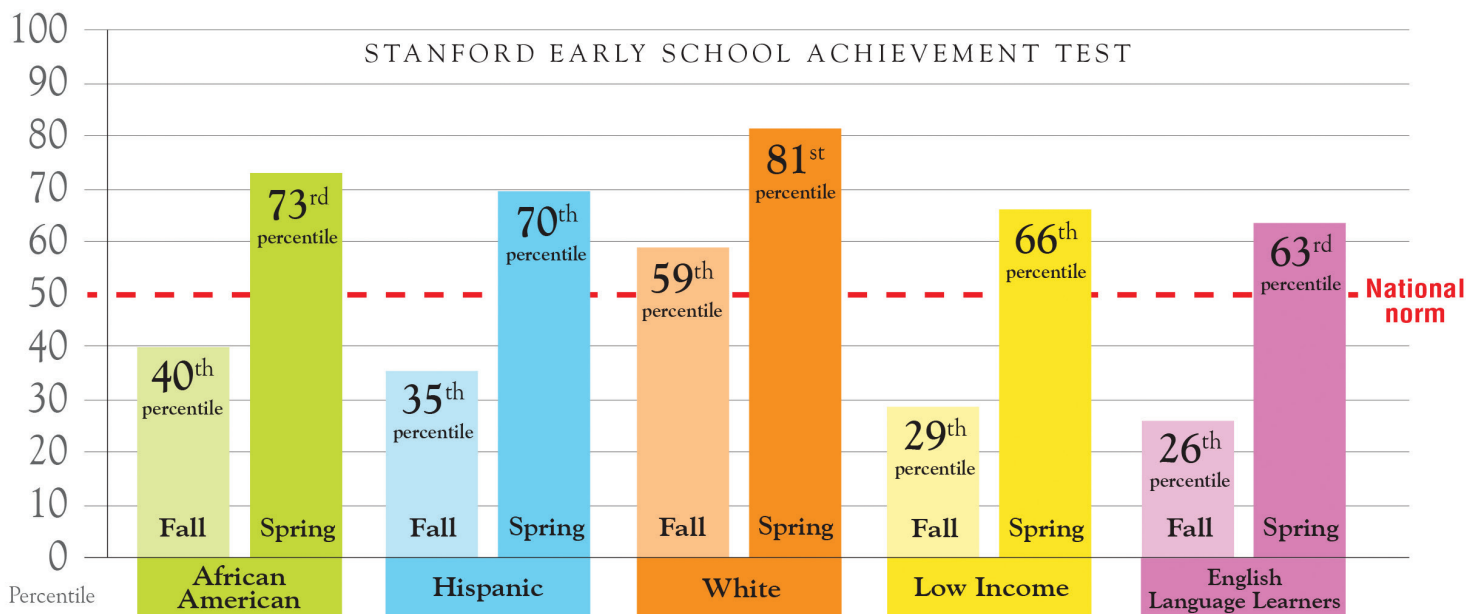
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Transforming from Good to Great
Through Effective Instruction

By Douglas Blancero

Today's schools have ever-expanding roles that can make it easy to lose focus on the primary goal: excellent instruction. "Transforming from Good to Great Through Effective Instruction" provides a forum for educators to reflect and share on strategies that can both place the emphasis back on instruction and identify what can be done to make such an emphasis part of the school culture. Creating a culture of collaboration in which all members of the school are committed to learning, having a teacher of quality in every classroom, and providing them evidenced-based information and support is essential.

Presenters Janie Feinberg, JP Associates, and Claudia Petersen, formerly a Buffalo administrator and now a consultant, facilitated a forum where information was presented and shared and then applied to a real-life case scenario.

The workshop has three learning targets for the participants:

- I will be able to identify teachers' and principal's importance to instruction.
- I will be able to identify what effective instruction is and know what to look for in the classroom.
- I will understand the need for assessments and effective professional development.

Drawing from Robert Marzano's *Classroom Management That Works*, the importance of the role of the teacher is explored and discussed. For example, even with the least effective school, the most effective teacher can make a 13 percent difference in student achievement. How teachers are supported and developed is an essential part of leadership. Briefly:

- Teachers are the single most important factor in determining student performance.
- The principal is second only to the quality of the teacher in contributing to what students learn in the classroom.
- Principals and teachers working together results in increased student learning and performance.

KEY POINTS TO CONSIDER WHEN TRANSFORMING INSTRUCTION IN YOUR SCHOOL

Professional development must be aligned with school and student needs. If we do not connect professional development with school improvement needs, our efforts to advance learning and teaching in our schools will not be completely successful. That's why getting into the classroom is so vital! Classroom visits can serve as formative assessments to help determine teacher needs. Professional development should be differentiated to meet those identified needs of teachers who can be grouped in tiers. It is important that both instructional staff and administrators attend all training. We know that side-by-side coaching in the classroom is one of the most effective ways to transfer learning and create change.

Assessment is the engine that drives student learning. With the right tools at the right times, educators can make accurate predictions of which students will be at risk for reading failure and can effectively monitor students who have been failing but who are receiving intervention. Those tools include, but are not limited to:

- Screening tests that provide information about the knowledge and skill base of a student. These tests can determine the most appropriate starting point for instruction and for planning instructional groups and interventions.
- Ongoing progress monitoring.

Examples of progress monitoring include curriculum-embedded tests or tests such as DIBELS or AIMSweb. These tests are used on a regular basis to assess student performance.

- Outcome assessment. Often used at the end of the school year, these assessments give us data about accomplishments and can be used for planning the next major segment of instruction for individual students.
- Diagnostic assessment. Most often used when screening tests or progress monitoring reveals a pattern of weakness, diagnostic tests such as the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test, Durrell Analysis of Reading Difficulty, and Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test pinpoint specific areas of weakness to target with interventions.

Assessment data should be used to:
- Examine trends across measures for purposes of planning professional development, support, and guidance; and
- Examine differences in performance across schools for purposes of planning and implementing differentiated support and oversight.

Telling is not teaching, teaching is not telling. Teacher are at their best when they guide learners to new or deeper understandings. Although there is a role for direct explanation and modeling, telling students over and over, or louder and slower, does not result in understanding. In other words…telling does not result in learning. Students should be guided toward understanding.

Good teaching is good teaching is good teaching. There are many basic instructional strategies that can minimize the need for differentiation. As educators, we all know that some children learn faster and easier than others. Errors often cause other students to go off task. If we can prevent errors from ever happening, we greatly increase our goal of higher student achieve-
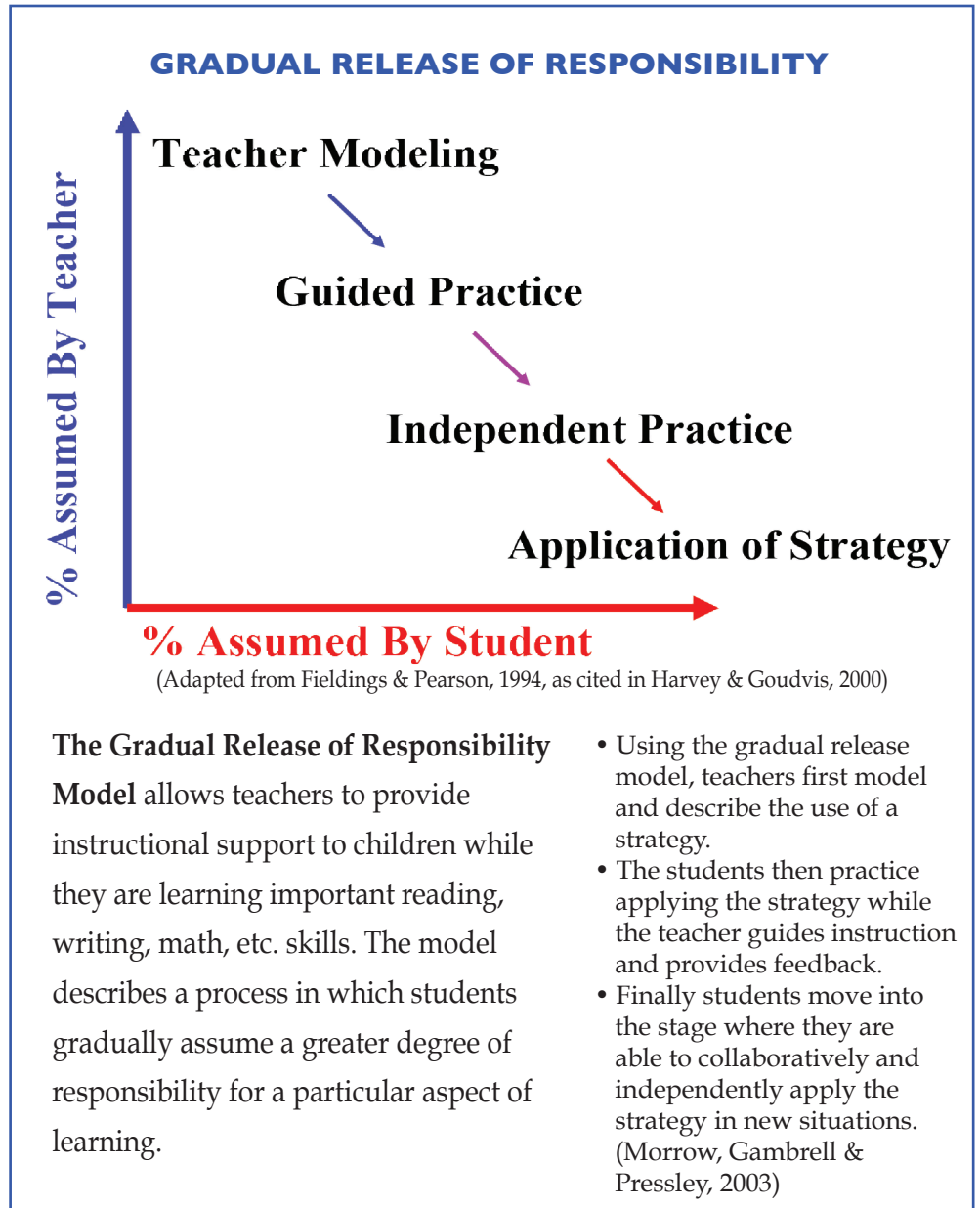
ment for ALL students. The goal is for educators not to become technicians of instruction – simply following what is given as a directive – but to become engineers of instruction, knowing how to teach ALL children successfully, efficiently, and effectively.

What to look for in an effective classroom. What is good instruction? When you go into a classroom what do you look for that tells you good instruction is going on? Here are some items to check for:

- Gradual release of responsibility (see graphic)
- Immediate, specific instruction feedback
- Model, lead, test (meaningful repetitions to mastery)
- Task analysis of prerequisite skills
- Overt responses from students
- Formative assessments to determine mastery
- Concise language of instruction
- Immediate corrections and feedback
- Positive interactions between student and teacher.

CONCLUSION

Good instruction does not happen overnight and it, like the needs of students, takes many forms. Leaders should learn everything they can about their teachers, building relationships as they preassess teachers' knowledge. Then begin with small changes and gradually increase the difficulty. As with all professions, staying up to date on best practices is integral to success.

GRADUAL RELEASE OF RESPONSIBILITY

Teacher Modeling

Guided Practice

Independent Practice

Application of Strategy

% Assumed By Teacher (vertical axis)

% Assumed By Student (horizontal axis)

(Adapted from Fieldings & Pearson, 1994, as cited in Harvey & Goudvis, 2000)

The Gradual Release of Responsibility Model allows teachers to provide instructional support to children while they are learning important reading, writing, math, etc. skills. The model describes a process in which students gradually assume a greater degree of responsibility for a particular aspect of learning.

- Using the gradual release model, teachers first model and describe the use of a strategy.
- The students then practice applying the strategy while the teacher guides instruction and provides feedback.
- Finally students move into the stage where they are able to collaboratively and independently apply the strategy in new situations. (Morrow, Gambrell & Pressley, 2003)

Both administrators and teachers need to have high expectations. Turning our schools around is not simply about a good plan or a good program; at the heart of all improvement efforts are the people who bring the strategies to life.

DOUGLAS BLANCERO is the senior vice president at JP Associates.

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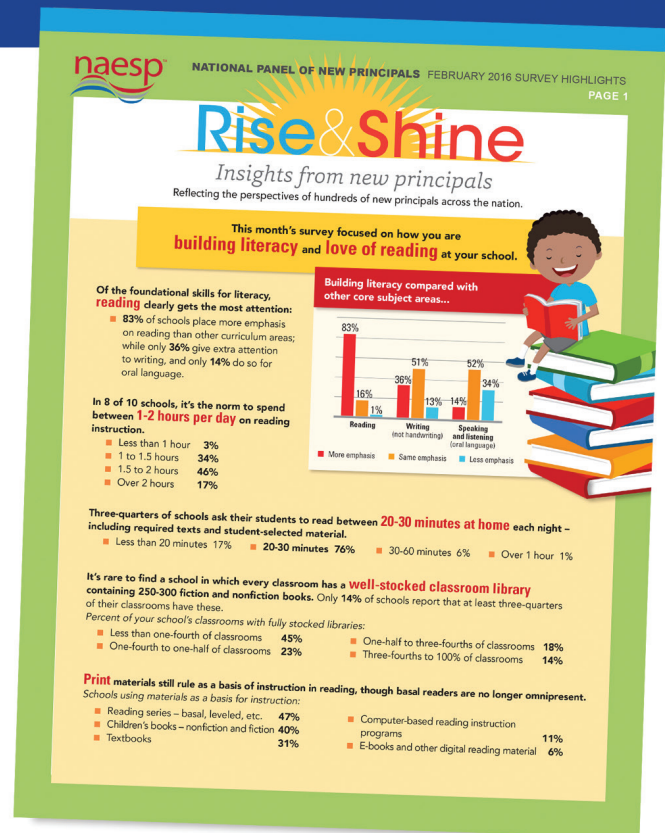
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Panelist Qualifications

- Participants must be first- or second-year elementary or middle-level principals.
- NAESP members and non-members are welcome.

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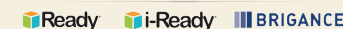
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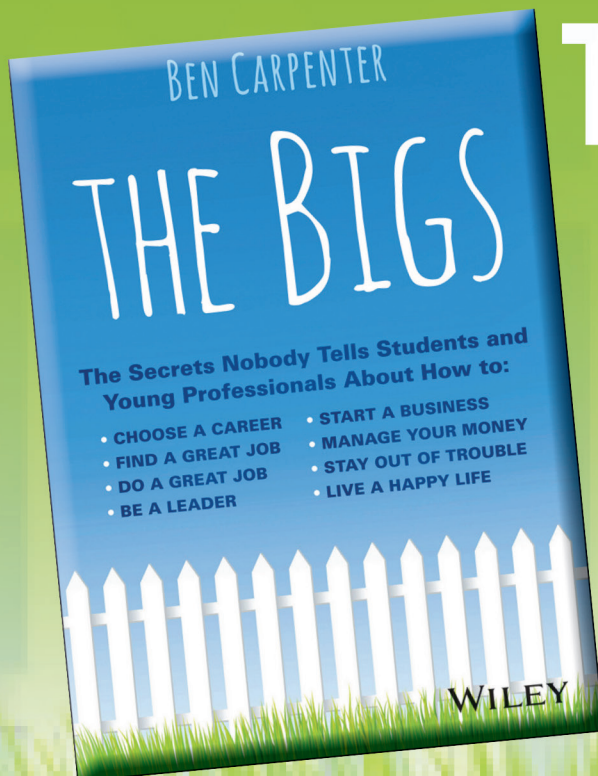*A MentorCoach can help you retain quality school leaders.*