STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

LEADING A CULTURE OF ENGAGEMENT

THE [NEW] RULES OF ENGAGEMENT: KEEPING STUDENTS ON TRACK IN A VIRTUAL WORLD

FINDING RENEWED PURPOSE THROUGH ENGAGEMENT

Contents

COVERSTORY

Practices
from practitioners
Student Engagement
SPRING 2020

COLUMNS

SAANYS
New York State

www.saanys.org

Your tireless dedication and commitment to New York's students is beyond commendable.

Thank you.

Harris Education Solutions provides multiple in-classroom and virtual platforms for curriculum, content, assessment, data collection, data analytics, and observation tools. Our support is unparalleled and is focused on delivering on our promises to customers. Whether it's in-classroom or via distance learning, we're here to support and help cultivate programs that enhance the educational experience of New York students. We're here to listen.

To learn more – visit think.harrisschoolsolutions.com/saanys

LEADING:

A Culture of Engagement

By Dominique Smith

It's hard to learn if you're not engaged. It really is that simple. When students disengage, they are way less likely to learn. The same holds true for teachers in professional learning situations, by the way. That's why there are so many books, articles, and professional development offerings focused on this topic. Most of these resources focus on behavioral engagement and include things such as looking at the teacher or writing things down. But we know that there are students who can look out a window and still pay attention to the content. Of course, if they're sleeping in class they cannot behaviorally engage. Thus, we think that behavioral engagement is easier to see but may not provide a complete picture of whether or not a student is really engaged.

Thus, we decided to write a book about the design of engaging learning opportunities: *Engagement by Design*. In *Engagement by Design*, we focused on cognitive and emotional engagement, not just cognitive engagement. In doing so, we had to think about inviting classrooms, relationships, teacher clarity, challenging tasks.

As part of our learning related to all three types of engagement (behavioral, cognitive, and emotional), we encountered the work of William Purkey, who developed the idea of invitational teaching (e.g., Purkey and Novak, 1996). This idea suggests that there are four types of teachers based on how intentional (or not) and how inviting (or not) they are. When you think about it, someone can be very intentional and very inviting. But people can also be the opposite: not intentional and not inviting. And then there are the two in the middle, meaning people who are intentional but not inviting or not intentional but inviting. The characteristics of each of these types of teachers are described below (Fisher, Frey, Quaglia, Smith, and Lande, 2017, p. 8):

- Unintentionally inviting teachers
  – Are eager but unreflective
  – Are energetic but rigid when facing problems
  – Are unaware of what works in their practice and why
  – Have fewer means to responding when student learning is resistant to their usual methods
- Unintentionally uninviting teachers
  – Distance themselves from students
  – Have low expectations
  – Don't feel effective and blame students for shortcomings
  – Fail to notice student learning or struggle
  – Offer little feedback to learners
- Intentionally uninviting teachers
  – Are judgmental and belittling
  – Display little care or regard
  – Are uninterested in the lives and feelings of students
  – Isolate themselves from school life
  – Seek power over students

- Intentionally inviting teachers
  – Are consistent and steady with students
  – Notice learning and struggle
  – Respond regularly with feedback
  – Seek to build, maintain, and repair relationships
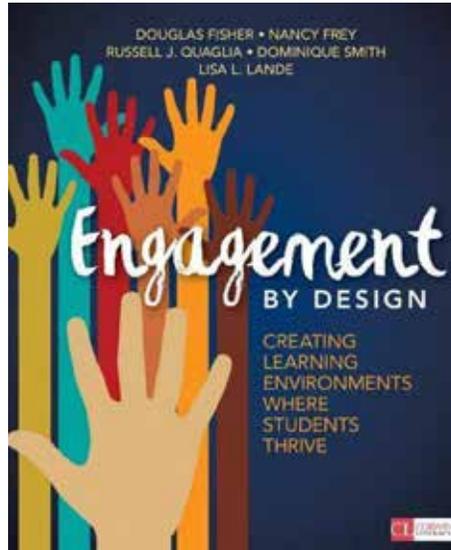
As leaders, we probably have all four of these types of teachers on campus and they need different things to grow. When we recognize these types of teachers, we can create learning plans, evaluations, coaching, and professional development to help grow these individuals. For me, it starts with setting clear expectations.

When I encountered classrooms with lower than expected levels of engagement, I had to ask myself if I had described, modeled, and explained in detail what the vision and expectations are for engagement in our school. Some teachers have no understanding of what the school or leaders want, so they create something that they have experienced or what they were taught when they went to school. The majority of the times, that means a teacher creates a classroom full of rules, straight row seating, and library voice atmosphere. When I asked teachers why they did this, the answer was remarkably consistent. They did so because they were fearful that if an administrator walked in and heard students talking, they would be perceived as a poor teacher who did not have "control" of the classroom and they would receive feedback that

the students are not engaged in the class. One teacher even told me, "My last principal expected a quiet and orderly classroom" so I make sure it's like that for when you come in.

As I reflected on this, I wondered if I had made my, and our school, expectations clear. I am looking for students "engaged" in the content. I don't mind if all students are talking. If they are so excited to share their thinking about that content, they're engaged. It also probably means that they love the content and they love the teacher delivering the content. Over time, I have come to realize that I had to identify my expectations, or my nonnegotiables, when it comes to engagement. Of course, that means that I have to share my expectations and support people to reach them. For me, these are things I care about:

- No straight row seating; we seek collaborative space
- No teacher's desk; we don't want teachers trapped or hidden
- Healthy, growth-producing relationships are a must
- Our students should know the what, why, and how of every lesson
- The tasks are rigorous and relevant

SEATING

Just because students are sitting in rows and looking at the teacher does not mean that they are engaged. If students are sitting up and looking forward, they might be engaged or they might be compliant (and on vacation in their minds). I encourage teachers to build spaces in their room where students can have the option to communicate with others. I believe classroom discussion is one of the best avenues for learning and that is backed up with Hattie's research that tells us that classroom discussion has a positive effect (.82) on student learning. When students share their thinking, they can learn from each other and clarify their own understandings.

HATTIE'S RESEARCH

So, we need to create spaces that allow and encourage collaboration and conversation. I encourage teachers

to move tables around so that they can design comfortable and flexible seating. I also encourage them to change the lighting in the room and to allow the classroom to have noise. In some classrooms, teachers have created a noise meter, a visual display that shows the expected volume at the time. For example, it might go from "silent" to "concert." When I asked the teacher about the highest level, she said, "Yeah, we did that once at the beginning of the year to see how it sounded and we agreed that was never appropriate for the classroom." This teacher uses the noise meter to help students monitor their volume. As she added, "If the volume isn't matched to the meter, I just walk over to it and point as a reminder and it changes right away."

Given the importance of classroom discussion as a facilitator of engagement, we have accepted the challenge that 50 percent of our learning will occur in some type of collaboration. We follow Doug Fisher and Nancy Frey's framework of the Gradual Release of Responsibility. This framework provides a format for teachers to follow to allow for true engagement. There are four parts to the model that can occur in any order including:

- **Focused instruction.** For the teacher that is the "I do it" when they model and explain.

- **Guided instruction.** This is the "We do it" part when the teacher is guiding students' thinking with questions, prompts, and cues.

- **Collaborative learning.** This "You do it together" practice allows the time for students to collaborate and to share their thinking in groups. This is why our seating is important; if we do not have seating that offers collaboration, we end up losing more time in transitions rather than learning.

- **Independent learning.** In the "You do it alone" stage students practice and apply what they have learned.

TEACHER'S DESK

How engaged are your students? Do your teachers know which students are or are not engaged? Are they making their judgment behind a desk or with students? Teachers are models. Students watch their teachers very closely. When walking classrooms, I sometimes notice that teachers model nonengagement. In those classrooms, teachers tend to do some direct teaching and then release their students to go and do independent work. As that release happens, some teachers then drift away to their computer at their desk and lose all connections with their students. Hands are shooting up and students are moving around and the teacher is not engaged in the class but rather their device. A culture of engagement has to be modeled. That starts with the leaders. You have to ask yourself if you are modeling engagement. Then, you have to help teachers model for students before they have engagement expectations from their students.

Of course, leaders have to model engagement first. For example, we should be present in any professional development offered to our teachers. Our schedules are slam packed but we cannot be nose deep in our devices while others are engaged and working. This sends a strong message that we are too busy for what is happening and whatever else we are doing is more important. We should model what it looks like to be a good listener and what it looks like to be engaged. This example will help teachers understand that while they are working with their students, they have to be engaged with the content as well as engaged with the students. As students see their teachers engaged with them, they are more likely to strive to be more engaged.

As a leader, I took a risk and pushed an idea that I believed could contribute to the culture of engagement. I decided that we would remove all teachers' desks from the building. Not as punishment, not a top-down approach, but rather a collective approach to help us move past unnecessary roadblocks. Each teacher had their desk removed and received a two- to four-drawer filing cabinet. They also received a

> Student-teacher relationships are a driving force in anything we do in education. If we want discipline to decrease, we need relationships. If we want our attendance to improve, we need relationships. And if we want students to be engaged in their learning, we need relationships."

podium to place their computer on for projection. The feedback was amazing. Teachers said students saw a difference and felt the difference. When teachers released students to work, instead of falling into the depths of a teacher desk, they were right next to students at their desks being engaged in their learning.

RELATIONSHIPS

Student-teacher relationships are a driving force in anything we do in education. If we want discipline to decrease, we need relationships. If we want our attendance to improve, we need relationships. And if we want students to be engaged in their learning, we need relationships. Relationships once again have to be modeled. We have to model a safe environment where students believe that they can be vulnerable as well as feel safe in asking any question. Some teachers struggle with this. They build a wall. They build a deep boundary so that students will never be too close. They establish a dichotomy: I am the teacher and you are the student and that is it. Teachers do this to our students because they experience it daily; they are the teacher and you are the leader. No need or time for a relationship. Are you thinking about the relationships you have with teachers and those that need to be repaired? Teachers need you, they want to trust you, and they want to ask questions and celebrate successes with you. As we create a more welcoming relationship from leader to teacher, we will create more engagement within our staff. We will have more participation in meetings and more connections throughout the school. This gesture of change can then become a norm, and

teachers will then seek relationships with students. A relationship ties a student to you, as well as ties them back to the content, and in *Engagement by Design* that's what we call true engagement.

CLARITY

I take great pride when I visit classrooms at our school and see that students clearly know what they are learning, why they are learning, and when they are successful. I reflect back to myself as a student in high school and I remember multiple classes when I couldn't answer any of those questions. I had no idea what I was supposed to be learning, much less why it would be important. Success was just a grade in a class. As a result, I was automatically not engaged in the content my teacher was delivering. But I don't think that was the teacher's fault. They had the things posted on the walls for their walk-throughs and delivered content from bell to bell, most of the time not even checking if we knew what was going on.

So, as I walk my classroom, I am thankful to see questions that our teachers reference through their lesson. They have posted learning intentions (what am I learning and why am I learning this) and then they have posted success criteria (how do you know you learned it) that tells students, by the end of the day and/or the end of the lesson, you will be successful if you have completed, learned, and understood x, y or z. An easy way to grab a student's attention as they walk into class is to ensure that they know what the class is about and then know how to be successful that day. This cannot happen without the guidance of a leader. Each day I walk our building, asking students at random the what, why, and how questions. Then on Fridays, during our professional development sessions, I list the percentage numbers of students who could answer those questions and then give some time for wonderings and action steps. This has allowed me to hold staff accountable but also give and support them with a new tool.

RIGOR, TASKS, AND RELEVANCE

The last area related to engagement focuses on the tasks students are asked to complete. When students have a strong relationship with the teacher and they know what they are learning, they are much more likely to accept the challenge of learning. That allows teachers to raise the rigor and create challenging tasks. We know that students want more challenge in their learning. What they don't want is boring tasks that require little thinking but a lot of time. I don't think that students will take a risk and agree to the struggle of learning without strong relationships and a clear understanding of what they are learning. They are necessary conditions, but not enough. The task has to be complex and relevant. When I visit classrooms, I take a look at the tasks students are asked to complete, and I make a note about the expectations the teacher has and how the students are responding. Over time, we've been able to considerably increase the expectations we have for students. And it works. They like school better and learn more.

SUMMARY

If you picked up this article thinking that there were gimmicks or tricks to get students to engage, I think I have failed you. What I have learned about student engagement is that it's more than what meets the eye: behavioral. And to really get students to engage, we have to help teachers establish strong, healthy, growth-producing relationships. And we have to increase the clarity of the learning. In doing so, we can increase rigor and invite students into the complex world of learning. As the leader, you are critical. You should model the way and provide feedback for teachers so that they can increase their impact through engagement.

Fisher, D., Frey, N., Quaglia, R. J., Smith, D., and Lande, L. L. (2017). Engagement by Design: Creating Learning Environments Where Students Thrive. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Purkey, W. W., and Novak, J. M. (1996). Inviting School Success: A Self-concept Approach to Teaching, Learning, and Democratic Practice (3rd ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

DOMINIQUE SMITH is the chief of educational services and teacher support at Health Sciences High and Middle College in California. He is responsible for the overall instructional program as well as creating and maintaining the school climate and culture, working with the faculty and staff to ensure the education of the whole child.

Smith is the coauthor of numerous books and he is also a national trainer for the International Institute on Restorative Practices, and member of ASCD's FIT Teaching® (Framework for Intentional and Targeted Teaching®) Cadre.

EQUITABLE | SAANYS New York State

Imagine a 401(k) available to educators – That's a 403(b)

We applied all we know about retirement savings and investing to design a strategy tailored to the needs of educators across the country. That's why we're the #1 choice for K-12 educators in the United States.[1] Learn how you can enjoy immediate benefits today.

Equitable is proud to be a strategic partner of SAANYS.

To learn more about how Equitable can help, visit **equitable.com** or call **(866) 401-3030,** Option 5.

1   AXA Equitable Life Insurance Company LIMRA, Not-for-Profit Survey, Q3, 2019, based on 403(b) plan assets, participants and contributions.

THE [NEW] RULES OF ENGAGEMENT:

Keeping Students on Track in a Virtual World

By Ellen Ullman

"It's all about the relationships," says R. J. DeLisle, director of technology for the Baldwinsville Central School District. "If students had a positive relationship with their teachers before we went virtual, they're going to crave that connection and engage in whatever way they can."

One of the ways Baldwinsville teachers have bonded with students during quarantine is through video. Teachers are recording and posting lessons on YouTube, and students have responded with videos of their own. "A group of high schoolers recorded a communal song; one student plays an instrument for the first part and then another student continues the song on a different instrument," says DeLisle.

The high school principal and the assistant principal did a time-lapse video of them painting a mural in the school that read "Seniors: we miss you." Many of the music teachers gave video lessons — not too surprising for a district that's been named a best community for music education designee for ten consecutive years.

Online classes are another way teachers keep students involved. DeLisle, whose wife is a first-grade teacher, witnessed this when he watched his wife using Zoom and Google Meet with her students. "They loved when she showed them our dog and loved being able to share their pets with her and the class," he says.

Perhaps nobody engages students with video more than Thomas J. Coughlin, principal of Elden Elementary. Every day, he put on a different costume to videotape a morning message. "He has dressed up as a cowboy, the Riddler, Batman, and a pirate. The students love it so much that he might have to continue doing it when schools reopen next fall," laughs DeLisle.

Although plenty of students used video and social media before the pandemic, DeLisle, who was named SAANYS 2020 Leader in Digital Education, finds significance in the fact that they are now using it for something more than socializing. They are creating videos to express themselves in a different way, to communicate with their teachers, and to stay connected.

Focusing on connections engaged students at other schools, too. "Our teachers gave out their phone numbers and did whatever they could to check on their students' social-emotional well-being," says Kisten M. Giglio, principal at Norwich High School.

In addition, Norwich teachers hosted virtual drop-in lunches and virtual healing circles. "A healing circle is a restorative practice that we used to do in person; it's another way to check in and give students a chance to talk," says Giglio. Some of her art teachers sent craft supplies to students so that they could make friendship bracelets and other items. The school also features senior spotlights on the website each day.

Giglio says making certain that students are okay is more important than formal instruction. "Our counselors, social workers, and at-risk coordinator have made more than 1,200 contacts with students. Because of our overall human approach, teachers are reporting student participation rates of 80 to 90 percent."

Maintaining strong personal connections through video and other methods is only one way to keep students on track. For other districts, innovation proved successful.

"We were the first district in New York State to close," says Jerry Crisci, director of instructional technology and innovation and codirector of the Center for Innovation for Scarsdale Public Schools. "One of our staff members was part of the coronavirus cluster in New Rochelle and tested positive."

Scarsdale's education plan is built around STEAM, hands-on learning, and the whole child approach, none of which replicate easily in an online environment. Crisci, who was already connected with educators around the world, was thankful to have been communicating with educators in Italy. Since the country was a month ahead of the U.S. in terms of school closures, administrators on his listserv were already sharing continuity plans and recommending digital tools for e-learning.

As Crisci says, "We couldn't replicate school or pivot. We had to reimagine what school could be." He saw other districts using Pear Deck, Screencastify, and Google tools and was able to purchase those products and start helping teachers learn how to use them.

He wanted teachers to try and keep the traditional activities that students look forward to, so everyone worked to adjust expectations and delivery. High school teachers held a virtual talent show and a virtual science symposium. Elementary teachers put together virtual author visits.

The largest engagement came during spring break, however. The governor mandated that schools remain in session, but the district wanted to give teachers and students a bit of a break since they'd been virtual

for a few weeks already. Ray Pappalardi, director of physical education, health, and athletics; Edgar McIntosh, assistant superintendent of curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and Thomas Hagerman, Scarsdale superintendent, put together wellness week. More than 100 teachers and staff members led workshops and sessions on yoga, meditation, origami, nature, poetry, and more. Each day, there were three different sessions that included family art projects, nature scavenger hunts, virtual tours of aquariums, and the Scarsdale read-aloud project. Students signed up ahead of time for the synchronous and asynchronous activities and encouraged siblings to join them. The largest session, an outdoor wellness activity, had more than 800 students participating.

"We survey students and ask for reflections on everything we do, and we had a 99 percent positive response rate on this one," says Crisci. "I'm grateful to the team for putting this incredible event together."

For some districts, being available beyond the typical school day is helping students stay on track. "We asked our teachers to be accessible between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m., but some of them had students reaching out at 9 p.m.," says Lisa Riggs, assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and assessment at Gresham-Barlow School District. "We didn't specifically encourage the late nights but teachers are concerned and want to keep the relationships going."

The things you learn in unprecedented times can be very helpful," says Bonnie E. Nobiling, director of IT services for Oneonta City School District. She learned that there is such a thing as too much information. "We tried to

do lots of on-the-fly professional development for our teachers, especially those who hadn't ever used a learning management system (LMS). At the beginning, we drowned them in email. That was a bad plan."

Nobiling discovered it was better to post resources in one place and send out digests about the new materials once or twice a week. "It's better to point them in the same direction without overwhelming them — and it's better when teachers do that with their students, too."

To that end, Oneonta teachers experienced more engagement from students when they used email to send the occasional "Hey, how you doing" message and the LMS to post assignments and homework.

Above all, district leadership made it as easy as possible for teachers to deliver lessons virtually. Although Facebook was not a recommended platform, one of the kindergarten teachers started doing lessons on Facebook Live. "No one even thought about asking her to stop," says Nobiling. "She is having fun, delivering high-quality instruction, making new connections, and experiencing high participation rates."

Some teachers were holding office hours on Zoom and finding that students stopped in to just say hello and catch up.

"In a way, we have had more professional development than ever," says Nobiling. "Without the one-on-one student time our teachers have more opportunities to come together and brainstorm." During the last few weeks at home, teachers held impromptu Zoom meetings to brainstorm, share technology tips, learn new skills, and chat with each other and district leaders. "Communication between teachers, students, and administrators is at an all-time high."

ELLEN ULLMAN has been writing about education technology since 2003. She lives in Burlington, Mass., and is the former editorial director for *eSchool News*.

Proven Ways to Spice Up Online Learning

If your district isn't lucky enough to have an award-winning library media specialist like Shannon Miller on your team, that's okay. Miller — the innovation director of instructional technology and library media at Van Meter School District and Future Ready Librarians spokesperson — regularly shares successful activities for online learning on her blog, the Library Voice. Here are four terrific suggestions.

• **Virtual Book Clubs** — Van Meter holds book clubs for parents and students all year long, so it was a no-brainer to continue running them virtually. Miller ordered books and left them in Ziploc bags on her front porch for families to pick up. In May, she launched ten new online book clubs for sixth graders after 48 students expressed interest in joining.

• **Virtual Pop-in Story Time** — By the end of April, Miller had already done 102 virtual read-aloud sessions in which she read for ten minutes. When possible, she tied these sessions in with curricular units, such as when she read *Some Bugs* to the first graders, who were studying insects.

• **Virtual Field Trips and Author Visits** — Like many districts across the country, everyone at Van Meter was disappointed to miss out on their end-of-year field trips so Miller set up virtual field trips for every class. Students "visited" a farm in Iowa, toured the Toledo Zoo, and Skyped with an astronaut. They also participated in eight author visits.

• **Choice Boards** — A choice board is a collection of resources that takes students on a learning adventure; they get to choose where to start, the order, and which activities they want to do. The Bloomsbury Farm choice board has links to learn about farmers, farm animals, corn planting, butterflies, and how to create a digital story.

FINDING RENEWED PURPOSE

Through Engagement

By Pat Fontana

A new teacher, a new administrator, a new school leader will typically begin their career with great fervor and immense enthusiasm. Their thoughts on their first day of school are filled with "I can do this" and "My kids are full of potential." Somewhere along the way, they can lose their passion and their sense of purpose. That's where Jimmy Casas comes in, to help them find their way back.

Jimmy is the founder, CEO, and president of J Casas and Associates, an educational leadership company focused on serving teachers, principals, and superintendents throughout the country.
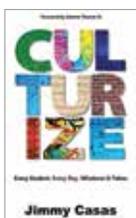
He is also an adjunct professor at Drake University, teaching courses in educational leadership.

AN EARLY START TO SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Jimmy Casas knows the world of educational leadership well. Born and raised in Iowa, he began his career in education in the inner-city schools of Milwaukee. A middle school bilingual education teacher, Jimmy took on his first principalship at the age of 26. He served as a building leader for the next 22 years, retiring just a few years ago.

His story is a bit more complex, though, and is the reason he now coaches other educational leaders. Jimmy says that 12 years into his career as a principal, he was "done." He describes it as an "on the edge of the couch moment." He was tired, frustrated, and ready to walk away from his career. Primarily, he was "exhausted dealing with people who didn't want to do their job." He blamed them for his dissatisfaction.

However, with the guidance of mentors who helped him understand that he was only seeing his school's culture through his own eyes, he discovered that he was the one who had actually created the environment in which he found himself at that point in his career. He realized that he needed to see it through others' eyes. That discovery helped him change the way he led. He knew he sincerely did not want to leave the profession and was determined to transform his own leadership.

A **PASSION** AND A **PURPOSE**

Jimmy says most people who go into education as a profession "go in with all of these desires and ambitions, a passion to make a difference." His experience, both from his own career and in working with others in similar situations, has led him to "understand that somewhere along our journey many of us lose our way. We no longer have the same drive as we did when we first went into the profession."

Jimmy wants to help those teachers and educational leaders get back their passion and purpose, to help them try to find their way back. He says that after working in the education field for a while, many leaders' behavior "no longer mirrors their initial beliefs that all kids can be great, that all kids can learn." His work has led him to find out what happened, what has changed within the educators themselves.
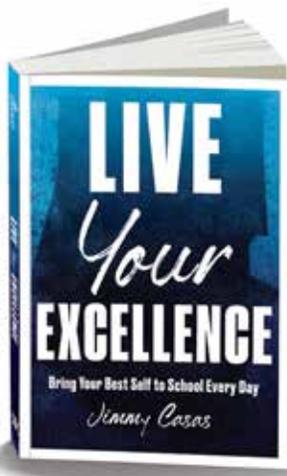
Educators and educational leaders, by the nature of their positions, must invest in their people. Relating this investment to the difference between the culture of a school or a district and the climate, Jimmy explains that "culture is how we behave in our organizations, how people treat one another. Climate is how we feel."

As teachers, school leaders, or district leaders, "We don't get to choose what kids come into our classroom. You certainly don't get to choose which families move into your community." However, he emphasizes, "We do get to choose the culture and climate in which we want to serve those students and families. It's on us as the adults."

ENGAGEMENT THROUGH CONNECTION

The adults are the ones who must set the example for themselves and for their students. Jimmy says that the reason most people lose sight of their purpose is on them, as the adults, and not on their students. The same is true for developing and maintaining engagement. That engagement has to be modeled at all levels by the adults.

He cites the example of teachers who do not want their students on their cell phones during class. However, what do teachers do in faculty meetings? They are on their devices. Up the tier, principals and other education leaders who participate in workshops or meetings are also constantly on their devices during sessions. The

same is true for the requirement for students to show up on time. There are consequences for students, but what are the consequences for leaders not showing up on time and not being fully engaged?

Jimmy says he asks these questions to begin to get people to think, to "try to influence people's thinking so they'll change their own behavior to create a culture of investment." He does this because he recognized in himself, as a school leader, that it was he who had been creating the issues, not the students.

Engagement requires connection and communication. The adults need to reach out, with a mindset and an attitude that engages others. Connectivity is an investment in time, but that connection is powerful in building relationships. What are we doing, as school leaders, to invest time in our students and families?

ENGAGEMENT THROUGH MODELED BEHAVIOR

During the spring 2020 coronavirus outbreak, schools across the country have gone virtual. In New York, teachers and administrators have had to scramble to determine the best methods for students to learn remotely and to put together online classes. Engagement through online sessions presents a new set of challenges, of course, but Jimmy says the core principles are still the same as they were when students and teachers were attempting to engage in their brick and mortar schools.

Throughout the school year, teachers try to create a culture and a climate in their physical classrooms. Now they are online and have to reach out by phone or via virtual platforms to connect. Jimmy believes it's not any different and that the same social and emotional components are involved. The focus needs to be on checking in, getting feedback, and asking if students are worried and if they have any questions.

For school leaders who are more managerial and less relationship oriented, the new virtual world may be more of a challenge. Principals are no longer able to walk the building

and check on teachers and students in person somewhat passively. They may struggle with making the effort to reach out and connect with people via telephone call or online platform. As Jimmy says, "For some people, that's not who they are. Different people have a different skill set."

True purpose and engagement are rooted in the core value system, regardless of whether school is held in a brick and mortar building or online. We "shouldn't ask teachers to do something we won't do ourselves. What we model is what we get."

The building leader has to reach out and engage, to model the behavior. The principal who would normally hold a weekly faculty meeting in person should reach out to teachers and staff virtually to check on them. Essentially, leaders should do the "same things as before, just do them differently."

A FOCUS ON **CULTURE**

Jimmy Casas was unusually young when he became a building principal. The lessons he learned from his experience are, in his words, "why I do what I do today." He says he did the best that he could at the time, thinking that he was supposed to be "great" at leading his school. He soon discovered that "not everybody does what they're supposed to do," but he thought it was his job to make them.

The new, inexperienced principal unintentionally created a culture of compliance. His conversations with teachers were frustrating and full of negative tones. He now realizes that it was he, not the students and not the teachers, who created "all sorts of undercurrents — fear, gossip, being upset, no longer invested, just checking the box" — and who caused his teachers to actually want to stay away from him as their principal.

Creating a more positive culture involves physically and behaviorally engaging with people. That requires some relatively simple effort. Smiling with a sincere "Glad you're here today!" can change the school's culture from the top down. Administrators need to reach out to teachers and teachers need to reach out to students,

whether in a building or online, to find out what's going on with them.

Jimmy says he does what he does now, not judging but rather to help people see where they are creating their own issues. In fact, his coaching expertise comes from "recognizing that maybe I was causing the problem" in his own school. Nobody wants to go to work every day hating their job, including the teachers and the principal.

His work with school leaders focuses on culture. He helps them identify "specific skill sets, strategies, and techniques for targeted goal areas." He and his coaching team help educational leaders understand that "we as the adults are causing all the issues in schools today." Jimmy uses logic to help them see that and to give them ways to do things differently.

Culture and leadership depend on the concepts of how to treat people fairly and how to make them feel we care about them. Most effective leaders, Jimmy says, work from a core principle. They "always go back to that core."

Particularly applicable in uncertain times is Jimmy's statement that "leadership is not how we behave and respond when we know what to do, rather it is how we behave and respond when we don't know what to do." He adds that "anybody can lead when everything is going well. True character is leading when things aren't going well." He believes that the "most effective leaders will rise in these times."

LOOKING **FORWARD**

When students return to their physical schools, it will be the adults who will have to adjust. There will certainly be a "new normal" in the new environment. Teachers and building leaders can no longer "make assumptions that kids have support at home." In fact, that has been one of the discoveries that have made virtual learning so challenging. It is not appropriate to blame the kids, whether in a brick and mortar setting or online.

The adjustments made during the coronavirus outbreak will "cause us

> "leadership is not how we behave and respond when we know what to do, rather it is how we behave and respond when we don't know what to do…. True character is leading when things aren't going well."

to reexamine our scope and sequence, how we look at our curriculum," Jimmy says. We will need to look at the way we communicate, the way we engage, and the way we invest in teachers.

When we are not engaging, Jimmy emphasizes, we are not taking the time to find out what the issue really is with teachers and students. Inequities happen from different levels. The effectiveness of the leaders in a school and in a district can cause divisions and issues.

FINDING THEIR WAY BACK

Jimmy Casas views his coaching approach as teaching rather than consulting. He works to help the adults in the world of education see that it is critical to see the school culture "not just through your eyes but through the eyes of students, families, teachers, and the community."

He enjoys his work immensely and says he feels "really blessed" to be able to help others in education. Though his start in school leadership was shaky and almost came to an early end, he was able to turn his thought process around for the benefit of his students and his teachers, with some recognition for himself.

Jimmy was the 2012 Iowa Principal of the Year and runner-up National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) 2013 National Principal of the Year. His school, Bettendorf High School, was named one of the best high schools in the country three times by *Newsweek* and *U.S. News and World Report*. He was invited to the White House in 2014 to speak on the Future Ready Pledge.

He has written five books, including:

- *What Connected Educators Do Differently*

- *Start. Right. Now. — Teach and Lead for Excellence*

- *Culturize — Every Student. Every Day.*

- *Whatever It Takes*; *Stop. Right. Now. — 39 Stops to Making Schools Better*

- his latest release, *Live Your Excellence — Bring Your Best Self to School Every Day!"*

Using lessons learned from his own career on the front lines of education, including all the challenges as well as the successes, Jimmy Casas now focuses on coaching and supporting others who may have lost their way. He wants all teachers and administrators to "find their way back," to remember that first day, and to renew their own purpose and passion for education and leadership.

PAT FONTANA is a business writer and communications trainer with a background in corporate training and community college instruction. Her business, WordsWorking, focuses on improving workplace communications, concentrating on the fundamentals of human interactions.

Seeing Is Believing

When students can see their own growth, they're inspired to reach even higher. Discover how *i-Ready* helps all students succeed.

i-Ready®

i-Ready.com/Tour

FYI

OPINIONS

"**Although school is compulsory learning is not.**"

– Engagement by Design (Corwin)

Throughout the Covid-19 school closures, SAANYS has offered timely online professional learning programs called SAANYS Connect. Sessions have covered such topics as: Supporting and Working with Our School Communities, Grading and Graduation Requirements, and Provision of Special Education Services. Visit www.saanys.org/saanys-connect/ for the full video archive plus many valuable resources from colleagues sharing innovative best practices.

Practices from practitioners
Student Engagement | SPRING 2020

Engaging Students and Families

During the Covid-19 Pandemic

By Mary S. Esposito

In my K-3 school of 780 students, the last day we all saw one another under the same roof was on March 12th. Our district was gearing up for what we thought at the time would be a temporary closure and therefore we were planning to get about two weeks' worth of lessons ready to go and be distributed to students. Two months later, and in what I call our fifth phase of home learning, we have learned some valuable lessons about student and family engagement.

FOREVER **MINDSET**

At our lower elementary school, students at our school range from five to eight years old (grades K-3). With about 80 percent of our students living in poverty, it wasn't as simple as just getting them a device and connecting them to the Internet to solve the engagement issue. It required way more than that to reconnect our students to school.

Out of the many reasons that students and families were not being engaged at first or throughout the pandemic at the level that we expected, some of the primary ones we dealt with were:

- Lack of connectivity or functional devices
- Scarcity of food and basic resources
- Families that are broken apart, children sent to live with relatives where they are safer
- Illness
- Death
- Mental health issues
- Language barriers
- Working family members
- Caregivers who lack language and technical ability to help our students
- The inability to process the massive amounts of information being thrown at them

All of these barriers and others I probably have not even thought of were and are holding our children back from learning opportunities during this time.

West Haverstraw Elementary School is a Title I school located in suburban Rockland County in the Lower Hudson Valley of New York, just 40 miles north of the epicenter of the world's pandemic. Here are some of the ways we tackled the issues surrounding student engagement.

First and foremost, making sure that our families' basic needs were being met was paramount. Like many school districts across the nation, we provided meals to all families with school-aged children. In some extreme cases, meals were delivered and continue to be delivered to our most severely affected families.

Second, families needed to be connected to us. We launched a fierce campaign to reach out to each and every family by phone. Every teacher reached out to the families of their students and ensured that we had the most updated contact information on each family. Any family that was unreachable was tracked down by a very sleuthy team of bilingual social workers, secretaries, and support staff. Our student database is being updated continually with new emails and phone numbers so when I send out our robocalls and messages, every family is reached. We conducted an extensive loan distribution of Chromebook devices and Wifi hotspots to families in need. Our goal was to get 100 percent connection to each and every family. We reached that goal!

Third, teachers and administrators made themselves available each and every day by establishing office hours. Those families and students who were not reachable during office hours were contacted at the hour that was most convenient for them. My assistant principal and I established a Google Voice service and published our phone numbers publicly so that a parent or family member could reach us at any time. We found that many of our families struggle with writing emails but find comfort with picking up the phone knowing that someone would answer or get back to them promptly. For those teachers who do not speak the native language of the family, we used apps like TalkingPoints that translate your message into a variety of languages. We also used our Spanish-speaking teaching assistants as translators during three-way calls.

Fourth, teachers, support staff, and administrators used the most age appropriate virtual mechanisms to connect with students. Some of them are Google Classroom, Seesaw, Bitmoji classroom, Smart-Kids, ClassDojo, etc. Whatever it took, we used. Our school website was updated and was made as student and family friendly as possible. Every chance we get, we continue to improve it.

Fifth, we are steadfast with maintaining consistency. Each and every day, new lessons are posted at 9:00 a.m. My assistant principal and I alternate with our morning announcement video, which is pushed out by

all of our teachers and is posted on our website. We also use social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram to spread the word and connect. Students are highlighted on Instagram doing the phys ed move of the day or demonstrating a gratitude action or posting proud work in the various subject areas.

Sixth, we connect with students by creating videos so students can see their teachers and each other. Some of the videos we have created have had themes like dance parties and thanking essential workers, spirit gear toss, and teacher (and parent) appreciation. These videos are all pushed out on our WHES YouTube channel.

Seventh, our support staff, including administrators, psychologists, social workers, family resource coordinators, and secretaries, all pooled our resources to bring and/or explain what resources are available to our family members. In many cases we spent a considerable amount of time on the phone with them, hand holding until they felt confident.

Eighth, teachers began to do live interactions with students on April 7th. Each and every teacher does some type of real-time interaction with students for at least one hour each day. This connection is priceless. The excitement of the children is contagious. Elementary teachers are some of the most incredibly creative people on the planet. Teachers have created in-

teractive Bitmoji classrooms where the image represents the virtual classroom complete with the teacher, links to resources for learning, and virtual images of all the familiar elements of the classroom they left on March 12th.

Ninth, now that we know that schools have physically closed their doors to students until September, we are all working on planning for the safe physical and emotional opening of school. Our school improvement team and subcommittees are all working on the plans to reopen school, keeping physical and emotional safety as its core principle. Our mission to study trauma, recognize it in our students, and prepare for addressing the trauma upon their physical return is our focus. Coming back to school without a plan for social and emotional learning is not an option for us.

Tenth, we made a decision two weeks ago that all students would be promoted to the next grade level and would move "together" with the classmates they left on March 12th. We announced this news this week to families and have received an overwhelming positive response from them. When students reenter our doors in September, they will at least not have to return with the first-day jitters of "Will I know anyone in my class?" or "Will I have a friend?" This will bring a tremendous amount of emotional comfort to them and their parents.

In conclusion, the Covid-19 pandemic created a need for us to take a critical look at our practices and infrastructure and harness our collective best efforts, ideas, and creativity to bring our ¨A+ game¨ in order to engage students and their families. One day when we can live once again without concern for physical safety, we will continue to benefit from the transformation that education was forced to undergo in order to reach all students. We will never really be the same or go back to a normal that we used to know. Growth mindsets prevailed during this crisis and we will forever be transformed and continue to transform.

MARY S. ESPOSITO is the principal at West Haverstraw Elementary School in the North Rockland Central School District.

Student Engagement Equals
Teacher Engagement Through a

District-University Partnership

By Tamara B. Lipke, EdD,
and Joseph T. Olsen

It was 4:30 p.m. on a Wednesday afternoon in early March. A university faculty member, junior-senior high principal, and assistant principal were poring over chart papers filled with post-it notes created during an hour-long faculty meeting where 55 secondary teachers had processed and reflected upon their implementation of specific student engagement protocols. The teachers had learned about the strategies in a previous month's faculty meeting and had been asked to plan and implement them with their students in the intervening weeks between meetings.

The teachers reflected on these questions:

- How has the use of active engagement protocols in your lessons impacted your students' learning?
- How does understanding brain research support your planning and instruction?
- How have the conversations in your professional learning groups impacted your instruction and your students' learning?

The post-it notes revealed encouraging signs related to the purposeful use of active engagement strategies on students and their learning. A sampling of the comments follows:

- "A game changer for me and my students"
- "More student voices are heard in class"
- "My quiet students are participating more"
- "Students seem more interested"
- "There is more variety now"
- "Using a protocol can have a stronger impact on student learning than rote memorization"
- "It is helpful to hear how other staff members are using active engagement strategies"

There were other responses, too:

- "We need to teach students listening skills"
- "The strategies do not work well in the classroom"
- "This takes practice to make it work"
- "These may work well with younger students but maybe not high school"

We claimed an early victory! The responses showed work still needed to be done but teachers were observing a change in their students and themselves. Reviewing this anecdotal evidence followed three months of faculty meetings where the principal and university partner modeled the instructional sequence (I do, we do, you do) to support teacher learning of specific active engagement strategies and provided time for collaborative lesson planning to incorporate the strategy matched to learning targets. Teachers, during the planning time,

were asked to reflect with colleagues about how to teach the strategy and debrief with their students about its role in their learning. In this way, student metacognition was included in the lesson design. At the close of each faculty meeting, teachers were asked to purposefully use each of the strategies they had learned, at least once, in a lesson prior to the next meeting and to bring artifacts and reflections to the meeting for discussion with their colleagues.

A UNIVERSITY-SCHOOL DISTRICT PARTNERSHIP

Leading this cultural and technical shift to support student engagement began with the goal of establishing a collaborative learning culture for faculty and students. We were reminded along the way that the path to our goals is never straightforward. The building leadership team wanted to implement professional learning communities (PLCs) as an initiative to support the district vision of "education at its best," which was described as including positive relationships, a culture of high expectations, and evidence-based decision making. The superintendent of the Altmar-Parish-Williamstown Central School District intended to advance the district vision and enhance the work of the junior-senior high school through a university-school district partnership. This partnership was centered on the relationship between the building principal and the university faculty liaison. As we began our work together, we compared it to learning how to dance. We began to dance, haltingly at first. Like the junior high students in the building we served, we tentatively shared our experiences and contexts. In those early conversations, we learned from each other and continue to do so. The principal had insights and understandings about the school culture and context, and the university professor had knowledge and experience with PLC implementation in a variety of settings. The venue selected to carry out the work was the twice per month faculty meeting. We established a rhythm for our collaborative planning and co-facilitation of the faculty meetings with the goal of developing a

cooperative community with the faculty.

MONITORING AND ADJUSTING AS A PATH FORWARD

Over the first few months of the school year — before, during, and after each faculty meeting — we shared our hopes for the students and faculty, and our frustrations. Eventually we began to develop trust in each other and the process. After coleading the first few faculty meetings, we reassessed the trajectory of PLC implementation given the structures that were unavailable due to staffing and contractual constraints. Additionally, we considered the current state of the culture and the faculty's zone of proximal development as we modeled the same expectations we have for students with the teachers. Through anecdotal observations within the faculty meeting and the use of formative exit tickets, we learned that the faculty were in favor of the opportunity to collaborate and also needed experiences to learn more about what a focus on student learning within a PLC looks like, sounds like, and feels like. As the principal shared interactions with staff and classroom visits between meetings, we began to shift our focus from the learning community concept to a single instructional element: student engagement. We realized that the two most common approaches to developing effective PLCs were not going to lead to formalized collaboration at this time and place. One of the approaches is teacher driven through inquiry; the other is administrator-driven with a focus on assessment analysis (Jacobson, 2010). We needed a third way forward and student engagement became the mission and pathway.

Students need to be active participants in the learning process. We wanted to elevate the importance of the skill sets students need. Students require opportunities to listen and ask questions of each other to learn and achieve mastery. They want to do more than receive content by listening to a teacher's lecture, copying notes, and completing worksheets. Students require opportunities to do something with the content: manipulate it, apply it, and use it to construct new mean-

ing. To demonstrate mastery, students must retain and transfer their learning to novel contexts. Our expectation to involve the faculty, and subsequently students, in purposeful, active learning guided our focus on strategies and protocols in service to students' cognitive engagement.

LEADING FOR TEACHER ENGAGEMENT

Leading this shift to the concept of student engagement required creating engaged learning experiences for the teachers. Research exploring the influence of teacher engagement on student engagement from Louis and Smith (1992) shows that the two are inseparable and from a student's perspective; the prerequisite to their engagement is their teacher's engagement. Teachers cultivate relationships with and engagement of students during the teaching-learning process when they demonstrate interest in an individual student's personal life and connect that to classroom learning and community. Additionally, when teachers design lessons that offer opportunities for students' unique ideas and thoughts to be acknowledged, recognized, and listened to (Louis and Smith, 1992), engagement and relationships are fostered.

Designing this possibility for engaged practice with their colleagues, we anticipated teachers would bring a similar level of action to their students and then reflect upon those classroom experiences during faculty meetings. We reasoned that we could not expect student engagement to occur without engaging the faculty first! Guided by Marzano (2012), we had to create the space for them to gain experience with the strategies and tools, the chance to deliberately practice, and then to monitor its effect on student learning through reflection and collaboration.

Leading this change meant explicitly teaching the strategies and the rationale for using the engagement techniques rooted in the research on teaching, learning, and the brain. The principal and university professor taught and modeled the engagement strategies, the teachers practiced them with each other grouped in both disciplinary and cross-disciplinary groups, and then the teachers were given time to collaboratively plan when they would teach the strategy to their students and use the protocol within a lesson to foster student learning of concepts and skills. Teachers would return to the faculty meeting the following month to discuss successes, challenges, and adaptations of the engagement protocols and what the impact was on student learning. These reflections were guided by discussion protocols that could be implemented in lessons to boost student collaborative discussions.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

We were launching our third round of lesson planning, and utilizing teachers' newly learned engagement protocols when the pandemic propelled us into a new reality for teaching and learning. With provisioning to support students' basic needs, social-emotional-mental health, as well as learning, our partnership has morphed once more. We hope for future opportunities to explore the influence our school-university partnership had on teacher engagement in service of student engagement and learning. We wish to be "a fly on the wall" to see and hear student reactions and reflections on their learning using intentional engagement approaches; to hear teacher reflections on planning and teaching with these protocols; and to study the implications of this partnership on the introduction to a collaborative culture for engaged learning among teachers and students. We anticipate that this information will eable even more purposeful engagement of students with their teachers!

REFERENCES

Jacobson, D. (2010). Coherent instructional improvement and PLCs: Is it possible to do both? *Phi Delta Kappan*, 91(6), pp. 38-45.

Louis, K. S., and Smith, B. (1992). Cultivating teacher engagement: Breaking the iron law of social class. In F. M. Newmann (Ed.), *Student engagement and achievement in American secondary schools* (pp. 119-152). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Marzano, R. J. (2012). *Becoming a reflective teacher*. Bloomington, IN: Marzano Research.

Tamara B. Lipke, EdD, is the assistant professor in educational leadership at SUNY Oswego.

Joseph T. Olsen is the principal of the Junior/Senior High School in Altmar-Parish Williamstown School District.

Student Engagement in
Post-Covid-19 Classrooms

By Carin L. Reeve

We have recently been participating in one of the most unique social and educational experiences of recent memory. The sudden shift to distance learning has created an opportunity for educators to rethink and reimagine the very fabric of schooling. As we have begun to plan for the eventual return to classroom life, we have turned our attention to what students really need to learn and master.

If we have used this experience to help us better understand the essential learnings that students in the technological age must have, then we can begin to evaluate what worked and what didn't work in this distance learning experience. Digging into that question will leave us with an important question: what is authentic student engagement in 2020 and beyond?

We have struggled to define student engagement for years, often confusing engagement with compliance. But, we know that high levels of engagement exist in some classrooms — where students are thinking deeply, posing thoughtful questions, interacting with rich content, and creating insightful products. Those high levels of engagement have not disappeared in our distance learning experience, but they definitely seem muted. So, the question is what does student engagement look like, sound like, and feel like in our post-Covid classrooms? Is it really just about participation or is it about deep thinking and challenging the status quo?

We can look to students themselves for this answer: where and when are today's students truly engaged? My own kids are truly engaged in things that interest them or in relationships that matter to them, most of which takes place in an online world. In this time of distance learning, they show up fully present for the teachers that they have the best relationship with and for the classes that are relevant to them or that make them think. When they have debate, discussion, or even social interaction, they are highly engaged and of singular focus. When they are passive consumers of prerecorded content, they multitask, half-listen, and produce low-quality products.

My own engagement in this time of social and physical distancing is similar: I am fully present for the relationships that mean the most and for the content that is meaningful and holds my interest.

When I put classroom experience and distance learning side by side, I am able to see what student engagement looks like, sounds like, and feels like in any kind of learning experience. Having high levels of student engagement requires that students are "showing up fully present," or, in simpler terms, "being all in without distractions." This leads us to the all-important question: what do students care enough about or what means enough to them that they are willing to put down their phones or other distractions to really be present for?

That may seem impossible in today's world of distractions, but I don't think it is. It does really ask us as educators to understand why and how learning is relevant to today's students and to ensure that the texts, tasks, and the student products we ask them to create are relevant to them as well. It also pushes us toward more discovery, inquiry, and project-based learning, making learning more active and less passive for students who have grown up Googling anything they want to know.

Humans don't just show up for things that interest them; they also show up for people that they truly care about and with whom they have authentic, trusting relationships. Being all in without distractions means taking a risk, so students must feel safe, seen, and valued in classrooms. The sense of community in the classroom is foundational to high levels of student engagement.

Returning to face-to-face learning will require more relationship building than ever before, with students, with families, and with colleagues. It's an opportunity for us to learn from our students what they liked and didn't like about distance learning — to gain insight into what they have learned about their own learning style and build strong classroom communities that are rooted in shared values and belonging.

Within this challenge lies a great opportunity to envision what it would look like, feel like, and sound like for students to be all in without distraction — to be highly engaged — in the text, tasks, and student products in your classroom. From that vision of engagement, ask yourself what skills and practiced behaviors will students need to have in order to get there? Start having students practice those skills right from day one. Inspire students to see your vision of engagement — to see themselves in your vision — and they will exceed your expectations.

Charlotte Danielson refers to classrooms with high levels of student engagement as being "cognitively busy places." Whether students are reading, or solving a problem, or working on a project, a cognitively busy place is one that is charged with thinking, discussion, questions, and all hands and minds on the task. Today's students can do much of what we are asking them to do in schools while still monitoring, and interacting with, multiple open apps on their phones or devices. Taking those devices away is not the answer; however, being all in without distractions would mean there was such investment and clarity of purpose for those students that phones or devices would be less appealing than the work. When students are truly engaged, when their hands and their minds are on the text, task, or product, using their phone would be only for the purpose of enhancing that discussion or end product.

As adults, we have phones and devices that we regularly turn to for answers and for distraction. But, when we are all in without distractions, either because we care deeply about the content, the person, or the task at hand, we are fully present. We can build that into our classroom culture — what it looks like, sounds like, and feels like to be "all in without distractions." By doing that, we can help today's students be prepared for their future: one with more independence, more autonomy, more self-direction, and more flexible thinking.

CARIN L. REEVE is the director of school improvement at Peaceful Schools in Syracuse, NY. She has 27 years in education committed to improving outcomes for students and developing excellence in teachers. Reeve spent ten years in school leadership, including four years as a successful turnaround principal. As a part of the team at Peaceful Schools, Reeve shares her expertise with schools, districts, and leaders who are looking to build systems of social, emotional, and academic support for children. For more information about Peaceful Schools, email carinr@peacefulschools.com.
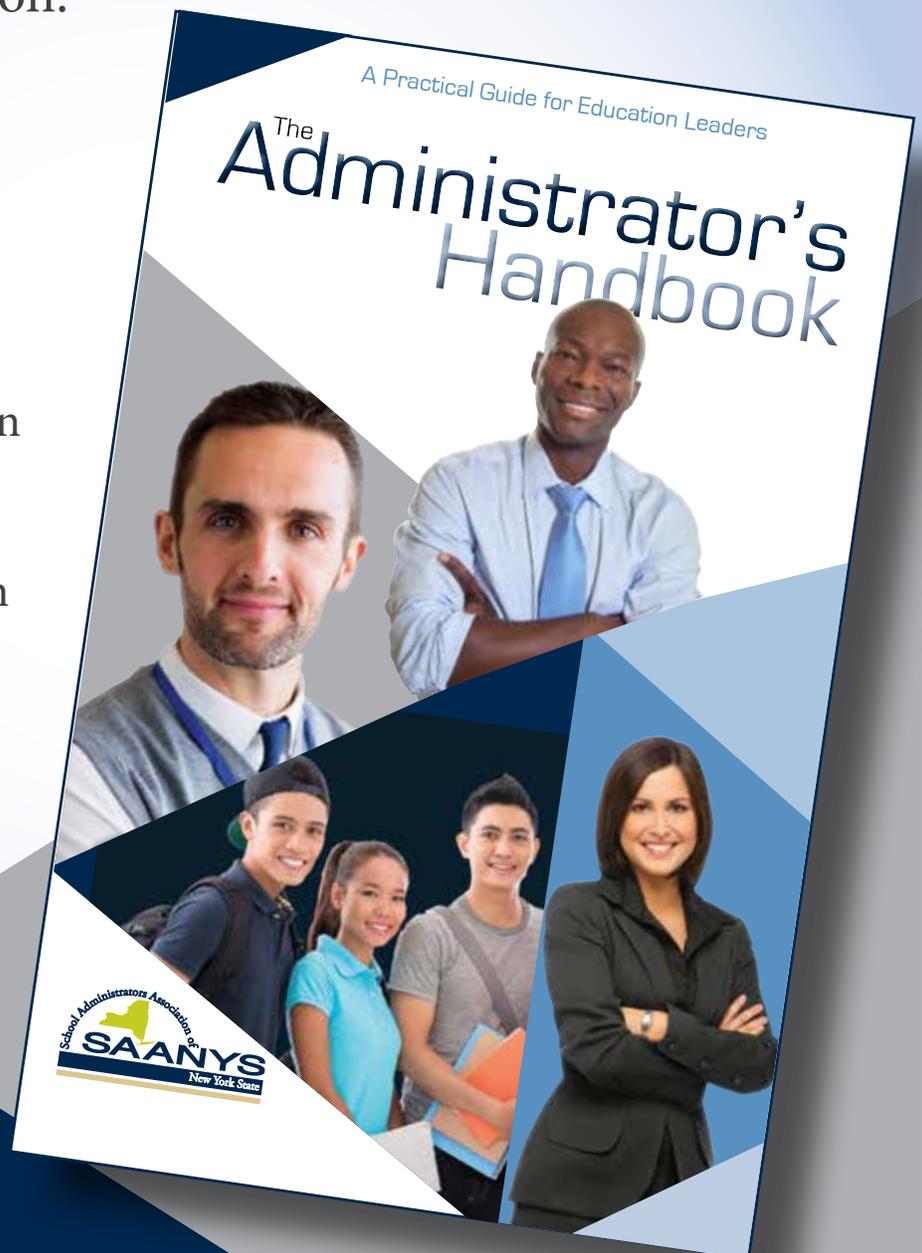
Lessons Learned

By Lisa Meade
and Daniel R. Poucher

With nearly 60 years combined experience as educators, we've never experienced anything like leading through a pandemic closure. We had no procedure manual to reference and found ourselves completely thrown into the deep end of the pool and expected to swim with Olympic prowess.

In the beginning, we held on to hope that school would not close. Perhaps this would all be precautionary and the school would reopen in a few weeks. But, that day never came. Instead, we learned that the balance of the school year would be completed online. We went from taking this day by day to making plans for weeks and months at a time.

Leading during this time definitely felt different.

In our postgraduate preparation plans for leadership, some of the most compelling work was responding to "hypothetical" situations posed by experienced administrators. You can be assured that not once did anyone pose: "Imagine the governor has closed your school indefinitely and you'll need to move to remote learning overnight. Be sure to include all the services and supports you provide during the school day. You have 48 hours to do that. What's your first step? Go!"

In our building, we tried to make the move one step at a time. Our teachers used Google Classroom as our main learning management system and began organizing priority content for courses. Some teachers were admittedly more skilled at using the platform. Instead of frustration being exhibited by our team, we saw teachers learning and leaning on each other for tips about how to move to remote learning successfully. We gave our teachers permission to post less than they thought they should have had we been in school. We increased by tenfold our communications to parents and students. We developed grading policies, with input from teachers and our BOCES region, that would be in effect for each marking period. We used our school counselors to follow up on any students of concern submitted each week by teachers. Our SRO began making weekly visits to students we were not able to connect with to remind families we were there to help. We asked teachers to complete a weekly check-in form that allowed us to collect these names (of students of concern) as well as feedback from the teachers about what information or support they needed next. We held weekly faculty meetings using Google Meet. (The secret to that is that those may have been more for us. We were missing our team members terribly and needed to find a way to connect even if it was once a week.) We held open office hours for students and celebrated when even one or two logged on to say hi. Through all of this, we learned some valuable lessons that will truly redefine our leadership practices moving forward.

SHOW STUDENTS GRACE

Many of our students became overwhelmed with remote learning. They were missing the interaction that being in school allowed. Trying to organize all the postings from all the teachers proved futile for some. We moved to a schedule for the posting of work and allowed two makeup weeks for students to catch their breath. Students were told which courses to focus on first. We allowed students flexible deadlines and committed to no zeroes.

While our students may have technology skill sets, what we found was that they were struggling initially with "doing school a new way." One of the keys to their potential success was for us to be readily available to help them foster the organizational skills necessary for them to work systematically in a nonsynchronous environment. If we, as adults, struggled with this new approach, imagine how it looks through their lenses. As time has gone on, most students have been able to make this transition with the patience and support of our wonderful staff.

SHOW FAMILIES GRACE

Early on in the closure, we stole an incredible idea from Dr. Freya Mercer, high school principal at Coxsackie-Athens, and had organized our TA team to make calls home to every house. The script we prepared asked families if they had Internet access and if there were any unmet needs from us as a school. This information at the onset proved invaluable at the start. We knew at the start who required paper copies of work and who would be relying on a school-issued Chromebook.

Some of our families did not understand "working offline" when the Internet wasn't an option or how to be added to Google Classroom as a guardian. We made sure to share teaching videos on both topics, and worked with our tech department to develop a "Need tech help at home" Google, where families could ask for a call from someone in our tech department. Sometimes families used this form to report a Chromebook stopped working and sometimes families used the form to learn more about Google Classroom. To date, nearly 50 families have been supported through this option.

We also learned that families preferred bulleted information over long letters explaining everything. We began to redesign our communications to be easier to reference as there were so many topics to be covered. We used social media to cross-post some of the information and used the mass email option from our SchoolMessenger system to regularly send out communications.

As we all are aware, families are facing many challenges during this time besides education. We took an honest look at how we could streamline this process and make it user friendly for households that might have students of several different grade levels residing there. We sought to build understanding partnerships with our families. The one common denominator in all of this is that we all want their children to succeed. Suddenly, parents and guardians who are the main caretakers and so much more have been faced with the daunting task of playing a larger role in the education of their children. By showing them grace and offering them ongoing support, we are hopefully building bridges that assist them in many ways as well as building deeper school-to-home connections that will outlast this stressful time and should reap future benefits beyond this pandemic.

SHOW TEACHERS AND SUPPORT STAFF GRACE

We tried to make sure all communication to staff was regular and clear. We set up the use of a buildingwide Remind account at the start of this which allowed us to send the most important news by text to our teammates. It also allowed those who desired a chance to text back to the principal with any kind of question or concern.

In the beginning of remote learning, we had a teacher who bravely shared how frustrated she was with teaching through asynchronous means. Yet, instead of staying there in that frustration, she pushed herself to

learn new technology tools. She eventually even launched her own YouTube channel: The Grand Kenyon! She now uses YouTube to deliver different parts of the earth science curriculum with hands-on exposure and optimism.

While this time has been one of angst and great concern regarding the educational process, we have seen many of our staff members embrace new ways of doing business by using modes of instruction that they may never have tried if this didn't happen. In the process, these new modes of operation have allowed us to address a variety of student learning styles with a vast number of different approaches.

SHOW OURSELVES GRACE

Reporting to work in a building without students and staff was lonely. There were days when real depression set in and we had to remind each other that those feelings were okay to feel. We sometimes felt inadequate or powerless against closure after closure being extended. But we would only let those moments be short lived. The secret antidote to all of it was to pick up the phone and check in on a student. Those conversations are what got us through.

During this time of traditional closure, we have been called upon as administrators to become both reflective and forward-thinking. We are learning and recognizing those things that are truly important and, in the process, our school is growing in unanticipated ways. The school experience may never be the same again. However, those who are educators have been impacted in ways that have increased our empathy as we seek to positively and effectively take what some would perceive as an impossible situation and build

pathways throughout our school and the surrounding community that will pay long-lasting dividends.

We will continue to stay the course and know that we will come through this stronger, better, and more committed than ever to the wonderful ideals that we ascribe to as part of our incredible community. School will undoubtedly look much different in the fall than it does today or did yesterday. What we've learned through all of this is we can, and will, get through it — together.

LISA MEADE is the principal of Granville Junior/Senior High School and the 2015 NYS Middle School Principal of the Year for SAANYS/NASSP.

DANIEL R. POUCHER is the assistant principal of Granville Junior/Senior High School and the 2013 Distinguished Assistant Principal of the Year for SAANYS/NASSP.

Can You Hear Them?
Giving Voice to Our Students

By Anna Rose Sugarman

What's that you say? We often ask each other to repeat what was said if we have not heard the other person's ideas or comments. But when have we asked students what exactly helped them learn anything in the last lesson or the lesson that they are currently engaged in? Some students have been reporting that they are not asked for feedback for learning until the end of the year when it no longer has any impact on their own learning. What about now during the age of Covid-19?

We are confronted with the reality that without student input, we will not be able to keep them engaged in learning. No longer are they a captive audience. Student choice has come to the forefront. They can choose whether to "join" a Google Meet or Zoom meeting or not, by checking in or dropping out during the session or not showing up at all.

We live in an age in which everywhere we travel we are asked for feedback on how the service was, whether in a restaurant or hotel, on a plane, even in a restroom. Interactions within our computers take in constant feedback when we are shopping online to enhance our shopping experience directing us to our exact match in need. Companies are making billions on this. Our students interact with this format through social platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, etc. In schools, for the most part, our practices need to improve in asking for feedback on our service. The simple question, what helps you learn best? needs to be asked of students every day in order to improve instruction and create a better instructional match between the student and the proposed curriculum. How will we know what's working if we don't ask?

In meeting our district goals this year, we have been conducting research on student voice, asking students how they learn best and under what circumstances; whether the use of 1:1 devices works for them in their learning or not; how often they are asked by their teachers for feedback on what works for them in their learning; and in general, what we could do to make their experiences at our schools more productive and better for them. Our modest long-term goal has been to have teachers ask students at least biweekly, if not more often, how the materials, resources, and instructional practices are helping them learn.

An idea that we found successful this year was to gather groups of students from different levels of performance in different schools and ask them a series of questions about learning in our district. Questions were developed by administrators to survey the students. Audio recordings were taken of student responses, analyzed, and then culled to put into videos for staff. These videos were shared during faculty meetings allowing teachers to hear their students. This process was much more effective than using questionnaires and asking teachers to read student responses. As teachers heard their students' voices, they were moved to action to meet their needs.

There are a number of ways that districts can garner student voice to learn about how students learn best using an online platform and in the future as we begin to design asynchronous learning options. Teachers can study video clips of their students during learning segments simply by recording their sessions online. In reviewing the videos, teachers can analyze the interactions to see what engages students, how long students can engage in continuous online instruction, and observe what isn't working. This should provide for a quick turnaround for teachers in their practice. Shenendehowa has been using Teaching Channel Plus for this process in our new teacher induction program for the last four years with great success for new teachers.

Using Google Forms, some teachers ask their students for feedback at the end of the week to enable them to shift their planning for upcoming classes. Some teachers reinforce student voices throughout the learning sequence. When beginning a class, they ask students to tell them what worked in the last session and then take a quick check midway through the lesson asking what worked for them so far. Virtual post–it notes can also be used as tickets out the door allowing students to indicate what worked best (or didn't) during the lesson. Flipgrid is an electronic tool that students enjoy using. They can answer a prompt that the teacher proposes regarding instruction and record their responses using their phones or a Chromebook.

Another side of this equation is the feedback cycle. Are we able to take it? Can we hear what our students are saying without rationalizing our point of view or insisting that the students shouldn't have a say because of their age. Brene Brown talks about courage. Sometimes it just takes courage to listen to and respond to student feedback.

We are now living in a time when student voices are needed more than ever. The stakes are high. The time is now. We are the ones to empower students in their learning experiences by asking them, how do you learn best? We cannot afford to lose learning opportunities day after day just because we don't ask…and have the courage to hear them.

ANNA ROSE SUGARMAN is the professional learning coordinator at Shenendehowa Central School District.

The Role of
Student Engagement in
Achieving Equity

By Michelle L. Gabree-Huba

Societies flourish through the diversity of its members. The collective contributions intertwine and enrich communities when each member is empowered to engage without limitation. Equal access and equitable opportunities in education ensure the success of all students in the classroom and beyond. The core belief of educators that all students can succeed underscores the value of the notion that a student's background should not be a predictor of their level of success.

Closing the achievement gap for marginalized groups of students including minorities, students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, and English language learners has been challenging. Achieving the vision of equity in outcomes is determined by the actions that we take as well as our inaction. Student engagement is a critical element to achieving equity. To be clear, engagement is not the practices that students adopt to be successful in school, and not those that represent the expectations of the dominant culture. Engagement involves student investment in the learning process and participation and efforts toward understanding. Engagement is multifaceted and includes both the visceral and intellectual aspects of teaching and learning. Our responsibility is to reform teaching practices in ways that foster engagement by helping all students make connections socially, academically, and cognitively in order to advance equity and eliminate the underachievement of at-risk students.

CONNECTING SOCIALLY

Students need safe spaces where they feel cared for and respected in order to optimally engage. Teachers create these spaces by recognizing their own implicit bias and through their commitment to maintain an asset-based view of all students. They see differences as strengths and not deficits, make each student feel welcome in the classroom, and show each student that they are a valuable member of the learning community. These teachers connect with students by taking the time to learn about their backgrounds so that they can respond to their lived experiences and the understandings they enter with in order to determine how students learn and where to begin.

Peer relationships are also related to student engagement. In a values-based classroom, time is spent on community building. Dignity for each individual, respect for differences, fairness, and inclusion are all fostered. Cooperative and collaborative learning opportunities build interdependent relationships, which promote a culture of learning. When students work together toward a common goal, participation is expanded. Students find their voice and improve one another's thinking by sharing ideas, asking questions, and challenging one another by posing alternative perspectives. These interactions help build trust among students as well as individual confidence. Instructional strategies that include cooperative learning provide opportunity for all students to equally participate and promote equitable access to content.

CONNECTING COGNITIVELY

Being intellectually engaged is a conscious activity. Students need to be actively thinking, reasoning, and internalizing their learning. It is not necessarily always visible. Just because a student is sitting quietly and completing a task does not guarantee that they are cognitively invested. There are, however, several approaches

that can support active intellectual engagement. To begin, teachers need to plan instruction that helps students establish the connection between what they are learning and the big picture. Standards taught in isolation detach students from the learning. Teachers need to draw connections to topics across disciplines and to the real world. Topics that are relevant to students allow them to connect their identities with something greater outside the classroom walls.

After planning on how to connect kids to the standards, practitioners need to determine how to begin. They need to establish what prior knowledge or, in some cases, misconceptions students are entering with. In addition to assessing students' initial understandings, educators must also ascertain the various learning supports needed by individuals and groups of students. Different people learn in different ways and that necessitates educators to have a variety of pedagogically sound approaches in their toolbox to apply in their classrooms to meet students where they are at. Personalized learning requires customization. It may take the form of tiered activities where students work through different processes or produce a different product within an appropriate level of choice, all the while striving for identified goals.

Clear expectations and criteria must be effectively communicated to students from the start. There needs to be an appropriate level of cognitive rigor to maintain engagement. If a task is too simplistic, students will lose interest. If it is too difficult, they will shut down. Students need to productively struggle and be given adequate time to do so. Teachers should continuously monitor understanding of directions, progress toward the goal, as well as understanding. Effective feedback is feedback that is specific. It may come in the form of questions that move students' thinking forward. Feedback may guide students to an awareness about their own thought process. Teachers assure that all students are asked higher order thinking questions and understand that their thoughts and opinions are important.

From the words of Dr. Pedro Nogeura, director for the Center for the Transformation of Schools at UCLA, "That's at the core of equity: understanding who your kids are and how to meet their needs. You are still focused on outcomes, but the path to get there may not be the same for each one." Connecting with students on a personal level to gain an appreciation for where they've been, their ways of knowing and understanding, and their passions will position educators to truly engage students intellectually. Cultivating respect for differences is essential in an increasingly interconnected world. Equitable teaching practices that equip all students to feel connected to that world will translate into greater individual knowledge, voice, and power that contribute to the greater good of society.
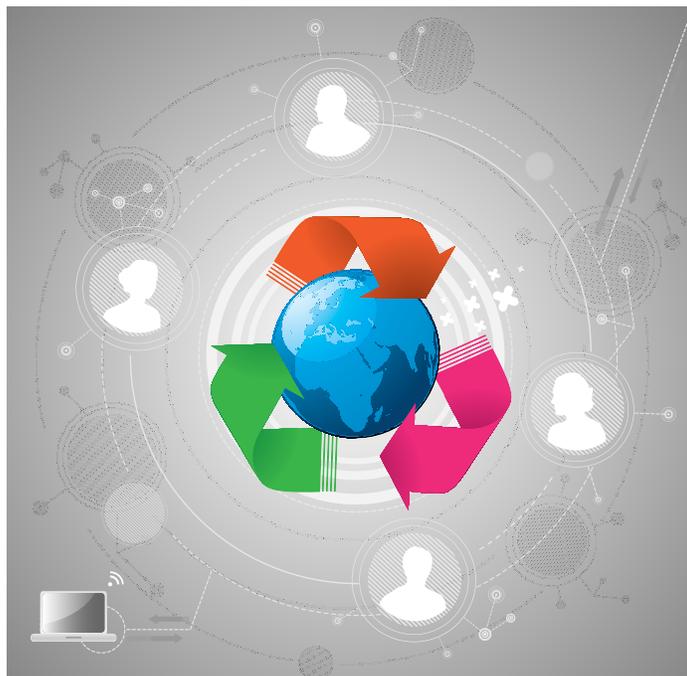
MICHELLE L. GABREE-HUBA, MS, is the academic administrator for math and science, K-5, in the Shenendehowa Central School District.

REFERENCES

Friesen, S. (2010). Student Engagement, Equity, and the Culture of Schooling. Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education. Retrieved from https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/student-engagement-equity-and-culture-schooling.pdf

Hanover Research. (2017). Closing the Gap: Creating Equity in the Classroom. Retrieved from https://www.hanover-research.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Equity-in-Education_Research-Brief_FINAL.pdf

Minero, E. (2020). Reflections on Becoming More Culturally Responsive. Edutopia. Retrieved from https://www.edutopia.org/article/reflections-becoming-more-culturally-responsive.

BETTERLESSON

Laura Boothroyd
(617) 281-7930
laura.boothroyd@betterlesson.com
betterlesson.com

BetterLesson combines innovative technology with adult learning science to reimagine professional instructional strategies, learning lab, digital portfolio, coaching, and workshops sustain teacher practice transformation and growth mindsets.

BL BetterLesson

CASTLE LEARNING

Scott Fischer
(800) 345-7606 ext. 107
sfischer@castlelearning.com
castlelearning.com

Castle Learning Online is an Internet-based review, testing, and assessment tool that supports classroom instruction. The site provides a K-12 Common Core-aligned question database that houses over 150,000 questions encompassing math, English, science, social studies, Spanish, and French. The resource can also be used by elective teachers through the development of personal content creation for the support of their curriculums. All users can access their accounts from school and/or home with any Internet-connected device; this allows for the extension of the classroom with built-in instructional feedback for the end user. Over 70 percent of the public school districts in NYS make Castle Learning Online available to their teachers, students, parents, and administrators.

Castle Learning

COGNIA

Jake Goldsmith | (603) 749-9102 ext. 7369
jake.goldsmith@cognia.org
advanc-ed.org & measuredprogress.org

Cognia has the knowledge to help schools improve. Cognia offers accreditation and certification, assessment, professional services, and consulting within a framework of continuous improvement. The result of the merger of AdvancED and Measured Progress, Cognia was formed to bridge the gap between school evaluation and student assessment. As a global nonprofit working in over 80 countries, our 36,000 institutions serve and support nearly 25 million students and 5 million educators every day.

AdvancED and Measured Progress are now | **cognia**

CREATIVE EDUCATION FOUNDATION

Beth Miller | (508) 960-0000
Bmiller@creativeeducationfoundation.org
creativeeducationfoundation.org

The Creative Education Foundation (CEF) trains administrators, educators, and families in Creative Problem Solving (CPS), the research-based, gold standard of creativity and innovation education. CPS engages participants with hands-on activities, real-world applications, and tools that work within restraints to engage and unlock classroom creativity.

Creative Education Foundation.

CURRICULUM ASSOCIATES

Rozalind Smith | (978) 408-4328
RSmith@cainc.com | cainc.com
Jeff Ohmer | (904) 515-8344
JOhmer@cainc.com | cainc.com

Curriculum Associates is a leading educational technology and publishing company with a mission to make classrooms better places for students and teachers. Its research-based, award-winning print and digital instruction and assessment products provide educators with the tools necessary to personalize learning and help all students become college and career ready.

Curriculum Associates

Ready   i-Ready   BRIGANCE

DREAMBOX LEARNING

Judson Aungst
(443) 534-2404
judson.aungst@dreambox.com | dreambox.com

DreamBox Learning is the only K-8 digital math program powered by students, built by and for educators, and independently proven to positively impact student achievement. DreamBox dynamically differentiates in real time based on students' answers and how they solve problems.

dreambox LEARNING

EDUCATIONAL VISTAS, INC.

Scott B. Crowder
(518) 344-7022
scrowder@edvistas.com
edvistas.com

For over 25 years, EVI has been providing the finest educational products and services to NYS schools. Hundreds of school districts and many BOCES & RICs have selected our management systems and leading educational services to assist them in meeting their goals and requirements. As a NYS company, EdVistas is proud to develop all our solutions locally in Schenectady, NY.

EVI Educational Vistas, Inc.
Increasing Efficiency
Reducing Costs.

EQUITABLE

Gregory A. Ronneburger, CFP®
(315) 425-6334
Gregory.Ronneburger@axa-advisors.com
www.cnyretirementplanning.com

Equitable Advisors is the brand name of AXA Advisors, LLC. CFP® and CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER(TM) are certification marks owned by the Certified Financial Planner Board of Standards, Inc. These marks are awarded to individuals who successfully complete the CFP Board's initial and ongoing certification requirements. Gregory Ronneburger is a registered representative who offers securities through AXA Advisors, LLC (NY, NY 212-314-4600), member FINRA, SIPC and an agent who offers annuity and insurance products through AXA Network, LLC. AXA Network conducts business in CA as AXA Network Insurance Agency of California, LLC; in UT as AXA Network Insurance Agency of Utah, LLC; and in PR as AXA Network of Puerto Rico, Inc. Investment advisory products and services offered through AXA Advisors, LLC, an investment advisor registered with the SEC. AXA Advisors and AXA Network are affiliated companies and do not provide tax or legal advice. Representatives may transact business, which includes offering products and services and/or responding to inquiries, only in state(s) in which they are properly registered and/or licensed. Your receipt of this e-mail does not necessarily indicate that the sender is able to transact business in your state.

EQUITABLE
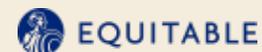
HAPARA

Dave Barclay | (518) 400-0967
dave.barclay@hapara.com | hapara.com

Hapara instructional management suite enables educators to create visible, differentiated and focused learning experiences with G Suite for Education. Hapara helps teachers see student efforts across G Suite applications, supports collaborative assignments, encourages real-time engagement, and highlights student browsing.

HUNGER SOLUTIONS NEW YORK

Jessica Pino-Goodspeed | (518) 741-0917
jessica.pinogoodspeed@hungersolutionsny.org
hungersolutionsny.org

Hunger Solutions New York promotes hunger awareness, participation in federally funded nutrition assistance programs for all who are eligible, and public policies that contribute to ending hunger. We also raise awareness of the health, economic, and educational benefits of antihunger programs.

LEAD (Let's Empower, Advocate, and Do, Inc.)

Lauren Wilkins | (978) 549-9926
lauren@leadnow.org | leadnow.org

LEAD is proactively revolutionizing mental health education and building community resilience nationwide by providing certification and curriculum to schools, camps, and organizations that empower educators to identify early signs of mental illness and encourage students to seek appropriate help before a crisis.

LEADER IN ME

Renée Ailing | (716) 946-7006
renee.ailing@franklincovey.com | leaderinme.org

Leader in Me is a CASEL-endorsed K-12 whole-school improvement model and process. It is being implemented in thousands of schools in over 54 countries worldwide. It serves as the foundational operating system for a school by creating an environment where existing programs and initiatives can thrive. The social-emotional competencies of Leader in Me are taught through the lens of personal and interpersonal leadership. Educators in Leader in Me schools build lifelong leaders by helping them develop habits of effectiveness.

LEXIA LEARNING

Tristan Egan | (978) 405-6249 ext. 6239
tegan@lexialearning.com | lexialearning.com

Lexia Learning is committed to helping all students in grades pre-K-12 become proficient readers and confident learners. Lexia empowers the literacy educators who are essential to student success with research-driven adaptive assessment and personalized instruction.

LIBERTY MUTUAL INSURANCE

Isela Flores | 469-617-4370
Isela.Flores@LibertyMutual.com
LibertyMutual.com/saanys

Special Offer on Auto and Home Insurance
As a SAANYS member, you could receive exclusive savings on Liberty Mutual Auto and Home Insurance.[1] We offer personalized coverage, multicar and multipolicy discounts, 24-hour claims assistance, and more. Liberty Mutual is trusted countrywide for quality coverage and exceptional service. Visit libertymutual.com/saanys or call 1-800-225-8281 for a free quote.

[1]Discounts and savings are available where state laws and regulations allow, and may vary by state. Certain discounts apply to specific coverages only. To the extent permitted by law, applicants are individually underwritten; not all applicants may qualify. Please consult a Liberty Mutual sales representative for additional information.

LIFETOUCH

Belinda Waldron | 518-767-9947
bwaldron@lifetouch.com | lifetouch.com

At Lifetouch, our purpose is to help families make memories and share them with others. Built on the tradition of "picture day," Lifetouch captures smiling faces from preschool through high school graduation, as well as sports, yearbooks, senior portraits, and special events. Ask about our full assortment of products and partnerships. Official photographer of the SAANYS Annual Conference.

PEACEFUL SCHOOLS

Dr. Lura L. Lunkenheimer | (315) 558-4219
LuraL@peacefulschools.com
peacefulschools.com

Peaceful Schools (WBE Certified) partners with schools across NYS to provide training, coaching, and consultation promoting socially safe and supportive schools. We offer a full range of services including: mediation, restorative practices, school improvement, leadership development, theatrical productions, and more.

PROMETHEAN

Richard Ruggiero | (201) 248-2319
Richard.Ruggiero@prometheanworld.com
prometheanworld.com

With more than 20 years of experience in K-12 classrooms, Promethean is a global leader in education technology. Promethean's ActivPanel and award-winning suite of teaching and lesson delivery software drive student engagement and bring lessons to life in the classroom.

SCHOOLTOOL/MINDEX TECHNOLOGIES

Chelsea White | (585) 424-3590
officemanager@mindex.com | mindex.com

SchoolTool is a student management system made specifically for New York State school districts. Being the only SMS vendor to exclusively market to New York State school districts, SchoolTool meets all NYSED requirements when they are needed.

TECHXTEND

Kevin Askew | (518) 860-8899
Kevin.Askew@techxtend.com
www.techxtend.com

TechXTend Education Solutions is a value-added reseller focused on a core portfolio of impact technologies in the areas of assistive technologies, career development, curriculum development, school safety, STEM, and other educational hardware and software products.

U.S. ARMY 1st RECRUITING BRIGADE

Major Marri Goldstein | (443) 610-2617
mary.j.goldstein.mil@mail.mil
goarmy.com

Education service specialists present educational programs and products the U.S. Army offers schools and its students, which cost nothing and carry no military service obligation. These programs assist youth with long-term planning and identify with the student's potential career paths.

ZANER-BLOSER

Tracy DiDio | (518) 466-3491
tracy.didio@zaner-bloser.com
superkidsreading.com

Zaner-Bloser is an educational-solutions company that specializes in delivering explicit instruction and a solid academic foundation for Pre-K-8 students in reading and language arts.

Option 1 — 1:1 Mentor Coaching

SAANYS Mentor Coaching Services

Option 2 — Group Mentor Coaching

"SAANYS mentoring has changed our administrative team...Our administrators have valued and cherished the time they have spent with their SAANYS mentor, who skillfully used questioning and scenarios to give them tools to solve their own challenges and build a plan to move forward with confidence and collaboration."

Shelley Rossitto
Executive Director, IT & PD, Monticello Schools

Contact
For more information about this program, contact Karen Bronson, SAANYS director of professional learning, at kbronson@saanys.org, or Bonnie Tryon, SAANYS mentor coordinator, at btryon@saanys.org.

OFFICIAL CTLE PROVIDER

School Administrators Association of SAANYS
New York State

In School and at Home

DreamBox Learning® K-8 Math is a powerful combination of rigorous curriculum and embedded formative assessment that provides a visual and conceptual learning experience available in English and Spanish.

Built for New York K–8 Students + Educators

Contact Your Local Rep!
Robyn Kohen, Regional Account Executive
robyn.kohen@dreambox.com
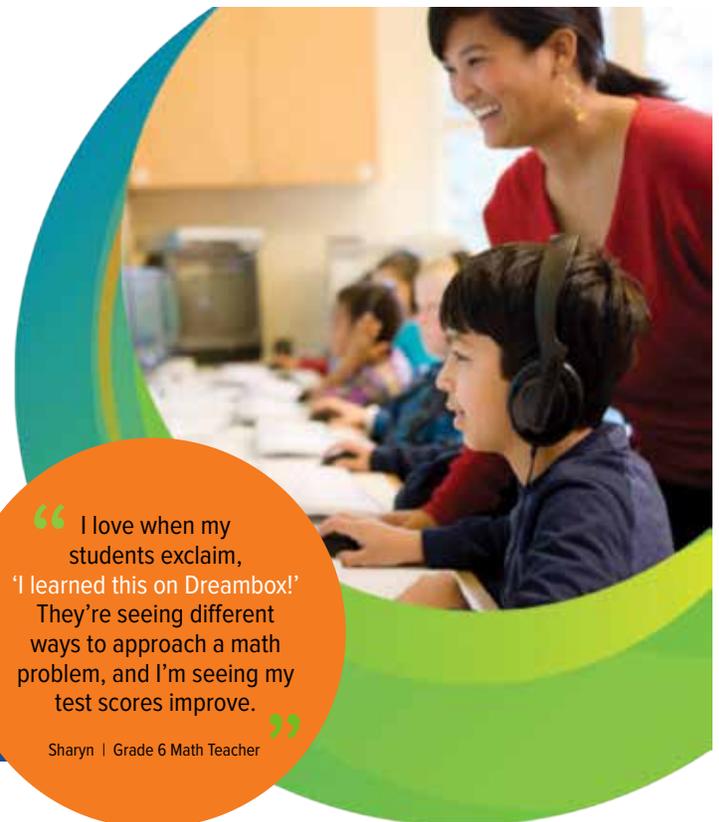
" I love when my students exclaim, 'I learned this on Dreambox!' They're seeing different ways to approach a math problem, and I'm seeing my test scores improve. "

Sharyn | Grade 6 Math Teacher

dreambox®
LEARNING

Adaptive. Rigorous. Motivating . Educator Focused.   **DreamBox.com**