

# Vanguard

School Administrators Association of New York State

WINTER  
2023

Exploring  
Educational  
Leadership



## WHAT KEEPS US STUCK

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WITH **PETER DEWITT**  
ON HIS NEW BOOK,  
**DE-IMPLEMENTATION**

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# Vanguard Practices

WINTER  
2023

from practitioners

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**“The key to de-implementation is holding on to what is impactful and reducing or replacing what isn’t.”**

*- Peter DeWitt*

**AN INTERVIEW WITH PETER DEWITT**

# Demystifying De-Implementation

By Ellen Ullman



If you’re the type of leader who believes in the phrases “less is more” and “work smarter not harder,” you’ll be excited to discover de-implementation. The concept – which means to replace or reduce low-value practices – originated in the medical field but is equally relevant for educators.

“The idea of de-implementation has been around for a long time, but it’s never been more useful,” says Peter DeWitt, a former principal from Albany, New York, who is now an author, speaker, coach, and *EdWeek* columnist.

“Right now, people are burned out, and stress and anxiety are at an all-time high.” His new book, *De-Implementation: Creating the Space to Focus on What Works*, offers an evidence-based framework and steps to help educators start their de-implementation journey.

DeWitt started thinking about de-implementation after a conversation with noted Australian education researcher John Hattie. The two men were discussing expanding workloads, teacher burnout, and America’s mental health crisis. “I couldn’t get the conversation out of my head,” says DeWitt. “I do a lot of social-emotional learning (SEL) and well-being coaching and write about both topics, and I couldn’t stop thinking that something has got to give. Our workloads keep increasing and teachers are leaving their jobs in record numbers.”

The specific inspiration for writing a book on de-implementation came from research DeWitt was conducting about teacher well-being for a book about instructional leadership teams. He wrote a blog about mental health that was forwarded hundreds of thousands of times. He decided to help educators take action to improve working conditions in schools.

**DE-IMPLEMENTATION STARTS WITH “WHY”**

In the last 30 years, we’ve seen countless education trends, including adaptive learning, microlearning, gamification, and small classrooms ... just to name a few. Too often, we keep chasing the next big thing instead of honoring the work we are already doing.

De-implementation lets us evaluate what is working so that we don’t fall prey to the next best thing. Begin the process by identifying low-value practices. Low-value practices:

- provide little or no benefit or impact to students
- are less effective or impactful than another available practice
- have potential to cause harm
- are no longer necessary.

Make sure to include teachers in your conversations to identify low-value practices; what is not effective for one person might be essential for another. An example of a low-value practice, according to DeWitt, is a zero-tolerance policy.

**DE-IMPLEMENTATION METHODS**

Informal de-implementation is something you can do on your own. “You might, for example, reduce the number of times you check email each day or the number of nights you work late,” says DeWitt. Other examples: replacing meetings with shared documents, leaving work at 5:00 p.m., or removing your work email from your phone. “It comes down to determining if something is ‘busy work’ or adds value,” says DeWitt.

Formal de-implementation is when you look at larger initiatives. It requires a team, impacts most of the school or district, and may require data collection from a variety of sources. Examples include revising your student discipline process, shifting from traditional to standards-based grading, or replacing zero-tolerance policies for more equitable methods.

You can de-implement low-value practices by reducing or replacing them. Some questions to ask yourself: Will reducing this practice allow me to spend more time with my family, help me feel less anxious, or give my teachers an emotional connection to their work?

DeWitt says some of the first things schools can reduce are meetings, emails, assessments, and homework. School leaders can help teachers minimize their assessments and reduce the homework they assign.



**GETTING STARTED**

If you’d like to put de-implementation into practice, you’ll need to ensure people feel safe to discuss well-being, what is working, and — most important — what isn’t. Teachers will need to be willing to talk about

DeWitt says some of the first things schools can reduce are meetings, emails, assessments, and homework.

what they are doing that contributes to over-workload, too. You’ll need to develop a shared definition of student engagement and which of your district’s practices deepen that engagement.

“Don’t walk in blindly,” says DeWitt. “I think most good leaders understand that people are working hard but they are stressed and anxious and suffering. Start with the reasons you would like to engage in this work.”

As you figure out what and how to de-implement, discuss how you’ll collect evidence to measure effectiveness. For example, will your teachers find they can go deeper in the practices they replaced? If you reduce the number of meetings, are people going home and spending more quality time with their families? Are people less anxious? Less stressed? Are they checking email less often?

During the last two years, DeWitt asked thousands of people what they would de-implement, and every single



person answered something that was being done to them – not what they do themselves. “It’s a lot easier to point fingers at others than to look at your own practices,” he says. “But we need to look internally. It isn’t about getting rid of things you don’t like. The key to de-implementation is holding on to what is impactful and reducing or replacing what isn’t.”

---

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

## 4 THINGS TO DE-IMPLEMENT

- 1. Common formative assessments:**  
The truth is, we don’t use the information assessments reveal.
- 2. Overcoaching:**  
Instead of sending three or four coaches, match the right teams for greater impact.
- 3. School improvement plans:**  
“Schools create these plans in the summer out of compliance,” says DeWitt. “Instead, use the plan as a resource. Don’t just shove it in a drawer for no one to see.”
- 4. Walkthroughs:**  
Leaders have multiple walkthrough tools and do it out of compliance. Instead, use walkthroughs to learn from.



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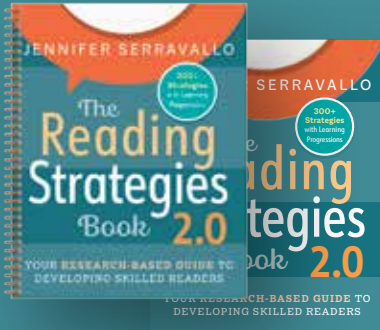
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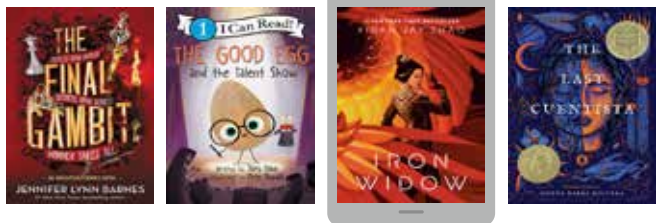
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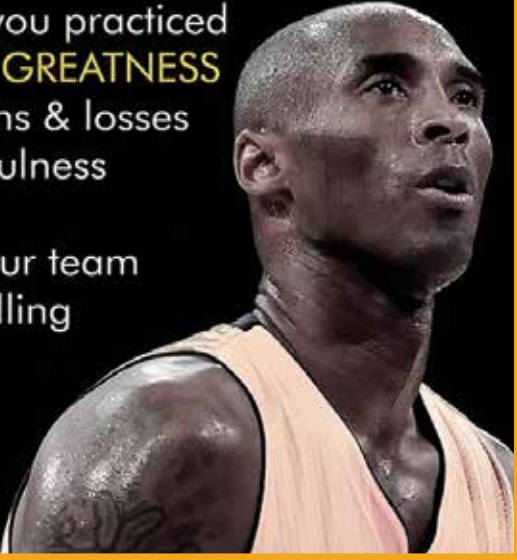
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**OPINIONS**

“The key is not to prioritize what’s on your schedule but to schedule your priorities.”

– Stephen Covey

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from practitioners

What Keeps Us Stuck

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# Stuck in a Moment? Pivot



---

By Paul M. Fanuele, EdD

*Now you're stuck in a moment,  
And you can't get out of it...  
And if the night runs over,  
And if the day won't last,  
And if your way should falter,  
Along the stony paths,  
It's just a moment,  
This time will pass.*

These lyrics to “Stuck in a Moment,” by Bono and U2, appear to reflect how we are feeling. The song was written in 2001, but it seems like being stuck happens more today than in previous years and lasts far more than a moment (every generation probably would agree).

## WORDS MATTER

A few years ago, I discovered a way to remain focused on my goals and resolutions even when I felt stuck. It was easy to use and came without the trouble of making long, detailed, and potentially complicated lists. The method is “one word,” that is, choosing a word that will motivate you throughout the upcoming year. Jon Gordon (2014) popularized this concept and discussed that most New Year’s resolutions are abandoned within one month. Instead of making a New Year’s resolution, I choose a word that will be my touchstone for the months ahead. I’m sure you can think of words that help define your goals and actions. This year, my word is *trust*, because I feel the world needs a little more trust in it. We need to trust that we will be there for each other. It is much easier choosing this word if you are surrounded by other trusting souls. My previous word was *fortitude*. It was a perfect word to deal with the challenges of a pandemic. You don’t have to wait until next January to pick your word. In fact, I recently thought of another word that would also serve me well, and enable us to handle the challenges of a pandemic or whatever else has us spinning our wheels.

The word is *pivot*. I am sure you have heard it before. It’s a seemingly simple word, but it also has several shades of meaning. On the one hand, according to Merriam-Webster, *pivot* is a noun that refers to “a person, thing, or factor having a major or central role, function, or effect.” It could also be referred to as a “centerpiece.” This interpretation is fitting when your community looks to you for solutions as the leader of your school or district. This interpretation is also appropriate when you are working with your community, constituents, or students to solve an issue. The team assembled becomes the entity having a central role in the solution. When the community acts as the pivot, with a say in the outcome, the chances of success are greatly enhanced.

On the other hand, you can use *pivot* as a verb, meaning “to adapt or improve by adjusting or modifying something (such as a product, service, or strategy).” This interpretation will

serve you well in most other situations, especially adaptive challenges, that is, ones that do not have solutions already developed. Heifetz and Linsky (2017) discussed the differences between technical and adaptive challenges. Technical ones already have tried-and-true solutions, such as a method to fix a copier machine. Adaptive ones need solutions to be developed, such as handling a pandemic when the last one occurred over 100 years ago. It requires you to change how you look at something and gain a new vantage point. Pivoting to change your perspective is essential when you are stuck.

When I think of improving your vantage point by pivoting, I think of a funny scene from an episode of *Friends* that has Ross asking his buddies to pivot numerous times as they unsuccessfully attempt to navigate a couch up a windy staircase. This task would appear to be a technical challenge with an already established protocol for success. Ross thinks he has a solution with a mapped-out plan, but his vision of it is only in his head (which is another article for me to write). His continuous calls for his friends to “pivot” are met with exasperation. At the end of the scene and after a complete failure to understand Ross’s plea, Chandler asks, “What did you mean when you said ‘pivot’?”

The scene is quite funny (Google it if you have not seen it) and gets to the point of why pivoting is important. If you don’t pivot, you will get stuck (like the couch did). A great example of what Ross meant comes from the sport of basketball. A pivot is when a player has the ball and keeps one foot in contact with the ground and uses the other foot to rotate their body to improve position. Using a pivot foot, the player can easily change direction and go around an obstacle. For example, they can move away from a defender or even shoot, pass, or dribble. To me, the pivoting basketball player is symbolic of those people who are true to their goals. Stay grounded with one foot firmly planted on the ground, but



stay fluid, keep moving, explore options, and go in new directions while connecting with others. Basketball coaches teach the pivot every season, but the lesson is more important off of the basketball court.

## HOW DO YOU PIVOT?

We as administrators need to pivot all the time, especially when we are stuck. Did you pivot when dealing with staffing shortages, a new/outdated course offering, or how you deliver instruction?

One notable example of our district pivoting in 2022 was adding enrichment activities at a grades 3-5 elementary school for all students. The purpose of this program was to capture the attention of students in a vulnerable stage of learning so that they don’t lose momentum and don’t get stuck on a trajectory that alienates them from school. One of our fantastic STEM teachers initiated Recess Explorers/Makerspace, open to all children during recess several times a week. Activities are “advertised” on the lobby monitor announcements. These hands-on opportunities foster creativity and encourage children to embark on individual learning paths that move forward and generate exciting possibilities. During this time, the students practice working together, sharing, and communicating in respectful ways. Trades Enrichment is a companion program at the elementary level that caters to students who thrive on experiential learning. It teaches such skills as basic carpentry, use of electricity, and sewing.

In the past, we only tended to of-

fer STEM activities that involved math and science. By innovating with this program, we extended STEM reach to students who otherwise might not have participated fully in academic opportunities. Rather than waiting for them to take skills-based classes in their junior year at our local BOCES, we introduced our version of the program early on, while students are actively engaged. These immersive activities have been extremely popular and we are confident that they will figure prominently in continued growth as students mature. Maybe college will be for them – or maybe not. They are being exposed to real-life problem solving that moves them forward, ensuring they will never stop learning and never get “stuck” feeling that their options are limited.

### GETTING UNSTUCK WITH A GROWTH MINDSET

We need to not let being stuck overwhelm us and learn from our circumstances. Growing and learning: that’s what pivoting is all about. By planning or making changes, we are asking ourselves questions and applying our new knowledge to what we truly want to do or what solution we feel is best.

Sounds simple, but in order to be able to pivot, we are also going to need a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006). This means that we believe through knowledge and application we can become better at whatever it is we are trying to do. For example, we might not know how to play piano, but we can learn. We just need to take the time to do it. Sometimes people think if something isn’t easy, then they’re not going to be good at it. We are seeing this more with students, especially after the pandemic. Resilience is a commodity that is often in short supply. We have to echo to our students that sometimes things are hard and take time to eventually learn. When we first learned to drive (if we can remember that long ago), we thought it was the hardest thing in the world. With more experience, it didn’t seem so hard, we just did it (until we had to teach our own children). The same is true for successfully navigating the challenges we face

as leaders. There is a solution: We just need the time, energy, and ability to stay open to finding the best solution. There’s also great optimism with a growth mindset: Even if we are experiencing some difficulty with a specific challenge, we believe we can find a solution. A growth mindset enables us to see the possibilities ahead.

### STAY POSITIVE AND MOVE FORWARD

When we keep an open mind, it enables us to move forward when originally stuck. It seems easy, but we often don’t do it and remain spinning our wheels. In the *Friends* scene already mentioned, Ross sadly states, “I don’t think it is going to pivot anymore.” It is easy to feel this way with all that is on our plate. However, when we stay open, possibilities appear. We never know what will happen next. Rather than dwell on what’s not going right, change direction, and pivot. We keep moving forward and don’t let the past define our future.

It takes courage and creativity to overcome obstacles. A former captain of our high school basketball team (and a strong user of the pivot on the basketball floor and in life) visited our high school in 2022 and spoke with our students about his life and how he has made some big changes. Stuck in a finance job that left him uninspired and struggling with mental health challenges, he pivoted around this obstacle and started a new handmade furniture company, while also dedicating himself to mental health awareness. He stayed true to his core values and convictions by visiting our students and telling his true story. When you make decisions in line with your character, you are creating an intentional path forward.

Remember the word *pivot* and its definition, especially when facing adaptive challenges. It will give us the mindset to stay patient and search for possible solutions when we are “stuck in the moment.” We are often the noun version of the word *pivot* as the centerpiece of our school or district, but the true magic in the word *pivot* comes from its verb definition. It allows us to navigate life’s challenges by stay-

ing true to ourselves while pivoting around life’s obstacles rather than getting stuck.

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PAUL M. FANUELE, EdD, is the superintendent at Spackenkill Union Free School District.

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# Overcoming Our Educational Elephants



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By Laurie Guyon

Elephants are intelligent and often heralded for their ability to support each other. They care for their young and live in harmony with the environment. As leaders, we can learn from elephants to help overcome some of our greatest challenges in schools today. We think of these challenges as the elephant in the room. Through effective leadership strategies, we can learn ways to address the elephant in the room. If we learn to live in harmony, they will become essential to student success. So let's explore some educational elephants and how we can overcome them and flourish because of them.

## I. TECHNOLOGY USAGE

In general, every classroom has access to technology these days. However, before our students touch technology, we should discuss digital citizenship strategies and model safe searching and behaviors. We can focus on what to use technology for to keep the conversation positive.

When I visit classrooms to teach digital citizenship, digital literacy, coding, or how to use a particular tool, I love discussing technology usage with the students. I ask them how they already use technology when not in school. It's essential to hear their voices to understand their abilities and struggles. From there, we talk about how to use technology safely, emphasizing good behaviors. We want to highlight how to use technology for good. We talk about the balance of time on and off devices, the importance of eye contact with others, and knowing that not everything you see online is real. To avoid improper usage as we progress through grades, we must build a solid foundation for our youngest learners. These lessons should not be just a half hour with a guest speaker, but instead an integral part of everything we do when using the technology.

Spending time with our youngest learners will also help them build on their skills to be successful problem solvers, collaborators, and communicators. It will foster their creativity. To overcome one enormous elephant in the room, shift the learning from teacher centered to learner focused. Exploring the use of technology with structured exploration and minimal guidance to start, we can foster students' curiosity and build confidence. If we guide every step, we teach how to comply in school, not how to use technology effectively.

For example, while spending time with a universal pre-K classroom recently, we talked about the ISTE pillars of digital citizenship. We explored what it means to be a good digital citizen through movement activities like balancing on one leg, five-finger breathing, and even playing a fun game of "would you

rather." Activities like these help keep the classroom focused and offer opportunities for students' voices.

## 2. TO BLOCK OR NOT TO BLOCK

Blocking content is another elephant in the room. There is a delicate balance between what we should and should not block. On a basic level, blocking is essential if it's unsafe or fake. However, the waters are muddy if it's a distraction or changes the opportunities for students to get information. Let's look at a topic that has made a lot of news lately, ChatGPT. GPT stands for Generative Pre-trained Transformer. It launched in November 2022 and was quickly blocked by many districts as it allowed students to have their computers generate content for them. Our gut said, let's block this before students stop writing altogether.

Many districts allow the use of Google Classroom's practice sets, Grammarly, and Canva. These programs already use AI-powered programs. Grammarly will check your writing for accuracy and quality. Canva has text-to-image and Magic Write. Google Classroom's practice sets offer support powered by Google Search. So for many of us, we have already allowed artificial intelligence into our schools. A student once told me that they will always find a way around a filter. Instead, this is a perfect opportunity to harness the new technology to live in harmony with this elephant. What if we had ChatGPT write essays but then require students to edit to add in their voice, opinion, research, or more? In a computer science class, students can use ChatGPT to help them with a line of code they are struggling with. In social studies class they can have ChatGPT outline a research paper for them, but then they need to do the research and collect the resources. ChatGPT cannot provide critical thinking, problem solving, or creative writing to a human's ability.

For example, I asked ChatGPT to write me a story about the elephant in the room.

Here is its response (see sidebar):

Once upon a time, there was an elephant in a room. The room was small, and the elephant took up most of the space, but nobody seemed to notice or talk about it. People would come and go, conducting their daily business as if the elephant wasn't even there.

One day, a little girl walked into the room. She looked around and saw the elephant, then she looked at the people and saw that they were pretending not to notice it. The little girl was curious, so she approached the elephant and touched its trunk.

Everyone in the room suddenly stopped what they were doing and turned to look at the little girl. They were shocked to see that someone had actually acknowledged the elephant's presence. The little girl asked, "Why isn't anyone talking about the elephant in the room?"

The people in the room hesitated at first, but then they began to open up and talk about the elephant. They discussed its size, its weight, and its majestic appearance. They also talked about the reasons why they had been avoiding the elephant and why they had been pretending that it wasn't there.

As they talked, the atmosphere in the room changed. The tension dissipated, and the people became more relaxed. They realized that acknowledging the elephant was much better than pretending it wasn't there.

The little girl was happy that she had brought the elephant to the forefront and helped the people in the room to talk about it. From that day on, whenever someone entered the room, they would make a point to acknowledge the elephant and talk about it. The elephant in the room was no longer a taboo topic, and everyone was free to talk about it open and honestly.

And so, the elephant in the room became a symbol of bravery and courage, reminding everyone that it's okay to talk about difficult topics.

If I had pasted this story into Google Docs, I could have used Grammarly to detect mistakes and find better ways to phrase sentences.

There are also ways to detect AI usage. For example, a student at Princeton University created an app called CPTZero. Huggingface.co can also detect a built-in detector. Turnitin is coming out with a product to detect it as well. But this is where the real learning can happen. In the “real world” do we look for shortcuts for tasks? Sure! I have an AI-powered vacuum, an Alexa to answer questions, I choose what to watch next on Netflix based on machine learning, and I drive a car with all kinds of sensors that warn me of dangers.

Instead of blocking this technology, we can have rich conversations with our students. We can explore its efficiency, correctness, and reliability. Every new tech tool or invention is an opportunity to explore new careers, new ideas, and new ways of thinking. What matters is that we take the time to help our students understand how best to use the new technologies, and give them an opportunity to explore its impact and its ethical implications. Let our students guide the conversations and you may be surprised at how they think, how they feel, and what they ultimately decide to do with it.

There have always been challenges to our educational framework. For example, when do you think this quote was written?

“The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise.”

This is a quote from Socrates. Nothing has changed about students; what has changed is technological advances. We still have to help our students understand the world around them.

### 3. INCORPORATING THE COMPUTER SCIENCE AND DIGITAL FLUENCY STANDARDS, SEL, AND DEI, SEAL OF CIVIC READINESS AND ALL OF THE OTHER INITIATIVES

Our teachers only have so many hours in the day to cover the required

curriculum. If you add initiatives, overarching concerns, and current events, the task can be quite overwhelming. This may seem like an elephant that we cannot rise against. And we shouldn't. Instead, this is the perfect time to acknowledge the elephant in the room and find ways to make it work in harmony. Instead of blocking, ignoring, forcing, or an assembly approach, we can take time to incorporate a holistic approach. While this may be time consuming on the front end, the benefits are astronomical on the back end.

If we can move from silos to incorporation, we can use technology for good. We can use the tools we have available to flatten our walls and open our eyes to other cultures, and we can offer opportunities for exploration and foster curiosity. This does not have to be a daunting task. For example, when thinking about how to incorporate more SEL into your schools, think about mini brain breaks that include breathing exercises. Read books and compare the technology from a particular time period to today. Host school-wide cybersecurity takes over days. Better yet, bring in the community and have your students provide instruction on digital literacy, other cultures, environmental outreach, and practicing the digital citizenship skills. Teach digital citizenship, SEL, and DEI in tandem by exploring technology, civics, and current events in history class. Have students create passion projects and invite the community to listen to their ideas. Collect all the data these technology tools offer and have your students find ways to graphically display it.

These activities don't take a lot of planning or time, but can have everlasting results on building community and fostering the skills our students need to be successful. There are many resources and ideas available to you to get started. Reach out to your BOCES for support, attend statewide conferences like SAANYS and NYSCATE, or global ones like



FETC or ISTE, to see how districts are putting all of the puzzle pieces together to overcome their elephants. It can be done and I guarantee it will be worth it.

---

LAURIE GUYON is the coordinator for Model Schools at WSWHE BOCES.

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# Airtight Compartments



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By Andrew Marotta

A lot of people ask me, how do you do it? How do you do it all? How do you get it all done? Your life must be crazy!

Well, I think I'm a little crazy, but in a good way, I enjoy the pressure. I enjoy the journey of creativity, inspiration, and motivation. In short, I am energized and enthused by trying to help others and creating interesting and motivating content.

The real secret, though, is airtight compartments. Think about a submarine or a ship. If the ship were taking on water, people could close the airtight compartments in different sections of the ship to keep it from completely sinking.

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Nothing gets in those airtight compartments, including the seeping water that’s all around.

I do the same with my time. I’m very organized with my time, and very focused on what I want to accomplish. When I’m with my family, I try to put down the phone and be totally engaged with them. While I’m at school, I shut out other distractions, and become totally focused on my staff, students, and stakeholders. When I’m working on other projects, I take my to-do list and put the tasks into those airtight compartments. For example, I’m writing this blog right now, in a 20-minute window between evening meetings. I’m taking the dog for a walk and doing talk-to-text to get it done. I have a list of blogs I want to write, and I know I have a small window to get one done, so I picked this concept and got started.

I learned the term “airtight compartments” from my friend Frank Somma, who is a business coach from New Jersey. Frank shared this in one of our sessions togeth-

er about maximizing your effectiveness in the times you have set.

Distraction, specifically from the cell phone, is so prevalent and such a time sucker. I am also blessed with ADD (it’s a superpower, not a disability) so I’m very cognizant of my blocks of time and what I want to accomplish during those times. I need quiet, my notebook, great internet, and uninterrupted time. Just like the airtight compartments, nothing is getting in, and nothing gets out, so I’m able to focus on the task at hand.

I also know myself and I know I work best in the morning, especially the early morning hours. I would rather go to bed at 8 or 9 o’clock, and get up at 5 or 6 a.m. and work hard until late morning. I’ve learned this about myself. I enjoy waking up, feeling energized, feeling inspired, and wanting to put pen to paper in a creative mindset, whether it is planning for school, creating a workshop, or writing a book. Mornings work best for me.

“The important thing is to make the important thing the important thing!”

- Dr. Rob Gilbert

So how do I get it all done, you ask? #airtightcompartments. Make a list and put those lists into the airtight compartments with no distractions, and no interruptions. Lastly, I love the quote from my friend Dr. Rob Gilbert: “The important thing is to make the important thing the important thing!”

If I can help you in any way, don’t hesitate to reach out at @andrewmarotta21 on Twitter.

ANDREW MAROTTA is principal at Port Jervis High School in Port Jervis, New York. He also hosts the Education Leadership and Beyond Podcast #ELB, and authors the weekly #ELBlog.



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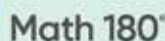
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# The Distraction of Student Cell Phone Use



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By Kevin Calacone, EdD

## THE PROBLEM

The modern cell phone is, without a doubt, the greatest single distraction plaguing public education today. Period. The word our teachers use is *ubiquitous*. To many students, a cell phone is like the air they breathe: they only begin to notice (or care) when they do not have access to it. There are laws against cell phone use while driving, and public spaces such as waiting rooms frequently have signs posted regarding appropriate cell phone use. But what about schools? Why are cell phones such an issue in our classrooms?

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We all have cell phone policies in our codes of conduct, but policy enforcement post-COVID has become an uphill battle...and it is a battle that we are losing. Students have become so accustomed to staring at screens since March 2020 that it is almost impossible to remove this distraction from their hands and pockets. In the 2021-2022 school year, our small, rural school (450 students in grades 6-12) experienced significant increases in fighting, cyberbullying, and insubordinate behavior. Add to this all the TikTok challenges, increased vaping, and vandalism and destruction of our recently renovated school building and it is no wonder why so many educators seriously began to consider leaving the profession by the end of the year.

We soon realized that student cell phone use had become the root cause of the problems we were seeing in our school. We were already planning proactive measures for the 2022-2023 school year to create an ideal school climate for student success. We planned to add a school resource officer to our staff, change our bell schedule to ensure that every teacher had dedicated meeting time and every student had access to an extra help or enrichment period during the school day, and create new opportunities like the Adventure Club and eSports to give students positive school experiences. While we were taking steps in the right direction, we knew we would not be able to make real progress until we addressed student cell phone use.

### THE SOLUTION

By March 2022, we were open to any ideas that would help get our school back on track. At the suggestion of a staff member, we looked into the Yondr phone pouch program. Yondr utilizes a locking neoprene pouch to store cell phones, smartwatches, and other wearable technology. It is used frequently by comedians and performing artists who want their audiences to be engaged in the performance and not distracted by their cell phones. In a school setting, students cannot access their cell phones during the school day while they are locked in the Yondr pouch.

After a few months of research

and discussion, we ultimately decided to take the bold step of partnering with Yondr to create a distraction-free school environment in 2022-2023. The specific dynamics of our district allowed us to move quickly. Our board of education was eager to find a course of action that would improve outcomes for our students, and our leadership team (superintendent and principals) had been building trusting relationships with the community for almost seven years at this point.

### THE PROCESS

We built our campaign around the vision of a distraction-free school environment, not a prison, for students. Our goal was to remove the distraction caused by cell phones and allow students to be fully present in their classes and interactions with others. Resistance to this vision was strong. Students (and families) had grown accustomed to the convenience of carrying and using a cell phone throughout the day. Why should that change now? It should also be stated that our students already carried electronic devices through our one-to-one Chromebook initiative. What did it matter if they also had a phone with them?

Fortunately, we were able to address this resistance successfully by employing the principles we already knew to be effective: open communication with the school community, active listening, and honoring stakeholders' concerns. Through the course of emails, phone calls, in-person visits, and two public forums, we either had or developed answers to all of the concerns presented to us. The most common concern was school safety in the event of an emergency. We were able to inform families that every classroom, office, and gymnasium in our district had a "landline" telephone on which we could dial 911 in an emergency, and everyone in the room had the ability to dial out. This simple fact alone was enough to set many minds at ease.

Another frequent concern was regarding students with medical conditions who needed to use their cell phones to monitor their heart rates or blood sugar levels. In these



specific cases, Yondr supplied us with special pouches that had Velcro seals instead of magnets. This affords the student the opportunity to be a part of the Yondr program while still having access to their device when they need it for medical reasons.

The more we talked to the community, the more we were able to answer their questions and honor their concerns. We eventually reached a point where all stakeholders started their conversations with this key phrase, "We know cell phones are a distraction during class time, but what about...?" It was at this point that we knew that our vision had been clearly articulated and we had built enough consensus to implement Yondr for the 2022-2023 school year. Our program launched on the first day of school in September 2022.

### THE OUTCOME

The benefits of the Yondr phone pouch program have been visible and immediate. Out-of-school suspensions are down 50 percent, and in-school suspensions are down 10 percent compared to last school year. Students are more engaged in their classes. Earbuds no longer pump distraction into students' ears during lessons. Students talk to each other, in person, at the appropriate times. Our cafeteria is noisy again, not because it is chaotic, but because it is filled with active conversations. Students are reporting an improved school climate where they actually interact with each other instead of texting someone who is in the same room (or at the same lunch table). We added a foosball table, a pinball machine, and an arcade-quality air hockey game to our cafeteria for students to engage with each other during their downtime.

Student achievement is also improving since our Yondr phone pouch program started. Course failures have dropped by almost 10 percent already in just the first semester. We had a handful of students sign up for elective courses (some of which carry college credit) when school reopened in September. One student amending his schedule told his counselor, "I'd rather take a class than stare at the four walls of study hall without my phone."

From an administrative standpoint, we have seen a drastic reduction in cyberbullying this year. Students are seeking adult assistance with their problems at a far greater rate than ever before. What used to be a text to a parent from a bathroom stall or a nasty social media post about a negative interaction with a friend has become a visit with a counselor at the Counseling Center or a trip to the office to file a complaint. A distraction-free school environment has helped us all get back to our core mission of helping children succeed. It has also helped countless

times in the investigation process of disciplinary issues. We no longer have to worry about cell phones interfering with the thorough investigation of any incidents that arise during the school day.

**CONCLUSION**

Creating a distraction-free environment has been a game changer for our entire school community. Moreover, it is not just the students who are thriving. Teachers and other staff members have also rekindled their passion for education. One of our teachers attended the New York State United Teachers retirement planning session last May and informed the district that the 2022-2023 school year would be her last. Although she taught some of our most rigorous classes and worked with some of our brightest students, the daily cell phone battles had taken the joy out of teaching. Two weeks into this school year, the teacher reported that she is no longer considering retirement and plans to teach for at least another

five years based on how much the climate in our school has changed. Another veteran teacher met with our superintendent and literally cried tears of joy after having experienced the greatest classroom discussion of the past five years (even before the pandemic), thanks to the distraction-free environment in her classroom.

We had to tackle the issue of student cell phone use. It was the sticking point that was holding us back. A distraction-free school environment is very real and has the potential to positively affect any school community that is willing to pursue it. The challenges are many, and the risk is great, but the rewards of engaged, successful students and empowered, effective teachers are well worth it in the end. No matter what solution your district comes up with, to become unstuck, you need to address the distraction of student cell phone use in your school.

Kevin Calacone, EdD, is the principal of Schoharie Jr./Sr. High School in Schoharie, New York.



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# How to Get Unstuck



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By Alexandra MacKinnon

Many colleagues have noted increased incivility at work during meetings, in emails, or even on quick stops at the grocery. We've experienced it at school basketball games or when waiting for a coffee before the game. National patience is shot, we all seem stuck. It's reflected in our students, exchanges with co-workers, and worse — I've caught it brewing in myself. It's time to self-reflect, get unstuck, and be more civil to one another.

Christine Porath reminds us of this in “Why being respectful to your coworkers is good for business” TED-Talk, 2018, (I’d add, it’s also just good for you.) Porath studies the effects of incivility on motivation, morale, and productivity. The results are what you would expect, although her findings also reveal that acts of incivility (whispering, rudeness, texting in meetings, talking over everyone) are infectious in our workplace environment. In so many words, negativity begets more negativity. Porath draws a direct line between incivility, disrespect, and decreased workplace productivity. It’s the same why-should-I-care-shrug educators often see in their students.

This lunar year marks the Rabbit: a year of hope and kindness. So how do we become unstuck and make 2023 a year based on connection and common purpose? As leaders, we ensure that our colleagues – our talent pool, are treated with respect. Mark Mortenson and Amy Edmondson suggest leaders can move the needle, from transactional relationships where we “reward” employees to relationships based on a shared purpose and connection. One example is a post-pandemic vestige to offer employees hybrid opportunities that initially prove positive but then often lead to a loss of meaningful work-based relationships, decreasing a sense of community. Work is where we spend a majority of our waking hours and days, and as leaders we must actively create space for meaning, purpose, hope, and contentment. The discord seen in the media, workplace, or our communities can be overwhelming. Work life once offered a reprieve to a hostile society but today the sense of mistrust is palpable and seemingly opportunistic.

As a leader, I spend time thinking how to increase civility, harmony, optimism, and equity in our everyday work life. This year, I have witnessed defeatist exchanges between colleagues who felt unheard and slowly seemed less productive. Mortenson suggests that as leaders we move away from solely transactional relationships to a culture of connection where opportunity for growth, support, community, and purpose creates a space

where employees see themselves.

An authentic culture builds morale and naturally fosters employee commitment to the organization. Ways to build an eco-system where employees feel valued, productivity increases, and meetings are more connected, start with sincerity and increased opportunities for civil engagement. Listening to one another, having difficult conversations in person, taking a moment to check in on one another, increasing micro acts of kindness, establishing no-cell-phone meetings, placing value back on the human connection, and placing a check on isolation are all important. In all frontline work, Porath noted small gestures of acknowledgment, like sharing credit for team successes and expressing gratitude regularly, will elevate any workplace. She even suggests by rewarding acts of civility, the act itself can become infectious.

While there is no immediate salve for incivility and pessimism, they are strikingly more noticeable than acts of civility, hope, and kindness. In a time where many of us are frustrated and angry, leaders must be conscious to increase optimism with authenticity; it is not a plug and play. Mark Murphy cautions that “toxic positivity is an excessive and distorted form of positive thinking.” Don’t expect to just insert it into your work environment without intention. Toxic positivity shows our challenges facing the organization in a transparent way and insist on business as usual. Toxic positivity can actually accelerate incivility in the workplace, whereas increased optimism is built on mutual trust and open communication between leaders and employees. Murphy’s company surveyed over 27,000 executives, managers, and employees, and found the risk of ignoring employee feedback had a significant impact on overall morale and productivity. Listening to your employees and increasing levels of optimism decrease acts of incivility and increase productivity and a sense of community.

Our workplace environment is critical to our mental and emotional health. It’s essential to cultivate connection and camaraderie to maximize our human potential. Leaders can sup-

port their employees with transparency and sincerity and show interest in the employee experience; this builds robust organizations. Simon Sinek shares that when leaders get organizational conditions right, they see remarkable things happen. Recently Adam Grant urged us to learn from exemplar employees by engaging them at a “stay” interview rather than kicking ourselves at the “exit” interview.

Good leaders listen to their employees; great leaders ensure employees feel respected, valued, and are purposely part of the workplace community. This is where civility thrives.

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ALEXANDRA MACKINNON is the director of adult education and professional partnerships at Ulster County BOCES, New Paltz UFSD.

# Love Will Keep Us Together

## Love Will Make Learning So Much Better



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By Donna McGuire

Considering the recent events in the world around us, the personal disconnect caused by the pandemic, and societal changes in how we interact with each other, we need to ensure that our buildings are a safe and welcoming space for all. They should be places to learn, feel supported, and know we are loved as we are. We have learned about Maslow's hierarchy of needs in our educational preparation programs. We focus on raising student and staff potential, we encourage everyone to reach their learning goals, and we do our best to provide a safe, nurturing environment that is conducive to learning.

**SURVEY SAYS...**

The 2022 national survey on LGBTQ youth mental health (<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2022/>) surveyed over 34,000 students across the U.S. on topics of mental health, suicide ideation and attempts, as well as anxiety and depression. Data results are graphed by age, sexual orientation, gender identity, and race/ethnicity. The unfortunate reality is more than half of the students considered suicide. Transgender youth have higher rates of suicidal ideation and attempts. Students of color and LGBTQ+ have higher results of suicidal thoughts and attempts compared to white peers. The results decreased when students felt loved, supported, and in a safe space. The survey report also showed data trends across 2020-2022, and the results were alarming. School administrators must reflect on the data depicted in the report and discuss it with various stakeholders, such as instructional cabinets, school staff, parents, and the student council. While some of us may think we are addressing the needs of LGBTQ+ students in our schools, the trend reports indicate otherwise.

**SOME STRATEGIES...**

Statistics can tell a tale, but they do not necessarily have to reflect your school's story. Committing to taking daily steps as a learning community will help ensure that your school offers a conducive learning environment for all.

Start by sharing the common belief that school is a home away from home – and everyone deserves to feel comfortable in his or her home. A student needs to be reassured that they can come to see us at any time. Remind students of this as you visit classes and individually converse with them in the hallways, in assemblies, and during small groups. Encourage staff to foster a nurturing classroom culture and do daily social-emotional checks. Emphasize an open door policy for staff and families in meetings and individual sessions.

- Foster a family atmosphere and refer to your school as your school family. It is vital to the school culture and to everyone

who is a member of our learning community to feel they are part of the school family. Encourage staff to carefully monitor their current students and intentionally check in with their former students. Encourage students to visit and say hello, and to check in with adults, too! Encourage students in upper grades to visit younger classes, assist former teachers, perform for the younger grades, or pair up to be a mentor. Provide extracurricular activities for children to feel proud and empowered. When you provide opportunities for people to make connections, they will feel more connected!

- Establish a Zen Zone, a quiet place for students to visit, if they want to relax or need a space to talk. Create a welcoming space and encourage students to visit if they need to center themselves.
- Consider having new groups or committees at school, such as an equity team for students and an equity committee for staff, a girls' empowerment group, or a student safety team. The groups can focus on making the school environment more safe, welcoming, and nurturing for everyone! Plan activities to celebrate accomplishments and highlight the importance of what individuals can do for the benefit of the whole.
- Staff and student equity teams can participate in a book review, using the Culturally Responsive STEAM Curriculum Scorecard, developed by the NYU Education Justice Research and Organizing Collaborative (EJ-ROC) (<https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/metrocenter/ejroc>). This can be an activity that allows for student and staff voice and choice, as it applies to culturally responsive texts. Using the STEAM scorecard, the equity teams will see how the literature fared. Collectively, they can decide which texts should be read first and present a rationale for their selection.
- What messages do you see adorning the walls when you walk

through the building? Consider interactive bulletin boards with Glows and Grows, random acts of kindness, antibullying pledges and activities, to name a few.

- Create a calendar for a monthly focus on character education and provide resources for the staff. Plan monthly parent meetings on the same topics, with resources to support their children at home. Host a "respect for all" week and follow it up with a month of activities. During assemblies with students, focus on the importance of mental health, not letting anyone sit alone, and advocating for peers when someone seems unhappy or not themselves, by connecting with them and making an adult aware.
- Encourage staff to say something if they see something, contact the counselor, keep team members updated, and inform administrators regarding students and signs of depression, anxiety, etc.
- Encourage students and staff to wear bright colors to show support and solidarity in June. Have a June spirit week to celebrate all of us!
- Do we still need a different color graduation gown for boys and girls? One alternative is to give everyone a white graduation gown and mortarboard and encourage students to design and don the colors, flags, etc. that best represent them. The result is a ceremony filled with a variety of graduation attire that is as unique as the students it represents!
- Zaretta Hammond's *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* (2015) states that for educators to be equity focused, they need to understand there are three key areas within education: multicultural education, social justice education, and culturally responsive teaching. The first area addresses social harmony. The second focuses on social justice, raising students' awareness and critical consciousness of inequities. The third area, a culturally responsive pedagogy,

helps marginalized students build resilience, question the dominant narrative, and foster independent thinking and learning.

- Create more opportunities for student voice by emphasizing student writing and expressing their point of view (POV). Display student writing and accomplishments on the hallway POV boards. The topics should relate to the world we live in and, of course, be aligned with standards. The task should have students use multiple text sources and provide supporting evidence to state their position. As students learn to apply literacy-based skills and strategies, they are also learning how to apply a rubric, articulate their position with their peers, and debate. When students and teachers provide feedback to each other during the writing process, diversity is

embedded into the lesson. Also, students are given the flexibility and freedom to share their voice in ways to make a difference through action-oriented projects!

- During faculty professional development, have volunteers share personal stories each week. Staff members can choose to share their journey with photos, create a slideshow, discuss their background or where they came from, etc. It can be a beautiful way to connect and learn about people they may not have had a chance to know. Encourage teachers to continue this practice in their classrooms. It can be another way to increase trust, tolerance, and support for members of our learning community.

### SUMMARY...

Getting to know our staff is just as important as getting to know our students. What we do during professional development should serve as a model for teachers to try in their classrooms. As leaders, we need to lead by example, and demonstrate and provide the tools, so staff can strengthen communication and cultural sensitivity in their own classrooms. We also need to continue developing a conducive learning environment that is welcoming and loving to all. This will ensure a safer space where everyone is nurtured and can achieve their personal best.

---

DONNA MCGUIRE is the assistant principal for PS/IS 18-Park Terrace School.

## RESOURCES

### LGBTQ+ | Climate | SEL | Self-care | Wellness

The CDC has resources dedicated to this topic  
[https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/safe-supportive-environments/lgbtq\\_youth.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/safe-supportive-environments/lgbtq_youth.htm)

**The Center for the Study of Social Policy**  
[https://cssp.org/our-work/focus/lgbtq/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIs\\_6lyezs-QIVAb\\_ICh-1HzgWGEAAAYASAAEgKtuvD\\_BwE](https://cssp.org/our-work/focus/lgbtq/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIs_6lyezs-QIVAb_ICh-1HzgWGEAAAYASAAEgKtuvD_BwE)

**The Culturally Responsive STEAM Curriculum Scorecard** developed by the NYU Education Justice Research and Organizing Collaborative (EJ-ROC), <https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/metrocenter/ejroc>

**GLSEN**  
[https://www.glsen.org/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIo-77Kq-3s-QIVAo\\_ICh1CAAu6EAAYAyAAE-gKI7PD\\_BwE](https://www.glsen.org/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIo-77Kq-3s-QIVAo_ICh1CAAu6EAAYAyAAE-gKI7PD_BwE)

**PBS Learning Media**  
<https://ny.pbslearningmedia.org/search/?q=lgbt>

**U.S. Department of Education**  
<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/lgbt.html>

**Wallace Foundation**  
<https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/social-and-emotional-learning/pages/default.aspx>

**WNET Education**  
<https://www.wnet.org/education/> has free toolkit for educators. The resources are on a variety of topics, for all grades, and include lessons and videos, all in effort to support the instruction.



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# Maintaining Stability and Growth

in the Athletic Department



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By Dr. Jim Wright and  
Greg Warren

There are not enough bus drivers; there are shortages in subject areas and a lack of substitute teachers; coaches are quitting; administrators are going back into the classroom; and sports teams are losing officials. Yes, of course, there is much more but when it comes to boots on the ground, they just are not there.

Going further, what is happening to coaches, athletic directors, athletic trainers, and officials? Where are they going? Who is to blame?

Let's start with coaches. Young teachers are required to spend countless hours maintaining their certification, and their evaluations are directly connected to those hours of professional development. They have realized that the little money made from coaching (\$3,000-\$5,000 per season) is not enough to make a huge difference when they could pick up similar funds working in a less stressful environment. They also are not adept at handling conflict that ultimately arises from parents and their desire to secure more for their children. Twenty-somethings have not developed the necessary social skills to overcome objections, and they look to the administration for support that may not be there.

Administrators may say that they have other, more pressing issues to deal with. Of course, you do, and in the grand scheme of things how important is it to get involved in a middle school playing time issue? Truth be told, it is important if that coach quits and you are left trying to fill a spot with someone who never played that sport. It is not that easy. Yet, it is correctable.

Very simply, support your coach and their decisions. Do not become that administrator who gives a yes answer to all the "minor" issues. Certainly, if the circumstances are such that a yes IS the answer, then go with it AFTER consulting with the athletic director and coach.

Subsequently, the athletic director falls into that same category. Chances are, you have an athletic director who

has less than five years on the job, and statistically, we know that at least 25 percent of schools have athletic directors with less than three years on the job. We want them to stay on the job. Again, as before, supporting them and permitting them to seek out professional development is critical. The New York State Athletic Administrators Association (NYSAAA) has a program to aid you in supporting your athletic director. It involves a cradle to retirement plan that provides necessary context for new applicants, and young and seasoned athletic directors, and it offers a national certification. We call this program AAMPD (Aspiring Athletic Director, Mentoring, and Professional Development). Logically, it gives you, the administrator, help in molding one of the most critical positions in your district.

The Aspiring AD program is a launching point for those interested in preparing to enter into the world of athletic administration. It is also there to ensure that candidates have the proper context prior to the first interview. In many cases, districts have members of their physical education department who are established teachers/coaches who are ready to take the next step of becoming an athletic administrator.

The Aspiring AD program provides instruction on essential components of the role of the athletic administrator, résumé development, and interview preparation. In the short existence of the program, over 25 candidates who have completed the course have secured jobs in New York State as a director of health, physical education, and athletics.

The mentoring component of the AAMPD program is designed for the athletic administrator with one to five years of experience. Monthly Zoom meetings are offered to participants in the mentoring pro-

gram. Subject areas focus on pertinent areas of athletic administration that are necessary for successfully operating an athletic program. Areas such as 14 legal duties, event management, dealing with difficult personalities, budget development, coaching certification, mixed competition, and DEIB are some of the areas covered in the mentoring component and are presented by veteran athletic administrators from across New York State.

The National Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association (NIAAA) offers quality professional development through its Leadership Training Institute and the 55 courses within the program. The NIAAA Leadership Training Institute and Certification Program are voluntary professional development initiatives designed by athletic administrators. Those who complete LTI courses attain additional knowledge and perspective of the athletic administrator's role and responsibilities. Completion of leadership training courses will enhance the daily operations of the athletic department and improve the programs being administered.

The athletic administrator who attains professional certification will have demonstrated the completion of a comprehensive plan for self-improvement. Individuals involved in both of these programs will enhance their ability to serve the students, school, community, and professional organization within the context of education-based athletics. The NIAAA encourages state athletic director associations to offer NIAAA Leadership Training at the state level.

With the vast turnover of athletic administrators, a need has developed for an educational program to support the new administrators and at the same time offer a professional development program for the experienced athletic director. The certification program is accredited by both NCASA and CASI.

The NYSAAA is able to provide these courses (and does on a monthly basis and at their annual conference) and also provide opportunities to sit for the certification exam for Certified Athletic Administrator status.

Finally, why is certification important? This is a question that has



been asked across the country, and still superintendents and principals fail to grasp the importance of supporting a pathway toward a separate and distinct certification that recognizes an athletic director’s commitment to improving their role.

The typical director of health, physical education, and athletics possesses a CAS or AGC in administration. However, the athletic director employed in smaller districts often does not carry this type of certification. In fact, they might only have a high school diploma. Student athletes and their parents deserve the opportunity to participate in a quality interscholastic athletics program in their district. A certified athletic administrator leading the program can help to ensure a positive experience.

At the recent National Athletic Director Conference (NADC), over

2,700 athletic administrators – a record-breaking number – were in Nashville, Tennessee, engaging in professional development. At last count, over 900 of these were new to the profession and attending for the first time. Turnover is happening rapidly and there is a noted shortage of qualified candidates available. Certification is needed now, more than ever, for the position of athletic director.

The NYSAAA is celebrating its fortieth conference this year, a testament to the commitment of so many to ensure that the student athlete receives the best possible playing environment and that the district is free from vulnerability to litigation. These principles are shared no matter where you look and should be appreciated by all members of the school community. We have offered to you ways to ensure

that this happens and that those hired will stay on the job and work to recruit others into the profession.

But we cannot do it without the support of school administrators and boards of education. Help us to be recognized properly and support our mission to designate the position of athletic director as one needing specific certification.

---

DR. JIM WRIGHT, CMAA, is the associate director of the NYSAAA and a retired director of health, physical education, and athletics at the South Huntington UFSD.

GREG WARREN, CMAA, is the president-elect of the NYSAAA and the director of health, physical education, and athletics at New Paltz CSD.

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For more information about this program, contact Karen Bronson, SAANYS director of professional learning, at [kbronson@saanys.org](mailto:kbronson@saanys.org), or Bonnie Tryon, SAANYS mentor coordinator, at [btryon@saanys.org](mailto:btryon@saanys.org).





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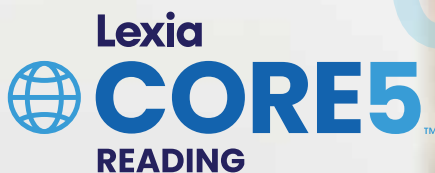


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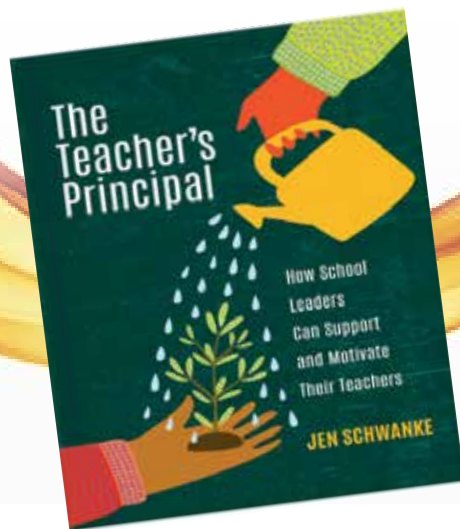
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If you are feeling that motivating staff and elevating morale is getting harder, you are not alone. At a 2022 leadership symposium sponsored by EdWeek, low teacher and staff morale ranked high on the list of issues school leaders cited as having the greatest impact. The first ever Merrimack Teacher Survey, done in conjunction with EdWeek Research, found that less than half of the respondents feel that they are respected and viewed as professionals. A quick look at social media reveals a flood of 'unhappy teacher' and staff videos where unsurprisingly, much of the blame is directed toward school leaders. Many times we learn the hard way that even actions meant to boost morale can backfire.

SAANYS and NYSASCD are excited to have Jen Schwanke, EdD facilitating a three-day summer

series focused on this important topic of motivating staff and improving morale. In addition to being a longtime educator who has taught and led at all levels, including 17 years as a principal, Jen is an author of three ASCD books, including: *The Teacher's Principal: How School Leaders Can Support and Motivate Their Teachers*; *You're the Principal, Now What?*; and *8 Ways to Revitalize Your School Leadership*. She is currently a co-host of the popular podcast, *Principal Matters*, and is a deputy superintendent and an instructor in educational administration at Miami University of Ohio.

**This three-session virtual workshop is designed to be relevant to all school leaders:** principals and assistant principals, as well as directors, essential service leaders, and central office leaders. **The e-book *The Teacher's Principal* is included with all registrations.**

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