



# School Administrator

JUNE 2020

ESSENTIAL INSIGHTS AND COMMENTARY FOR SCHOOL SYSTEM LEADERS

## Amplifying Student Voices

Authentic learning from school publications and other peripheral experiences

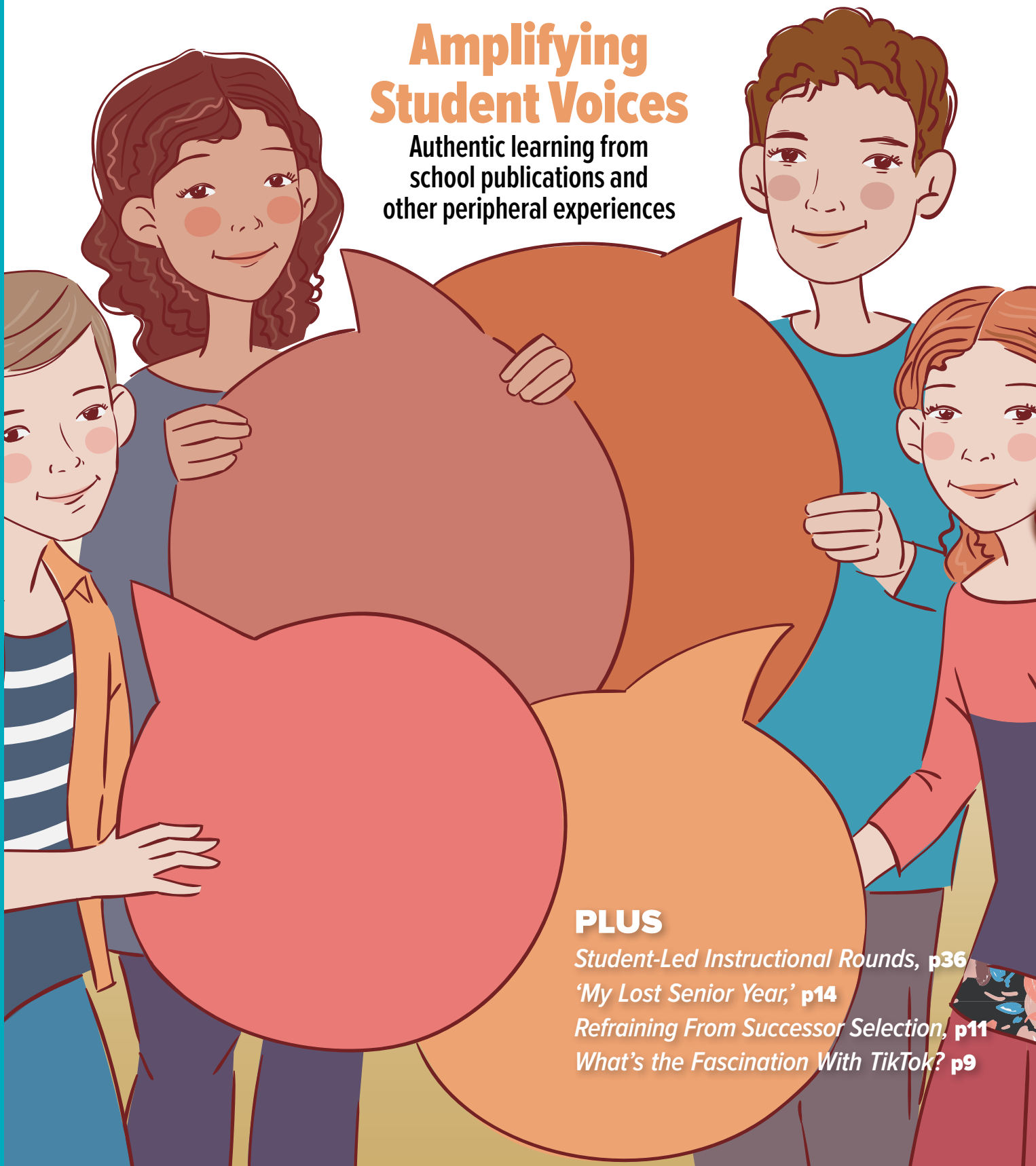
### PLUS

*Student-Led Instructional Rounds, p36*

*'My Lost Senior Year,' p14*

*Refraining From Successor Selection, p11*

*What's the Fascination With TikTok? p9*





NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON  
EDUCATION

# SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

FOCUSING ON THE

# TOTAL CHILD

SAVE THE DATE

FEBRUARY  
18-20,  
2021

Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, New Orleans

[WWW.AASA.ORG/NCE](http://WWW.AASA.ORG/NCE)

Presented by

**AASA**  
THE SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS ASSOCIATION

# Make grading and reporting practices honest, accurate, meaningful, and fair

"Simply put, if you want the most comprehensive and authoritative treatment of this topic, then **you need this book!**"

—Jay McTighe, educational author and consultant



"*Get Set, Go* is **an essential read for educators** taking on the challenge of transforming their grading and reporting systems."

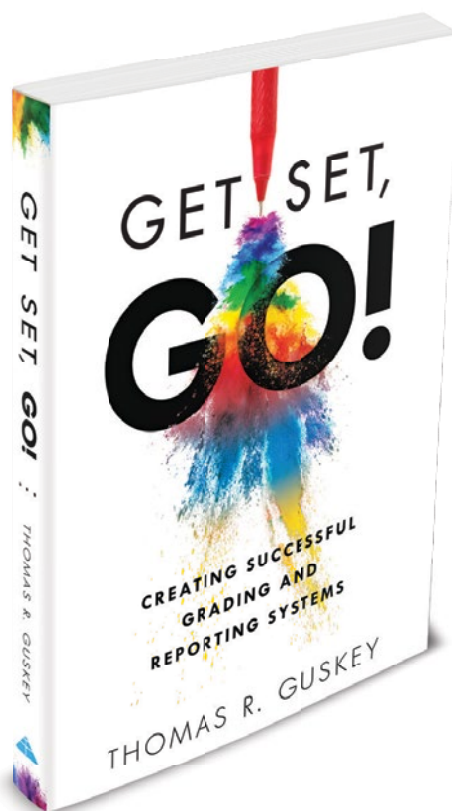
—Katherine T. Smith, high school administrator, educational consultant, and author

"I found myself **nodding along on nearly every page.**"

—Alexis Wiggins, author

"*Get Set, Go* is one of those rare books that **artfully bridges the divide between research and practice.**"

—Lu S. Young, executive director of the UK Center for Next Generation Leadership



"Guskey's latest **magnum opus.**"

—Michael L. Smith, director, American School of Valencia, Spain

"*Get Set, Go* is the **ultimate grading resource** and will have readers returning to it time and again."

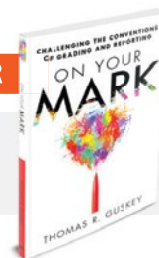
—Laura Link, assistant professor, educational leadership & policy, College of Public Service

"*Get Set, Go* has **leapt onto my personal list of essential reads** for educators committed to making grading practices work for student learning."

—Andrew Maxey, director of special programs, Tuscaloosa City Schools

Pair your book study with the companion resource, *On Your Mark*

**BESTSELLER**



**ORDER TODAY**

SolutionTree.com/**GetSetGo**  
**800.733.6786**



**Solution Tree**



# SchoolAdministrator

JUNE 2020 • NUMBER 6 VOL. 77

## 18 How Voice Empowers Personalized Learning

BY BENA KALLICK AND ALLISON ZMUDA

Through field-based experiences, the authors have identified four attributes for building a supportive culture inside schools.

### 21 A definition and four attributes

22 Andrew Houlihan: Continuous improvement through voice

## 24 Powerful Learning at the Periphery

BY JAL D. MEHTA

Routes for making students as excited for school before the final bell as they are for what comes after.

26 Jason Glass: Our district's experience with deeper learning

## 28 Giving Voice to Students Through Published Words

BY MICHELLE R. DAVIS

Educators testify to the authentic learning and 21st-century skills that scholastic newspapers and online publications bring to students' educational experiences.

31 Amy Besler: Voice through the student press

32 Jay Goldman: Students addressing a viral pandemic

34 Terry Armstrong: My support of student press freedom

35 Four steps toward a high-caliber journalism program

## 36 Student-Led Instructional Debriefings

BY JOANNE BUCKHEIT

An unusual iteration for classroom observations that amplifies student voice at a school in Staten Island.

## 40 Redefining School Culture With Listening

BY PATRICIA JENSEN AND KRISTA RATCLIFFE

A process that hears the voices of students, teachers and administrators equally for building a responsive climate.

43 Additional resources

## 44 Elevating Voice Through Social & Emotional Learning

BY MELISSA SCHLINGER

Ways for students to practice skills as decision makers and problem solvers.



*"I was genuinely moved by the students' responses to my question about what makes their school so special. They spoke effusively about their school, the adults who work there and the experiences they have had."* **PAGE 13**

## FRONTLINE

### 6 STARTING POINT

The profound impact of student journalism in amplifying student voice and delivering real skills.

### 6 STATE OF THE SUPERINTENDENCY

#### What Lies Ahead?

What do current superintendents see themselves doing five years hence?

### 7 BEST OF THE BLOGS

Thought-provoking excerpts from four AASA members' recent blog postings.

### 8 ETHICAL EDUCATOR

#### A Split Decision

A tough call for a head librarian dealing with a part-timer on maternity leave and her highly diligent substitute.



### 9 SOCIAL MEDIA

#### Understanding Student Fascination With TikTok

BY BRIAN G. RICCA

The superintendent in St. Johnsbury, Vt., views the popular video app as a force for good during a time of physical distancing.

### 10 TECH LEADERSHIP

#### Future-Proof Your One-to-One Program

BY ROBERT GERARDI JR. AND STEPHEN WOICK

A choose-your-own-device practice yields maximum flexibility for students in a Massachusetts district.

### 11 BOARD-SAVVY SUPERINTENDENT

#### When Exiting, Refrain From Successor Selection

BY PEG PORTSCHELLER

Is there an appropriate departing role for the outgoing superintendent when the board is conducting its search?

### 12 MY VIEW

#### Proactive Support of Budding Principals

BY JEFF EAKINS

What it takes to construct a preparation path for high-quality principals.

### 13 MY VIEW

#### Student Voice: Are You Really Listening?

BY KEVIN GODDEN

From his monthly conversations, what does this superintendent learn about students' experiences?

### 14 MY VIEW

#### Don't Feel Bad for My Senior Year

BY ELLIE FRIEDMAN

A high school senior carries a forward-looking spin on the "senior experiences" disrupted by the public health crisis.

### 16 MY VIEW

#### A Sense of Urgency

BY KIMBERLY PIETSCH MILLER

A superintendent's intent to be responsive to stressed students who are feeling a need to "do it all."

## RESOURCES

### 48 BOOK REVIEWS

- ▶ *100-Day Leaders: Turning Short-Term Wins Into Long-Term Success in Schools*
- ▶ *Civility Lost: The Media, Politics and Education*
- ▶ *Committing to the Culture: How Leaders Can Create and Sustain Positive Schools*
- ▶ *Ready for Anything: Four Touchstones for Future-Focused Learning*
- ▶ *Step In, Step Up: Empowering Women for the School Leadership Journey*

Also, Colonial Heights, Va., superintendent **William Sroufe** on why he authored *Everyone Needs a Mrs. Bailey*

### 50 ABSTRACT

#### Trust Building

Doctoral findings on trust building between administrators and teachers.

### 52 PRESIDENT'S CORNER

#### Courage, Compassion and Self-Care

BY DEBORAH L. KERR

An unprecedented journey that calls for true leaders to rise to the challenges.

### 54 EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE

#### One Pandemic Plus: Greater Voice for Students

BY DANIEL A. DOMENECH

One of the few upsides to emerge from the public health crisis' impact on schooling.

### 58 PEOPLE WATCH

A monthly record of professional career moves by AASA members.

### 59 PROFILE

#### Samantha M. Fuhrey

BY JULI VALENTINE

The superintendent in Georgia's Newton County redefines the fight against poverty.

## PLUS

### 4 READER REPLY

### 60 LEADERSHIP LITE



**School Administrator** (ISSN 0036-6439) is a benefit of membership in AASA, The School Superintendents Association, 1615 Duke St., Alexandria, VA 22314. Telephone: 703-875-0772. Fax: 703-841-1543. Annual membership dues in the association are \$460 (active members), of which \$110 covers a subscription to *School Administrator*. *School Administrator* is published monthly except July. Send address changes to AASA, Membership Division, 1615 Duke St., Alexandria, VA 22314. Copyright 2020 by AASA. All rights reserved. Printed in USA.

Susan Enfield and Kristine Gilmore contributed **AN AMAZING ARTICLE** (“Women on a Plateau in the Superintendency”) to your March issue. I thoroughly enjoyed it, then scanned a copy and sent it to several of my district’s female senior leaders who aspire to be superintendents.

Their article will positively **CHANGE THE TRAJECTORY** of many female school administrators across the country who hope to serve in the superintendency. I hope they both understand the impact they are having on our profession. It is greatly appreciated.

**DAVID SCHULER**  
SUPERINTENDENT,  
TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 214,  
ARLINGTON HEIGHTS, ILL.

## Women on a Plateau

I was heartened and inspired to read Susan Enfield and Kristine Gilmore’s article. The concept of who can “legitimately” lead a school district and how has been shaped to privilege white men and has long roots in the literature on the superintendency.

As a white, male leader in our schools, I implore my white and male counterparts, who still dominate the leadership roles of most school systems in this country, to take Enfield and Gilmore’s article seriously. It’s way past time to actively disrupt the overtly white and male constructions of the original, century-old conceptions of who can do this work at high levels.

A moral responsibility exists to disrupt the “good ol’ boys club” that still permeates this profession and for men and women alike to find roles as advocates and allies for the women leaders we know and work with, to help ensure that the glass ceiling finally is torn down and that gender balance in the

## Correction

The preview box on the book reviews page in the April issue incorrectly spelled the name of Jal Mehta, co-author of *In Search of Deeper Learning*.

superintendency and other high-level leadership roles in America’s school systems will be realized.

**MICHAEL A. COPLAND**  
DEPUTY SUPERINTENDENT,  
BELLINGHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS,  
BELLINGHAM, WASH.

What an outstanding article, co-authored by my superintendent, Kristine Gilmore, on women and the superintendency. (I’ve known her since she was a student in my American history seminar in 1985.) She was destined early for a top leadership position in the community.

What she faced as a female district administrator is clearly outlined in the article, but nothing I really thought about until now. I was particularly surprised by how a community and the public hold females to a higher bar. Her comments about being seen at public functions and having community members question “who’s watching the kids?” really took me by surprise. That people would question why she was at her children’s school events rather than spending time working for the school district was simply shocking.

**PAUL ALECKSON**  
K-12 SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM COORDINATOR,  
D.C. EVEREST AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT,  
WESTON, WIS.

## Equity Audits

I was intrigued by the process of an equity audit that George Theoharis and his colleagues described in “Harvesting the Garden of an Equity Audit” (February 2020), based on their work in the Syracuse, N.Y., City School District.

In working with my district team in Hornell, N.Y., I’ve developed an interest in conducting some type of self-assessment or audit of our practices and our people. I believe we have some issues relative to equity and bias that we haven’t really ever spoken about. As such, I plan to follow up with Theoharis to discuss how we might proceed.

**JEREMY PALOTTI**  
SUPERINTENDENT,  
HORNELL CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT,  
HORNELL, N.Y.

**LETTERS SHOULD** be addressed to: Editor, *School Administrator*, 1615 Duke St., Alexandria, VA 22314. Fax: 703-841-1543. E-mail: [magazine@aasa.org](mailto:magazine@aasa.org)

EDITOR  
**Jay P. Goldman**

MANAGING EDITOR  
**Liz Griffin**

SENIOR EDITORIAL ASSISTANT  
**Jacqueline Hyman**

DESIGN/PRODUCTION  
**David Fox, AURAS Design**

PRINTING  
**Lifetouch National School Studios Inc.**

## HOW TO REACH US

**EDITORIAL SUBMISSIONS:** Query letters and articles relating to school system leadership are welcome. Author guidelines and an editorial calendar are available on the magazine’s website.

**SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR**  
1615 Duke St.

Alexandria, VA 22314

TEL: 703-875-0707; Fax: 703-841-1543

E-MAIL: [magazine@aasa.org](mailto:magazine@aasa.org)

WEBSITE: [www.aasa.org](http://www.aasa.org)

**LETTERS TO THE EDITOR:** Letters may be submitted to the editor for consideration. Letters may be edited for clarity and length.

**CHANGE OF ADDRESS:** AASA members can report changes of address by phone (703-875-0748), fax (703-841-1543) or e-mail ([info@aasa.org](mailto:info@aasa.org)).

**BACK ISSUES:** To order, call 703-875-0707.

**ARTICLE ARCHIVES:** Past issues can be accessed at [www.aasa.org](http://www.aasa.org). Articles are also available through these document services: EBSCO ([www.ebsconet.com](http://www.ebsconet.com)), ProQuest ([www.proquest.com](http://www.proquest.com)) or Cengage ([www.gale.com](http://www.gale.com)). Microfilm and microfiche are available from ProQuest (800-521-0600).

**REPRINTS AND PERMISSIONS:** Quality reprints of articles can be ordered in quantities of 25 or more. To order, call 703-875-0707. Requests for permission to reproduce or distribute copies of an article for academic or professional purposes should be submitted to the editor at [magazine@aasa.org](mailto:magazine@aasa.org).

**ADVERTISING INQUIRIES:** For a media kit and advertising information, contact Kathy Sveen, TEL: 312-673-5635.

*The views expressed in School Administrator do not necessarily reflect AASA policy nor does acceptance of advertising imply AASA endorsement.*



## MISSION STATEMENT:

AASA, The School Superintendents Association, advocates for equitable access for all students to the highest quality public education, and develops and supports school system leaders.

# From **simple** to **sophisticated.**

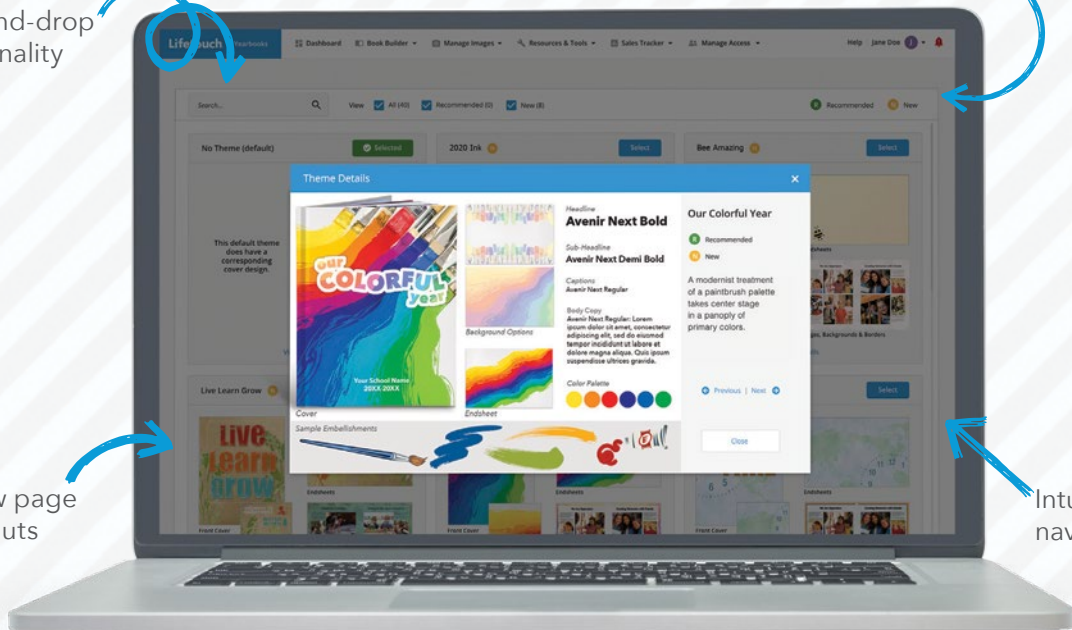
Introducing our new Lifetouch Yearbook Creation Tool.

Enhanced  
drag-and-drop  
functionality

12 new themes

New page  
layouts

Intuitive  
navigation



We make it **fun** and **easy** to tell your school's story.



Picture Day images  
automatically upload for you  
to flow onto pages.



Build pages effortlessly:  
choose a layout, add images  
and captions and you're done.



Inspirational resources and  
tools for every stage and  
every page.

[schools.lifetouch.com/yearbooks](https://schools.lifetouch.com/yearbooks)

# Lifetouch®



## STARTING POINT

### The Exercise of Student Voice

**TRUTH BE TOLD**, the work I do now as editor of a monthly magazine had its launching point back in high school. I took a journalism elective course as an 11th grader taught by an outstanding teacher and subsequently joined the monthly student newspaper that led to an after-school sports reporting job with my hometown daily.

Scholastic journalism has had its ups and downs and taken some different directions in the decades since, yet student publications continue to serve the important purpose of amplifying student voice, the theme of this month's issue. Students who work on their schools' yearbooks, newspapers, news magazines, video programs and online publications are getting opportunities to practice real-world applications of effective communication and creative thinking skills — exactly what schools ought to be delivering these days.

Readers will find considerable attention to this underappreciated facet of scholastic journalism. Our coverage includes some thoughtful positions of support by school system leaders (pages 31 and 34) and a piece about student journalists keeping their communities informed during the pandemic crisis in spite of being confined to their own homes (page 32).

Harvard researcher Jal Mehta lends further support (page 24), calling attention to the valuable learning that students receive in peripheral aspects of their schooling, notably their after-school extracurriculars.

Perhaps there's never been a more important moment for the exercise of voice. Educators ought to do what they can to flex their students' muscles.

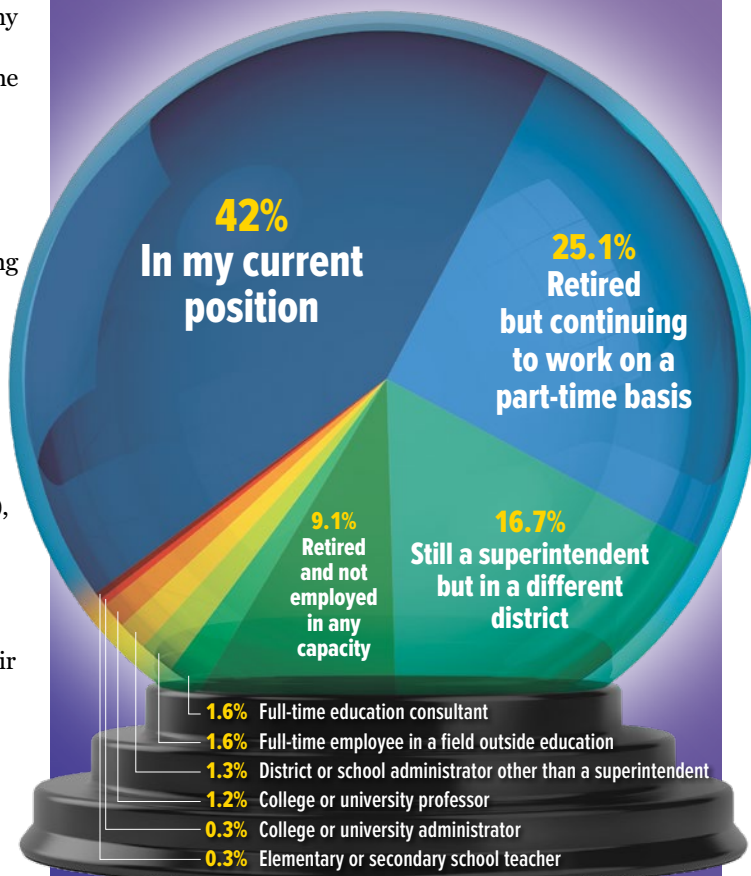
*Jay P. Goldman*  
**JAY P. GOLDMAN**  
 EDITOR, SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR  
 VOICE: 703-875-0745  
 E-MAIL: JGOLDMAN@AASA.ORG  
 TWITTER: @JPGOLDMAN



*"Number three is Mr. Hugo, my kid's 7th-grade teacher — the one whose exam contained questions not covered in the assigned reading."*

## STATE OF THE SUPERINTENDENCY

### What do you expect to be doing in 2025?



### Five Years From Now

Where do those working as superintendents in 2020 expect to be professionally in five years?

According to an AASA nationwide survey, nearly 60 percent intend to be superintendents in 2025, which is nine percentage points higher than the decennial study found in 2010. Of those, almost three of four expected to remain in their current districts.

Of the superintendents who intend to retire by 2025, a quarter hope to continue working part-time.

**SOURCE:** "The American Superintendent 2020 Decennial Study," published by AASA with editor Christopher H. Tienken. Full details at [www.aasa.org](http://www.aasa.org).



## BEST OF THE BLOGS

“[R]emember what makes you a truly great teacher. Not because you have a fancy

online platform or because you’ve assembled tidy bundles of learning activities for your students — but because you build connection, build confidence and you build community every single day. You can do the same things online.”

From “What My Online Students Taught Me” by **Jill M. Siler**, superintendent, Gunter Independent School District, Gunter, Texas, on her blog Values-Driven Leadership

“[W]e have been thrown into uncharted territories with neither a map nor a captain who has previous experience on this journey. ... Our approach is to take on a learning stance.”

From “Our Learning Organization” by **Judy Paolucci**, superintendent, Smithfield Public Schools, Smithfield, R.I., on her blog Super Scoop

Read the full postings of these and other members’ blogs at [www.aasa.org/SAblogs.aspx](http://www.aasa.org/SAblogs.aspx).

“[W]hat matters are not the things that did not go well, it is what I get to do daily: hug my kids, run, breathe, bake cookies with my son, tell silly riddles, help someone find a new way of doing something.”

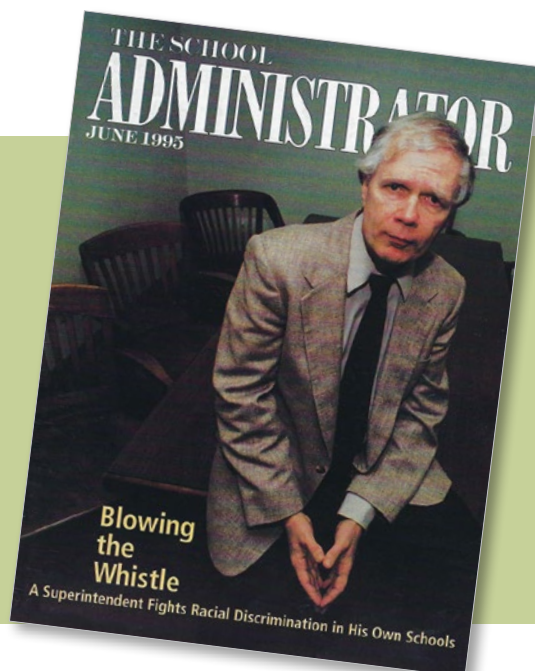
From “The Seed” by **Kristen Paul**, principal, Barrington Middle School, Barrington, Ill., on her blog Kristen Paul, Principal

“[C]reating opportunities for learners to direct their own learning and take control of their learning could be more critical now than ever before because of how much of what is happening in our world is out of our control.”

From “Student Choice/Voice During School Closures” by **Tony Sinanis**, assistant superintendent for human resources and leadership development, Chappaqua Central School District, Chappaqua, N.Y., on his blog Leading Motivated Learners

## FLASHBACK JUNE 1995

The cover story by Corkin Cherubini detailed why he filed a federal civil rights complaint about his own district in Morgan, Ga., for racial discrimination. ... Other full-length articles examined using research to improve student learning, with separate contributions by two research-using superintendents, Robert Manheimer and Renfro Manning. ... Gene Bottoms of the Southern Regional Education Board reported on school programming for career-bound students. ... AASA policy specialist Nick Penning addressed a proposal in Congress that would lead to the creation of vouchers. ... Letters to the editor commented on past coverage of administrators’ pay-for-performance contracts, outcome-based education and superintendent performance evaluations. ... AASA President Homer Kearns titled his President’s Corner “Leaders Reach Out to Their Communities.” ... Profile subject: Michael Flanagan, superintendent of the Wayne County, Mich., Educational Service Agency.



## A Split Decision

**SCENARIO:** The head librarian at a 2,500-student high school has two direct reports, one of whom works 10 hours a week. A diligent worker, she is out on a three-month childbirth leave but wishes to return. The chief librarian hires a fill-in, who proves to be even more hardworking and independent. As the leave nears its end, the young mother seeks an additional month at home. The librarian wonders whether to accede to the request and, once she does return, to keep both workers for five hours a week, which strikes her as a paltry number of hours. The school's principal learns of the matter. What guidance might he provide?



**MEIRA LEVINSON:** The assistant librarian's request for an additional month at home is separable from the question of whether she is due her full hours when she returns. The head librarian *could* use the request as a way to wangle concessions from her employee: "I'll give you the extra month if you agree to work five rather than 10 hours a week when you return." But this would be ungenerous.

Frankly, granting the request seems like a win-win because the new mother wants the additional month at home and the replacement librarian is more efficient and effective at the job.

The question is then how to manage the assistant librarian's return. Rather than assume five hours a week is too "paltry" to consider, the chief librarian should ask both if they'd consider splitting the job. If the original assistant wants to keep her 10-hour schedule, though, then the head librarian should grant her request because workers should have confidence in their rights to their jobs upon returning from parental leave.

**MAX MCGEE:** Delegate up! This matter is one for the human resources director because there are certain to be policies and

laws related to leave practices.

If there is no higher authority to make the decision, the principal must let the young mother know she needs to return to work at the end of the three-month leave or must resign. If she returns, her replacement will need to be let go with a gracious, sincere formal letter of appreciation that she could use for a future reference. If she does not return, the replacement should be strongly encouraged to apply.

**MAGGIE LOPEZ:** The principal needs to clarify with the librarian that he will not support cutting the employee's hours.

Policy and labor law should further clarify his decision. The employee on leave is entitled to return to her job with the expectation that her leave didn't jeopardize her hours or position.

The decision as to whether to extend the employee's childbirth leave for another month should be guided by district policy, which the principal can apply as appropriate.

Further, the principal needs to emphasize to the librarian the need from here on to inform him when considering high-stakes decisions.

**SHELLEY BERMAN:** A 10-hours per week employee is generally employed at will, giving the librarian discretion for handling this situation. The librarian should honor the leave extension both as an appropriate

action to support the original employee and to further assess the fill-in worker. Her first commitment should be to help the original employee develop the assets demonstrated by the fill-in.

The librarian should be cautious about retaining the fill-in. To warrant such a decision, past evaluations of the original employee would need to show deficiencies, which is unlikely. Otherwise, the new mother might have justification to file a discrimination claim against the district. If the librarian makes a change, it should be at year's end or after a performance review.

Alternatives could include the principal's finding resources to hire both individuals or referring the fill-in worker to other district librarians. The fill-in could be a valuable employee elsewhere in the district.

Each month, *School Administrator* draws on actual circumstances to raise an ethical decision-making dilemma in K-12 education. Suggestions for dilemmas may be submitted to [magazine@aasa.org](mailto:magazine@aasa.org).

The Ethical Educator panel consists of **SHELLEY BERMAN**, superintendent, Andover, Mass.; **MEIRA LEVINSON**, professor of education, Harvard University; **MAGGIE LOPEZ**, retired superintendent, Colorado Springs, Colo.; and **GLENN "MAX" MCGEE**, president, Hazard, Young, Attea and Associates in Schaumburg, Ill. Expanded analyses appear in the magazine's online edition.

See the panelists' full analyses of this case and read the AASA Code of Ethics at [www.aasa.org/SAethics.aspx](http://www.aasa.org/SAethics.aspx).

# Understanding Student Fascination With TikTok

**TO TIKTOK OR** not to TikTok is the wrong question. The reality is, TikTok is where our students are in 2020, now more than ever because most of them are not attending their physical schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

If this is where our students are, why are we not meeting them there?

Several years ago, Twitter was considered to be not much more than a place where you could find out the latest dish on the Kardashians. Yet at the most recent AASA national conference in San Diego, there was an entire social media lounge, several organized Twitter chats and a focus group on the final day about the professionally encompassing presence of Twitter among superintendents.

Twitter is way more than a place to access the latest gossip. It's a place where individuals can connect based on the merit of the ideas, and it's the best professional development I've ever participated in while wearing my pajamas.

## A Public Service

So what is TikTok? From its website: "TikTok is the leading destination for short-form mobile video. Our mission is to inspire creativity and bring joy." It is where our students are recording and sharing videos, capturing the moments in their lives they want to memorialize forever (even if they don't yet know it) and share for all to see. It's how they are making their mark on the world. But they're not the only ones who are using TikTok.

Consider Dr. Danielle Jones, a gynecologist in College Station, Texas. According to a recent account in *The New York Times*, Jones is using TikTok because she hopes to "counter medical misinformation to a surging audience." Think of it as a viral public service announcement.

Truth Initiative, a nonprofit public health organization committed to eliminating tobacco use, used a TikTok challenge to urge teens to quit vaping. The #ThisIsQuitting TikTok challenge came on the heels of a national campaign launched in January that led to more than 1.8 billion views on TikTok and more than 365,000 TikTok user-created videos intended to help young people nationwide quit vaping.

I think of this as a no brainer, but I know as the leader of a 600-student school district that

students in 2020 are still trying to vape, using items that look like a USB storage drive. I can use all the help I can get.

## Digital Missteps

Are there shortcomings to TikTok? As with any social media, of course there are. I have seen plenty of examples of students (and adults) running amok on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. As appealing new apps emerge, we see where our students gravitate, and we must go with them. We must expand their understanding of digital citizenship and digital footprints and the dangers that digital missteps could mean for their future.

But we can't dwell here on the downsides. We want our students to use their superpowers of social media for good. Now is a time when TikTok can make connections for students and teachers, due to social distancing and closed school buildings. Now is a time to embrace creativity and use TikTok videos for multiple means of expression, so our students can show us how they're learning.

If we only consider the downsides to social media, would Twitter be as professionally prevalent as it currently is? Would Facebook even have gotten off the ground? Would SnapChat even be a "thing"?

I believe that the staying power of different social media platforms is crowd-sourced — the ones that survive are the ones used by the masses. Do you remember Friendster, MySpace and AOL Instant Messenger? Of course you do, but they're no longer relevant.

TikTok is relevant right now, so now is the time to see what all the fuss is about.

Consider this: Instead of the five-paragraph essay, how about a 2½-minute video? Now is the time to allow students to use TikTok to engage with their world, not run from it.

Jennifer Abrams, an education consultant who works to improve the voice of leaders, talks about getting into "necessary trouble" to do our work authentically. This is the necessary trouble of leadership in 2020 and beyond. If our students are using an app to interact with their world, we need to know about it, and we need to be there. If we don't, their world will literally pass us by while our heads are in the sand.

**"Now is a time when TikTok can MAKE CONNECTIONS FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS, due to social distancing and closed school buildings."**



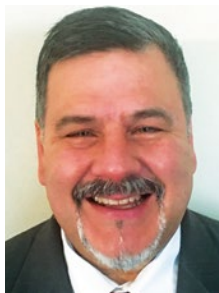
**BRIAN RICCA** is superintendent of the St. Johnsbury School District in St. Johnsbury, Vt. E-mail: [bricca@stjbsd.org](mailto:bricca@stjbsd.org). Twitter: @BGRiccaVT



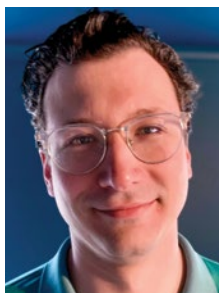
## Future-Proof Your One-to-One Program

**DURING OUR TIME** as administrators in the Maynard Public Schools in Massachusetts, we created a distinctive program we called Choose Your Own Device, or CYOD, to provide the widest technology application opportunities for students and staff.

At the time, Maynard, a school district with 1,300 students, had moved from traditional desktop applications to wireless one-to-one technology. But the one-to-one models still locked users into device-specific programs. CYOD offered greater flexibility. Our efforts to build an innovative and sustainable CYOD program could serve as a roadmap for other school districts.



**ROBERT GERARDI JR.** is finance director at Minuteman Regional Vocational Technical School District in Lexington, Mass. E-mail: RGerardi@minuteman.org. He formerly served in Maynard, Mass.



**STEPHEN WOICIK** is technology director at Agawam Public Schools in Feeding Hills, Mass. and formerly served in Maynard, Mass.

### Developing Options

In the beginning, we followed other innovative districts by choosing to be device-specific. We became an Apple district with iPads and Apple TV hardware. Over time, the G-Suite platform and low-cost Chromebooks were hard to resist, and we shifted from one platform to another.

As we became more sophisticated about the use of technology in the classroom, we discovered that no single device met the needs of all learners. We looked to outside industries to help solve this problem. Finding inspiration from the business world, we developed CYOD.

The goal of every device program is to provide students and teachers with access to technology that makes learning easier, faster and more adaptable. Forcing students to use a single device helps them understand how to work specifically with Google, Apple or Microsoft, but we felt students should have options for using a device that best fits their needs, learning styles and comfort level.

CYOD provides flexibility for students to choose their own devices and not be forced into being a user of our district's choosing. The devices are issued by the school, and the instructional technology department manages and supports the devices and network. In the first year, students were offered an iPad, Chromebook or Chrome tablet. Windows, Mac and Linux laptops were the expansion plan.

### Grade-Level Plans

The implementation plan in Maynard is as follows:

- ▶ K-4 students use a variety of these devices as classroom computers. They try out different platforms to see what best fits their learning style.
- ▶ 5th-grade students can choose their own device for one-to-one. This device will stay with them through 8th grade.
- ▶ 9th-grade students again choose the device they want to use for the one-to-one program. This device will last them through high school. When they graduate, they can purchase the device at a reduced cost, although they are not required to.

### Financial Plans

Beyond the educational benefits, this program provides budget stability through diversification. Prices go up and down every year. Educational discounts don't last forever. CYOD builds a program that doesn't lock someone into a vendor's platform and force the user into an upgrade expense cycle. Also, a district avoids needing to significantly increase its budget in one year because of being locked into a contract with one vendor.

Another budget benefit is that the infrastructure is in place to implement new technology almost instantly without incurring additional overhead. A device-agnostic infrastructure provides a plug-and-play system to support various innovations and changes in technology.

Most importantly, our students and staff are device-agnostic in their personal lives. Why would we force students into a device-specific environment? Let them use the device they are most comfortable with. This maximizes learning and lowers the barrier of entry for technology in the classroom.

As for our current school districts, Minuteman is device-agnostic based on industry needs for individual vocational programs. Agawam is further developing its CYOD program.



## When Exiting, Refrain From Successor Selection

**THERE COMES A TIME** when, as superintendents, we head for the exit door. This can happen as we ponder retirement, as we seek employment elsewhere or as the board of education for whom we work chooses not to renew our contract.

Regardless, it behooves us to leave our position with grace and humility. To serve as the CEO/superintendent of an organization is indeed an honor.

As I assumed my first superintendency, I found an envelope addressed to me in the top drawer of my office desk. The note card, written by the outgoing superintendent, still holds a prominent place in my box of memorabilia. It said simply, "I wish you all the best and hope that your time here brings as much joy as I have experienced. In spite of challenges here, there and everywhere, miracles abound." The note also said champagne would have been included but board policy and state law prohibited liquor on district property.

What a warm, wonderful surprise.

### Nonparticipant Role

As one departs, what is one's role relative to assisting the board in the search process for a successor? Quite simply, short of some dramatic circumstances, there is none.

Often, the board of education, in seeking a new superintendent, will lean toward emphasizing the skills, abilities and experiences that may have been a bit deficit in the departing superintendent. If the outgoing leader was strong on fiscal and business matters, bond issues and facility oversight, the board may seek someone strong in relationships, culture and team building.

Boards are best served when they secure an external partner with whom to work in the search and selection process. These partners (McPherson and Jacobson; Ray and Associates; Hazard, Young and Attea; state school boards associations, etc.) can and should assist in identifying criteria in the selection of the next superintendent and establishing a process for the search. And while the final decision rests with the school board, it is wise to include the voices of employees, parents, business owners, seniors, civic leaders, students and others

in discussions about the skills, attributes and capabilities sought in the next leader.

At times, the board may directly ask the outgoing superintendent to assume a role in the process. While we may be tempted to assist, it is best to steer the board toward engaging with a firm.

Recently, a superintendent who was retiring inserted himself into the process, attempting to steer the board toward candidates he supported (presumably for noble reasons). Fortunately, the board had contracted with a search firm and the firm's consultants, upon learning of this, accompanied the outgoing superintendent to the proverbial woodshed, reminding him it was *their* job to assist the board in their search and selection. The outgoing superintendent was directed to refrain from participating in the search process. It is in everyone's best interests to keep the process "clean."

### Steering Clear

In another district, a superintendent decided to retire after experiencing health issues. Because several critical initiatives were underway, she believed it best to shape the process herself to ensure a friend was selected. The entire situation went south when former board members serving on the citizens' committee insisted the board "take control of the process." The superintendent ended up departing early, and no one was well-served.

In yet another case, a board of education asked the outgoing superintendent to lead the search. While everyone involved may have had good intentions (it surely saved money), things quickly turned ugly when the board became disenchanted with the new superintendent six months into his tenure and blamed the past superintendent. No district needs this kind of chaos. Money spent on a quality search firm is money well spent.

Of the many statutory responsibilities held by school boards, perhaps none is more important than selecting the district's superintendent to lead the community forward. The greatest way for sitting superintendents to contribute is to stay out of the way and be as supportive as possible at arm's length ... and as gracious as possible to one's successor.

**"The greatest way for sitting superintendents to contribute is to **STAY OUT OF THE WAY** and be as supportive as possible ..."**



**PEG PORTSCHELLER**, a retired superintendent, is president of Portscheller & Associates in Parachute, Colo. E-mail: [pegp5@comcast.net](mailto:pegp5@comcast.net). Twitter: [@pportsch](https://twitter.com/pportsch)

## Proactive Support of Budding Principals

**TEN YEARS AGO**, we were a school district that lacked clarity around how to effectively and strategically support schools. Don't get me wrong, a lot of staff from various divisions were working tirelessly to support the schools, but to our schools, this help seemed reactionary and, in many cases, not sustainable.

We had to look at ourselves in the mirror and ask, "Why have we created such a reactive system of support?"

The answer became clearer and clearer each time we were charged with filling a principal vacancy. Our candidate pool was drying up. Newly appointed principals were entering their roles lacking the support and

training to develop as effective building leaders. This was not fair to them.

Our system was reactive because of a growing lack of trust with principal effectiveness in our schools. We had to rebuild that trust by rebuilding the process for preparing and supporting our principals. And we had to be more intentional.

### Molding Incomers

Enter the Wallace Foundation and its support of our school district in building a high-quality principal pipeline. It was a game changer.

The Principal Pipeline Program is strategic. We encourage qualified teachers to apply for the Future Leaders Academy. From there, these candidates go through the Assistant Principal Induction Program, where we begin to mold them into the leaders we want them to be. After three years, an assistant principal can apply for and begin a course of study focused on hands-on experience relevant to the principal role. The final stage is the Principal Induction Program.

Each of the programs is grounded in a set of leadership standards, which are the driving force behind all parts of our comprehensive pipeline. The standards drive candidate recruitment, selection, pre-service training, hiring, on-the-job support and evaluation of school leaders.

### Deliberate Backing

Within a few years, we had more great principals ready to lead our schools. Now we had to create a better districtwide support system for them. We needed strong people in central roles who knew how to give proper support.

We established a new system of area superintendents and principal coaches who also had an understanding of effective instructional leader-

ship. We ensured everyone on the pipeline was working under the same instructional lens.

We also recognized the importance of preventing our great leaders from burning out. We are deliberate about this. We allow different departments to be more strategically responsive to the needs of our schools and not just create a haphazard system of support.

One area where we've been more responsive is our higher-needs schools — we call them our Achievement Schools. Not only do these schools receive their own highly specialized team of district leaders and supports, but the process to become a principal of one of these schools is even more intense. The candidate must complete the pipeline, have at least two years of experience as a principal and go through turnaround leadership. A system of specific support encourages and guides candidates the entire way.

### Resources Remain

Another benefit of the pipeline is how fiscally responsible it is. It allows us greater clarity to make more effective financial decisions that are sustainable. The money from the Wallace Foundation grant is gone, but the pipeline and the resources in place to support it remain.

In short, the pipeline created great principals and our shifts in support enabled these leaders to succeed. We created a strong line of accountability that aligned the supports for principals and allowed the rest of the organization to support their schools in their own areas. We got out of our own way. By doing so, we put in place a system that sets our schools and our district up for success.

**JEFF EAKINS** retired in March as superintendent of Hillsborough County Public Schools in Tampa, Fla. E-mail: jeffeakins65@gmail.com

## People Promotions



*School Administrator* wants to know about AASA members' appointments to new posts, upcoming retirements and significant honors so we can include you on our **People Watch** page.

Send your news to [magazine@aasa.org](mailto:magazine@aasa.org).

**SchoolAdministrator**  
ESSENTIAL INSIGHTS AND COMMENTARY FOR SCHOOL SYSTEM LEADERS

## Student Voice: Are You Really Listening?

**I MADE A** commitment earlier this year to have focused meetings on a monthly basis with students in our secondary schools as an integral part of my school visits. I am doing so because it models the importance of engaging students and I gain valuable insight into whether our schools are working for them.

One recent meeting was with about 10 seniors at our school district's alternate school, Bakerview Centre for Learning. (As an aside, I find it curious that we use the term "alternate" to describe the things that go on in this school. The students make a strong case that their experiences are anything but alternate.)

### Adult Connections

I was genuinely moved by the students' responses to my question about what makes their school so special. They spoke effusively about their school, the adults who work there and the experiences they have had. Among the more pointed comments were these:

- ▶ "We have a great connection to the staff here."
- ▶ "They teach us how to take responsibility for our actions."
- ▶ "I have choices about how, when and where I learn."
- ▶ "People here sincerely care about us. We would hate to disappoint them."
- ▶ "I am respected."
- ▶ "They use different ways of teaching to help us be successful."

The students spoke at length about the academic and emotional support they receive from the staff, as well as from a myriad of community agencies such as the medical clinic and counseling services affiliated with the school. It was overwhelming for me to hear, and I wish some of their teach-

**"... I wish some of their teachers could have been in the room to witness HOW THEIR STUDENTS FELT ABOUT THEM and the conditions they created for them to be successful."**

ers could have been in the room to witness how their students felt about them and the conditions they created for them to be successful.

The students described their school as a community. Someone mentioned that the school's culinary program allows them to cook lunch for each other every day, and the group spontaneously erupted in applause.

I followed up with a question about what might make their school even better. Among their thoughtful and heartfelt responses, the primary concern had to do with physical activity and sports. While they appreciated the weight gym in their school, they also wished for more opportunities to play a wider range of sports. Some expressed a desire to have better access to some elective options and career programs that were available to other students in the district. They spoke about having greater access to experiential learning opportunities in the community.

### Adults Who Care

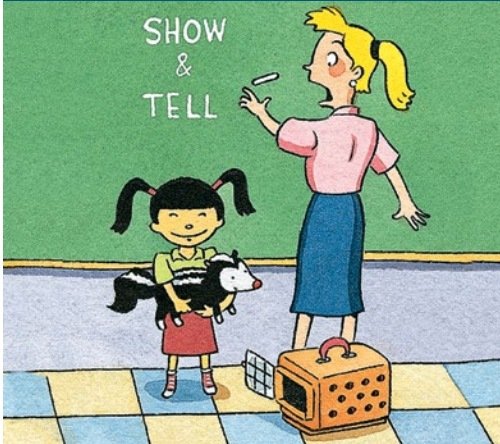
Perhaps the most poignant part of our conversation was prompted by this question: "Can you name three adults who care about you?" Every student at the table immediately raised his or her hand. Several said that this was the main difference between their current and former schools. Again, I wished the staff members were present to hear how warmly the students spoke about them.

As the conversation wound down, I was asked what I was going to do with the information they shared. I told them that I would share what I learned with my colleagues and hopefully use it to help guide our mission to create more life-changing experiences for students.

The students expressed sincere appreciation that I would make time to hear their perspectives. This meeting was hands down the best part of my work week.

**KEVIN GODDEN** is superintendent of the Abbotsford School District in Abbotsford, British Columbia. E-mail: Kevin.Godden@abbyschools.ca. Twitter: @KevinGodden1. This column is adapted from the author's blog.

## Funny Encounters



*School Administrator* is interested in hearing amusing anecdotes related to the work of school administration for possible use in **Leadership Lite**.

Tell us about the light-hearted moments in your office, during school visits, at school board meetings and ventures into the community.

Send your humorous episodes to: [magazine@aasa.org](mailto:magazine@aasa.org)

## SchoolAdministrator

ESSENTIAL INSIGHTS AND COMMENTARY FOR SCHOOL SYSTEM LEADERS



## Don't Feel Bad for My Senior Year

**AS A HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR** who has been incredibly involved in my school and community, I've had some time of late to consider how my final year of school is coming to a most unexpected conclusion.

Because my school district (like most of the schools throughout Michigan) last conducted in-school classes on March 13, I have been doing a lot of reading and reflecting on the global economic, political and social impacts of COVID-19. Like, a lot.

And after hours of consideration, I have come to the conclusion that my lost "senior experiences" don't really matter in the grand scheme of things. Of course, I always have looked forward to helping out with graduation

**"... though teaching and learning may not be able to take place in a physical way, THIS SENSE OF COMMUNITY CAN'T BE STOPPED by a global pandemic."**

speeches, receiving recognition at Senior Honors Night, leading my last school club meeting and dancing with my friends at prom. But when viewed in the context of broader developments, those experiences seem largely unimportant. The economy has been crashing, the presidential administration has seemed lost in responding to a real crisis, and a dangerous virus was spreading without check across the country and around the world.

While experiencing drastic and sudden changes to my daily routine, I began to realize I had to accept the loss of my senior-year festivities as necessary.

### Feeling Grateful

I have seen social media posts encouraging readers to pray (specifically for the graduating class of 2020), and I appreciate people's concern for me and others who will miss the face-to-face activities that accompany senior year. If anything, these event cancellations only have given me added perspective on what I can be grateful for, including the family, friends and teachers and to be mindful of what I do have control over.

I have been using my extra time at home to study topics that interest me. I reach out to my friends (virtually, of course) and tell them how much their presence means to me. I will cherish my high school diploma and high school experience even more because it will have one hell of a story behind

it. I will enter college in the fall with meatier issues to focus on in my policy and education studies at Michigan State University, and I hope that challenges from this pandemic can serve as a catalyst for even larger strides toward true educational equity.

To high school seniors, I say it's OK to be upset. It's OK to ponder everything that could have been. But I encourage my classmates to consider how this unprecedented turn of events can prove to be a good thing.

### Personal Connections

I have tried to stay positive during this period of physical distancing, which can affect mental health. That is just another reason why students and staff should continue to connect with each other during these unprecedented times.

At its core, education is important to me because of the sense of community that a school generates. And though teaching and learning may not be able to take place in a physical way, this sense of community can't be stopped by a global pandemic. Changing the nature of these crucial interactions to digital forums has been difficult for school communities, but it is a challenge that is prompting students, teachers and administrators in school communities to find innovative ways to celebrate students, especially the graduating seniors.

Regardless of how the final weeks of my senior year play out, the COVID-19 pandemic will fundamentally change our world. I know, though, that we can endure the changes and hardships and lift one another up if we reach out and work together. We can do this.

**ELLIE FRIEDMAN** is a senior at Walled Lake Central High School in Commerce Township, Mich. E-mail: elliefrieds@gmail.com. Twitter: @elliefrieds. The author adapted this column from an earlier version appearing in the *Detroit Free Press*.

## Shining A Sidelight



Do you train therapy dogs, sing in a barbershop quartet, collect antique autos or own a skydiving school?

If you're an AASA member with an unusual avocation or talent, we want to shine the spotlight on you in the magazine's **Sidelight** section, appearing regularly on the **People Watch** page.

Send a note about your distinctive interest to: [magazine@aasa.org](mailto:magazine@aasa.org).

**SchoolAdministrator**  
ESSENTIAL INSIGHTS AND COMMENTARY FOR SCHOOL SYSTEM LEADERS

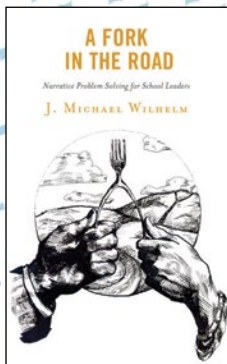


# **“AN INVESTMENT IN KNOWLEDGE PAYS THE BEST INTEREST.” —BENJAMIN FRANKLIN**

## **THREE NEW 2019 RESOURCES FOR TODAY’S SCHOOL LEADERS**

NEW from  
**AASA**  
THE SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS ASSOCIATION

and co-published with  
**ROWMAN &  
LITTLEFIELD**



### **A Fork in the Road** **Narrative Problem Solving** **for School Leaders**

By J. Michael Wilhelm

“Everyone loves a good story. Veteran Superintendent Mike Wilhelm has captured the essence of a day in the life of a superintendent. Through 12 relevant and timely case studies, Mike dives into the complexity of the role of a superintendent and the myriad of issues they face ranging from relationships with school boards, administration, policy development and current issues such as the perennial presence of technology in our schools. Easy to read, and easier to relate to; the case studies provide real-life issues of running a district...”

—*Eileen King, executive director,  
Maine School Superintendents Association*

2019 • 150 pages  
978-1-4758-4632-4 • \$25.00 • Paper  
978-1-4758-4631-7 • \$50.00 • Cloth  
978-1-4758-4633-1 • \$23.50 • eBook



### **The Emerging Work of** **Today's Superintendent** **Leading Schools and** **Communities to Educate** **All Children**

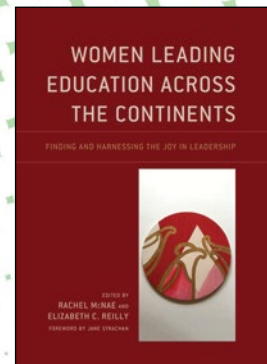
By Philip D. Lanoue and  
Sally J. Zepeda

“Philip Lanoue and Sally Zepeda describe a changing educational and community landscape that requires new questions to be asked by superintendents and school leaders. *The Emerging Work of Today's Superintendent* creates a context for leader reflection as today's educational system is redesigned to educate ALL children to reach their full potential.”

—*Robert Avossa, superintendent, The School  
District of Palm Beach County, West Palm  
Beach, FL*

“Lanoue and Zepeda will help the educational leader carry an effective voice on behalf of the district and become a champion for the children within the community and beyond.”  
—*Daniel A. Domenech, executive director,  
AASA*

2018 • 184 pages  
978-1-4758-3551-9 • \$33.00 • Paper  
978-1-4758-3550-2 • \$70.00 • Cloth  
978-1-4758-3552-6 • \$31.00 • eBook



### **Women Leading Education** **Across the Continents** **Finding and Harnessing** **the Joy in Leadership**

Edited by Rachel McNae  
and Elizabeth C. Reilly

“*Women Leading Education Across the Continents* is groundbreaking and sets the agenda for women leadership in education while creating a cultural shift and empowering mechanism. The rich voices presented in the different chapters set the stage for cross-sectional understanding of women leadership and equitable education praxis in different nation states which makes the book of a global value.” —*Khalid Arar, associate editor, International Journal of Leadership in Education; author, “Arab Women in Management & Leadership”*

2019 • 230 pages  
978-1-4758-4071-1 • \$27.00 • Paper  
978-1-4758-4070-4 • \$100.00 • Cloth  
978-1-4758-4072-8 • \$25.50 • eBook

Call 1-800-462-6420 toll Free and mention promo code **“AASA20”**  
to receive the 25% AASA member Discount!

## A Sense of Urgency

**IT'S LUNCHTIME** on a Tuesday and my high school student advisory council has joined me for our regular meeting. They arrive with meals in hand, greeting one another and me. Sometimes I have a specific agenda item for them, and sometimes they just begin talking. Today, they wanted to return to a topic we had discussed over the course of the year — their social and emotional wellness.

In particular, the 12 kids around a conference table wanted to address the pressure they feel to “do it all” in the pursuit of getting into the “right college.” These are kids who love their school and their community.

They know they are fortunate to be in a community where education is valued. But they are feeling pressure most adults did not feel during their high school years.

The students, mostly sophomores and juniors, didn't want to vent or complain. These students shared ideas of how we could make it better. They are so smart about it. They know there isn't an easy fix or one variable we need to shift. They recognize a local culture of high expectations, the American drive to achieve, pressure on parents for their kids to succeed, stress on teachers to deliver high test scores ... and peer pressure.

But they also are looking to the

adults to help to make it better. They are looking at us to do something. That is where the sense of urgency comes in.

### Picking Up Pace

At the end of the meeting, one of the students said, “I appreciate that you are listening. But I am a sophomore. Will I get to experience some of the changes and progress before I graduate?” My answer was that if he doesn't get to see it, knowing that change is slow, I will feel a sense of failure.

We are at a crossroads in education. We know suicide is on the rise, mental health and wellness are growing concerns across our country,



# THE AASA LEADERSHIP NETWORK

SHARING • SERVICE • SUPPORT



**The AASA Leadership Network** is a valuable resource dedicated to advancing your career. We offer programs that will build your leadership skills, grow your connections with your community, and provide exclusive insight from effective and successful colleagues.

**WEBINARS** offer insight into ongoing and emerging issues.

**COLLEGIAL COACHING** and mentorship opportunities provide personalized feedback.

**CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS** build your network, strengthen strategic planning and provide expertise from leading superintendents.

**COLLABORATION** through cohorts and summits enhances your skills and knowledge.

**Become a part of the largest, most diverse network of superintendents in America.**

**[AASA.ORG/LEADERSHIPNETWORK](https://aasa.org/leadershipnetwork)**

and the pressure to perform is out of control. We also know it is difficult for us to make changes because someone will not like it. Someone will want to hold on to what makes them comfortable even if it doesn't put students at the center of our decision making.

However, our fear cannot stop us from making changes that allow us to positively impact the development of each of our students. Our students are counting on us. And I feel a sense of urgency for that student who asked me for help with all the hope that I, or that we, could provide it.

### Encouraging Risks

So what can we do? We can encourage students to take courses they have a passion to study. They don't need a

**“They don’t need a full day of AP courses to be successful. Stop telling students to do things because ‘it will look good on your college applications.’ Let’s PROMOTE EXPERIENCES THAT DEVELOP THEIR PERSONAL INTERESTS and spark their curiosities.”**

full day of AP courses to be successful. Stop telling students to do things because “it will look good on your col-

lege applications.” Let’s promote experiences that develop their personal interests and spark their curiosities.

Also, we should teach students how to solve problems instead of solving problems for them. Maybe even let them fail. Taking risks, facing challenges and learning to carry on when times get tough will build the grit to navigate the multitude of life’s challenges they will inevitably face.

Finally, let’s assure our kids it is acceptable to take some downtime. Everything in life is not about getting to the next rung on the ladder. Sometimes, it’s OK to just be a kid.

**KIMBERLY PIETSCH MILLER** is superintendent of the Bexley City Schools in Bexley, Ohio. E-mail: kim.miller@bexley.us. Twitter: @KimMiller\_Learn. This column is drawn from a post on her blog.

# Blogging Alert



Read what superintendent colleagues are blogging about on [www.aasa.org/SAblogs.aspx](http://www.aasa.org/SAblogs.aspx).

You'll find excerpts on the magazine's **“Best of the Blogs”** page.

**SchoolAdministrator**  
ESSENTIAL INSIGHTS AND COMMENTARY FOR SCHOOL SYSTEM LEADERS

# How Voice Empowers Personalized Learning

Through field-based experiences, the authors have identified four attributes for building a supportive culture inside schools

BY BENA KALLICK AND ALLISON ZMUDA

**S**chool communities are reimagining policies, practices and technologies to personalize student learning in the here and now of the classroom as well as anticipating the uncertainties of the future.

Schools often adopt technologies that require students to navigate instruction through a series of topics independently and that communicate how students are growing in relation to desired outcomes.

However, technology needs to be disentangled from personalized learning to adapt to a culture that is personal and relational. A noticeable shift unfolds in a school's personalized learning culture when every teacher's voice is respected and given weight. Teachers

can harvest the seeds of their ideas, imaginings and innovations, and effective thinking and problem solving flourishes.

Our field-based experiences with hundreds of schools around the world helped us generate four key attributes that help educators build a personalized culture. These attributes, in conjunction with a clear definition for personalized learning, provide a guiding framework to help us know how to design and measure learning in that culture.

## What Others Say

Voice honors the learner as essential to the learning process. When developing voice, it is as important to listen to what others have

ILLUSTRATION © ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/OWASIMODO





to say as it is to learn how to voice your own thoughts. Often, when we are listening closely to another, we begin to seek greater clarity about what the other is trying to express. We raise questions that help to clarify our understanding and we pay attention to what the other person is thinking and feeling.

At the same time, as we establish our own voice, we try hard to choose words that help express our thoughts with specificity. So, for example, instead of saying “everyone thinks that is the case,” we might say “when I was at the meeting the other day, I heard at least three people say that this is the case.”

Growing voice through building habits of mind that focus on both expressing yourself and thinking clearly about what it is you really are trying to say is an essential key to the sense of empowerment we want all learners to experience as they engage with the world. When everyone in the personal learning community commits to such habits, trust grows. Disagreements or misunderstandings can be worked through a process of learning from one another and effective problem solving.

### Incorporating Voice

In Southern California, principal Eric Chagala leveraged design thinking when he transformed the public school he founded, Vista Innovation and Design Academy, with the existing staff. VIDA is a magnet school serving about 750 6th through 8th graders in the Vista Unified School District that teaches students to apply creative thinking skills to nontraditional solutions to real-world problems.

Chagala focused on growing the talent of his teaching staff to manifest engagement and commitment by including the voices and experiences of his faculty. He believes it is nearly impossible for teachers to inspire and support creativity, growth mindset or risk-taking in their students when they do not have self-efficacy in those domains themselves.

The heart of the academy grew from imagining. He asked at the outset: “What have you always wanted to do with students that you have never been able to do?” He turned those wants into new, specialized elective classes and/or other opportunities on campus to engage their strengths, interests and values. Through his leadership, Chagala developed a work climate that would make teachers jump out of bed, put both feet on the ground and want to run to school each day.

In another setting, when Vermont began to move to a statewide proficiency-based system by articulating subject-area standards and transferable skills that relate to college and career readiness, Sam Nelson, a middle school social studies teacher, took up the challenge to empower the voices of his 7th- and 8th-grade students to articulate what this would mean in their units of study.

Nelson, who teaches social studies and humanities at the Shelburne Community School in Shelburne, Vt., set up a system in which all students collaborated on the initial curriculum design anchored in the proficiencies. Students continue to develop the curricular document both in full-class discussions and on a weekly basis with the school’s student planning committee as they tweak and implement each of the unit plans.

In Brooklyn, N.Y., consultant Giselle Martin-Kniep co-created a program with the teacher-leaders of Middle School 88 to promote students’ voice in civic discourse by engaging them in frequent controversial issues such as the role of police in local neighborhoods. Through discussions and classroom deliberations, they gained a deeper understanding of different perspectives rather than arguing and solidifying polarized positions.

To increase their voice in the ownership of their inquiry, inform their research and prepare for deliberations, students develop and refine their voice through their own inquiry questions. The results lead to opportunities to assess their own cognitive biases and to recognize the biases in the voice expressed through the mass media.

In Madison, Conn., superintendent Tom Scarice wanted to provide “elbow room” for teachers



**Principal Eric Chagala with enthusiastic students at the Vista Innovation and Design Academy in Vista, Calif.**

PHOTO BY ERIC CHAGALA



**Bena Kallick (left) and Allison Zmuda are co-authors of *Students at the Center: Personalized Learning with Habits of Mind*.**

to explore and take action on personalized learning. Teachers initially voiced their worries and need for permission to take risks and try innovative instructional approaches in a safe environment. That means withholding judgment as an administrator and offering support in developing and refining instructional practices.

Scarice created what he called an “innovation space” with a consultant and a group of volunteer teachers to test and refine ideas. Individual projects flourished. In anatomy class, each unit was launched with a case study and students then navigated instructional choices to more deeply understand the content and propose a diagnosis/treatment. In high school English classes, students increased their role in the evaluation and grading of their own writing, while pre-calculus students reflected on current performance, determined areas of challenge and sought resources to improve their fluency and understanding.

In addition, teachers in the Madison schools continued to share their thinking with their students and with one another as they personalized their instructional strategies.

In Wisconsin, when Pat Deklotz became superintendent of the Kettle Moraine schools in 2006,

she was asked by her school board to transform the school district into a 21st-century learning environment that attends to academic achievement, citizenship and personal development.

Her first move was to set up an inclusive system to engage the voice of the school community. She created leadership councils at the district and school level and, as they gradually learned how they would like to meet this challenge, decided the school district would use the habits of mind, an identified set of 16 problem-solving, life-related skills most recently appearing in the 2018 book *Cultivating Habits of Mind: A Quick Reference Guide* co-authored by one of us (Kallick) and Arthur Costa. These habits served as a framework in the Kettle Moraine schools for defining and implementing that elusive question of personal development.

*continued on page 23*

## A Definition and Four Attributes

First, our definition: Personalized learning is a progressively learner-driven model where students deeply engage in meaningful, authentic, and rigorous challenges to demonstrate desired outcomes.

### Four Attributes of Personalized Learning



#### VOICE

Increasingly more open to share their thinking



#### CO-CREATION

Thinking interdependently to construct and take action on ideas



#### SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

Building network and connections to seek out and share expertise



#### SELF-DISCOVERY

Reflecting on learning and gaining insights through self-knowledge

**SOURCE:** *Students at the Center: Personalized Learning With Habits of Mind* by Bena Kallick and Allison Zmuda



# Student Voices Inform Our District's Progress

BY ANDREW G. HOULIHAN

I began to understand the power of student voice when I taught 2nd grade almost 20 years ago. Every afternoon, my students led a reflective activity that identified the many positive aspects of their day as well as ways to improve the following day. This practice empowered them to develop strategies that improved the overall culture of our classroom.

Ever since, I have carried similar approaches to amplifying students' voices throughout my career as a principal, central-office administrator and now superintendent of a 41,500-student school district.

After being named superintendent in 2016, I encouraged the Superintendent's Student Advisory Council, consisting of 55 students in grades 10-12, to share feedback about school district operations. This enabled me to understand the pulse of our schools.

## Invaluable Input

The students' feedback was invaluable and led to the adoption of budget recommendations that included free, in-school College Board examinations as well as additional school counselors. This helped us connect more students to higher

education opportunities and ensured additional counseling support to help students navigate academic and peer pressures and prepare for the competitive job market.

In 2018, we decided to forego the typical keynote address during our Summer Leadership Institute, a professional development conference for school leaders. Instead, we featured a panel of high school students who discussed the most effective ways they learned in their courses.

That summer institute also marked the official launch of EmpowerED, an instructional framework developed by our school system to encourage students to connect, collaborate and create in the classroom. The ideas the student panelists shared pushed our leaders to understand how student feedback could influence instructional strategies.

Several months later, the EmpowerED framework began to take hold in our schools.

Inspired by the television show "Shark Tank," 3rd graders at one of our elementary schools spent weeks researching real-world challenges. Working in small groups, they pitched their solutions to a panel of "sharks" consisting of business profession-

als and district staff, who decided which project would win the grand prize.

I was amazed to see young students working collaboratively, conducting research and presenting viable solutions to complex challenges, such as litter in New York City and bats in Austin, Texas. Most importantly, the 3rd-grade teachers took a step back and let students lead their own learning. The school's principal also said the Shark Tank project encouraged other teachers to tweak lessons in a way that would incorporate more student voice in their classrooms.

## Impactful Pitches

As superintendent, I share these kinds of lessons with educators throughout our district. That is why our 2019 Summer Leadership Institute began with a similar experience for school leaders: EmpowerED Shark Tank. Participants were charged with developing a design for their school that would allow for greater learning. After presenting their pitches to a panel of EmpowerED staff experts, the finalists presented their pitches to a new group of sharks.

Can you guess who served on the surprise panel of sharks? You bet — our students!

This experience encouraged our leaders to push their own thinking when addressing their school's problem of practice in relation to the implementation of our EmpowerED framework. It also encouraged teachers to think beyond their traditional practices. As a result, our schools have collectively shifted their focus toward creating an environment that incorporated student voice at a much higher level.

At the district level, the student advisory council's feedback continues to help guide our decisions. We regularly seek ways to amplify their voices during professional development conferences. Giving voice to students, we expect, will lead to greater performance gains in our schools.

**ANDREW HOULIHAN** is superintendent of Union County Public Schools in Monroe, N.C. E-mail: [andrew.houlihan@ucps.k12.nc.us](mailto:andrew.houlihan@ucps.k12.nc.us). Twitter: @AGHoulihan



Union County, N.C., Superintendent Andrew Houlihan with members of his Student Advisory Council at a meeting in February.



**Pat Deklotz (center), superintendent of Wisconsin's Kettle Moraine School District, says her schools give students the chance to voice their learning through portfolios and self-assessment.**

*continued from page 21*

Over many years, through Deklotz's commitment to including the voice of students, teachers, administrators, businesses and community organizations, she successfully has led a K-12 design for personalized learning. One principle insight was realizing that the most powerful way to assess personal development was by using this framework to give students an opportunity to voice their learning through a portfolio and self-assessment.

### Space for Partners

So what have we learned from working with these and other educators about growing voice within a school system?

Personalized learning requires some flattening of the top-down hierarchy of a school to make space for meaningful partnerships where key stakeholders have voice in designing their aspirations as well as co-creation in the approach. We'd suggest education leaders consider the following:

- ▶ Attend to listening with understanding and empathy and questioning and posing problems.
- ▶ Provide regular opportunities for students and staff to examine actions, interpret results and develop next steps with your support to grow innovative practice.

- ▶ Encourage teachers to voice their strengths and talents and bring them to the design table as they transform learning.
- ▶ Support teachers in giving voice to students as they develop explorations and actions in alignment with desired outcomes.
- ▶ Foster critical thinking and respectful discourse by protecting a safe space to express opinions and challenge thinking and the thinking of others.
- ▶ Consider ways to assess personal development by using a consistent, K-12 framework to give students an opportunity to voice their learning through a portfolio and self-assessment.
- ▶ Provide a clear understanding for stakeholders as to their role — when they are advising and where and how the final decision will be made.

Seeking out others' perspectives and providing regular forums to benefit from voices takes more time and can feel messy and inefficient. But ultimately, the process leads to increased ownership because everyone is committed to the vision and believes her or his voice has influenced the actions of the learning organization. ■

**BENA KALLICK** is an education consultant based in Westport, Conn. E-mail: [kallick.bena@gmail.com](mailto:kallick.bena@gmail.com). Twitter: [@benakallick](https://twitter.com/benakallick). **ALLISON ZMUDA** is an education consultant based in Virginia Beach, Va. They are co-authors of *Students at the Center: Personalized Learning With Habits of Mind* (ASCD).

# Powerful Learning at the Periphery

Can we make students as excited for school before the final bell as they are for what comes after?

BY JAL D. MEHTA

**W**hen my colleague Sarah Fine and I set out to study deep or powerful learning in the American high school, we started with core classes — math, English, history, science. But despite the fact that the 30 public schools we chose came highly recommended, much of what we saw was disappointing.

Lots of worksheets. Most tasks residing in the bottom half of Bloom's taxonomy, with classroom assignments directing students to recall or apply but only rarely to analyze, synthesize or create. When we asked students *why* they were doing what they were doing, the answers were often dispiritingly similar: "I dunno," "For college, I guess" and, in one memorable instance, "Ask that girl over there; she's the one who knows what's going on in this class."

We also had opportunities to talk privately with superintendents and other administrators about the education of their own children. And here, in unvarnished moments, speaking as parents rather than professionals, they express remarkably similar sentiments. They worry their kids are doing too many worksheets. They fear their kids see school as something to be endured rather than enjoyed. As one told us, "I just want my daughter to *want* to go to school."

## Students as Producers

At the same time, in these same schools, we did see a model of powerful learning — in extracurricular programs and elective courses. In extracurricular spaces that ranged from theater to debate to newspaper to arts and athletics, we saw a much more potent approach to learning.

These spaces were places where students saw a clear purpose to their efforts and where teachers functioned more as coaches than as instructors. Students described these spaces as filled with community and feeling "like family." Students were teachers as well as learners, as younger students apprenticed to older ones.

Students experienced high levels of agency in these spaces. They had chosen to be there. They were expected to be producers rather than passive recipients of information, and they





were often leading the efforts with adults guiding from the side.

They also were examples of what my Harvard colleague David Perkins calls “the whole game at the junior level.” Perkins’ point is that when you learn something like baseball, you don’t spend a year throwing, a year catching, a year batting, and then play an actual baseball game when you get to graduate school. Rather you do it all from the start, mistakes and all, which keeps excitement alive, gives you a sense of the whole, and

instills the need to keep working on the parts.

We did find some academic classes, frequently in electives but also occasionally in core subjects, that were similarly compelling. The teachers in these spaces did many of the things that we saw in the extracurriculars. They slowed down, moving away from a race to cover content to, instead, creating space for students’ questions, ideas, and in-depth investigations in their arenas. They motivated students with real purposes — things to be

made and exhibited beyond the classroom walls or essential questions that connected to deep queries of the students. They wove more basic content through these deeper tasks. Much as a baseball game can motivate a student to take 100 groundballs in practice, they embedded grammar lessons in letters students were writing to the city council.

And, finally, the best teachers we found were themselves intellectually alive, professionally participating in their domains and constantly wondering about the subjects they taught and the ways in which they might connect to their students. Writing teachers were still writing. Theater directors were active in regional theater. One English teacher told us he saw “everything as text” — that every book, movie, podcast or even advertisement he consumed was an opportunity to deconstruct meaning and to think about which might be generative for his students.

### Emerging Patterns

How can we make these exceptions the rule? How can we make the core more like the periphery? How can we make it so that when our own kids come home from school, they are eager to tell us what they learned, to show us what they were doing and making? How can we do so equitably and for all students?

We have been investigating these questions in a community of practice of a dozen superintendents (known as the Deeper Learning Dozen) across the United States and British Columbia. We also have been influenced by the work of several school districts that are collaborating with Ed Leader 21 and Next Generation Learning Challenges, some of whom have been at this work for a decade or more.

Many lessons are coming out of this work. No district has a solution entirely figured out, but some interesting patterns are emerging.

The first thing to recognize is that you, and the systems you have inherited, are a big part of the problem.



When I give this talk at the school level, the first question that teachers ask is whether I've given this talk to their boss. Teachers consistently reported that state tests, teacher evaluation systems and district pacing guides are the three biggest obstacles to deepening learning in their classrooms.

So it starts with setting a different direction. Some districts have used a process known as "Portrait of a Graduate," which asks a variety of stakeholders to think together about the qualities they hope their students will possess when they graduate. Stakeholders include teachers, parents, community members and, vitally, stu-

dents. The focus always is on big personal capabilities — critical thinking, collaboration, empathy, ethical decision making, character, citizenship — and never on the kind of detailed and sometimes arcane knowledge toward which today's schools are oriented.

A next step is to translate this big picture vision into something specific

## Our Actionable Routes to Deeper Learning

BY JASON E. GLASS

**H**ow do we bring about deeper learning for all students in a system that is highly site autonomous and in a political environment that values high test scores?

For the past three years, that is the challenge Jeffco Public Schools in Colorado has tackled. Serving 85,000 students in 155 schools over much of the western portion of the Denver metro area, the district serves a diverse mixture of communities ranging from affluent suburbs to middle-class neighborhoods to urban areas to more remote mountain towns.

Our schools also are diverse in their instructional philosophies. Within the district's neighborhood, charter and "option" school portfolio, approaches cover the gamut from more traditional models (Core Knowledge and classical academies) to constructivist models (International Baccalaureate, expeditionary learning) to specialized schools (STEM, career and technical education, and arts integration).

### Targeting Tasks

Our district needed a way to focus the work of practitioners across the district on deeper learning that also could transcend different school models and instructional philosophies. We targeted the student "task" as that leverage point.

Regardless of the pedagogical approach, at some point every teacher assigns work to students. This serves as the task, and it presents the best opportunity for deeper learning.

Jeffco asks its teachers to "transform the task" as our central reform. This means large-scale shifts to problem- and project-based learning and supporting teachers in the design of opportunities for students to practice skills. These skills include collaboration, self-direction and personal responsibility, creative and complex problem solving, agility and adaptability, and civic and global engagement in their work.

### A Central Role

The district continues to allow for considerable site-based autonomy. Yet we also

are clearing the way for deeper learning by focusing staff professional learning on transformed student tasks and by connecting emerging best practices and innovations from teachers.

We recognize we must be accountable for results on state standardized measures and are taking steps to ensure high expectations and content knowledge are central to the student experience.

We also can't have this work be "hands-on but minds-off." We are using problem- and project-based approaches in the work our students are doing and demonstrating skills that prepare them for this fast-paced, globally interconnected and automated world. But tasks also need to be anchored in academic content standards.

### Four-Step Model

The district also has implemented a four-step continuous improvement approach we call the "Jeffco Deeper Learning

Model." The steps include aligning student experiences to high expectations and academic content, creating learner-centered teaching practices that support all students to get to deeper learning, using both systemwide and classroom-based formative measures and performance criteria to evaluate student progress, and using data-driven processes to determine next steps for student mastery.

This structure is not novel or flashy by design. Our teachers are familiar with continuous improvement models. The difference comes with the intentional design of student tasks that, while rooted in content knowledge, give students by design the chance to practice a whole set of deeper learning skills that we believe will be essential to their future success.

**JASON GLASS** is superintendent and chief learner of Jefferson County Public Schools in Golden, Colo. E-mail: Jason.Glass@jeffco.k12.co.us. Twitter: @COJasonGlass



Superintendent Jason Glass expects teachers to assign student tasks that contribute to deeper learning in the Jefferson County, Colo., Public Schools.

and concrete. One of our districts, Jefferson County, Colo., has set as their North Star a concept they call “Transform the Task,” which sets as a goal that every task in every classroom be challenging, engaging and relevant. The district is highlighting model tasks developed by teachers, providing rubrics, and creating opportunities for horizontal sharing among teachers, steps which are building considerable momentum for a new pedagogical agenda. (See related article, page 26.)

An aligned step is to prune the standards. The province of British Columbia has zeroed in on three to six “big ideas” (organizing ideas) and five to 10 curricular competencies (skills) that educators want students to address for each grade and subject. It ensures students will investigate key areas of content that policymakers and the public think are important, but it also creates enough time and flexibility for teachers to explore those topics in some depth.

### Teachers as Pros

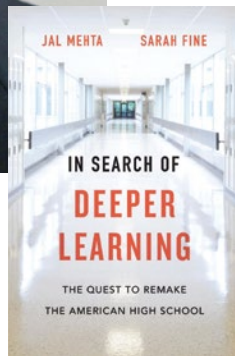
Professional learning among teachers is perhaps the most needed shift. Teachers are being asked to re-envision their roles, to see themselves less as deliverers of knowledge and more as expert guides who lead investigations into different fields and their attendant possibilities.

To this end, we need to relate to and treat teachers as intellectual beings, professionals whose ideas and passions need to be respected, not as widgets in a machine. This means that teachers need more control and agency over their learning (much as students need control and agency over their learning) and that the most valuable form of learning for them will likely come from sustained interactions with master teachers in their fields, not from consultants or one-off workshops.

Think boldly when acting on these ambitions. One school district, in Cowichan, British Columbia, started a new school that the superintendent hoped would pioneer a different vision of learning. When the teachers



**Jal Mehta is a professor at Harvard Graduate School of Education.**



arrived at the school, they found it had no furniture. Well, said the superintendent, define your vision of learning and think about how you want to achieve it — then tell me what kind of furniture would be most useful, and I will order it!

School districts also have found they need a different change process to achieve different ends. You can’t mandate powerful learning. The more you try, the more resistance you will face. Instead, after galvanizing a vision for a new direction, you want to invite people into the change process.

Ask teachers about their most powerful learning experiences. Then ask them what they could do — and what you would need to change to make space for them — to create such experiences for their students. Start with the willing adopters, but make sure there is an onramp for the next circle out — those who are intrigued but aren’t the first to volunteer. If you can win over this middle group — ignore the out-and-out resisters — you have a fighting chance of significant and sustainable change.

### Owning Their Decisions

While the scale of desired change is significant, you don’t need to have it all figured out in advance. Much exist-

ing advice on change processes is still rooted in the Newtonian mechanics we are trying to escape. It assumes you are the one who decides the key goals and maps all of the actions that will bring those goals into being.

What we’re learning from our districts is an alternative and higher-capacity change strategy: Galvanize a common purpose, yes, but then

distribute leadership and allow many groups to work in different ways toward those ends. You might have one group working on how to make the curriculum more anti-racist. There might be a high school studying how to remake the schedule to create longer blocks. There might be a space committee think-

ing about how to construct a new school in a way that enables more cross-disciplinary collaboration. And a professional learning team figuring out how to onboard new teachers in ways consistent with your overall instructional vision.

Exactly what these groups decide matters less than that they will *own* the decisions that they make. And, whenever possible, each of these groups should include students, as ultimately they are the ones the system is seeking to serve.

Powerful learning experiences already exist in our schools. We know what they look and feel like. But much of the grammar of our schools works against them, which is why some of the most engaged learning today is taking place at the periphery rather than at the core. We have the power to change this. We just need to change that grammar so that students are as excited for school before the final bell as they are for what comes after. ■

**JAL MEHTA** is professor of education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education in Cambridge, Mass. He is co-author with Sarah Fine of *In Search of Deeper Learning: The Quest to Remake the American High School* (Harvard University Press, 2019). E-mail: jal\_mehta@gse.harvard.edu. Twitter: @jal\_mehta





# Giving Voice to Students

# Publicly

Educators testify to the authentic learning and 21st-century skills that scholastic newspapers and online publications bring to students' educational experiences

BY MICHELLE R. DAVIS

During his years as superintendent of several school districts, Scott Kizner has had student journalists write about immigration policies, teen pregnancy, teenage peers overdosing on drugs and bullying of a transgender student — topics that parents didn't necessarily want to see covered or that made the school board uncomfortable.

In January, Kizner testified before the Virginia state legislature where he asked lawmakers to protect the rights of student journalists through state law, even though professional organizations such as the Virginia Association of School Superintendents were lobbying against the measure.

"There are many times, let me tell you, that I wish the topic [the students were writing about] would go away," says Kizner, superintendent of the 30,000-student Stafford County, Va., district. "But you don't get to pick and choose what is newsworthy to avoid difficult conversations."

Student scholastic publications — whether that's a newspaper, yearbook or literary magazine, both in print or online, or a student news broadcast — bring authentic learning to the educational experience and prepare students with 21st-century skills for whatever career they may end up pursuing. Learning how to work collaboratively in groups, think critically about an issue and communicate clearly in speech and writing are requisite for college and career and the outcomes of participation on a student publication.

When schools shut down in response to the coronavirus outbreak, these skills were on display across the country in many student publications. While working remotely and physically apart from each other, student journalists pivoted quickly. They produced digital editorial packages on the crisis, disseminating factual news to the student body,





# tudents Through d Words

reflecting their unique experiences and reporting from home. (See related story, page 32.)

But even school district leaders who clearly see those affiliated values and support students' scholastic press rights admit navigating these waters is not always simple and straightforward.

Superintendents and high school principals can find themselves as objects of criticism or the focus of unflattering public attention when student journalists analyze school district policies or question practices that leaders may wish went unaired. School and district leaders may need to defend student journalists against harsh judgments from the community, fellow educators and even the school board, says Kizner, who has spent more than 20 years as a superintendent in four school districts.

"So many times the students are far ahead of the adults, and they want to discuss these issues that are important to them," he says. "You have to trust the students and the staff that has been given the responsibility for advising them, to help them learn and grow."

## Censorship Can Backfire

Not every superintendent or principal feels this way, of course. Some students are required to submit stories to a school administrator for review before they are published. Others describe having their work censored or scrapped when controversial or sensitive topics are raised in student reporting.

But generally, those stances by school leaders don't serve either the students or the school and district, says Roger Stock, superintendent of the Rocklin Unified School District in Northern California, where the student press in the recent past has spotlighted student walkouts to protest lax gun laws and profiled a "polysexual" student. A journalism adviser at one of Rocklin's high schools is the president of the Journalism Education Association and Stock's been vocal about his support of such programs.

"We always want to have a balanced perspective with all of the information," he says. "You have to engage with student journalists to make sure they have all the different facets and perspectives."

When Stock learns students are planning to tackle a subject that could raise ire, the superintendent's first thought is to





Junior assaulted, perpetrator charged, convicted  
with Meyer and other...  
tariffs h...  
m system



**Students from Rocklin Unified School District in California critique the page layouts of their 2020 student yearbook.**

ensure they've talked to people on all sides of an issue and gotten a full range of opinions. He views members of the student press the same way he sees the local news media, and he encourages school board members and others in the school community to take the same approach.

"Censoring a story can boomerang back on you and be worse than the actual story," he says. "People can really question the district's transparency."

Curtailling students' reporting pursuits, Stock adds, undermines the aim of an effective scholastic program: providing authentic learning experiences in a real-world setting.

Michael Richards, superintendent of the Harrisonburg, Va., City Schools, easily ticks off the important skills students gain from scholastic journalism: research and reflection, presentation and communication, development of voice and the ability to express ideas clearly.

"Journalism is about exploring a variety of sources, being discerning about what is empiri-

cally accurate and constructing a story that reflects that reality in a way that is objective," he says. "That's not just good journalism — that's good thinking."

Michael Ginals, superintendent of the Corning-Painted Post Area School District in New York's Southern Tier, believes the ability to write coherently and communicate at a high level is essential to student growth and readiness for whatever follows high school. And student journalism programs teach that in a way that is unlike nearly any other course offered in a high school, adds Ginals, pointing to a situation where students interviewed state lawmakers about a bill relating to student press rights that was moving through the legislature.

Students often are in the thick of current events. As the COVID-19 pandemic shuttered schools nationwide, student journalists were working with faculty advisers remotely to put out stories more important than ever to their student communities.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ROGER STOCK



"These are experiences that can't be recreated in any classroom," says Ginalski, who with two colleagues shared the Journalism Education Association's Administrator of the Year Award in 2017. "The skills they learn in this activity carry on to all walks of life."

And it's not just about the writing itself. Students learn the business and marketing sides of the operation, learn to navigate social media in a professional way and to present ideas through multimedia and video channels. "All of these are essential to the work force today," says Mike Hies-

tand, senior legal counsel at the Student Press Law Center in Washington, D.C.

In fact, it's clear employers value and actively seek many of these skills in their workers. A 2019 RAND report on reimagining the workforce found that employers are struggling to find employees with skills they need on the job such as "information synthesis, creativity, problem-solving, communication and teamwork" and that jobs requiring those 21st-century skills are going unfilled. Scholastic journalism programs teach those things and more.

## Amplifying Student Voice Through Their Publications

BY AMY BESLER

I arrived on the scene at Bear River High School in Grass Valley, Calif., in 2015 — a first-time principal ready to take the world by storm. The historical reputation of the school was fairly strong, but positive stakeholder perceptions were waning.

After scoping out the existing state of affairs, I discovered some significant needs related to communication and a lack of shared identity. It was particularly important to me that students would ultimately grow to have a high degree of ownership of Bear River's culture.

As a former high school yearbook adviser, I knew how powerful student voice could be in shaping, capturing and conveying a school's culture. At the time of my arrival at Bear River, student journalism was relegated to an afterthought, an English department elective that served to round out teaching assignments and fill students' schedules.

What passed as the student newspaper consisted of a couple of poorly printed pages rife with uninspired articles (the byproduct of class assignments rather than a desire to convey something important). It was read by almost no one. Copies were left to litter the campus and gather dust on shelves.

### Confronting Reality

As all school administrators know, one of our biggest leverage points as leaders is our ability to hire talented people and then encourage their efforts. I was lucky enough to have a brilliant, experienced journalist (with no teaching background) walk into my office. It became immediately clear that I needed to figure out how to hire Christina Levinson and support her development as an educator.

Before long, she had turned a rag-tag

bunch of unwitting students into journalists who took the initiative to develop a fantastic online news site with meaty articles, sleek graphic design and companion video components. We collaborated on ways to use the platform to showcase and reinforce our values and celebrate the good ... but, of course, real student journalism cannot just live in Warm Fuzzy Land. It must confront things that are controversial, uncomfortable and even jarring at times.

During this period, the #metoo movement gained tremendous momentum and then, in the wake of the tragic school shooting in Parkland, Fla., student voice took center stage throughout the nation as students were walking out and speaking up. My student journalists wrote hard-hitting pieces on these serious topics and others that landed even closer to home, such as a teacher from our school who was facing criminal charges for domestic violence.

On the one hand, as a proud principal trying to build a positive culture and improve public perceptions, I naturally wanted only positive reporting out there about my school. And yet, my higher calling as an educator beckoned that empowering young people and helping them grow in skills and confidence was a far superior endeavor.

### Inevitable Stumbles

No matter the stickiness of the subject matter, I never declined an interview requested by a student journalist — not once in my three years as principal. This openness helped establish their credibility and set the tone with the rest of the staff. They stumbled along the way (often asking leading questions, making last-minute requests or failing

to have done proper advance research), and their adviser and I helped guide their efforts. Before long, they were earning national journalism honors and, even better, developing passions that would lead to careers or manifest in other meaningful ways in their adult lives.

No doubt, the idea of students owning a school's culture and speaking to it publicly is mildly terrifying (and, at minimum, messy), but I would argue they own it whether we are intentional about helping them form it or not. I can-

not underestimate the value of school and district leaders recognizing, supporting and actively encouraging students to use their voices to own and shape their schools and communities.

**AMY BESLER** is director of secondary education in the Elk Grove Unified School District in Elk Grove, Calif. E-mail: abesler@egusd.net



Amy Besler, director of secondary education in Elk Grove, Calif., sees major upsides to encouraging students to exercise their voices through school publications.

# Students Keep Communities Informed During Virus Shutdown

BY JAY P. GOLDMAN

The producers and reporters on the student news program at Fort Osage High School in Independence, Mo., were days away from producing their weekly broadcast when they learned their school would be closing at the end of the day March 13 because of the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Undeterred by the unexpected shutdown and the requirement to maintain physical distance from anyone outside their family, members of the broadcast news program “Tribal Review” mobilized from their homes using smartphones, iPads, Chromebooks, Snapchat and FaceTime to produce a 13-minute program. Published one week later on YouTube, the news show (<https://youtu.be/rh5HI3renRA>) hosted by two editors carried images of deserted school hallways and playing fields, an interview with their school’s principal on his priorities during the closure, segments on how various students were using their days at home and advice for viewers on keeping germ-free during the public health crisis.

The program’s faculty adviser, Benjamin Merithew, worked with the students in the days leading up to the broadcast while also supporting a handful of eager student reporters for *The Signal*, the school’s online news



publication ([fohssignal.net](http://fohssignal.net)), to develop fresh coverage of the pandemic’s impact on their school year.

“I’m obviously proud of the students who are doing something and covering these uncertain times,” Merithew says.

Scholastic journalism shined in other quarters during the first several weeks of interrupted school operations. The online publications served to keep affected students and their families informed and to provide peri-

odic reminders of safe personal behavior as evidence of the COVID-19 virus accelerated quickly through virtually every state.

“The kids ... seem to be diving into this with a passion,” says Candace Perkins Bowen, who directs the Center for Scholastic Journalism at Kent State University. “They realize no one else is going to tell their story because there are so many stories out there to tell.”

At Mona Shores High School in Norton Shores, Mich., the student newspaper staff was about to send off its March 26 issue of *The Sailor’s Log* ([https://issuu.com/kpool33/docs/full\\_march\\_26\\_np](https://issuu.com/kpool33/docs/full_march_26_np)) to the printer when they were forced to finalize plans from their homes. Student reporters scrambled at the 11th hour to add virus-related coverage, according to newspaper adviser Warren Kent III. The result was a 12-page PDF-only edition with a cover featuring “Viral Reality,” a prominent column titled “Stay Safe During This Coronacation” and a full-length news story “Left With an Empty Feeling.”

In Saegertown, Pa., Stacey Hetrick, adviser of *The Panther Press*, says her students worked quickly to add relevant coverage to their fifth issue of the school year, posted online on March 20, a week after the state

## Navigating Legal Issues

In addition, high school journalism study plays exactly into what schools’ mission statements often say they aspire to do — prepare students for life in a democracy, says Candace Perkins Bowen, director of the Center for Scholastic Journalism at Kent State University in Ohio.

Part of that preparation means helping students understand the essential value of a free press, even more important in today’s partisan political climate as the news media faces attacks from many sides. Critical thinking is part of that, but if students are censored by their administration, the development of that skillset will be inhibited, Bowen says, adding, “You don’t learn to think critically if someone is always saying ‘You can’t do that.’”

Two U.S. Supreme Court cases often serve as the basis for reigning in student publications, Hiestand says. The landmark 1969 ruling in *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent School District* protects most student speech, laying out two areas, he says, that give school officials the

authority to prohibit or ban student speech — when it may be libelous or unlawful, for example, or it would disrupt normal school operations.

In 1988, the high court curbed student speech in *Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier*. The regulations of *Tinker* still applied, but the Supreme Court justices determined that education administrators can censor for a reasonable pedagogical justification, Hiestand says, noting, “That sounds reasonable, but what does that mean in practice?”

The result often means principals or district leaders who want to censor or ban student speech can find a justification to do so.

## Protective Measures

In recent years, supporters of scholastic journalism activities have been pushing for what’s called “New Voices” legislation on the state level to protect student speech. Currently, 14 states have such a law on the books and several more are debating them in their legislative sessions, Hiestand says.

These New Voices laws put back into place



closed all public schools. The eight-page issue included a reassuring message from the school's principal and an opinion column by the managing editor headlined "Corona Class of 2020."

In addition, the school's journalists continued to provide up-to-date information through the publication's Twitter feed (@PantherPressSHS), website ([thepantherpress.com](http://thepantherpress.com)) and Instagram account ([pantherpressshs](https://www.instagram.com/pantherpressshs)). Some of the students' daily accounts, in a series they titled "Saegertown Shutdown Stories" featuring what students and staff are doing during their time away from school,



have been republished in the local newspaper, *The Meadville Tribune*.

"We just decided that we were going to do everything we could to keep our community informed and connected, and our goal was that people wouldn't feel so alone in this," Hetrick says.

At Northwood High School in Silver Spring, Md., students involved with Northwood Update, a video newscast broadcast every weekday morning on YouTube during the school year, considered it a logical move to begin producing a weekly "at home" edition during their unanticipated school closure in mid-March.

Senior producer Charlie Kretkowski admits his inspiration came from watching local TV news anchors do live segments from their home offices to adhere to social distancing guidelines. Kretkowski, who hopes to study film in college beginning this fall, took that comfy feel one step further, hosting the first weekly show on March 27 with his computer perched on his bed at home.

"I felt like many Northwood students were getting [and] spreading information through social media and word of mouth that wasn't 100 percent accurate," he says. "Working with school administrators to get the real Northwood news to the Northwood community



definitely set the story straight."

The inaugural 9½-minute news program ([https://youtu.be/f\\_kR548KMdE](https://youtu.be/f_kR548KMdE)) featured an offbeat segment showing how one Northwood student was finding imaginative ways to use her time alone and a series of brief videos of assistant principals trying to maintain order among their young children at home.

"Assuming that schools are closed for a month or longer, we already have a calendar for things we want to cover," says Kretkowski, adding he wants to resume school sooner than later to finish his senior year once the spread of the virus is contained. "Whatever happens, I know that my crew will be prepared for it. We are used to doing a live TV show every day after all."

**JAY GOLDMAN** is editor of *School Administrator* magazine. E-mail: [jgoldman@aasa.org](mailto:jgoldman@aasa.org). Twitter: @jpgoldman

added levels of protection and provide students with the right to make decisions for publications unless speech is unlawful or disruptive.

Without the state laws, scholastic newspapers and yearbooks are at the mercy of whoever has oversight within the district, according to Tiffany Kopcak, yearbook adviser at Colonial Forge High School in Stafford County, Va. "We have amazing people in place right now and they trust this program," she says. "But that hasn't always been the case."

In past years, student publications in her district were forced by administrators to pull pre-press news stories about student gum-chewing, for example, because there was a no-gum policy in schools. Years ago, when the Gay-Straight Alliance established a club at the school, Kopcak was told not to include it in the yearbook.

Christina Levinson, who advises student news and literary organizations at Bear River High School near Sacramento, Calif., a state with one of the oldest New Voices laws, says those legal protec-

tions allow students to "learn their rights, become confident and talk to people in positions of authority," she says. "They learn that just because you're a teen, people can't dismiss your views, and that you have the right to point out problems even if it's inconvenient or embarrassing to schools."

Those press rights are seen as an important reason for California schools consistently producing some of the nation's strongest student journalism. Academy High School in Escondido, Calif., took an in-depth look at student mental health issues in its "Invisible Wounds" spread, which won a Student Journalist Impact Award from the Journalism Education Association in 2019. A year earlier, two of the five top digital stories of the year, awarded by the National Scholastic Press Association, were from California schools. One of those stories focused on the March for Our Lives movement and the other looked at the legacy of retiring teachers.

But it doesn't mean principals and superintendents should be completely hands off. In fact,



# Student Journalism as a Route to Civic Engagement

BY TERRY P. ARMSTRONG

John Dewey's assertion that school is a social institution and should reflect the world outside the schoolhouse doors greatly influenced me when I was studying to be a social studies teacher. It would impact how I would approach teaching, leading a building as principal and guiding a school district as superintendent.

Helping our students become fully prepared for postsecondary life in college and career can be a challenge. In the face of constantly increasing mandates, engagement with the outside world is often seen as something to "fit into the curriculum" rather than as a natural extension of the curriculum. Upon being named superintendent in 2014 of Lordstown schools in northeastern Ohio, where I had started as a teacher years earlier, I knew I wanted to create an environment that would stimulate student engagement and instill the philosophy that democracy is a verb!

## A Need for Sharing

Working directly with a newly hired social studies teacher, Courtney Gibson, we were able to raise the level of student political involvement through creation of a political history club. In recent years, that club has facilitated schoolwide programs such as candidates' nights and events tied to Veterans Day, Constitution Day and what we have called Democracy Day. The students



Journalism students from Lordstown, Ohio, with Pete Buttigieg, former mayor of South Bend, Ind., on a trip to learn how the Iowa political caucuses operate.

have attended political rallies and observed the caucus process in Iowa firsthand.

Next, we needed a way for students to share the information they were learning and researching and to reflect meaningfully on the events they were experiencing with their peers. One glaring void was the lack of a student newspaper and a journalism class to support it.

We were fortunate to have a newly hired English teacher, Ryan Hart, with previous experience as a student newspaper adviser. Students with an interest in starting a newspaper met with Brenda Linert, editor of the Warren *Tribune Chronicle*, following her Democracy Day address about press freedom at our school. I was excited to see students with a thirst for serving their peers as student journalists.

The school district supported their efforts by creating time in the high school schedule for a journalism class. The student journalists stepped up to create a quality newspaper, designed in true newspaper style and published on newsprint. Last November, the newspaper staff was chosen to share its success at the state's largest student achievement fair, hosted by the Ohio School Boards Association. A special edition of the appropriately titled *Devil's Advocate* (our school nickname is the Red Devils) was distributed to those at the statewide event.

Our students were particularly proud to host students' rights advocate Mary Beth Tinker, who was the teenage plaintiff in a landmark 1969 Supreme Court case that defined student press rights, for a Democ-

racy Day event. Student reporters interviewed her about her experiences during and since the ruling in *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, and about her current support of student activists, including those at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida. Her visit came soon after our own students' peaceful demonstration calling attention to student safety, which included writing letters and delivering them directly to state lawmakers at the Ohio Statehouse in Columbus.

## Future Involvement

We are proud of our students serving as journalists for their peers and the engagement that has resulted from their active participation in the world outside the school doors. The student journalists have reported on issues affecting students at our school and their families, notably the closure last year of the General Motors assembly plant in Lordstown that once employed 14,000.

Mary Beth Tinker said it best during her visit when she greeted a writer from the *Tribune Chronicle* with "It is always great to meet a member of our free press." We hope our students carry civic engagement with them into the future while protecting and promoting quality journalism for decades to come.

**TERRY ARMSTRONG** recently left the superintendency in Lordstown, Ohio, to work as treasurer of the Newton Falls Exempted Village School District in Newton Falls, Ohio. E-mail: [mistertarmstrong@yahoo.com](mailto:mistertarmstrong@yahoo.com)



As superintendent in Lordstown, Ohio, Terry Armstrong promoted student journalism as a vehicle for civic learning.

a trusted and close relationship with publication advisers often defines successful programs. School and district leaders should spend time with student journalists to understand their aims and goals and keep an open dialogue flowing, says Levinson, whose former principal Amy Besler was honored as the Journalism Education Association's 2019 Administrator of the Year at a national conference last fall that drew nearly 7,000 high school journalists and advisers to Washington, D.C. (See related article by Besler on page 31.) Many advisers say when they have positive relationships with administrators, they give them a courtesy heads-up when a hard-hitting news or feature story is set to become public.

Even though superintendents may not be on the front lines of day-to-day student journalism programs, they play a significant role, says Kelly Glasscock, executive director of the Journalism Education Association. "Leadership sets that culture for the entire district. Coming from the top down, it's an important message to send."

### Real Stories

Bumps in the road are inevitable, even when district leadership is largely supportive of the student press. For Ginalski, in Corning, N.Y., one of those bumps came on the eve of President Trump's inauguration when student journalists covered a local protest march against Trump as well as a public protest by teachers expressing outrage over Trump's nomination of Betsy DeVos as U.S. secretary of education. Student journalists posted their coverage on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, prompting a flood of angry calls to Ginalski from community members who were outraged that student time and school resources were being used to cover opposition to Trump.

While Ginalski knew the students' posts were protected, parents were irate. So the superintendent asked for a cooling-off period and had the students briefly take down some social media coverage until the school district's attorney could issue a memo outlining legal protections of student speech.

"It got heated and with the inauguration the next day, the situation had the potential to spiral out of control," Ginalski says. "The reality is that the public doesn't understand students' First Amendment rights, and they don't care."

But the incident had fallout. "I was the censorship superintendent," he says. "It damaged the relationship on both sides."

Ginalski says he now takes a different approach. "The kids have real stories to tell and we have to deal with whatever comes from that."

## Four Steps Toward a High-Caliber Journalism Program

Even with state laws that support student journalism and superintendents who believe in protecting student voice, it can be hard for scholastic publications to navigate controversial stories, often amid pressure from the school community.

Superintendents and school journalism experts recommend taking steps to create a high-quality scholastic journalism program where students can learn skills that will serve them in their college and career readiness.

### ► Hire publication advisers with experience and rely on their judgment.

Develop a trusting relationship with the adviser and keep lines of communication open. "The role for the adviser is to see those train wrecks and prevent them before they happen," says Christina Levinson, student publication adviser at Bear River High School in Grass Valley, Calif.

Train wrecks don't refer to students' reporting on sensitive topics that might spark outrage in the community, but rather stories that might be libelous or that don't meet journalistic standards, Levinson says.

### ► Create an open relationship with student journalists.

Michael Richards, superintendent in Harrisonburg, Va., gives student journalists in his district direct access to talk about stories they're working on, and he is willing to discuss coverage of subjects that might be controversial.

Be a participant in the process, Levinson adds. "The smart thing to do is always engage with the student press, always," she says. "Once students are running with a story, the best thing to do as an administrator is to manage the story without infringing on kids' rights. If you're not transparent, it looks like you're trying to hide something."

### ► Don't shy away from controversial topics and stories.

"For administrators, the No. 1 thing is often that you want the school to look good," Candace Perkins Bowen, director of the Center for Scholastic Journalism at Kent State University, says. "But it can make it look worse when you're censoring legitimate stories that would eventually make the school better."

### ► Set clear and objective standards for what is not permissible.

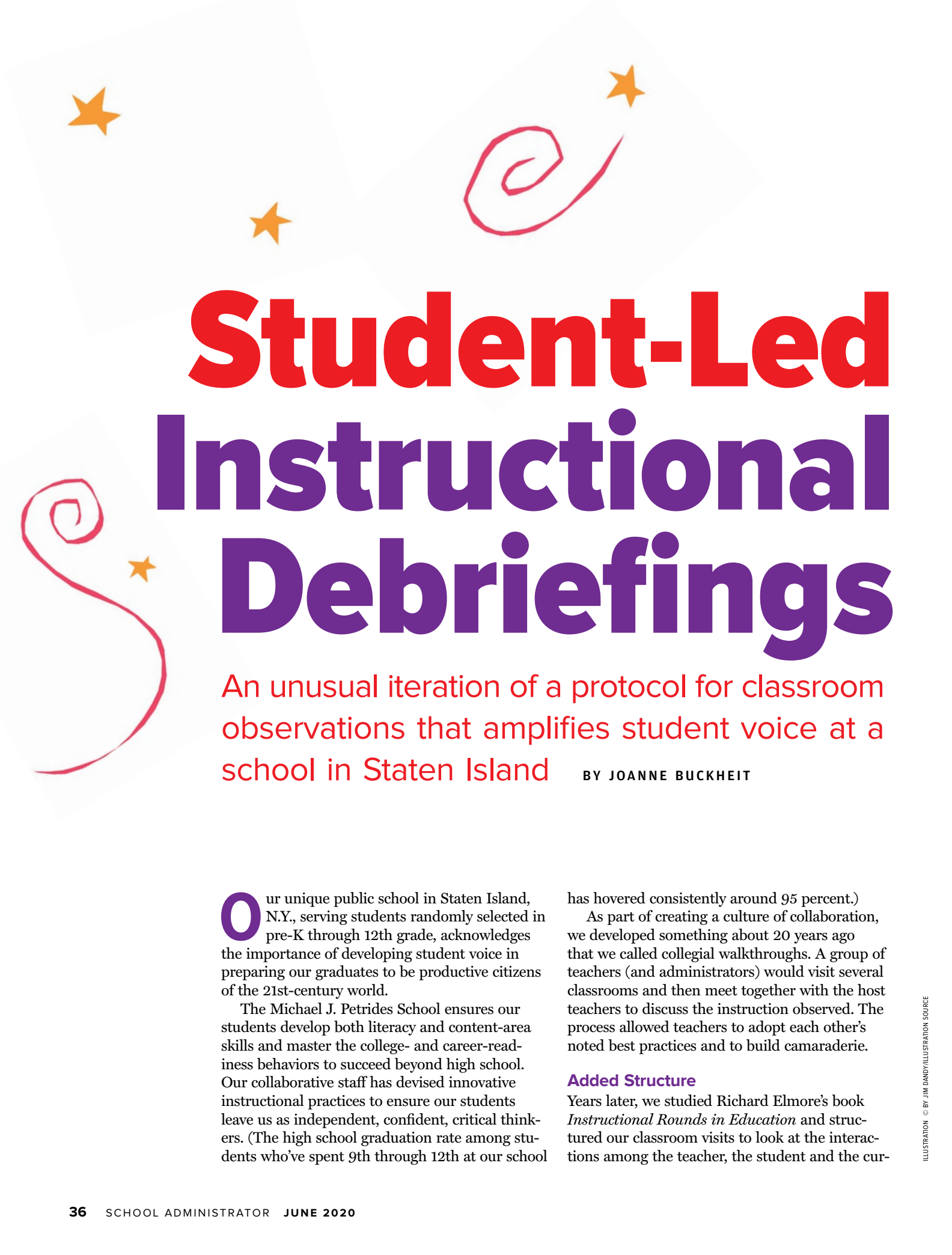
Students must understand where the legal lines are. Then stick to those lines, says Michael Hiestand of the Student Press Law Center.

— MICHELLE DAVIS

Kizner, superintendent in Stafford County, Va., echoes those sentiments. One of his high school principals objected to a news story proposed by student editors about student bullying, possibly feeling, the superintendent believes, that the school's "dirty laundry" shouldn't become public. Kizner permitted the story to be published.

"My response was we've got to discuss it," he says. "If they feel we're sweeping the issue under the rug, it's only going to increase the times that students feel unsafe at school." ■

**MICHELLE DAVIS** is an education freelance writer in Silver Spring, Md. E-mail: michrdavis@hotmail.com.



# Student-Led Instructional Debriefings

An unusual iteration of a protocol for classroom observations that amplifies student voice at a school in Staten Island

BY JOANNE BUCKHEIT

Our unique public school in Staten Island, N.Y., serving students randomly selected in pre-K through 12th grade, acknowledges the importance of developing student voice in preparing our graduates to be productive citizens of the 21st-century world.

The Michael J. Petrides School ensures our students develop both literacy and content-area skills and master the college- and career-readiness behaviors to succeed beyond high school. Our collaborative staff has devised innovative instructional practices to ensure our students leave us as independent, confident, critical thinkers. (The high school graduation rate among students who've spent 9th through 12th at our school

has hovered consistently around 95 percent.)

As part of creating a culture of collaboration, we developed something about 20 years ago that we called collegial walkthroughs. A group of teachers (and administrators) would visit several classrooms and then meet together with the host teachers to discuss the instruction observed. The process allowed teachers to adopt each other's noted best practices and to build camaraderie.

## Added Structure

Years later, we studied Richard Elmore's book *Instructional Rounds in Education* and structured our classroom visits to look at the interactions among the teacher, the student and the cur-





riculum. More recently, we added the “Evidence, Analysis, Action” protocol, as described by Paul Bloomberg and Barb Pitchford in their book *Leading Impact Teams* to strengthen the debriefing discussions and to enable teachers to leave the instructional rounds with identified next steps.

Today, with well-organized instructional rounds a regular practice at our school, we’re visiting classrooms three to four times a month. Embedded in our monthly professional development plan, rounds allow us to gather data about teaching and learning in our school and to highlight and share best practices.

As we strengthened instructional practices across grades and content areas to empower

students to take ownership of their learning, a natural next step was to include them as essential participants in the classroom rounds.

### A Student Twist

Our first student-led instructional rounds, conducted back in April 2017, was one of the best experiences in my 34 years as an educator, including 15 years as principal of the 1,350-student Petrides School. And almost every one since then has been just as enlightening, exciting and rewarding.

The process for conducting student-led rounds has remained the same since that first attempt. We usually wait until the morning of rounds to select a diverse group of eight to 12 students to



**Principal Joanne Buckheit (center) with students preparing to do classroom observations as part of student-led rounds at her school in Staten Island, N.Y.**

participate. We strive to be inclusive and involve students representing all subgroup populations (students with disabilities, English language learners, economically disadvantaged and both high-performing and struggling students).

Typically, we select students to do observations in classrooms that are one grade level below.

Once identified, the students are called to my office. And, while most kids describe their nervousness about being summoned to the principal's office, they always sit up taller in their chair when I tell them, "We want to learn from you today!"

We explain they were chosen to join us for rounds and that we'll be visiting classrooms and meeting with teachers to discuss what they observe. All of our students have experienced having visitors in their classrooms so they smile big when they learn they will be the visitors that day.

We created a "note catcher" for students to use with clipboards during the visit. This guides students as they collect low-inference observation notes on what they see and hear happening in the classrooms visited. We also encourage students to

record their wonderings.

The rounds observers gather information in classrooms visited by talking to students about what they're doing, asking questions of the teacher and noticing materials and resources around the room.

### Valued Input

Following the classroom visits, students sit with nameplates and hot chocolate alongside the teachers at my conference table so they feel like valued members in our meeting.

The debriefing process is guided by the Evidence, Analysis, Action protocol. I start by asking students to share their low-inference observations. An adult, usually an assistant principal, serves as recorder for the meeting, entering student responses on a template projected on a large screen for all participants to see. As facilitator, I help to identify trends noticed by students across classrooms. We discuss their relevance to the Danielson Framework for Teaching, specifically the competencies in Domain 3: using questioning





and discussion techniques, engaging students in learning and using assessment in instruction.

The trickiest part of the debriefing is to identify actionable next steps for teachers. This must happen respectfully so we can maintain trust with our staff. We tried asking students, “If you had three wishes to improve your education, what would they be?” Now, we simply ask, “What can we do to improve your learning experience?”

When we started student-led rounds, some high school teachers understandably were reluctant to participate in the process as they felt the students would be evaluating their performance. By allowing those teachers to participate in rounds alongside student observers as they visited classrooms and including those teachers in the debriefing process, we gained their trust and created such comfort with the process that all 97 teachers in our school now happily participate.

### What We’ve Learned

We plan rounds in response to what we want to know, which means the focus can vary from one walkthrough to the next. For example, we took a mixed grade-level group of students (from grades 4–6) to look at vertical math classes (in grades 3–6). The purpose for these rounds was to identify math practices and strategies that are most helpful for our students.

We organized student-led rounds for our high school freshmen to visit Advanced Placement classes in hopes of sparking their interest in striving for such classes. We talked about what skills students would need to be ready for the rigor of these courses and identified possible prerequisite paths.

As we focus on developing Habits of Mind that ensure our students understand the qualities of good learners and acquire good learner habits, we have conducted rounds to gather evidence about the current learning behaviors that students exhibit.

We’ve learned lots more from involving kids in rounds, too. Consistently, students identify John Hattie’s visible learning influences, including self-efficacy, teacher clarity, classroom discussion and reciprocal teaching, as crucial to their learning. And, in debriefing discussions, students noted the importance of brain breaks. (These are opportunities to relax the brain so a person can stay focused and energetic and less stressed. The breaks should allow a person to do physical activity or deep breathing to allow the blood and oxygen to move to the brain to think more clearly.)



**Students at the Michael J. Petrides School debrief with principal Joanne Buckheit (rear) after their classroom visits.**

They also asked for flexible scheduling during the day to allow time for student choice in independent activities, such as reading for pleasure or improving their writing. Students described the value of a personal connection with their teacher, saying it helps them be more motivated and more engaged.

### Impact Felt

The most significant impact of student-led rounds is on those students who participate. “I feel powerful,” said Keanna, an 8th-grade student, when asked about the experience of taking part. “We’re kid principals,” shouted 2nd grader Kiera in response to the same question. And 4th grader Robert described being nervous at the start of the process and proud that he was able to do it. ■

**JOANNE BUCKHEIT** is principal of the Michael J. Petrides School in Staten Island, N.Y. E-mail: JBuckhe@schools.nyc.gov. Twitter: @petridesschool



# Redefining School Culture With Listening

The authors vouch for a process that hears the voices of students, teachers and administrators equally for building a responsive climate

BY PATRICIA JENSEN AND KRISTA RATCLIFFE

**A**n elementary school teacher with well-established classroom routines for instruction is about halfway through the school year when a new student arrives, disrupting the learning environment with challenging behavioral, social and emotional needs.

The teacher, after unsuccessfully trying to deal with the new student in her classroom, resolves the problem by sending the student to receive specialized support for the full school day. With the student gone from the classroom, the teacher resumes her regular instructional practices. The challenging student receives her learning in a restrictive environment. Although her academic needs are being met, two negative consequences

also ensue: The social and emotional gap between her and her peers widens, and differences are marginalized.

How might this situation have been approached differently?

## **An Equal Hearing**

Episodes like these — a real one observed by one of us (Jensen) while working as an elementary school principal — are troubling, especially where empowering student voices is a goal.

A common misconception is that disruptive students need to receive specialized instruction. Actually, a continuum of educational services exists for students, and the goal ought to be to use such services in a manner that allows students



to learn in the classroom with their peers to the greatest extent possible.

Despite administrative efforts to communicate this philosophy of instruction, a teacher's use of specialized instruction often becomes a crutch to make teaching easier for the instructor and learning easier for the students. Teachers worry that other students in the classroom will pick up on the atypical behavior or that parents will complain if the teacher does not intervene to stop the disruptive child.

How can school leaders protect the integrity of students' learning without eroding the teachers' confidence in themselves or their leaders?

We see an answer in using leadership practices based on rhetorical listening. Rhetorical listening,

in this situation, provides an equal hearing to the voices of students, teachers and administrators to create school cultures where everyone feels not only heard but also connected, competent and in control.

#### **What is Rhetorical Listening?**

Developed by one of us (Ratcliffe), rhetorical listening is a stance of openness that one may adopt when confronting different or competing perspectives. It invites listeners to focus on both the claims and the cultural logics within which the claims function. (A cultural logic is simply a way of reasoning common to a group of people.)

In practice, rhetorical listening asks listeners to pause, lay individuals' competing claims side by

side, reflect on the reasoning (or cultural logics) that supports each claim and then use this understanding to negotiate differences.

Rhetorical listening does not demand that listeners accept all perspectives as truth. Rather, it encourages listeners to attempt to understand how people reason both as individuals and as members of cultural groups. Indeed, it asks listeners to reflect on how people think and why they embrace their own perspectives as truth.

By acknowledging competing perspectives, rhetorical listening allows listeners to analyze disagreements and misunderstandings across individuals and cultures in the hope of finding common ground on which to negotiate differences.

### Listening to the Teacher

The outcome of the opening scenario might have played out differently if the following key steps of rhetorical listening had been employed.

First, to adopt a stance of openness, the principal in the opening scenario would have had to accept that the teacher's actions are reasonable within the teacher's cultural logic. The view that specialized instruction is a tool for classroom management would count as a cultural logic. If the principal had listened to the teacher's claim ("remove the student from the classroom") and cultural logic ("because such students are disruptive to classroom management and learning"), the principal would have been able to understand the instructor's perspective and to conceptualize the problem more broadly within other cultural logics.

The principal's acceptance of the teacher's reasoning would have been easier if she had first listed variables outside the teacher's control that influence the decision-making process. Such variables might include increasing classroom size or a lack of professional experience to support efficient classroom management. With these variables in hand, the principal then would have met with the teacher to discuss the reasoning behind her decision. During the meeting, the principal could have asked open-ended questions so that the teacher felt comfortable sharing her perspective. For example, the principal might have asked: "Which of the student's behaviors do you find most concerning?" As the teacher talked, the principal would have recorded her responses.

### Listening to the Student

The principal then would be ready to listen to the student. To grant the student a fair hearing, the principal first would list known variables outside of the student's control. Because students are not always able to name the factors that influence their



**Patty Jensen, principal of Lone Mountain Elementary in Cave Creek, Ariz., points to the importance of listening to the teacher and student in any given scenario.**

behaviors, creating this list often requires the principal to research the child's educational history.

The effectiveness of students' educational histories depends on the system used to collect the data. To ensure that schools provide immediate support that is responsive to students' needs, principals should create a system for building and reviewing educational records that goes far beyond the records clerk transferring data into the student information system.

An effective system builds an ethnographic account of the known variables in the child's educational and familial history. Knowing these variables ensures that the guidance counselor, reading and math specialists, English language teacher, special education psychologist and administrators can speak to one another and thus listen with greater purpose to what the student might not be able to fully articulate. In the absence of such a system, student support teams often draw simplified conclusions about a student's behaviors, which hampers a student's ability to voice her or his perspective, even within a listening environment.

Once the principal had collected the student's educational history, she then would ask the student open-ended questions so as to triangulate the student's voice with the teacher's voice and the child's educational history. For example, the principal might ask: "What do you need from your teacher, from the administrators, from the school counsel-





**Krista Ratcliffe, an English professor at Arizona State University, says her research on rhetorical listening can be used to improve school culture.**

ors and/or from the specialists you work with in order to learn?” As the student talks, the principal would place her responses alongside the teacher’s.

Laying the student’s responses alongside the teacher’s voice and the student’s educational history is important for three reasons: (1) Not all atypical behaviors are symptomatic of deeper problems — the student might simply be misbehaving; (2) Not all motivating factors are recorded in the student’s educational history — as traumas occur in real time, administrators need to collect data actively in order to support their students; and (3) Not all recorded data from the student’s educational history is accurate.

### Negotiating Differences

Once the principal had collected the student’s response, she would return to the teacher to examine the differences in the teacher’s and the student’s perspectives as well as the reasoning that supports them. Using rhetorical listening as a data-collection tactic would help the teacher see that the principal does not privilege either perspective.

Such recognition would enable the teacher to remain open to acknowledging any negative consequences that she may have unintentionally produced while trying to maintain her ideal of a comfortable, orderly classroom. In addition, such recognition would allow the teacher to interpret the student’s behavior with greater insight and understanding.

Having established this common ground between the teacher’s and student’s perspectives, the principal and the teacher then would develop an action plan that responds to the teacher’s needs while empowering the student’s voice. The goal is a win-win scenario.

### Listening to School and District Culture

Rhetorical listening can be implemented at any level of K-12 education. Research by one of us (Jensen) suggests that central-office colleagues sometimes struggle to understand how their policy recommendations affect school cultures.

For example, to measure a school’s culture or climate, district administrators will ask teachers to complete anonymous surveys about the campus leadership team. Then they typically will present survey data to campus administrators without walking through the campus to triangulate their findings. Although the need to conduct such surveys remotely is an efficient data collection method, it is not always the most effective method for gauging school culture. Some research shows this data-collection method often creates as many cultural problems as it solves.

If administrators at all levels were to develop the habit of listening to student and teacher perspectives, they would be able to solve such unintentional problems by triangulating student and teacher voices with the survey findings. Doing so would allow all stakeholders to identify more effectively where common ground exists and thus solve core classroom problems.

Rhetorical listening helps everyone observe that a stance open to multiple ways of reasoning, combined with a commitment to equitable documentation, can remove the barriers that unwittingly prevent every voice from contributing to our learning environments. ■

**PATTY JENSEN** is principal of Lone Mountain Elementary in Cave Creek, Ariz. E-mail: [pjensen@ccusd93.net](mailto:pjensen@ccusd93.net). **KRISTA RATCLIFFE** is a professor and chair of the English department at Arizona State University in Tempe, Ariz.

## Additional Resources

To learn more about rhetorical listening and its application to K-12 schooling, the authors suggest these two works:

- *Helping Children Succeed: What Works and Why* by Paul Tough. See chapters 15-22 in particular.
- *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, Whiteness* by Krista Ratcliffe. Read chapters 1 and 5.

# Elevating Voice Through Social & Emotional Learning

**Finding new ways for students to practice skills  
as decision makers and problem solvers**

**BY MELISSA SCHLINGER**

**“A** dults should not do for students what students can do for themselves.” That’s a fundamental belief at Johnson Senior High School in St. Paul, Minn., where student voice has been a catalyst for schoolwide transformation, driving implementation of social and emotional learning and school climate improvements.

At Johnson, which enrolls 1,300 in grades 9-12, every student has an opportunity to be a leader within the school’s multilayered Govie Leadership structure. Through this structure, Johnson’s principal, Micheal Thompson, has offered students various leadership roles, including running weekly schoolwide forums about social issues and serving on the principal’s student advisory group on school policies. Students also

are an integral part of a peer support initiative started by school social workers and participate in training staff in restorative practices.

Thompson was clear that he wanted to turn the professional development model upside down. Students received training first, and then, with assistance from professional trainers, the students trained the staff.

The school’s extensive student leadership exemplifies the deep connections between SEL and student voice. Social and emotional learning provides opportunities for all students to develop and practice the skills they need to become leaders, decision makers and problem solvers. It also helps adults and students to jointly create learning places that elevate everyone’s voice and strengthens the community.





### Core Competencies

SEL is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships and make responsible decisions.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, or CASEL, identifies five core competencies that can be taught in many ways across classrooms, schools, homes and communities. When students have frequent opportunities to develop these competencies, they are better equipped to use their voices to lead action. These opportunities also provide rich practice in social and emotional competen-

cies. For example, students engage in:

- **Self-awareness** by defining their own values and perspectives, gaining awareness of personal strengths and self-efficacy.
- **Self-management** by practicing self-motivation and organizational skills when working toward goals.
- **Social awareness** by recognizing others' perspectives when many voices are elevated.
- **Relationship skills** by communicating and collaborating with others on shared ideas and goals.





Senior leaders at Johnson High School in St. Paul, Minn., during the Time to Thrive Conference in Washington, D.C.

► **Responsible decision making** by identifying solutions to issues they care about in their classrooms, schools and communities.

### Supportive Environments

Amplifying student voice requires both the promotion of students' social and emotional competence and a safe and caring learning environment where adults listen to and value what students have to say.

To create this type of environment, it is important to consider the existing power dynamics between staff and students. Our organization has heard from some schools where adults aren't accustomed to asking students to share their perspectives or may fear a loss of control when giving students opportunities to advocate for change.

By integrating SEL practices into classrooms and schools, teachers and other staff can develop more trusting and supportive relationships with their students. SEL also can help adults reflect on their own

social and emotional competencies and the different ways that they engage with students.

Furthermore, the implementation of school-wide SEL can itself offer a valuable opportunity to elevate student voice and engagement. Students can inform SEL planning and provide important perspectives on how decisions impact day-to-day life in the school. By listening to students, schools and districts can make informed choices about how to meet the social, emotional and academic needs of all learners.

In Nevada, the Washoe County School District — a partner in CASEL's Collaborating Districts Initiative — holds what it calls a Strength in Voices Symposium that brings together elementary, middle and high school students to discuss priorities and challenges within the district. In sessions led by their peers, students analyze results from climate surveys and make recommendations for change, while adults capture their input. Their involvement in data analysis not only raises student investment in making changes, but it also makes the data come alive for adults.

Washoe ensures a representative sample of students by providing each school with 15 randomly selected students, eight of whom are selected to participate. Michelle Hammond, student voice coordinator in Washoe, says: "All kids have a voice, and they deserve to express it." (Access Washoe County's Student Voice site at [www.washoeschools.net/page/4472](http://www.washoeschools.net/page/4472).)

### Elevating Voice

Schools can ensure they hear from all students,

not just those who regularly speak up and take leadership roles, by providing thoughtful opportunities to lead and contribute both in and outside the classroom.

These are ways that staff can honor and elevate student perspectives as part of schoolwide SEL efforts:

► **Foster supportive learning environments that ensure all students have opportunities to share their perspectives.** Start by developing shared agreements that reflect how students wish to be treated and how they will treat one another. Make sure this process



As vice president at CASEL, Melissa Schlinger pushes for integration of social and emotional learning practices into academic instruction.

includes all students, including those who don't normally speak up.

► **Adopt an evidence-based SEL program that promotes student voice.** SEL instruction provides many opportunities for students to reflect on and share their feelings and perspectives, work with classmates to solve problems and initiate and lead action. Identify a high-quality program that helps ensure consistent opportunities for all students to engage in SEL.

► **Integrate SEL practices into academic instruction.** Use instructional practices that provide frequent opportunities for students to discuss ideas, choose learning activities, collaborate with peers and reflect on their learning throughout all content areas. This amplifies student voice while providing practice in social and emotional competencies and deepening learning and engagement.

► **Provide opportunities for students to lead family-teacher conferences.** Teachers can help students prepare to lead the discussion about their own academic, social and emotional progress by having them gather work samples to review, write a reflection on their strengths and challenges and provide goals for the next quarter.

► **Collect, reflect on and act on data on student perspectives.** Many districts use surveys to better understand students' perspectives on schoolwide SEL implementation, school climate, academic engagement and adult-student relationships. Some districts go even further by involving young people themselves in research and analysis, a strategy called youth participatory action research.

However you engage in collecting data on student perspective, ensure the results are transparent. Communicate that you have heard their views, share what you plan to do about it and let students know how they can be part of the planning process.

► **Ensure student representation on SEL and other school leadership teams.** Students need an authentic voice in school decision making, such as the hiring of teachers. While all students' voices are important, it may be especially critical to hear from those who feel disconnected from school. To support students who are hesitant to take on these roles, provide opportunities for them to practice and receive feedback from a trusted adult or peer mentor on important leadership skills such as public speaking and meeting facilitation.



Students from Washoe County School District in Reno, Nev., study data on social and emotional learning collected in their schools.

► **Encourage students to generate their own ideas on how they'd like to elevate their voices to make change.** As members of their communities, students will have reactions to school, community and national news. Listen to students' concerns and create space for them to research and develop solutions.

### Mindset Shifts

Reflecting on the history of student voice as principal at Johnson Senior High School in St. Paul, Minn., Micheal Thompson recognizes the challenges of turning traditional approaches to leadership upside down by not only involving youth in decision making but by allowing students to implement these decisions, which may require more time, creativity and resources.

"While it's difficult," Thompson says, "we as adults needed to make the mindset shift of letting go." It's only by making this shift that we can support students in becoming the leaders and citizens we want them to be. ■

**MELISSA SCHLINGER** is vice president of practice and programs at CASEL: Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning in Chicago, Ill. E-mail: mschlinger@casel.org



# Reading & Resources

## BOOK REVIEWS

### Step In, Step Up: Empowering Women for the School Leadership Journey

by Jane A. G. Kise and Barbara K. Watterston, Solution Tree Press, Bloomington, Ind., 2019, 256 pp. with index, \$39.95 softcover



*Step In, Step Up: Empowering Women for the School Leadership Journey* by education consultants Jane A. G. Kise and Barbara K. Watterston provides insight on some of the

challenges women leaders experience in the workplace. The authors provide a mix of academic research and recent statistics on the representation of female leaders in school systems.

Written in a format that can be used as a book study guide, the book is filled with stories from women leaders on how they have navigated challenges in school leadership. Some describe the difficulties and lessons learned throughout their leadership journey, providing wisdom on dealing with the impostor syndrome, confidence building and overcoming gender barriers in the workplace. At the end of every chapter, Kise

and Watterston share actionable strategies and reflection steps that can be completed individually or as a group.

Kise and Watterston provide guiding questions and short exercises that will challenge female leaders at any level to be intentional about leading with courage. *Step In, Step Up* will take readers on a journey where female leaders will assess their emotional awareness, self-worth, relationship management and decision-making style. A book that can be read multiple times, it is a guide for personal growth, especially for those starting the school leadership journey.

Reviewed by Lynmara Colon, director of English learner programs and services, Prince William County Public Schools, Manassas, Va.

### Committing to the Culture: How Leaders Can Create and Sustain Positive Schools

by Steve Gruenert and Todd Whitaker, ASCD, Alexandria, Va., 2019, 117 pp. with index, \$22.95 softcover



Building an effective school culture is every superintendent's goal. In *Committing to the Culture: How Leaders Can Create and Sustain Positive Schools*, a follow-up to their two previous books on school culture, professors Steve

## MORE BOOK REVIEWS

[www.aasa.org/SAreviews.aspx](http://www.aasa.org/SAreviews.aspx)

### *The Aspiring Principal 50: Critical Questions for New and Future Leaders*

by Baruti K. Kafele

REVIEWED BY MARY B. HERRMANN

### *An Education Crisis Is a Terrible Thing to Waste: How Radical Changes Can Spark Student Excitement and Success*

by Yong Zhao, Trina E. Emler, Anthony Snethen and Danying Yin

REVIEWED BY THERESA ALBAN

### *Soft Skills for Leaders: Scenarios from Higher Education Administrators*

by Wanda S. Maulding Green and Edward E. Leonard

REVIEWED BY DIANE E. REED

Gruenert of Indiana State University and Todd Whitaker of the University of Missouri unpack the components of culture, explain how toxic cultures come about in schools and describe how to build positive cultures based on trust, collaboration and commitment.

The authors use an analogy of a motion picture to describe the many roles that individuals might play in a school. The actors change, but the roles are always present. A major part of a leader's job is to shift the narrative (the movie script) that determines how the educators (the actors) react to each other and to the events that occur in a school (the subplots).

This could involve changing the script to reduce toxic teachers' influence and increasing the parts of more promising actors (the next generation of stars), fostering collaboration to commit to a different vision (plot), finding common ground with the "guardians of the past" (some of the school's current and fading stars) and building trust among educators and with the school's stakeholders (the movie patrons).

This book probably contains little that most superintendents have not heard before. It could be most useful to assign as a book study for principals or to be given to a new leader for in-person or online mentoring by a superintendent.

Reviewed by Ronald S. Thomas, interim chair, Instructional Leadership and Professional Development Department, Towson University, Baltimore, Md.

## WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK ...



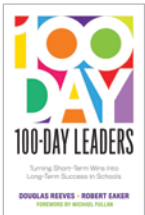
*"Against a lot of odds, I was able to do many things in my life. I attribute my accomplishments to my 6th-grade teacher Francis Bailey. This book is about the impact of a teacher. I hope my story will help other adults look beyond the emotional luggage a kid carries, and I want children and teenagers to know that no matter what happens to them, it doesn't define who they are. As educators, we have the responsibility to help them understand and believe this."*

William D. Sroufe, superintendent, Colonial Heights, Va., on writing *Everyone Needs a Mrs. Bailey* (Akmaeon Publishing, 2018)



## 100-Day Leaders: Turning Short-Term Wins Into Long-Term Success in Schools

by Douglas Reeves and Robert Eaker, Solution Tree Press, Bloomington, Ind., 2019, 168 pp. with index, \$26.95 softcover



*100-Day Leaders: Turning Short-Term Wins Into Long-Term Success in Schools* examines commonly held principles of change leadership and school improvement into a user manual of sorts for school leaders

responsible for ensuring that all students achieve to their fullest potential.

In this book, Douglas Reeves, founder of Creative Leadership Solutions, and Robert Eaker, professor emeritus at Middle Tennessee State University, make the complex challenges of education practical and manageable.

The primary concept is that big ideas must be pared down to actionable chunks that spur innovation in real-time improvement cycles. The book features a few key points, such as fidelity to professional learning communities, alignment of organizational priorities and the importance of focusing on student work and evidence of learning.

One major takeaway is that PLCs can be incredibly impactful yet also relatively ineffectual if people do not understand the principles of collaboration or model expectations, if SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-Bound) goals are ambiguous, if expectations are unclear and, perhaps most importantly, if they are not supervised properly.

The appendix includes materials to guide the development of 100-day plans and rubrics to support implementation. *100-Day Leaders* would be a valuable resource to princi-

pals looking to build the collective capacity of teams and ensure high quality PLCs in schools and districts.

Reviewed by David Moyer, superintendent, Elmhurst Community Unit School District 205, Elmhurst, Ill.

## Ready for Anything: Four Touchstones for Future-Focused Learning

by Suzette Lovely, Solution Tree Press, Bloomington, Ind., 2019, 144 pp. with index, \$31.95 softcover



Suzette Lovely, a former superintendent in Carlsbad, Calif., provides insights to educators on how to refine current educational practices to help students best prepare for their futures.

In *Ready for Anything: Four Touchstones for Future-Focused Learning*, Lovely identifies these four areas as innovative practices; strength-based culture; personalized learning experiences; and collaboration with the outside as a means for teachers and administrators to refocus learning with student curiosity to prepare them for the world of work.

In her introduction, Lovely quotes architect Buckminster Fuller by stating, "You can't change things by fighting the existing system. Rather to change something, you need to build models that make existing models obsolete." Her book is designed to help educators become the Buckminster Fuller of their craft by creating a picture of what a future-ready learner needs to be successful in the 21st century.

Lovely takes educators on a journey for understanding the challenges that will impact students' lives and suggests ways to create learning experiences that will engage students in relevant thinking. She also encourages educators to reflect on their current practices and to understand why our craft needs to be improved to impact these new learners.

The book's chapters are based on the four touchstones that provide educators with practical shifts to align their thinking based on learning rather than teaching. Each chapter includes a summary of points to ponder and strategy tools.

Reviewed by Christopher Brewer, assistant superintendent for educational programs, Rome City School District, Rome, N.Y.

## AASA School Solutions Center

These firms make up the AASA School Solutions Center.

PREMIER PARTNER

Sourcewell  
Formerly NJPA

[www.sourcewell-mn.gov](http://www.sourcewell-mn.gov)

When you leverage our national purchasing power, we reinvest in student and community success.

**Armor At Hand** | [www.armorathand.com](http://www.armorathand.com)

Smart shields for instant protection.

**The Association Partner** |

[TheAssociationPartner.com](http://TheAssociationPartner.com)

Digital ad retargeting partner.

**CitizenAID** | [www.citizenaid.us](http://www.citizenaid.us)

Empowering school communities to save lives.

**CrisisGo** | [www.crisisgo.com](http://www.crisisgo.com)

Emergency communications tools for schools.

**Diamond Assets** | [www.diamond-assets.com](http://www.diamond-assets.com)

Premier Apple hardware trade up service.

**ECRA Group** | [www.ecragroup.com](http://www.ecragroup.com)

Leadership, planning and analytical solutions.

**E-Rate Advantage** | [www.erateadvantage.com](http://www.erateadvantage.com)

Full service E-Rate consulting services.

**GotZoom** | [www.gotzoom.com](http://www.gotzoom.com)

Student loan relief and forgiveness for district employees.

**JASON Learning** | [www.jason.org](http://www.jason.org)

STEM education through exploration.

**National Fire Adjustment** | [www.nfa.com](http://www.nfa.com)

Insurance recovery for school districts.

**Quantum Learning** | [www.quantumlearning.org](http://www.quantumlearning.org)

Transformative schoolwide professional development.

**Triway International Group** |

[www.triwayinc.com](http://www.triwayinc.com)

International education, exchange and recruitment.

**UPS** | [www.ups.com](http://www.ups.com)

Shipping, freight, logistics, supplies for schools.

**VitalInsight™ Technology** |

[vitalinsightsolutions.com](http://vitalinsightsolutions.com)

Safer schools and higher performance.

**Wonder Media Story Maker** |

[www.wondermediastorymaker.com](http://www.wondermediastorymaker.com)

Transforming education by cultivating writers through animation.

*School districts should do their own due diligence before signing contracts with companies that belong to the AASA School Solutions Center. More on the School Solutions Center can be found at [www.aasa.org/ssc](http://www.aasa.org/ssc).*

## Civility Lost: The Media, Politics and Education

by **George A. Goens**, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Lanham, Md., 2019, 150 pp. with index, \$30 hardcover



America's history is filled with examples of societal tensions that are intensified when uncivil behaviors emerge as the norm. From the president to social media-savvy citizens, civility seems in short supply. In *Civility*

*Lost: The Media, Politics and Education*, former superintendent George A. Goens explores the powerful linkage between an educated citizenry and civil discourse in a robust democracy.

Goens calls upon citizens and leaders to navigate the current turbulence by understanding our history and citizenship duties. In *Civility Lost*, he identifies the virtues, values and ethics that inform civil behavior in a democracy.

Because educators are called upon to play a significant role in the formation of an educated citizenry, Goens notes that educators “must balance education for citizenship and educating people to meet their individual ambitions.” Importantly, *Civility Lost* outlines strategies that educators and school leaders can build into their work to model effective citizenship and prepare others, especially young people, for their citizenship role.

School leaders and teachers provide the tools, and the culture of their classrooms provides the place for young people to understand information, analyze its impact and formulate conclusions. Building a strong, well-equipped citizenry requires modeling by all citizens, especially educators. This book outlines actions and approaches that the school system and its leaders can use to model integrity, courage and civility for students and others in their communities.

**Reviewed by Brian L. Benzel**, leadership consultant and retired superintendent, Redmond, Wash.

## ABSTRACT

### Trust Building

School leaders may often overlook the importance of trust building between teachers and administrators, according to a new doctoral dissertation by Ryan Place at University of Massachusetts Lowell.

Place studied five school leaders to learn how they influence trust levels. Using data from administrator surveys, individual interviews, workplace observations and survey results provided by administrators involved with the study, the researcher found that building relationships with teachers enabled school leaders to influence trust levels.

Using strategies such as openness, honesty, communication, supportiveness and consistency as well as creating a positive working environment, school leaders influence trust levels with teachers.

Copies of “How Do School Leaders Influence Trust Levels between Teachers and Administrators: A Case Study” are available from ProQuest at [disspub@proquest.com](mailto:disspub@proquest.com) or 800-521-0600.

## Magazine's Best Articles

For the second year, *School Administrator* magazine will produce a digital-only issue featuring articles and columns considered the “Best of 2019-20.”

The issue will be distributed to readers on July 1. It's the lone month when AASA's magazine does not appear in print.

### Salary Study

AASA's eighth annual superintendent salary study, based on more than 1,300 responses, gauges the compensation, benefits and critical demands of urban, suburban and rural school system leaders nationwide.

The report is available in two versions: a full version for AASA members and an abridged version for wider circulation.

Access the public version of the “2019-20 AASA Superintendent Salary & Benefits Study” at [www.aasa.org/uploadedFiles/AASA-Salary-%20Benefits-Non\\_membership.pdf](http://www.aasa.org/uploadedFiles/AASA-Salary-%20Benefits-Non_membership.pdf). AASA members can obtain the member-only version through [My.AASA.org](http://My.AASA.org).

### Advocacy Network

Stay informed about federal affairs in education through the AASA Advocacy Network. Members receive advocacy updates and calls to action, including weekly briefs on Fridays when Congress is in session, and monthly analyses to keep school system leaders up-to-date on news in the nation's capital.

To sign up for these AASA member benefits, contact Noelle Ellerson Ng ([nellerson@aasa.org](mailto:nellerson@aasa.org)).

### Superintendent Bloggers

AASA members who are active bloggers can be added to the Member Bloglist on the association's website. You can find links to more than 100 blogs maintained by superintendents and other central-office leaders at [www.aasa.org/sablogs.aspx](http://www.aasa.org/sablogs.aspx).

The bloglist is managed by the staff of *School Administrator*.

## BITS & PIECES

### Principal Retention

The Learning Policy Institute conducted research on principal turnover and introduced solutions for avoiding turnover, such as improving working conditions and allowing decision-making authority.

The report says the average tenure of principals was four years in 2016-17.

Read the full report at [bit.ly/turnover-LPI](http://bit.ly/turnover-LPI).

### Accelerators in Schools

The Consortium for School Networking has released its first two reports in its annual series looking at top five accelerators advancing digital transformation in school districts.

The strongest accelerators are personalization and social and emotional learning, while the biggest hurdles include data privacy and digital equity.

Read the full reports at <https://cosn.org/k12innovation/hurdles-accelerators>.

## School Start Time

The National Center for Education Statistics released data on the start times for public high schools in the United States, as of the 2017-18 school year.

Most high schools in suburbs (54 percent) had a start time before 8 a.m. More high schools in cities (26 percent) than in suburbs (18 percent), towns (13 percent) and rural areas (11 percent) had a start time of 8:30 a.m. or later, the report said.

A start time of 8:30 a.m. or later is recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Read "Start Time for U.S. Public High Schools" at [bit.ly/public-high-school-start-time](http://bit.ly/public-high-school-start-time).

## National Spending Data

The National Center for Education Statistics reported that revenues and expenditures in public K-12 education nationwide increased for the fourth consecutive year in fiscal year 2017.

The report includes the most recent federal data on revenue and expenditure totals, revenues by source, expenditures by function and object, current expenditures and current expenditures per pupil.

Read the full report at [bit.ly/national-spending-data](http://bit.ly/national-spending-data).

## Local K-12 Spending

A report from the National Center for Education Statistics presents data on revenues and expenditures for elementary and secondary education at the local or school district level for the 2017 fiscal year.

The national median of total revenues per pupil was \$13,334, while the national median of expenditures per pupil was \$11,236. This was a 1.8 percent increase over the previous year.

Read the full report at [bit.ly/local-k-12-spending](http://bit.ly/local-k-12-spending).

## Graduation Rates

Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates for the 2017-18 school year increased nationally from the previous year across all racial and ethnic subgroups and for economically disadvantaged students, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

## School Administrator | AUGUST

**ACCREDITATION OF SCHOOLS.** An examination of the current work of regional accrediting bodies. How failing school districts have used the accreditation process to begin their recovery. The superintendent of Hampton, Va., schools on his district's path to full accreditation. Ideas for redesigning the 12th-grade year for students.

### PLUS

- ▶ Board-Savvy Superintendent: The soft skills for working alongside a governing board
- ▶ Nurturing the mental well-being of students via social media
- ▶ Debut President's Corner column by Kristi Wilson
- ▶ Mary Herrmann on why she wrote *Learn to Lead, Lead to Learn: Leadership as a Work in Progress*



The rate for students with limited English proficiency decreased by less than one percentage point. The center also released state-level graduation rates.

View the full data at [bit.ly/2017-18-adjusted-cohort-graduation-rates](http://bit.ly/2017-18-adjusted-cohort-graduation-rates).

## Chronic Absenteeism

A new report from Future Ed examines strategies, at three intervention levels, for reducing chronic absenteeism, such as removing barriers to attendance and improving school climate.

Read "Attendance Playbook: Smart Solutions for Reducing Chronic Absenteeism" at [future-ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Attendance-Playbook.pdf](http://future-ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Attendance-Playbook.pdf).

## Violent Incidents

The National Center for Education Statistics released a report on the national survey of public schools regarding enrollment where violent incidents and hate crimes occurred.

In the 2017-18 school year, 78 percent of U.S. public school students were enrolled in a school where a violent incident occurred. Of those students, 84 percent were in a school with a sworn law enforcement officer present.

Read the full report at <https://nces.ed.gov/datapoints/2020007.asp>.

## Author Spotlight



Are you the author or co-author of a recently published book? We would like to hear from you.

We feature authors in *School Administrator*.

Contact us at [magazine@aasa.org](mailto:magazine@aasa.org).

**SchoolAdministrator**  
ESSENTIAL INSIGHTS AND COMMENTARY FOR SCHOOL SYSTEM LEADERS



## PRESIDENT'S CORNER | DEBORAH L. KERR

### Courage, Compassion and Self-Care



**IN TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY,** we must rise to meet our biggest leadership challenges — and this is that time.

The worldwide pandemic has affected all of us, from rural America to urban centers. This unprecedented journey is one that none of us ever expected or were quite ready to deal with. This time of uncertainty, grief and anxiety calls for true leaders to rise, to lead with courage, compassion and self-care.

► **Courage.** On March 13, I prepared a message to my district's families and staff — a message I'd never before had to craft. We were closing Brown Deer schools for the next four weeks. I was overwhelmed with grief and sadness.

**“Amidst this isolation, encourage your team to REACH OUT TO EACH OTHER, to share movies they've watched or books they are reading.”**

The health of our students, staff, families, community members and the most vulnerable is of the utmost importance, and closing our schools was something we could do to support efforts to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus. This difficult decision was made in collaboration with Quadrant D, a team of remarkable superintendents in southeastern Wisconsin that makes decisions related to snow or inclement weather days. We typically meet via conference call at 4 a.m. However, these conversations were anything but typical.

We were ahead of our state and national leaders in deciding to close our schools, which created some uncertainty for us all. We needed to make plans to feed the children, to support families with child care, to take care of our employees and to provide remote learning opportunities. Thirteen courageous

school leaders took the lead to cancel schools in their respective districts. I am so proud of Quadrant D.

► **Compassion.** As leaders, we can be a force for the good. During these times of isolation, we must stay connected and take care of one another through kindness, by showing appreciation and love for our families and school communities. We need to let the community know that we are here for them.

Amidst this isolation, encourage your team to reach out to each other, to share movies they've watched or books they are reading. I just finished watching the movie “Yesterday,” a sweet romantic comedy about a struggling British musician who believes he's the only person who remembers the Beatles! I needed this story, inspired by music, to warm my soul.

We cannot change the negative news of the pandemic, but we can be the voice of compassion that inspires hope for tomorrow. This is leadership.

► **Self-Care.** Self-care, a vital aspect of our leadership role, is nourishment for the soul. Self-care must be a priority to sustain us through the ever-changing demands on our time. The pandemic has caused overwhelming stress for school leaders. This is the time to rise up and lead others in our charge. When we become intentional and take care of ourselves, we nourish our souls as leaders. We give to ourselves to give back to others. Self-care is a vital aspect of leadership.

I am so honored to have served you in my role as president in 2019-20. You have forever influenced my leadership. Let us continue to be intentional and steadfast in our leadership of equity. Our children and school communities now more than ever need your gifts and your leadership. May you all inspire, innovate and lead greatly. Until we come together again.

**DEBORAH KERR** is AASA president in 2019-20. E-mail: [dkerr@browndeerschools.com](mailto:dkerr@browndeerschools.com). Twitter: @DrDLKerr

#### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2019-20

(terms expire June 30 of the year indicated)

##### PRESIDENT

Deborah L. Kerr  
Superintendent  
School District  
of Brown Deer  
Brown Deer, Wis.

##### IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT

Christopher O. Gaines  
Superintendent  
Mehlville School District R9  
Saint Louis, Mo.

##### PRESIDENT-ELECT

Kristi Wilson  
Superintendent  
Buckeye Elementary  
School District  
Buckeye, Ariz.

##### MEMBERS

Nicholas Ceglarek (2021)  
Gladys Cruz (2022)  
Jay Curtis (2021)  
Brian Harris (2021)  
Blaine Hess (2020)  
Shane Hotchkiss (2021)  
Paul Imhoff (2020)  
Ann Levett (2020)  
Ralph Marino Jr. (2021)  
Joseph Maruszczak (2022)  
Raymond C. Morgigno (2022)  
Rodney Shotwell (2020)  
Candace Singh (2020)  
Max R. Tanner (2022)  
Scott Thielman (2022)  
Tom J. Turrell (2020)  
Ronald C. Whitmoyer (2020)

Daniel A. Domenech  
AASA Executive Director  
(Ex Officio)

R. Kirk Hamilton (2020)  
Association of State  
Executives Liaison  
(Ex Officio)

# How Positive Psychology Can Improve Student Success

**An Illinois school district uses a program that encourages a positive outlook to boost academic performance.**

(Excerpted from *US News and World Report*, Jan. 2019)

**S**hawn Achor is perhaps best described as a happiness guru. He has published two best-selling books on the subject, *The Happiness Advantage* and *Big Potential*, and presented one of the most-viewed TED Talks ever. He has also created a research-based program to improve student success.

Achor's overarching view is that happiness and mental well-being aren't just a nice way to go through life. "My research proves that happiness and mental well-being are precursors to greater success rates," he says.

In a nutshell, "happiness significantly raises memory, attention, productive energy, social connection, trust, intelligence and creativity, and shields against depression and anxiety," Achor says.

The Orange Frog program teaches this approach to students and staff at schools around the country. One such district is Schaumburg Township Elementary District 54, in Illinois. To kick off the school year, Achor hosted a Happiness Summit and presented workshops for all staff members.

## Research Shows Happiness Key to Success

Achor's research revealed that District 54's positive psychology efforts yielded tangible benefits:

- ▶ Led to a happier, healthier and more engaged learning environment.
- ▶ Fostered student, family and community development.
- ▶ Improved student success.

In the past three years, School District 54 went from the 73rd percentile of academic achievement in Illinois to the 95th percentile. Achor says, "They are in the top 2 percent of schools now nationwide.

"And SD54 is not an outlier," Achor adds. "We worked with the poorest school district in Iowa over a five-year period, and the graduation rates rose to 91 percent, attendance to 95 percent. For the first time, kids are coming back from the rich counties to attend school in the poorest county in Iowa. Their literacy rates have the greatest percentage increase of any school in Iowa."

The Orange Frog program embeds happiness in the social-emotional curriculum:

- ▶ Students are instructed to record things they are grateful for each day, act out plays based upon the



research, meditate for two minutes in the classroom and bring those lessons home to their families.

- ▶ Teachers attend learning groups that focus on connecting around positive content. Parents attend the program's Parent University each semester.
- ▶ Schools include a 30-minute emotional learning block in the weekly schedule. A "Happiness Team" of staff members implement the various components of happiness training.

Experience the largest and most successful positive psychology training program for educators in the world. AASA members save \$500 on the public workshop and train-the-trainer.



To inquire contact:

Donald Bargo

International Thought Leader Network  
Cary, NC

Tel: 919-434-6502

E-mail: donaldb@ithoughtleader.com

[www.OrangeFrogExperience.com](http://www.OrangeFrogExperience.com)

## One Pandemic Plus: Greater Voice for Students



**I AM WRITING** this in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic with the hope that, as you read it, events will be taking a turn for the better.

As I've talked to the news media in recent weeks about what the long-term impact of the pandemic will be on our school systems, the theme for this month's issue of *School Administrator* is quite relevant: student voice and motivation.

AASA has produced many articles and web-based resources on personalized learning, and I co-authored a book on the subject in 2019. A major component of the practice is to allow students to have a role in determining what they want to learn and when. In schools that have implemented personalized learning, we already see students are more motivated to learn. Students who had found their schools and the learning process to be irrelevant now are engaged in meaningful learning. They are motivated to participate in activities they have chosen.

### Uneven Impact

Closures of school buildings have called for districts to provide online learning. We know the capability to do that varies widely, and many also have provided learning packets to be sent home to the students. But the impact of prolonged school closures has made it clear that online learning can no longer be an innovation — it must be the practice for every student in America. The school calendar, seat time requirements and attendance regulations are just some of the current standards the pandemic will affect.

The prolonged school closures will result in significant inequities in the amount and quality of instruction that students receive, widening the achievement gap. Those with access

to virtual learning experiences will be at a distinct advantage. Those students who are excited about being able to choose what they learn will have an edge over those who do not.

Teaching the same material to all students at the same time after students return to school will not close the gap. Indeed, there is a distinct possibility that students who have thrived on online learning will resent having to return to traditional instruction.

**“Superintendents who have delved into personalized learning will tell you that EMPOWERING THE STUDENT VOICE does not always meet with overwhelming approval.”**

Superintendents who have delved into personalized learning will tell you that empowering the student voice does not always meet with overwhelming approval. Teachers whose practice has been to teach the same lesson plan for the entire class may object to allowing students to divert to unexpected areas. They may not have had the training to differentiate instruction. It's a generalization, but this may be more common at the secondary level than at the elementary level.

However, the opposite is true for online instruction. A recent survey by the Consortium for School Networking shows that, when looking at the one-to-one capacity needed for online instruction, 66 percent of high schools and 69 percent of middle schools surveyed indicate they have that capacity. Only 43 percent of elementary schools say they have that capacity.

In the current environment, we may find more personalized learning going on in elementary classrooms but more online instruction at the

secondary level. Student maturity may be a factor as older students may require less teacher support. However, the equity issue underlying virtual learning from the home will need to be resolved. Many students may have the laptop from school, but they do not have internet access at home. Provisions must be made to extend access to those families that cannot afford it.

### Safe Feelings

Beyond personalized learning, student voice also is getting more attention as social-emotional learning gains greater importance in classrooms. Prior to the pandemic, what kept many superintendents up at night was the opioid epidemic, student suicides, school shootings and bullying incidents.

The recognition that emotional factors impede the ability of many students to learn, even to stay alive, has brought about a renewed focus on social-emotional learning. We need to hear from our students. We need to encourage them to share their worries and fears and what they need to feel safe and secure in our schools and their homes.

AASA manages a vibrant Social Emotional Learning Cohort that is engaged in meaningful dialogue on how the practice contributes to the development of the whole child. Working with the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, we have developed a Superintendent's SEL Toolkit (available on our website). We are thankful for the financial support for this initiative provided by the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative.

Motivated students raising their voices may be one welcome byproduct of the coronavirus pandemic.

**DANIEL DOMENECH** is AASA executive director and co-author of *Personalizing 21st Century Education: A Framework for Student Success*. E-mail: [ddomenech@aasa.org](mailto:ddomenech@aasa.org). Twitter: @AASADan



# Back Tracking on Your Reading?

## Get Recent Back Issues of SchoolAdministrator

Catch up on any issues you may have missed of AASA's flagship publication, *School Administrator*.

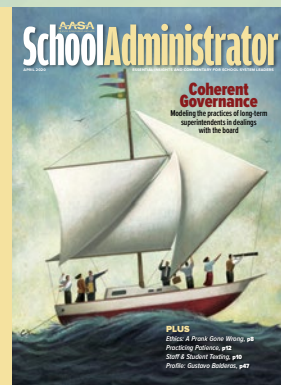
To order a single issue or purchase a bulk quantity with a discount, contact **703-875-0772** or [magazine@aasa.org](mailto:magazine@aasa.org).



MAY 2020

### Tech Leadership

PRICE: \$9 member/\$10 nonmember



APRIL 2020

### Coherent Governance

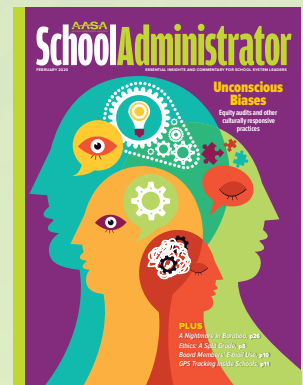
PRICE: \$9 member/\$10 nonmember



MARCH 2020

### A Higher Hurdle

PRICE: \$9 member/\$10 nonmember



FEBRUARY 2020

### Unconscious Biases

PRICE: \$9 member/\$10 nonmember



JANUARY 2020

### Mindsets in Special Education

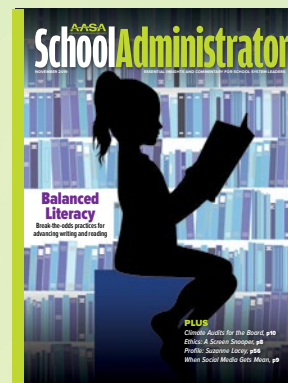
PRICE: \$9 member/\$10 nonmember



DECEMBER 2019

### Leading Through Turbulence

PRICE: \$9 member/\$10 nonmember



NOVEMBER 2019

### Balanced Literacy

PRICE: \$9 member/\$10 nonmember



OCTOBER 2019

### Disruption

PRICE: \$9 member/\$10 nonmember

A young child with light brown hair is shown in profile, looking intently at a tablet. The tablet screen displays a video of a student in a pink shirt writing on a notepad. Overlaid on the bottom of the video are four circular icons: a green video camera, a green microphone, a green list icon, and a red telephone handset. The background is a dark wooden surface with a stack of books in the upper right corner.

Your school  
counts on you.

Count on us.



# Working together

As you navigate a new normal in education, let us help.



Contract #080119-ATT



Contract #081419-CDW



Contract #121218-WWG



Furnishing Knowledge®

Contract #031715-K12



Contract #010615-SCC



Contract #022217-WEX

View all awarded contracts at:



[sourcewell-mn.gov/contract-search](https://sourcewell-mn.gov/contract-search)

Sourcewell is your government source for more than  
400 cooperative contracts.

[sourcewell-mn.gov](https://sourcewell-mn.gov)





### John J. Buckey

John Buckey will become the superintendent of the Marblehead School District in Marblehead, Mass. He has been the principal of Nantucket High School

in Nantucket, Mass., since 2008 and was named Massachusetts High School Principal of the Year in 2012. Previously, he served as the principal of Littleton High School in Littleton, Mass. Buckey is a past president of the Massachusetts School Administrators Association. He earned his Ed.D. in educational administration and organizational leadership from Northeastern University. Buckey has been a member of AASA since 2015.



### Clint Christopher

The Muscatine School District in Muscatine, Iowa, has appointed Clint Christopher as its new superintendent. Christopher has served as superintendent

for the 9,700-student Eastern Carver County School District in Chaska, Minn., since 2017 and previously was its associate superintendent for three years. An educator for 23 years, Christopher earlier worked as an assistant superintendent in Moline, Ill., and began as an elementary school teacher in North Scott, Iowa. He joined AASA in 2014.



### Thomas G. Farrell

Joining the 9,000-student school district in Brick Township, N.J., as superintendent is Thomas Farrell. Since 2013, Farrell has worked as super-

intendent of the Shore Regional School District in West Long Branch, N.J. He previously was a principal at New Egypt High School in New Egypt, N.J. He came to education from business, having served as executive vice president at Atlantic Lighting in Edison, N.J., for seven years. An AASA member since 2013, Farrell completed his Ed.D. in leadership at Monmouth University.



### Jessica Schmettan

After serving as assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction for the Port Jefferson Union Free School District in Port Jefferson, N.Y., Jessica Schmettan has

transitioned into the district's superintendency. Before joining Port Jefferson in 2016, Schmettan was the assistant superintendent for elementary curriculum and instruction in the Sachem Central School District in Lake Ronkonkoma, N.Y. Earlier she was literacy coordinator for five elementary schools in the Three Village Central School District in Stony Brook, N.Y., and a teacher in Setauket, N.Y. She has been an AASA member since 2019.



### Jason D. Thomson

Jason Thomson has begun his new role as superintendent of the Ichabod Crane Central School District in Valatie, N.Y. Prior to taking this post, he was

superintendent of the Delaware Academy Central School District in Delhi, N.Y., for nine years and served as principal of a K-12 school, director of curriculum and director of special education in Franklin, N.Y. Earlier, he worked as a dean in Walton, N.Y. Before moving into education, Thomson was a personal trainer for Yoko Ono for a year. He has been a member of AASA since 2012.



### Julie Treppe

The Boone Community School District in Boone, Iowa, has welcomed Julie Treppe as its new superintendent. Treppe has spent the last three

years as a shared superintendent of two Iowa districts: West Monona Community School District in Onawa and West Harrison Community School District in Mondamin. She previously was the principal at Paul Norton Elementary School in Bettendorf, Iowa. An AASA member since 2017, Treppe is part of AASA's 2021 West cohort for the National Superintendent Certification Program.

## APPOINTMENTS

**Stephen D. Butz**, from superintendent, Southeast Delco School District, Folcroft, Pa., to director of career and technical education, Delaware County Intermediate Unit, Morton, Pa.

**Kimberley Cantu**, from deputy superintendent to superintendent, Mansfield, Texas

**Thomas W. Kenworthy**, from assistant superintendent to superintendent, Portsmouth, R.I.

**Andy Kohl**, from assistant superintendent to superintendent, Warrensburg, Mo.

**Troy Marnholtz**, from superintendent, Chilhowee, Mo., to assistant superintendent, Warrensburg, Mo.

**Christopher Montini**, from assistant superintendent to superintendent, Naugatuck, Conn.

**Ryan P. Pacatte**, from assistant superintendent of instruction and student learning, Palmyra-Macedon Central School District, Palmyra, N.Y., to superintendent, Avon, N.Y.

**Robby Parker**, from superintendent, Madison, Ala., City School District to principal, Whitesburg Christian Academy, Huntsville, Ala.

**Matt Pearce**, from assistant superintendent to superintendent, Republic, Mo.

**Jesse Rodriguez**, from superintendent, Proviso Township High Schools District 209, Forest Park, Ill., to superintendent, Zion-Benton Township High School District 126, Zion, Ill.

**Andrew S. Wise**, from superintendent, Olympia Community Unit School District 16, Stanford, Ill., to superintendent, Center Cass School District 66, Downers Grove, Ill.

## RETIREMENTS

**Mat Bottoms**, superintendent, Carteret County, N.C.

**Gary Cialfi**, superintendent, Trumbull, Conn.

**Brent Colbry**, superintendent, Skowhegan, Maine

**Jacque Cowherd**, superintendent, Fulton, Mo.

**Walter Davie**, superintendent, Tuscaloosa, Ala.

**Jeff Eakins**, superintendent, Hillsborough County, Fla.

**Teresa Fabricius**, superintendent, Fruitland, Idaho

**John George**, executive director, Montgomery County Intermediate Unit, Norristown, Pa.

**Robert Hanger**, superintendent, Palmyra, Neb.

**Paula Hawley**, superintendent, Pikeland Community School District 10, Pittsfield, Ill.

**Lyle Holiday**, superintendent, Windham Southeast Supervisory Union, Brattleboro, Vt.

**Scott Howard**, superintendent, Butler County, Ky.

**Kathy Kelly**, superintendent, Columbia Heights, Minn.

**Scott Patrick**, superintendent, Warrensburg, Mo.

**Michelle Saylor**, superintendent, Bellefonte, Pa.

**Karen Sullivan**, superintendent, Indian Prairie School District, Aurora, Ill.

**Chance Wistrom**, superintendent, Republic, Mo.

News about AASA members' promotions, retirements, honors and deaths should be addressed to: Editor, *School Administrator*, 1615 Duke St., Alexandria, VA 22314. Fax: 703-841-1543. E-mail: [magazine@aasa.org](mailto:magazine@aasa.org)

## Changing Community Views About Poverty

BY JULI VALENTINE

**COMMUNITY SUPPORT** and stability means a lot to Samantha Fuhrey, superintendent of the Newton County schools in Covington, Ga. She grew up in a military family that moved frequently, yet Fuhrey made memorable connections with so many of her teachers that she was inspired to become one herself.

Now she's in charge of a school district in which 68 percent of students receive free or reduced-price lunch, trying to build a sense of community and belonging.

"My passion is for my community, my love and care for my students," says Fuhrey. "I just think the world of the almost 20,000 kids that we serve."

For someone whose youth was spent largely on the move, her professional life has maintained a steady anchor. Fuhrey has lived in Newton County, a southeastern exurb of Atlanta, for almost 30 years and worked in the district for the last 20. When the superintendency became available in 2013, she wanted to maintain the momentum the district had been building during her time there and made her move into the chief role.

"I had the institutional knowledge and the background to be able to take on the leadership role as we were not in a position to have wholesale turn-over. It would just have set the school system back paces," says Fuhrey, who was honored in February as one of four finalists for AASA's 2020 National Superintendent of the Year award.

One thing she's added to her resume to help her community is the role of certified poverty coach. This certification, awarded by the Beegle Poverty Coaching Institute, allows her to meet with different stakeholder groups to promote the transformation from being poverty-aware — that is, knowing poverty exists in the community — to being poverty-informed, or understanding how people are impacted by their economic circumstances.

### BIO STATS: SAMANTHA FUHREY

**CURRENTLY:** superintendent, Newton County School System, Covington, Ga.

**PREVIOUSLY:** deputy superintendent, Newton County

**AGE:** 51

**GREATEST INFLUENCE ON CAREER:** The students with whom I have worked over the course of my career. They are why I hit the ground running every day.

**BEST PROFESSIONAL DAY:** In May 2019 when 1,369 students graduated and earned the largest amount of academic, athletic and fine arts scholarships in the history of our school system, totaling more than \$51 million. The same graduating class posted the highest graduation rate ever, 87.6 percent.

**BOOKS AT BEDSIDE:** *Clarity for Learning* by John Almarode and Kara Vandas; *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox, and the Horse* by Charlie Mackesy; and *The Coffee Bean: A Simple Lesson to Create Positive Change* by Jon Gordon and Damon West

**WHY I'M AN AASA MEMBER:** Membership ensures legislative representation and advocacy on behalf of all public education students, specifically those students I serve in my community.



"It's a lot of hard work because you're having to change people's mind frames and the way they have always thought about things," Fuhrey says. "You're really attacking what is an implicit bias within people that they sometimes are ashamed to admit they have."

That hard work has paid off and fellow superintendents have taken notice. Fuhrey serves on a regional education service agency with Michael Duncan, superintendent in nearby Pike County, who says Fuhrey has built an effective team in her district that views everything through an equity lens.

"She's done an amazing job helping Newton County understand the challenges faced by children and families in poverty and developing a communitywide approach to building support systems," says Duncan. "This is because of Samantha's leadership and the community's courage to accept the equity challenge she set forth. Com-

munities and school districts around our nation spend time talking about equity, but Newton County puts it into action every day for every child."

While working to change public views of poverty and its effects on the youth she serves, Fuhrey says she remains impressed with the resiliency and attainment of the student population. Last year, 1,369 graduating seniors earned more than \$51 million in college scholarships, the largest amount ever awarded to Newton County students.

"That's a very large accomplishment for our children, but collectively speaking [I'm most proud of] the tenacity that our people have across the system — from the children to our teachers and leaders — to just keep pushing forward with the eye on the prize," Fuhrey says. "Even when we're down, we keep pressing forward."

**JULI VALENTINE** is digital content editor at AASA. E-mail: [jvalentine@aasa.org](mailto:jvalentine@aasa.org).

### Secrets on Public Display

Superintendent Patrick Anderson drew autobiographically on his own family dynamic and his experiences as an educator to write the script of a stage play titled “School Secrets” based on a book he had published.

When the production appeared at the Alton Little Theater in Alton, Ill., not far from the Wood River-Hartford school district that he leads, the show included a playlist of pop tunes, such as “Principal’s Office” by Young MC, “Education Song” by Bruno Mars and “Parents Just Don’t Understand” by DJ Jazzy Jeff.

Said Anderson of his experience: “I remember a fellow playwright asking me if I was nervous about the production. I said I was a little nervous. He told me I should be a whole lot nervous because 90 percent of the people who bought my book didn’t read it, but 100 percent of the people watching the play will watch it! ... Then I got nervous.”

### Goats 2, Weeds 0

Thick vegetation covered the steep hillside terrain adjacent to the sports stadium in the Norwin School District in North Huntingdon, Pa., making access by maintenance staff and lawn mowers somewhat treacherous.

So the Norwin leadership contracted with Nuisance Wildlife Solutions to bring in a herd of goats to handle the job. A few weeks of overgrown weed consumption also was expected to resolve a second nuisance to the school system — groundhogs making residence near Norwin Knights Stadium.

Norwin superintendent Jeff Taylor scored a double victory off the playing field. The distinctive method of landscape maintenance was both cost-effective and environmentally friendly.

**SOURCE:** Jonathan Szish, Norwin School District



### Nick’s Cannonball Express

Growing impatient by delays in taking occupancy of a \$55 million addition to East Leyden High School in Franklin Park, Ill., superintendent Nick Polyak added a little suspense to the long-anticipated opening. Polyak started telling everyone around him that once the new swimming pool was open for use, he would be the first one in.

He made it a special moment, wearing a full business suit with a tie for a dive off the board. (He considered it an old suit and threw it out afterward.)

The moment was captured on video (<https://bit.ly/nicks-cannonball>) by four school faculty members — who along with Polyak had just finished their weekly before-school basketball game in the school gym.

Upon surfacing, Polyak declared the new pool “open for business as of tomorrow!”

**SHORT, HUMOROUS** anecdotes, quips, quotations and malapropisms for this column relating to school district administration should be addressed to: Editor, *School Administrator*, 1615 Duke St., Alexandria, VA 22314. E-mail: [magazine@aasa.org](mailto:magazine@aasa.org). Upon request, names may be withheld in print.



# NO BIG RESOURCES? GET BIG RESULTS ANYWAY

AASA drives change and works to increase educational equity for kids across the country. Your participation is key to improving and redesigning policies and practices at district levels.



“All kids engaged in learning today . . . for life tomorrow’ is our vision. That includes four-year-old preschoolers discovering how to play with others, elementary students learning to speak English for the first time, middle schoolers learning to code, and high school students preparing for college and/or careers via Career and Technical Education programs where they learn hard and soft job skills. It means that we work hard today to improve the lives they will have tomorrow and beyond. Ambitious? Definitely. But AASA membership helps our vision become a reality.”

## **TAMMY LACEY**

Superintendent of Schools  
Great Falls Public Schools  
Great Falls, Montana

## **ANOTHER VITAL BENEFIT OF AASA MEMBERSHIP**

Visit [AASA.ORG](https://aasa.org) or call **703.528.0700** to take advantage of everything AASA membership has to offer you.





**Travel-Free PD**  
Professional Learning Anytime, Anywhere

Designed to **maximize efficacy and impact**

Travel-Free PD, by Solution Tree, offers your team the flexibility to engage meaningfully in professional learning at your own pace, on your own schedule, in any location of your choosing.

Receive expert guidance as you develop a vision and actionable plan for leading and improving the important daily work of your school community.

### Rely on Travel-Free PD to help your district:

- > Develop a comprehensive plan for sustained improvement
- > Integrate a targeted and systematic RTI
- > Determine if current assessments are driving instruction
- > Develop instructional practices that engage, empower, and motivate
- > Support teachers in preparing and delivering effective lessons
- > Improve school culture

**“This was a FANTASTIC way to get to attend the event without actually being there in person.”**

—Jennifer Denham, curriculum support provider, Del Rey Elementary School, California



**LEARN MORE**

TravelFreePD.com | **855.880.4624**



**Solution Tree**