

AASA
THE SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS ASSOCIATION

School Administrator

AUGUST 2013

ESSENTIAL INSIGHTS AND COMMENTARY FOR SCHOOL SYSTEM LEADERS

Schools' Role in Student Health Care

Investments in mental health, in-house clinics, healthy food policies



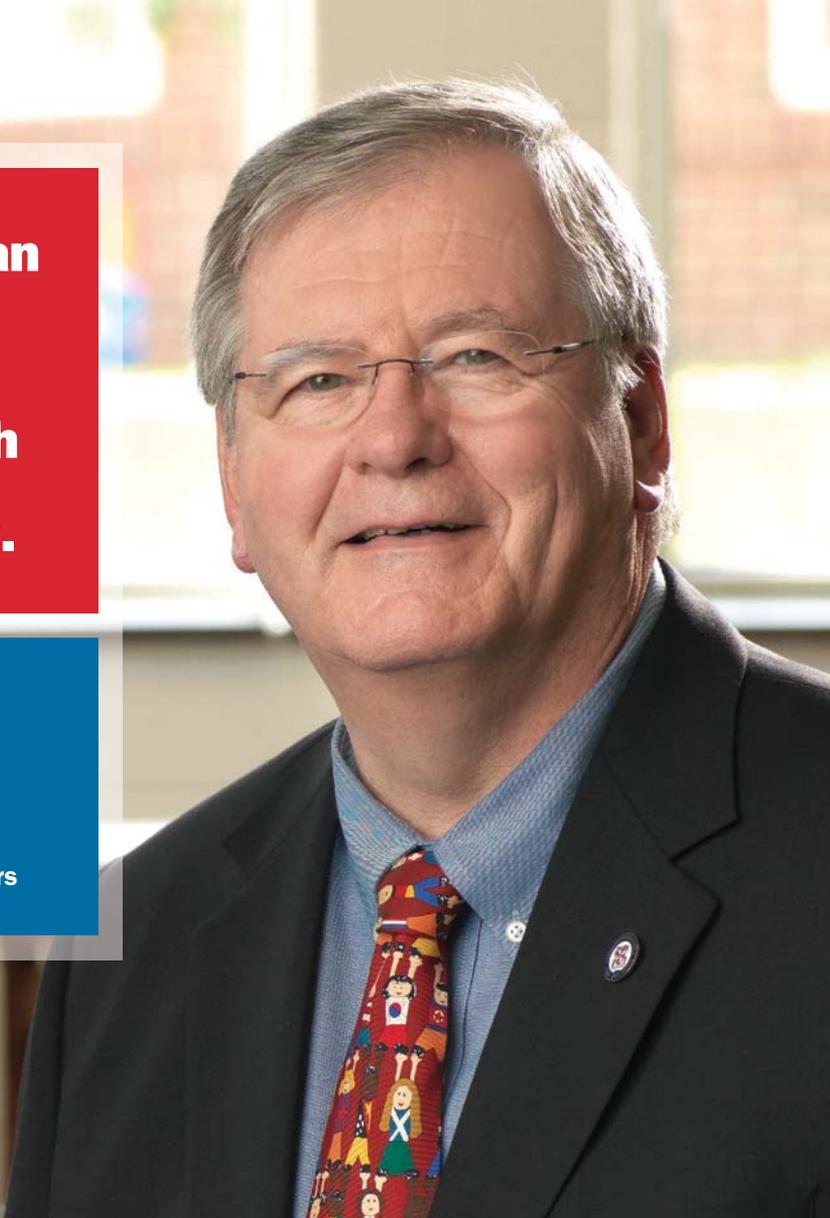
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A portrait of Dr. Edgar B. Hatrick III, a middle-aged man with grey hair and glasses, wearing a dark suit jacket, a light blue shirt, and a colorful patterned tie. He is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred office setting with bookshelves.

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Past President,
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Harry Pringle's advice in his Board-Savvy Superintendent column, "Five Ways to Unknowingly Undermine Your Board" (April 2013), **SHOULD BE TAUGHT IN EVERY SCHOOL LEADERSHIP COURSE!**

Whenever I found myself headed for trouble during my days in the superintendency, I could pin it on one or a combination of the behaviors he wrote about.

Now I hope he will write on this subject for members of school boards.

JAMES M. FITZPATRICK
PRESIDENT,
SCHOOLSPRING,
SOUTH BURLINGTON, VT.

Journalism Support

I thought Susan Enfield's comments on the importance of supporting scholastic journalism in schools was outstanding.

In her March 2013 article ("My Defense of Scholastic Journalism"), she was spot-on about freedom of expression and the essential role journalism study plays in educating young people. I found it truly refreshing to hear a colleague take this approach as opposed to hearing so many complain about the need for greater censorship of the student press.

STEPHEN C. JOEL
SUPERINTENDENT,
LINCOLN PUBLIC SCHOOLS,
LINCOLN, NEB.

As someone who has followed Susan Enfield's career over the last six years, I was happy to discover her article in defense of student journalism.

The first four years of my career were spent as a high school newspaper adviser, and I, too, understand the academic benefits of teaching students to interview, report, argue, tell stories and publish in a responsible way. It has been my experience, unfortunately, that some district and school leaders oversee student publications so stringently that it pre-empts their instructional power. So it is nice to hear a

superintendent defend the freedom of a student press to maximize student voice and to minimize "quiet dissatisfaction."

Next school year I will complete an administrative internship through a graduate university program in educational leadership. When I get the opportunity to serve as a principal, I hope it is under the leadership of a superintendent who demonstrates the vision and perspective that Enfield has shown in her career.

CRAIG CURRY
ENGLISH TEACHER,
RIDGEFIELD HIGH SCHOOL,
RIDGEFIELD, WASH.

Acknowledging Teachers

Re Benny Gooden's President's Corner "Teachers Determine Success" (March 2013):

As a 26-year teaching veteran, I agree with the point of this column: Teachers continually do whatever is necessary to reach their students.

We are given nearly impossible expectations and consistently work hard to reach them. We're not looking for fame, glory or riches, but simple respect. Our students today deserve the best.

LAURA FENGER
MEMBER, BOARD OF EDUCATION,
MASON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
MASON, MICH.

Demands on Teachers

I enjoyed Kimberly Moritz's My View column "A Generation Apart: What We Expect From Teachers" (April 2013). Like her, I have a daughter who has been teaching for about 10 years, and I am amazed and increasingly concerned about what we are asking of these young teachers.

Thanks for giving Moritz the opportunity to highlight this issue.

WILLIAM D. SILKY
SENIOR PARTNER,
CASTALLO & SILKY EDUCATION CONSULTANTS,
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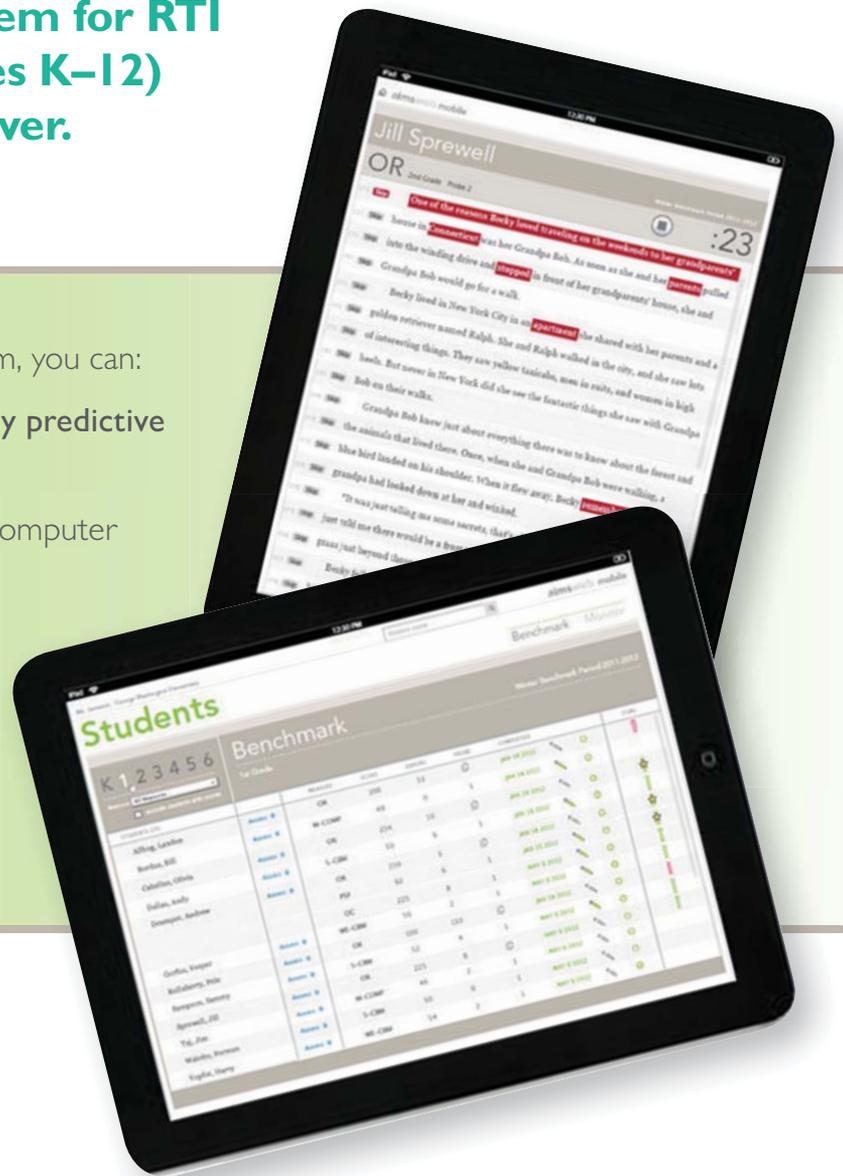
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ALWAYS LEARNING

PEARSON

STARTING POINT

A Call for Contributions

One of the hard parts of managing this magazine for a readership whose professional responsibilities seem without boundaries is settling on a few editorial themes that will resonate with readers and appear timely by the day the magazine shows up in the office mail. It's an exercise we go through every six months as we extend our editorial calendar into the future.

The themes we've identified for the first half of 2014 recently were added to our magazine's page on the AASA website. I invite you to take a look and to consider submitting a story idea or a manuscript draft that connects to one or more of our planned subjects. The author guidelines on the magazine's site lend useful guidance on what we seek in article submissions.

Most major articles in this month's



"We'll implement the suggestions from Linda and Bob, and send the rest to Congress."

issue on the linkages between student well-being and learning were the product of joint planning with members of the AASA Children's Programs Department. Many of their activities are underwritten by outside funding from foundations, corporations and government agencies, and we were pleased to highlight their important work.

One final point: We say fare-

well this month to someone who has been a cornerstone of AASA for a generation, Bruce Hunter, who is retiring. A deserved tribute begins on page 52.

Jay P. Goldman

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STATE OF THE SUPERINTENDENCY

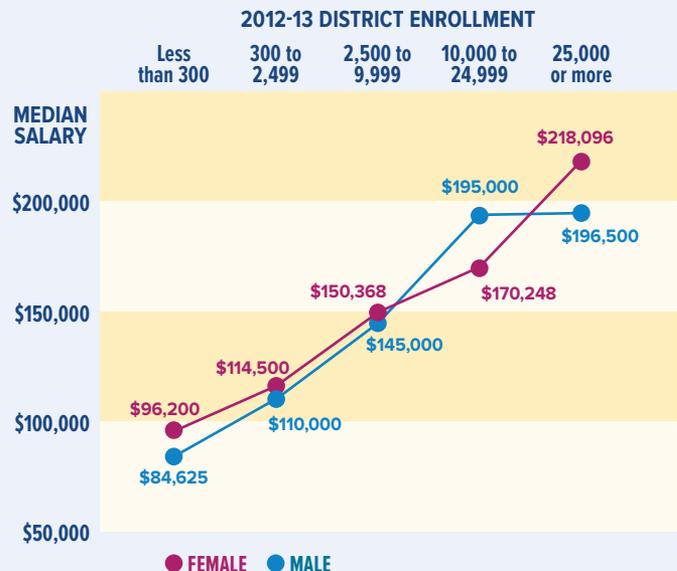
Pay by Gender and District Size

Superintendents nationwide experienced small growth in median salaries from 2011-12 to 2012-13, according to a new study by AASA. As expected, salaries for the top district leaders generally increased with district enrollment.

In four of the five categories across the size of school districts, the median salaries paid to female superintendents slightly exceeded those paid to their male colleagues.

In drawing conclusions from these data, one must consider the relatively small number of respondents in the smallest and largest groupings of student enrollment in the school districts.

SOURCE OF DATA: "2012 SUPERINTENDENTS SALARY AND BENEFITS STUDY" PUBLISHED BY AASA. ANALYSIS BY ROBERT S. McCORD, NOELLE M. ELLERSON AND CHRISTOPHER C. STREAM. FULL STUDY AVAILABLE AT WWW.AASA.ORG.





“I also mentioned that our profession as we know it was going to change so radically that all of us ‘old dogs’ (myself included) would have to learn some new and complicated tricks! Unfortunately, I think my prediction was pretty accurate.”

From “CCLS and APPR—Abbreviations Changing Education” by Christopher R. Brown (superintendent, West Genesee, N.Y.) on his blog, *Notes from the Superintendent*

Read the full postings of these and other members’ blogs at www.aasa.org/SAblogs.aspx.

“When philanthropists have potentially useful ideas about education, they should by all means try them out, establish pilot programs, put their money where their mouths are. But before government officials incorporate those ideas into policy, they must study them carefully and make sure that what sounds reasonable in theory works in practice.”

From “Needing Better Balance ...” by Michael Maryanski (superintendent, Maple Valley, Wash.), quoting a *Los Angeles Times* editorial on his blog, *Seeking Shared Learning*

“I continue to find it interesting that state law prohibits bait and switch tactics, but some of the legislature’s members endorse this illegal strategy for promoting their own proposals when their proposals won’t stand the scrutiny of the facts.”

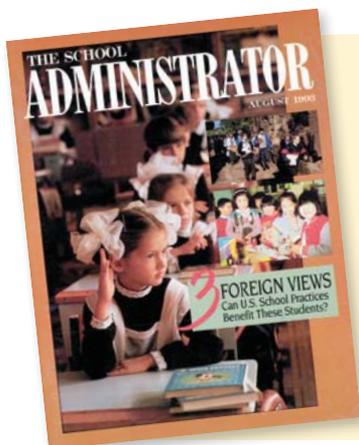
From “Voucher Schools” by Richard Zimman (superintendent, Ripon, Wis.) on his blog, *Dr Z’s Blog*

“The challenge is sometimes knowing which course is best in any decision and often knowing that someone will be upset with the outcome. It’s knowing that I’ve considered all of the information at hand.”

From “What’s Been Your Greatest Challenge Since Becoming a Superintendent?” by Kimberly Moritz (superintendent, Randolph, N.Y.) on her blog, *G-Town Talks 2.0*

“Happiness comes not from accumulating things but from developing relationships. Happiness comes not from being somebody but from helping someone else up. Happiness is not an end in itself but a result of being involved in something meaningful beyond yourself.”

From “Letting Happiness Find Me” by Steve Matthews (superintendent, Novi., Mich.) on his blog, *The Superintendent’s Chair*

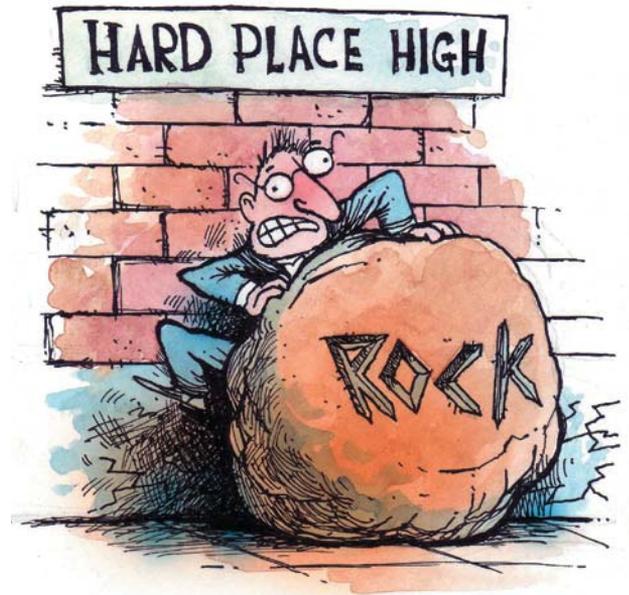


FLASHBACK AUGUST 1993

A theme issue on growing interest in global K-12 education with a cover story that gave school leaders in England, Japan and Russia a chance to describe American school practices they thought worth adopting. ... The president of the United Kingdom’s equivalent association to AASA shared his observations of AASA’s 1993 national conference in Orlando. ... In a guest commentary, the president and executive director of National School Boards Association responded to criticism by school leaders appearing in a previous issue about its new philosophy on governance. ... Statements from candidates for the AASA Executive Committee included one from Superintendent Dan Domenech. ... In his President’s Corner, Robert Fox addressed “imposing religious beliefs through public schools.” ... Yale psychologist Seymour Sarason contributed the back-page Viewpoint on the need for self-scrutiny in school leadership.

A Gay Principal's Aspirations

SCENARIO: A candidate for a middle school principalship — someone who has taught in a neighboring school system — is passed over for the opening. He contends he has been rejected because he is openly gay. Some parents at the school with the vacancy have voiced concerns about having their children under the daily direction of gay employees. How should the superintendent deal with these complaints — from the parents as well as the gay teacher?



ROY DEXHEIMER: Assuming the candidate wasn't passed over for this reason, I think both the candidate and the parents ought to be reassured that a selection was based upon merit and experiences, that the school district fully

recognizes its obligations under the appropriate statutes, and that no evidence has emerged to support the allegation that sexual orientation was a factor in the decision.

The parents, in particular, need to be firmly assured that the district did not in this instance, nor will it in future instances,

discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation.

PAULA MIRK: Documentation, as the data for decision making, is so important just for cases like these. The superintendent should have a clear picture of the process for choice of principal, and even if the details are confidential, the factors or criteria for selection shouldn't be. The process should reaffirm the laws of the land by being blind to gender, race and sexual orientation.

Meanwhile, the superintendent also needs a process to help parents understand these inalienable rights. The process should underscore the district's commitment to fairness and respect and should perhaps include an element about

parental responsibility in a public school environment.

KARL HERTZ: There are clearly two key parts to this administrative challenge: the assertion by the candidate that being gay was a consideration in not getting the position and the parents' expression of concern with the children being under the direction of a gay person.

Ethically and legally, the school district must make it clear what its policies regarding the topic are. Hopefully, the district has past practices that it may cite to demonstrate it has taken the appropriate path over a period of time. This in itself may help the candidate understand that his sexual orientation is not the reason for the district's decision.

The parents, too, may need to see the policies and decisions of the past as a basis for the current actions. It is likely that explanation of nondiscrimination laws will have considerable impact on the parents.

My analysis is based on the assumption the district did act appropriately, legally, ethically, within policies and without prejudice.

SHELLEY BERMAN: Apart from legal considerations, best practices in hiring exclude discussion of personal issues unrelated to job responsibilities, including a candidate's racial or familial background, sexual orientation or political beliefs. The superintendent has an obligation to investigate. If comments about the candidate's

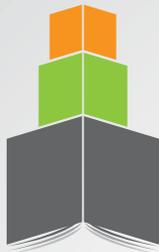
sexual orientation influenced the hiring committee, the superintendent should void the decision of the committee and restart the entire process.

Although societal values have changed dramatically around the issue of openly gay individuals, some parents are still concerned when gay teachers and administrators are in a position of authority relative to their children. The superintendent can respond to parents' concerns by emphasizing that it is inappropriate for any staff member to advocate for a particular sexual orientation and that sexual orientation has no bearing on one's professional abilities. The superintendent must take a firm and positive position on professional, moral and legal grounds.

Each month, *School Administrator* draws on actual circumstances to raise an ethical decision-making dilemma in K-12 education. Our distinguished panelists provide their own resolutions to each dilemma. Do you have a suggestion for a dilemma to be considered? Send it to: magazine@aasa.org.

The Ethical Educator panel consists of **SHELLEY BERMAN**, superintendent, Eugene, Ore.; **ROY DEXHEIMER**, retired BOCES superintendent and former college vice president, Ithaca, N.Y.; **KARL HERTZ**, retired superintendent, Thiensville, Wis., and AASA past president; and **PAULA MIRK**, director of education, Institute for Global Ethics, Rockport, Maine.

See the panelists' full analyses of this case and read the AASA Code of Ethics at www.aasa.org/SAethics.aspx.



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‘2-4-6-8. What’s the Sport We Love To Hate?’

“If there is anyone less enthusiastic than a superintendent to see a cheerleading dispute come across the desk, it’s a federal judge.”

MENTION CHEERLEADING TO just about any superintendent, and you are sure to evoke a story, especially in my home state of Texas, where tales of cheerleading controversies range from petty disputes to serious acts of violence.

Widely held views to the contrary, there is no protected legal right to be a cheerleader. School decisions about cheerleading — like any interscholastic sports program — should be upheld with any rational justification, and due process is not required before the privilege of participation is removed.

If there is anyone less enthusiastic than a superintendent to see a cheerleading dispute come across the desk, it’s a federal judge. The U.S. 5th Circuit Court of Appeals, which governs Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas, once declared a cheerleading lawsuit “a petty squabble, masquerading as a civil rights matter, that has no place in federal court or any other court.”

But don’t think a little thing like the law will stand between cheerleaders and their dreams. Disappointed cheerleaders and their parents still fight for their right to cheer.

Common Disputes

When a school district’s lawyer deals with a cheerleading-related dispute, the matter is likely to touch on one of the following issues:

► **GENDER DISCRIMINATION.** Occasionally, male students seek a position on traditionally all-female cheer squads. In light of antidiscrimination laws, male students generally have a right to try out and to participate if selected. However, under most circumstances, a male student cannot insist on wearing a traditional female uniform if a male uniform is designated.

► **PREGNANCY DISCRIMINATION.** A district may not dismiss a pregnant cheerleader on the basis of her pregnancy. The district may require medical certification of fitness to participate, as long as similar certification is required of all students with conditions requiring medical attention. Absent a legitimate governmental interest, such as health or safety, asking a student to submit to a pregnancy test or medical examination may constitute an unreasonable search or invasion of privacy.

► **PRIVACY RIGHTS.** Under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, a school must permit parents to review education records related to their own child. This entitlement is broad enough to include tryout forms, teacher evaluations and any other student records created in the cheerleader tryout process.

► **FREE SPEECH.** A recent Texas case with troubling facts re-emphasizes that cheerleading is not a protected right. A cheerleader at Silsbee High School alleged she was sexually assaulted by two male basketball players, and she later refused to cheer for one of the students during a game. She was removed from the cheer squad, and her parents sued, claiming their daughter’s silence was symbolic, protected free speech.

On appeal, the 5th Circuit Court reiterated that students do not possess a constitutionally protected interest in participation in extracurricular activities and ruled that being silent substantially interfered with cheerleading.

► **RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION.** Another Texas case considers whether cheerleaders are expressing their own personal views or serving as representatives of the school when they cheer. Cheerleaders in Kountze, Texas, displayed Bible verses on posters at high school football games. Attorneys advised school officials that the cheerleaders, as uniformed spirit leaders, could be perceived as offering school-sponsored messages subject to the limitations of the First Amendment’s Establishment Clause. Others, including the Texas attorney general, maintained the cheerleaders’ decision to display religious messages was private speech, subject to the protection of the Free Exercise and Free Speech clauses. A state court judge recently sided with the cheerleaders.

► **SUSPENSION FOR MISCONDUCT.** Schools often adopt extracurricular codes of conduct or cheerleader constitutions imposing a higher standard of conduct on participants. Most schools require students and parents to sign an agreement. The enforcement of extracurricular codes by suspending extracurricular participation for off-campus misconduct has withstood numerous legal challenges.



JOY BASKIN is director of legal services with the Texas Association of School Boards in Austin, Texas. E-mail: joy.baskin@tasb.org

Tea Party Board Members: A Challenge and Opportunity

CITIZENS IDENTIFYING THEMSELVES with the tea party movement are being elected to school boards throughout the nation, especially in more conservative communities. I have worked with boards of education in three states where this has happened, and in every case it has posed a challenge for the veteran board members and the superintendent.

Of course, each situation is unique, but the pattern is the same. The new board members believe school taxes are too high and the school district is wasting money. Usually these board members also clamor about the abysmal state of academic achievement in the local schools. These stances put the tea party affiliates at odds with veteran board members and the superintendent, who see the schools being underfunded and educators working diligently to raise student learning.

Faced with these board dynamics, a superintendent's first obligation is to avoid aligning with one faction or the other. All board members must be treated the same.

Second, the superintendent should try not to be defensive and dismiss the new board member's concerns as unfounded. Board-savvy superintendents take all board members' input seriously. Where new board members have a valid point, they acknowledge it, and where a response is called for, they provide the appropriate response.

Seriously Misinformed

The challenge these new board members present is also an opportunity. Most likely, they were elected because voters share their views. These voters will be part of future board elections, so winning over the tea party board members is the first step in educating those who support them.

This is where the challenge becomes an opportunity. Some tea party voters and the candidates they elect may be just plain hostile to public schools. But the ones I have met are not unlike most board members — well-educated, well-intentioned, honest and reasonable.

However, they also are seriously misin-

formed. Board-savvy superintendents start educating them even before they are sworn in as board members. In addition to providing them with a comprehensive orientation to the school district, board operating procedures and state regulations, they invest personal time in developing a cordial professional relationship. And, of course, they encourage veteran board members to do the same.

It may take a year, but I have seen tea party board members, while not changing their views regarding big government, become transformed into champions of their school districts and highly effective members of their governance teams.

A warm welcome and the facts can change minds. And what have the new board members learned? That public education is a public good, not just something for parents. That an effective and efficient public school system is a constitutional requirement in their state, even as the state constitution says little if anything about health care and social services. That school districts must have balanced budgets, and indebtedness for capital expenditures must be approved by voters. That school districts are highly regulated by state statutes, limiting their freedom to innovate.

Facts Prevail

Finally, these new champions of their school districts have learned that bringing all children to grade-level performance is difficult work, that no silver bullets are available, and that teachers and administrators are working hard and welcome constructive criticism.

With nondefensive, open and honest conversations, most new tea party board members learn the facts, and the facts speak for themselves. In the same spirit, this information also must be effectively communicated to voters.

While disagreements over strategy may continue, there is no reason tea party board members and voters cannot take exception to what they see happening in Washington and simultaneously be champions of efficient, effective public education.

“It may take a year, but I have seen tea party board members, while not changing their views regarding big government, **BECOME TRANSFORMED INTO CHAMPIONS OF THEIR SCHOOL DISTRICTS and highly effective members of their governance teams.”**



DON McADAMS is founder and chairman of the board of the Center for Reform of School Systems in Houston, Texas. E-mail: mcadams@crss.org

Tying Superintendent Performance to Teachers, Principals

MANY STATES CURRENTLY are focused on developing systems for teacher and principal effectiveness and evaluation. These systems are aligned to key requirements created by U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan for No Child Left Behind state waivers and Race to the Top grants.

One of the most notable requirements is the use of student academic growth as a significant factor in evaluating teachers and principals. While the extent of student achievement has not been exactly defined, most states are using growth as a factor in

an index that weighs student growth between 30 and 50 percent.

In Kentucky, we have heavily involved teachers and principals in developing our evaluation systems, and our focus has been on teacher and principal effectiveness rather than bottom-line judgments. By promoting professional learning and growth, we believe we will have a major impact on student learning.

Missing Components

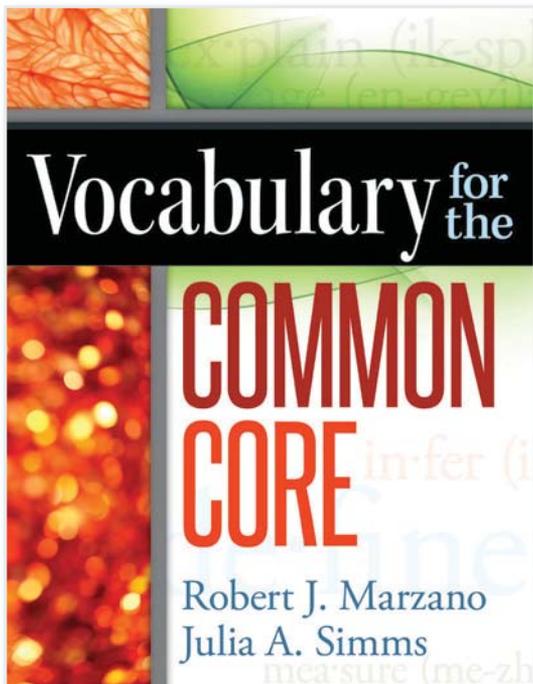
While states have been busy at work on evaluation issues, they largely have overlooked two important perform-

ance systems — the evaluation of superintendents and school boards. As Kentucky's education commissioner, I have been pushing hard to align the evaluation of superintendents with the work happening on teacher and principal evaluation. Based on my experiences as an administrator in South Carolina and a superintendent in two North Carolina districts, I am convinced the alignment of evaluation systems from the classroom to the boardroom is essential in making systemic improvement.

In North Carolina, the state board of education aligned its system by



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establishing clear standards for teachers, principals and superintendents and then implementing statewide systems of assessing performance for each level. In Kentucky, we took this model and leveraged the No Child Left Behind waiver and the Race to the Top grant to launch teacher and principal systems and require local boards to use key components of a statewide superintendent evaluation system that's tied to their teachers and principals.

Kentucky passed legislation 23 years ago requiring the state department of education to approve local school board plans for measuring the performance of their superintendents. The state department of education is using this requirement to establish clear expectations for student learning and fiscal management as part of the annual superintendent evaluations.

The required fiscal goals were adopted in response to several widely publicized school district audits by the state auditor that revealed significant fiscal mismanagement by superintendents and local board members. These goals include such traditional measures as a balanced operating budget, a required 2 percent reserve, an annual "clean" audit and approved facilities plans. Also stipulated is a public review of the results from each school district's biannual working conditions survey related to facilities and resources.

The student learning goals are directly linked to the Kentucky Board of Education student learning goals in the state strategic plan. These goals include the measures used in our No Child Left Behind waiver and Race to the Top grant. There are specific annual and five-year targets for improvement in college/career readiness, proficiency in language arts and math, achievement gaps, graduation rates, teacher/principal effectiveness, and program reviews in non-tested areas.

The annual and five-year targets are developed by the state for each district based on their current performance. The annual goals are pub-

lished for each school and district on our school/district report card, which is accessible on the Kentucky Department of Education website (www.education.ky.gov).

By requiring every local school board to review the district's annual performance on fiscal measures and student learning, the state wants to ensure alignment of teacher, principal, superintendent and local board performance. We also want to ensure school boards address what they should.

Too often, local board members focus on single agenda items and fail to provide specific feedback to superintendents about expectations for student learning. By annually reviewing performance on fiscal and learning goals, it should be evident to board members where they need to focus resources. It also should be clear to superintendents where they need to concentrate their attention.

Modeling Behavior

Our work has been met with some support and with some criticism. We continue to work closely with the professional associations representing school administrators and school boards, yet our state board of education has made it clear what they now expect.

The state board modeled the behavior it expects of local school boards through its evaluation of me as commissioner of education. The board established clear expectations for transparency by providing as a public document the annual goals and the annual summative evaluation of the state commissioner. Guided by a vision of college and career readiness of all children, the board is committed to an alignment from the classroom to the boardroom that features continuous improvement, accountability for results and transparency.

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PRICELESS

Sometimes a picture is worth more than a thousand words...
Sometimes it's worth a life.



SCHOOL PORTRAITS

Success by (Graphic) Design

FOR ANY JOURNEY, knowing where you want to go and how to get there from where you are is critical. It means the difference between success and failure in accomplishing your mission. This is particularly true for school districts.

Schools share a common mission — enabling all students to acquire the skills, insights, knowledge and understanding that will prepare them to take advantage of the opportunities and meet the challenges in their future lives. Accomplishing this mission is a journey that requires specific, clear directions — not unlike the guidance provided to a traveling motorist today by global positioning technology.

A GPS system offers the traveler a constant reminder of his or her destination and specific, up-to-date directions as to how to get from here to there.

Mapping Our Mission

The value and usefulness of the guidance provided by a GPS framed

our thinking during the summer of 2009 when a group of teachers and administrators in the Greensburg Salem School District in western Pennsylvania defined a pathway for our students. Our GPS stood for Guiding Pathway to Success, and it defined our school district’s mission, values and beliefs while establishing a road map for student achievement. We developed an illustrative graphic to capture the idea that success for students will come not by chance but by design.

To make the design relevant, it had to be well-known and understood by all stakeholders and actually serve as a guide for the work we do. The idea of creating a graphic originated from our experience as teachers. We found research that supports the idea that graphic designs depicting complex processes are much better remembered than written text or verbal directions.

To develop the graphic, we initially identified the key components we needed to depict — our mission

(the starting point of our journey), our goal (the end point of our journey) and six benchmarks that had to be reached if we were to fulfill that mission and meet our goal.

Our next step was to identify appropriate icons for each of the key points of our journey and to develop a logical sequence for the benchmarks of the journey.

Appropriate Icons

Because selecting the correct icons would determine the effectiveness of our graphic representation, we chose representations with which our stakeholders could relate:

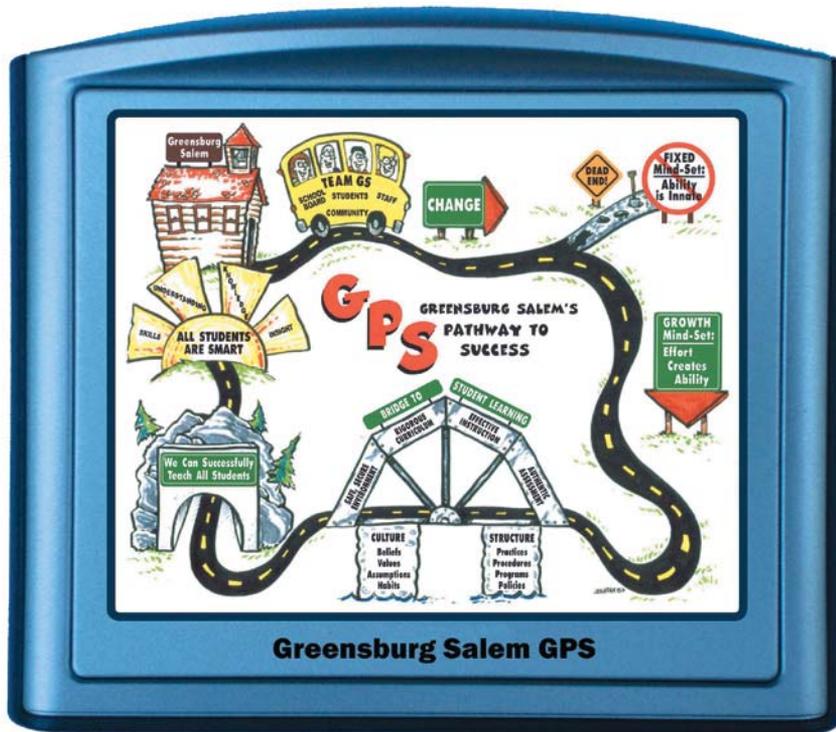
- ▶ **THE SCHOOLHOUSE.** Our mission, empowering all students with the knowledge, skills, insights and understandings they need to be successful in their futures, begins at the schoolhouse door.
- ▶ **THE BUS.** The vehicle for the journey recognizes our fundamental belief that a collaborative effort of all the passengers on the bus — students, parents, school staff, and school board and community members — is essential for a successful journey.

▶ **THE “CHANGE” ROAD SIGN.** There can be no improvement without change. Preparing students for their future means we must change what we teach, how we teach, how we assess and how we respond to the data from those assessments.

▶ **THE FORK IN THE ROAD.** What do we really believe about students and how they learn?

There are two divergent choices: We can believe ability is innate, or fixed, or we can believe it is malleable and that effort creates ability.

▶ **THE BRIDGE.** Student learning is represented by crossing a chasm of unpreparedness. The bridge struc-



ture represents the four areas we can most directly shape — the school environment, curriculum, instruction and assessment. The bridge piers represent the two key supports for learning — our district culture (what we believe and value) and our structures (our policies, procedures, practices and programs).

► **THE TUNNEL.** The tunnel represents the need for reflection. Thinking critically about and reflecting on our actions and then making the necessary changes are essential processes in completing our journey.

► **THE SUNRISE.** The sunrise, labeled “All Students Are Smart,” symbolizes the dawn of a new journey for students. Our success ultimately will be measured by our students’ post-secondary success.

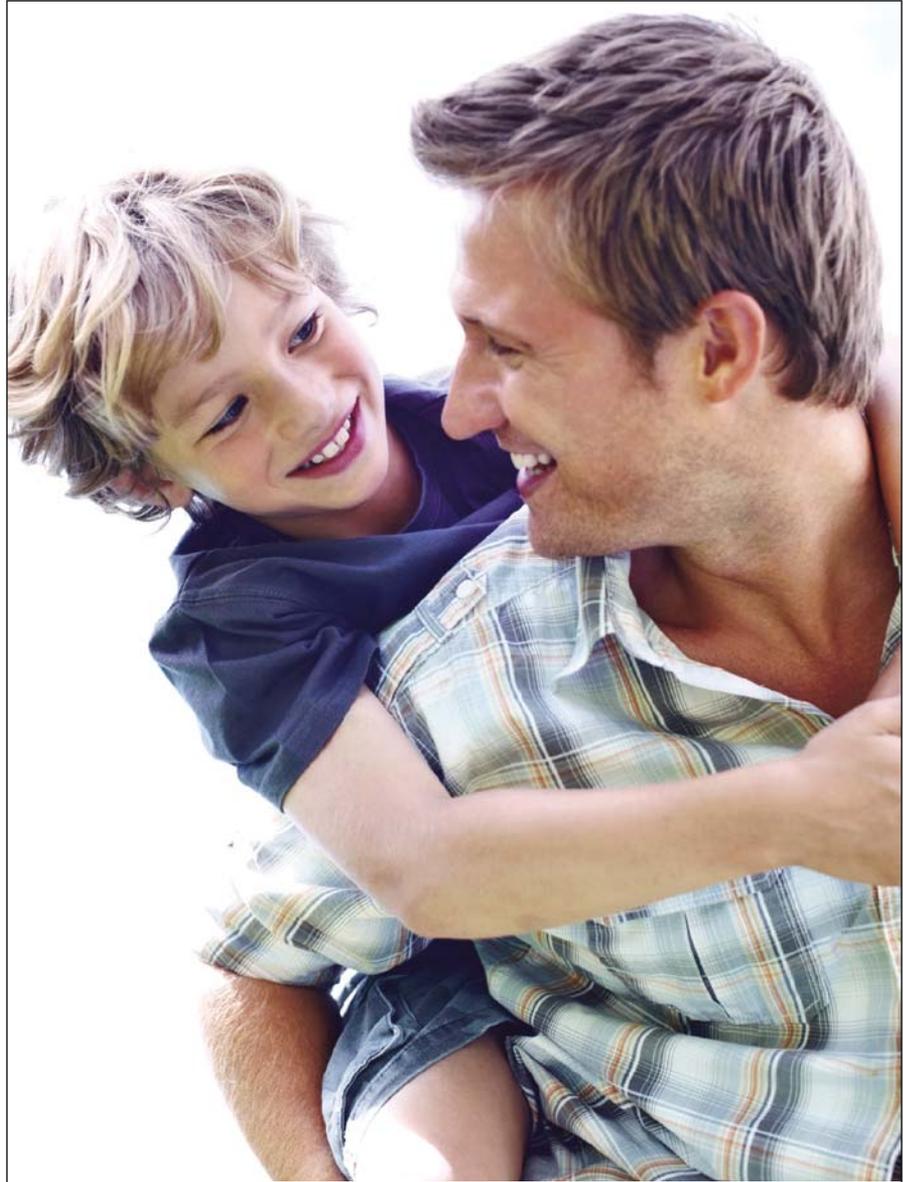
A Daily Reminder

Once the GPS graphic was finalized, we had to find a way to introduce it to our staff and other stakeholders and then to embed it as a viable working guide for our journey. We used students, staff and community to help us develop a video actually taking the journey depicted in the graphic.

The 28-minute video and graphic were used as the basis for our opening in-service day. It also was shown to the board of education and the community.

The graphic and video became an important tool in our new-teacher induction program and in faculty professional development activities throughout the following school years. Each teacher was given a mouse pad printed with the GPS graphic, and colored posters were placed in each classroom and learning area to keep the vision in sight daily.

THOMAS YARABINETZ is the retired superintendent of Greensburg Salem School District in Greensburg, Pa. E-mail: tyarabinetz@comcast.net. **THOMAS SHIPLEY** is the retired director of secondary education in Greensburg, Pa.



SECURITY

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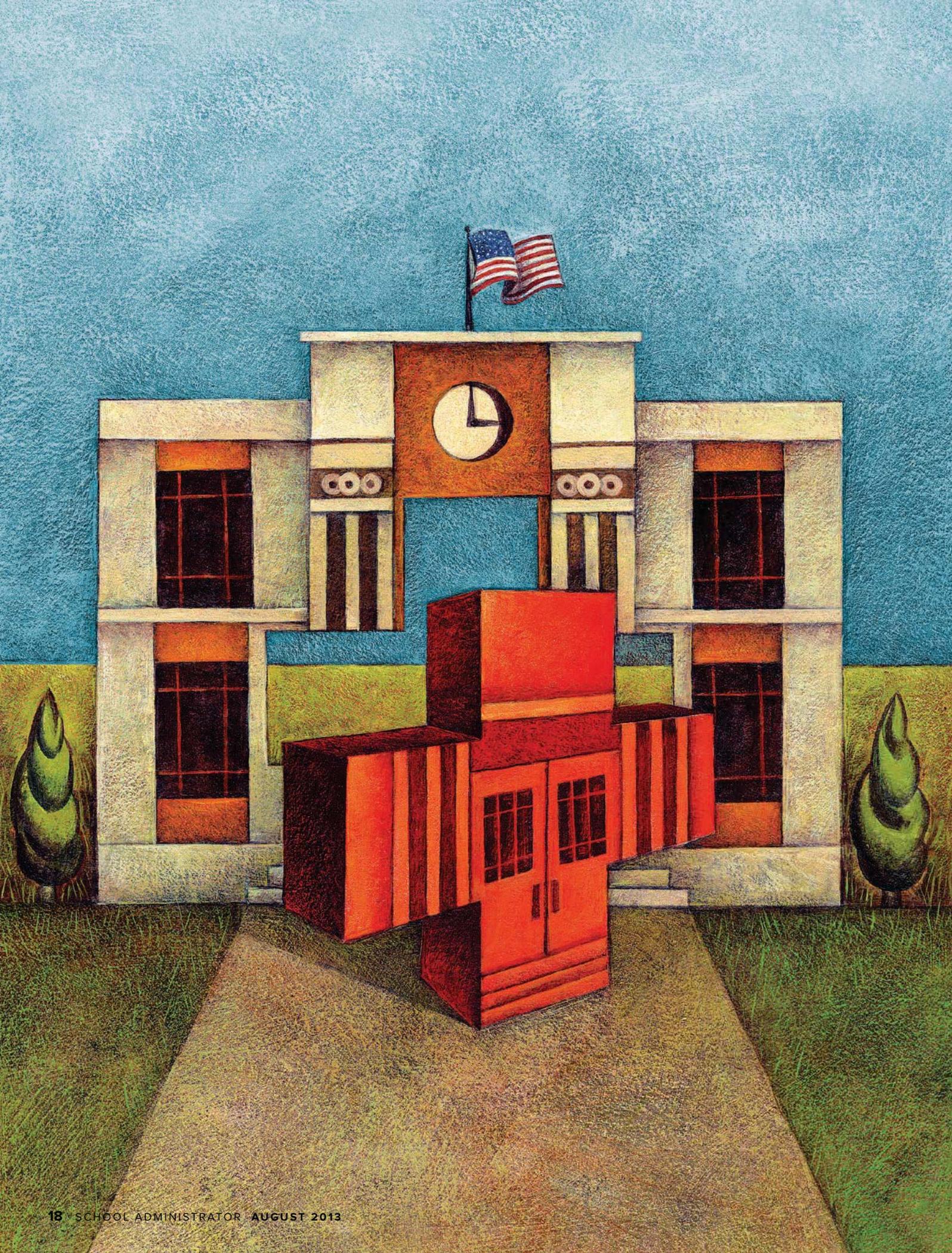
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Investing in Healthier Students

Physical, emotional and social health problems undermine instructional efforts and learning, says a researcher at Teachers College

BY CHARLES E. BASCH

Almost every parent of a school-age child in America knows the routine. On the day before the standardized tests, parents invariably will get a letter from the school urging them to make sure their children get a good night's sleep and a healthy breakfast. The advice is sound: Students who are well-rested and well-nourished are better able to concentrate than those who are tired and hungry.

However, school leaders who instinctively send out those notes need to ask themselves this: Wouldn't our students be more capable of learning and mastering the material on which

they are being tested if they were well-rested and well-nourished going into every day of learning?

Causal Connections

Recently, scientists and education researchers in fields ranging from neurosciences and child development to education and economics have provided compelling evidence for the causal role of specific health problems in limiting students' motivation and ability to learn.

If children can't see well, if their eyes do not integrate properly with their brain and motor systems, they will have difficulty acquir-

ing the basic and essential academic skills associated with reading, writing, spelling and mathematics.

If their ability to concentrate, use memory and make decisions is impeded by malnourishment or a sedentary lifestyle, if they are distracted by negative feelings, by fear of violence or verbal or cyber bullying, it will be more difficult for them to learn and succeed in school.

If their relationships at school with peers and teachers are negative, they will be less likely to be connected with school and, therefore, less motivated and able to learn.

If they are not in school, because of uncontrolled asthma or ADHD or because they are afraid and do not feel safe, they will miss teaching and learning opportunities.

If they drop out, perhaps because they are failing or faltering or because they are socialized to believe that, even if they complete school, there will be no better opportunities or because they become pregnant and there are no resources in place enabling them to complete school while pregnant and after they give birth, it is not likely they can succeed.

If they cannot focus attention and succeed socially, it is unlikely they will succeed academically.

Committing to Action

School health programs have a long history in the United States, but they never have been a central part of the education mission of schools. That's changing now.

Education Secretary Arne Duncan recently stated: "No one is going to push harder for higher graduation rates and lower dropout rates and more students graduating ready for college than I am. But ... the only way we can get there is if our students' physical, emotional and social needs are being met."

The challenge faced by school leaders is how to increase focus on students' health while under mounting pressure to raise schoolwide performance on standardized tests and limited budgets. Given these pressures, why should school districts invest time and money on students' health? The one most striking reason is that certain health problems reduce students' motivation and ability to learn.

No matter how effectively teachers can teach, no matter how rigorous or well aligned with Common Core standards the curriculum may be, no matter what assessments and standards are adopted, and no matter what data systems are created and used to track student achievement and inform decisions, progress in school will be limited profoundly if students are not motivated and able to learn. Physical, emotional and social health problems jeopardize the benefits of school improvement efforts.

Three Principles

It's not surprising school leaders may be unsure how to translate political will to address student health. Did their professional preparation devote substantial time and attention to these issues? Is guidance and technical assistance available from departments of education at the federal and state levels?

Based on my framework, discussed in detail elsewhere (<http://bit.ly/EquityMattersVol6>), effective and efficient school health programs should (1) strategically select health problems

Steps for Building Better Health in Schools

BASED ON HIS OWN RESEARCH in health education and independent studies by others, Charles Basch, of Columbia University's Teachers College, identifies 11 measures available to school districts and their top leaders for addressing the relationship of student health to student learning outcomes.

▶ Establish a group of teachers, parents and community members to provide vision, leadership and coordination for the school health program (usually called a school health council or team).

▶ Let teachers and staff know you care about this issue. One of the most tangible ways is to include health goals in annual school improvement plans.

▶ Create policies that reinforce your commitment — such as eliminating junk food vending, supporting daily physical activity and adding curricular time to help students learn and practice social-emotional skills.

▶ Collect and use health-related data to establish priorities, determine best practices and evaluate ways to improve and judge school health efforts.

▶ Select health problems as priorities based on how many youth are affected, their relevance to improving teaching and learning, and the capacity of school-based programs and services to address them.

▶ Pick quality programs, ones with evidence of effectiveness, and then provide training and support to teachers to ensure proper use.

▶ Coordinate health programs as part of a larger school improvement plan.

▶ Provide professional development for teachers and staff to improve their capabilities to address students' health needs that interfere with learning.

▶ Build a positive school climate that supports students' connectedness and attends to their mental, emotional and social health needs.

▶ Connect with community organizations with a stake in these issues.

▶ Emphasize programs that help students develop life skills, such as working in teams, dealing with failure, anger and frustration, and persevering through personal challenges.



Charles Basch, a professor at Columbia University, has documented through his research the link between childhood health and learning in school.

that affect students' motivation and ability to learn; (2) rely on high-quality programs; and (3) effectively coordinate various programs and services that make up the overall school health program.

► **ESTABLISHING PRIORITIES.** Schools can't address every health issue, but how do you pick and choose? One principal I spoke with said: "I'm not going to take on all the health problems affecting kids, but if there are issues that interfere with learning and there's something I can do about them, those get my attention."

Three questions can help to prioritize: Does the health problem affect many students in my district? Does the health problem interfere with students' motivation and ability to learn? Is it feasible to reduce the health problem through school health programs and services? The particular health problems deemed most important will vary by community.

Seven health-related problems that affect many youth, that adversely affect motivation and ability to learn, and that can be feasibly addressed through schools are: *poor vision; uncontrolled asthma; teen pregnancy; aggression and violence; low physical activity; skipping breakfast; and inattention and hyperactivity.*

Vision problems affect about 20 percent of school-age youth. Asthma affects 9.9 million youth under 18 years of age. Almost one in three female adolescents in the United States

become pregnant before age 20.

Additionally, aggression and violence are a pervasive part of daily life for many youth. Most school-age youth do not meet recommended levels of daily physical activity, and millions of youth do not eat breakfast on any given day.

More than 8 percent of school-age youth, 4.6 million, have received a diagnosis of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, and millions more have symptoms.

Many students are affected by multiple problems simultaneously, which require various responses. Also, mental and emotional health issues are likely to be related to each of these problems, so addressing those needs is an overarching goal.

► **HIGH-QUALITY PROGRAMS.** Decades of investments by the Department of Health and Human Services and other federal and nongovernmental organizations have produced school health programs that work. But putting these programs into practice nationwide has been more limited.

At the same time, some of the most widely implemented school health programs have virtually no evidence of effectiveness. The best example is the decades-long investment in school-based drug abuse prevention, which has had little impact in the majority of schools. Other efforts, such as vision screening, have no adequate follow-up, which compromises the value of such investments.

Considerable resources already are being invested in school health. But in too many cases, these investments are not focused on improving educational outcomes, do not use high-quality programs and are not effectively coordinated. Investing scarce public resources ineffectively is never tenable.

► **EFFECTIVE COORDINATION.** In a recent interview, a writer from a popular education publication asked me, “What is the most important thing to do?” The one most important thing is to not think one most important thing exists. The link between health and learning cannot be addressed by any short-term solution or narrowly focused program.

A coordinated approach has programs and services involving different groups of people playing different roles, forming a team and working toward a common goal, namely improving students’ motivation and ability to learn. Links between teachers and health service personnel help to ensure students’ problems, vision, asthma or ADHD, by example,

receive follow-up care.

Consider that a local health department may conduct the vision screening, then a note is sent to the family indicating the need for an eye exam, and then the parents and teacher must ensure the child uses the eyeglasses as prescribed. It’s not unreasonable to expect the child may lose or break the glasses or refuse to wear them, perhaps because of peer teasing. Without coordination, it’s easy to see how the educational benefits of vision screening can be lost.

Time is a precious resource in the school day. It’s not reasonable to expect that substantial time can be allotted to the many different health issues affecting youth, but effective coordination can help. Fortunately, susceptibility to many of these different problems requires learning and practicing the same set of mental and social-emotional skills (e.g., self-regulation, dealing with social pressures, communicating assertively versus aggressively).

A school health coordinator is in the best position to recognize the different programs, services and policies and how they can take

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advantage of limited resources effectively and efficiently.

Leaders at the school and district levels have a role to play by forming partnerships within schools and between school personnel and family/community resources.

Bottom Line

I recently asked a superintendent from a high-performing suburban school district why he invested so much time and energy in supporting school health programs when he was under such tremendous pressure to maintain and improve standardized test scores. He had a ready answer.

“The health programs help improve test scores. I’m sure of that,” he said. Then he leaned back and added, “And it’s the right thing to do for the kids. That’s why I do this work.” ■

CHARLES BASCH is the Richard March Hoe professor of health education at Columbia University’s Teachers College in New York, N.Y. E-mail: Ceb35@columbia.edu

Additional Resources

Charles Basch has compiled a short list of recommended websites for finding evidence-based school health programs, all of them supported by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and other federal and nongovernmental organizations:

- ▶ <http://findyouthinfo.gov>. This website, created by the Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs, which is composed of representatives from 18 federal departments and agencies, provides interactive tools and other resources to plan, implement and participate in effective programs for youth.
- ▶ <http://evidencebasedprograms.org>. The Social Programs That Work website is run by the Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy to identify interventions.
- ▶ <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc>. The What Works Clearinghouse is an initiative of the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences.
- ▶ www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/AdolescentHealth/Registries.htm. The Registries of Programs Effective in Reducing Youth Risk Behaviors is a product of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- ▶ <http://nrepp.samhsa.gov>. The National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices is a site run by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

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The Schools' Role in Students' Mental Health

With needs apparent, an expert asks
when educators will realize 'the head
is not separate from the body?'

BY SCOTT LAFEE

In every classroom in every school in every district in the country, at least one student is mentally ill. That's reality.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness estimates 20 percent of American adolescents have a diagnosable mental disorder, from attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder to autism to chronic behavioral issues. Perhaps 8 percent meet the criteria for major depression, according to NAMI.

"Until fairly recently, it was believed that young children could not experience depression," says David Murphey, a senior research scientist at Child Trends, a nonprofit research center in Bethesda, Md. "Now we know differently."

Each year, approximately 2 million teens attempt suicide; about 2,000 succeed. Suicide kills more American youth, ages 15 to 24, than

any cause other than accidents (primarily auto-related) and homicides.

Crying Needs

For years, a debate has raged about the capacity and responsibility of elementary and secondary schools and educators to effectively assess and address the mental health problems of their charges. Nowhere outside of the home do students spend more time. Teachers may see pupils more than parents. Schools would seem to be the first and natural place to seriously grapple with the factors that affect students' mental well-being.

If so, it's safe to say schools are doing a less-than-perfect job. In any given year, according to just one oft-cited statistic, only 20 percent of American children with mental disorders are identified and provided services. The rest,

according to studies, are unlikely to receive any formal help.

And that leaves some people crying for help, among them Morton Sherman.

Sherman is superintendent of the 13,100-student Alexandria, Va., City Public Schools. An educator for 41 years, including four superintendentcies, Sherman long has been a staunch and vocal proponent for improved mental health awareness and advocacy in schools, not least because he has personal experience with the subject. His own daughter

was successfully treated for suicidal depression, a story he detailed in *School Administrator* magazine in February 2006. But Sherman is frustrated today.

“Even now, I am still struck by a comment made years ago by Ken Duckworth, the NAMI medical director, who said, ‘When are we going to wake up and realize that the head is not separate from the body?’”

Too many educators and policymakers, Sherman says, still haven’t made the connection.

“Caring for children means caring for all of

The Tangled Web of Medicaid and Mental Health Services

BY SASHA PUDELSKI

Public schools increasingly rely on Medicaid reimbursement to provide mental health services to eligible students.

More than 70 percent of school-age children who receive treatment for a mental disorder do so through the schools they attend, with Medicaid reimbursement covering the costs of treatment for a wide range of services for students with emotional, behavioral and mental health needs.

Medicaid reimbursement for mental health services in school districts is state-specific, and not all states allow Medicaid reimbursement for mental health services. But the number of participating states is increasing. A 2011 survey by the National Alliance for Medicaid in Education found that all but one of the 23 states responding authorized local school districts to receive reimbursement for mental health services for Medicaid-eligible students.

Complicated Billing

However, the use of Medicaid for funding such services through schools can be a challenging process for several reasons, says Rick Jacobs, a Chicago-based consultant who works with states and school districts on Medicaid reimbursement.

First, Jacobs says, districts must identify mental health professionals who are appropriately credentialed both to provide services in their schools and to bill Medicaid for the services they offer. Some mental health professionals able to work with students may not satisfy the creden-

tials required to bill under their state’s Medicaid regulations, while others may not be credentialed to work in a school setting. Only 33 states currently allow for some type of reimbursement for selected services to Medicaid-eligible students that are provided by appropriately credentialed school psychologists.

Second, Jacobs points to the complicated documentation required to bill Medicaid when school districts seek Medicaid reimbursement for mental health services. The documentation, in combination with the confidentiality of student records and the notes mental health providers generate, can create conflicts between two separate federal statutes, HIPAA and FERPA, and confusion over what information must be disclosed to claim Medicaid reimbursement.

Lastly, he says, federal and state Medicaid policies and coverage rules change frequently, which makes it difficult for mental health providers and school districts to keep up with the different requirements.

AASA’s Push

Unfortunately, school districts cannot receive Medicaid reimbursement for all of their low-income students who need or would benefit from mental health services in their schools. For such services to be reimbursed by Medicaid, they must be both medically necessary and specified in a child’s individualized education plan or individualized family service plan as a related service.

In contrast, a community health clinic that treats the same low-income student could receive Medicaid reimbursement for providing similar services based on medical necessity alone. This stumbling block contributes to children “falling through the cracks,” Jacobs says, and not receiving the same services in schools that are available in the community.

Despite the complexities involved, some districts rely on Medicaid reimbursement as a major funding source for school-based health and mental health services.

For decades, AASA has worked to improve and protect the ability of schools to receive Medicaid reimbursement, most recently pressuring the U.S. Department of Education to improve parental consent regulations required to bill Medicaid. Because Medicaid is the largest and most comprehensive source of health care for low-income children, who are at greatest risk of developing social and emotional problems, schools cannot miss an opportunity to use the program to support and expand services for this population. AASA will continue to work with our federal partners, as well as the National Alliance for Medicaid in Education, to improve

Medicaid reimbursement processes for schools.



SASHA PUDELSKI is government affairs manager at AASA. E-mail: spudelski@aasa.org



Left: Morton Sherman, superintendent in Alexandria, Va., has been outspoken about the need for better attention to students' mental health. Right: James Hodgkin, superintendent in Wales, Maine, addressed the 2013 AASA national conference on raising test scores by attending to students' health needs.

them,” Sherman adds. “We routinely screen our kids for other problems. They get shots. They have their teeth checked. They have required physicals before they even begin school. Nobody questions any of that. We all want to make sure children are in good physical health, but we draw the line above the shoulders. I think it’s an issue of stigma and responsibility. If we screen, we might find something wrong.”

Reality Dissociation

Few educators, to be sure, are likely to argue students’ mental health *isn’t* inextricably linked to their personal well-being and academic achievement.

“The research on social-emotional learning and brain development is underscoring that students can’t perform to their potential on academic achievement without attention to their mental health needs. The most successful schools will be the ones that incorporate that knowledge,” says Brigitte Vaughn, a senior research analyst at Child Trends.

That perspective was shared with attendees at AASA’s 2013 national conference in Los Angeles by a member of AASA’s School Administrator Training Cadre for Coordinated Student Health, a five-year program funded in part by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

James Hodgkin, a vocal advocate on the subject, says: “I think administrators understand that undiagnosed or unaddressed mental

health issues not only get in the way of learning for affected students, they impact everyone else.” Hodgkin is the superintendent of Regional School Unit 4, a 1,500-student pre-K through grade 12 district in Wales, Maine.

But aside from talking about it, what are administrators like Sherman and Hodgkin to actually do?

“There’s plenty of research, but not a lot of practical advice for administrators like me,” Sherman says. “If I’m a principal and wake up one morning deciding to really implement a new mental health plan, where do I go? Beyond awareness, not a lot of attention has been paid to actual plans of action. Where’s the clearinghouse for student mental health information? I can find lots of material about what works in terms of effective reading or math, but I’d have a really hard time finding anybody who can tell me the five or 10 things I can do today to specifically improve student mental health.”

Whose Duty?

The challenge begins with deciding who is primarily responsible for students’ mental health. By default, teachers often find themselves in the category of first responders, but almost no one believes they should shoulder the role of therapist.

“They’re not trained for that job,” says Mark D. Weist, founder and director of the Center for School Mental Health, a think tank, and a professor in the Department of Psychology at

“School psychologists ensure that mental health services are infused into learning and instruction, benefiting the child socially and academically.”

the University of South Carolina. “Most teachers want help. When they don’t get it, they feel isolated and at a loss about what to do. That’s when many decide to leave the profession.”

A more obvious choice would be the school psychologist.

“We are trained in school law, school systems functioning, how to assess and provide interventions for a variety of learning, mental health and behavioral needs, and how to provide quality consultation to teachers,” says Melissa Reeves, a consulting school psychologist and lecturer at Winthrop University in South Carolina who has testified to Congress on these subjects.

“No other professional has this unique training that allows students to be served during the school day when they need immediate help,” she adds. “School psychologists ensure that mental health services are infused into learning and instruction, benefiting the child socially and academically.”

Reeves blames deficiencies in school mental health services, at least in part, on constraints imposed by superintendents and administrators who don’t fully understand or value school psychologists’ work. School psychologists too often are limited to assessing students for special education eligibility or assigned to so many schools that their services are overstretched

and marginalized.

With appropriate support and resources, Reeves contends, school psychologists can provide counseling services; help select and implement schoolwide prevention programs; provide consultation to teachers to help them meet the academic, behavioral and mental health needs of their students; conduct threat and suicide assessments; help with collection of data to make informed programming decisions; collaborate with community service providers; provide leadership regarding crisis prevention and intervention; and work with families.

“If a district could afford to place a minimum of one full-time psychologist per school, we could make such a positive impact and also help teachers who are overwhelmed trying to meet needs of students for which they have had no training,” says Reeves.

Unwieldy Ratios

There are roughly 37,000 full- and part-time school psychologists in the United States, according to the National Association of School Psychologists. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects average job growth (about 11 percent) in the field over the next decade.

In hard budgetary times, however, school psychologists often are regarded as something of an educational luxury, a comparatively pricey staff position. The national association recommends one psychologist per 500 to 700 students, though actual ratios are closer to one per 2,000 or more students nationwide.

What about relying on the school counselor? The American School Counselor Association recommends a ratio of 250 students per counselor, but the average ratio is 457:1, based on 2008-09 data, the latest available. Only five states were operating at or above that recommended level: Louisiana (238:1), Mississippi (234:1), New Hampshire (233:1), Vermont (207:1) and Wyoming (197:1). California topped the list at 814 students per counselor.

Even then, many experts argue school counselors are not really the complete answer. Their primary job is to ensure every student has the tools — psychological and otherwise — to be successful in school and in life. They may be ideally situated to act as sentinels for students’ mental health. “They know teachers and kids better than anybody,” says Peggy Hines, director of the National Center for Transforming School Counseling. But they may lack the time, training and resources to delve deeply into each and every student’s problems.

“Twenty percent of students take up 80 per-

A Framework for Safe and Successful Schools

In April, a consortium of six national organizations representing school counselors, school psychologists, school resource officers and principals issued a joint statement outlining a unified effort to create safe, successful schools.

The 16-page document, endorsed by AASA, offers six policy recommendations:

1. Allow for blended, flexible use of funding streams in education and mental health services.
2. Improve staffing ratios to allow for the delivery of a full range of services and effective school-community partnerships.
3. Develop evidence-based standards for district-level policies to promote effective school discipline and positive behavior.
4. Fund continuous and sustainable crisis and emergency preparedness, response, and recovery planning and training that uses evidence-based models.
5. Provide incentives for intra- and interagency collaboration.
6. Support multitiered systems of support.

The full framework can be found at www.nasponline.org/schoolsafetyframework.

cent of a school counselor's time," Hines says. "For a kid with mental health issues, a school counselor might have just a few sessions, each just a few minutes long, to try to work things out."

Clinics on Campus

A more promising answer is a coordinated, collaborative series of steps leading, ultimately, to professional psychological services outside of the educational system. It's a middle path that can work with broad support and on-going effort, says William Dikel, a Minneapolis, Minn.-based psychiatrist and 25-year consultant to school districts and policymakers on mental health issues. He's seen both ends of the spectrum, from full-service districts to no-service districts.

"There are districts that hire social workers, do psychological assessments and treatment plans, even bill Medicaid," he says. "And there are districts that don't want to hear 'mental health' and 'school' in the same sentence, who think the former is really somebody else's job."

Both approaches are problematic, according to Dikel. In a recent policy paper for the National School Boards Association's Council of School Attorneys, Dikel said school staffs that provide diagnostic and treatment services must recognize "that their records containing sensitive student and family information become part of the educational record. Schools cannot get malpractice coverage, and their existing coverage may not be sufficient to protect them from liability."

Conversely, schools that completely avoid addressing mental health issues still deal with the indirect costs, which he defines as "time-consuming visits to the principal's office, educational failure and one-to-one aides and other educational interventions that would have been more successful had the student been receiving effective mental health services."

Dikel adds: "Every school classroom has at least one kid with a mental health disorder. Many of these children end up in special education. They may be emotionally disturbed. They are typically undertreated, inappropriately treated or not treated at all. The result is generally incredibly poor outcomes — high dropout rates, high arrest rates, poor educations and job histories."

The optimal course falls in between. "The best approach is for schools to stay out of the mental health business of diagnosing and treating but play a crucial role in the continuum of collaborative services that includes parents, medical and mental health providers, community agencies and county services," he says.



Melissa Reeves (right), a consulting school psychologist in Rock Hill, S.C., spends lunchtime with students.

Specifically, Dikel recommends schools adopt mental health procedures and guidelines that help build connections to community mental health services for students, but protect schools and personnel from liability risks. These include defined roles for school staff and an effective system of collaboration with external mental health service providers.

As an example, Dikel cites a consultation request from the special education director of a 5,000-student school district. The director had noticed a disproportionately high number of students were being referred to restrictive Setting 4 placements in which they receive services at a separate facility. A file review revealed that 85 percent of the students had received psychiatric diagnoses in the past, but only 5 percent were receiving any mental health treatment.

"The director set up space in several schools for a colocated community mental health clinic to provide services. Many students received treatment for the mental health disorders that were causing their severe emotional and behavioral problems and, as a result, they were able to return to less restrictive programming, which resulted in a savings of more than \$800,000 per year for the district."

Short of treating students with psychological problems, teachers can contribute in other ways.

"They can talk to parents. They can collect information and observations that can be helpful to clinicians. They can accommodate and modify classrooms to be more environmentally friendly for kids with issues. Depending on the problem, they can alter the way teaching is done to be more helpful."

"The best approach is for schools to stay out of the mental health business of diagnosing and treating but play a crucial role in the continuum of collaborative services ..."

Space and Access

Administrators and school boards can play equally supportive roles.

“Most children with mental health problems are in general education. School leaders should know this and advocate for policies and systems that provide schools, teachers and students with necessary skills and resources,” says Dikel, who is completing a book tentatively titled *Student Mental Health: A Practical Guide for Teachers*. “Plus, a school district isn’t going to get the outside help it needs unless it reaches out and invites it in.”

Dikel recounts the example of a school district that collaborated with the county health department’s crisis unit to provide psychological interventions for students showing evidence of potential danger to themselves or others. With parental permission, school social workers gave background information to county social workers, which enabled the latter to more accurately assess students’ risks and take appropriate action, including hospitalization if necessary.

There are, of course, the real limitations of

the real world. Sherman, the veteran superintendent in Alexandria, Va., notes that many schools struggle just to stay on top of core functions. “Nobody really has the time, resources or training to provide services like therapy,” he says.

Nonetheless, Sherman advocates for strong, collaborative relationships between schools and community mental health providers. Of course, much depends upon whether these services are available and sufficient in the community. Schools can help, he says, perhaps by providing necessary space and access on campus for mental health professionals.

“A lot of schools already do this with other health services. They have clinics on campus with separate entrances. Some deal with controversial issues, such as teen pregnancy. I don’t see why mental health can’t also be addressed this way. It might provoke a lively conversation in a community, but it’s one that should happen.” ■

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Delivering Health Care Inside the Schoolhouse



The Kenosha, Wis., district partners with a community health organization to operate site-based clinics in three schools for students and families

BY SUSAN M. VALERI

During the nine years I worked as a principal of an elementary school, many students came to school with serious health care needs. They required attention for lingering medical or dental problems, but their families didn't have health care insurance or a family physician to turn to.

As other staff members have done, I would give money to parents to enable them to take their child to a local clinic to have an illness or infection diagnosed and perhaps to obtain the necessary antibiotics. Often the school social worker

would transport parents and children to a publicly funded clinic or to the nurse of the day located at a local grocery store for those who required a vaccination or antibiotic but didn't have a private provider. The staff wanted to ensure the students received the help they needed.

This story is much more common than many in our community tend to realize. Those who have adequate health care take the coverage for granted.

Access to preventative health and dental care for students is something every principal wants for students.

A Modest Start

Those of us working as educators in the Kenosha, Wis., Unified School District could easily see how the unmet health needs of our students often interfered with their ability to learn.

A common problem educators see is the student with the constant sinus infection that never goes away because it remains untreated. One success story we can report from the past year relates to the school-based clinics keeping students in school who chronically complain about not feeling well and asking to go home. The nurse practitioner in the clinic has collaborated with school staff and parents to have those children checked out on-site, allowing them to remain in class when there is no medical need to send them home. We have then supported these students with counseling to find out what the underlying issue might be.

We set a goal to get students and families preventative health and dental care. We started by collaborating formally with the Kenosha Community Health Center, a nonprofit organization that provides comprehensive health care to underserved citizens. The partnership began on a simple level by co-managing a single program, Seal-A-Smile, in three

“One success story we can report from the past year relates to THE SCHOOL-BASED CLINICS KEEPING STUDENTS IN SCHOOL who chronically complain about not feeling well and asking to go home.”

elementary schools in 2009. This oral health program, sponsored by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, has grown to include 17 elementary schools in Kenosha, serving students in 2nd, 3rd and 5th grades as of last fall. Based on the success of Seal-A-Smile, we began to address other health concerns that were interfering with the ability of students to learn fully. The discussion of school-based health centers started in May 2011 with Kenosha’s superintendent, Michele Hancock, a member of AASA’s Coordinated School Health School Administrator Training Cadre, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Hancock is a strong advocate of meeting the health needs of students to make them better learners. She and other leaders of the school

Linking Students to Health Care Coverage

BY SHARON ADAMS-TAYLOR

In a partnership with the nationally respected Children’s Defense Fund, AASA is encouraging schools to enroll eligible students in Medicaid or the state’s Children’s Health Insurance Program.

Through a grant from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the joint venture is built around a simple question: “Does your child have health insurance?” Parents who cannot respond in the affirmative receive information on Medicaid and CHIP and help in completing the application. We are promoting access to health insurance through school registration materials and want to ensure the outreach and enrollment become a routine operation in all school districts.

“In any health coverage for children, it’s

important to simplify the bureaucracy and build on best practices to make it easier for the eligible to receive benefits,” says Marian Wright Edelman, CDF president.

Medicaid and CHIP provide low-cost or free health coverage for uninsured children and comprehensive benefits including doctor visits; vision; dental and mental health services; prescriptions; immunizations; X-rays; hospitalization; specialty care; basic prenatal care; and more. In addition, young adults under the age of 26 will qualify for their parents’ health insurance plan if they are not receiving health insurance from an employer.

Willing Participation

AASA and CDF are testing this strategy in eight urban, rural and suburban school

systems with diverse student populations: El Monte Union High School District and the Mountain View School District in California; Clarke County School District and Gwinnett County Public Schools in Georgia; Jefferson Parish Public Schools and Orleans Parish School Board in Louisiana; and Clarksdale Municipal School District and Cleveland School District in the Mississippi Delta.

The superintendents of these school districts willingly agreed to work with AASA and the Children’s Defense Fund because it made sense. They knew it would help them accomplish their main goal — the academic achievement and regular attendance of students without health insurance.

Phil Lanoue, superintendent in Clarke

district and the community health center sought ways to deliver health care to families without health insurance or access to medical providers.

An advisory committee targeted three schools with student populations having a high need for health care. (The percentage of students qualifying for free and reduced-price lunch was a key consideration.) The schools were asked to commit to this initiative as pilots. Once we created and sustained a successful model, we intended to expand the services to other schools in Kenosha.

To learn from other educators, we sent four individuals, two from the district and two from the health center, to a national conference on school-based health care in June 2011, an event run annually by the National Assembly on School-Based Health Care. Conference sessions focused on the startup of health centers within schools, an extremely valuable resource in our development.

Needy Selections

To launch this initiative, we chose three elementary schools — Curtis Strange Elementary, Brass Community School and Chavez Learning



Brass Community School is home to one of the school-based health centers in the Kenosha, Wis., Unified School District.

Station — to more easily define the health care options available to students and their families. The goal was to get the health care centers up and running successfully at the elementary level before addressing the more challenging issues of adolescents at the secondary schools.

The community health center committed to

County, Ga., has made this registration process part of the first goal in the school district's strategic plan.

"Participating in this AASA/CDF initiative is one of the best decisions I ever made as a superintendent," Lanoue says.

The leadership and engagement of the superintendent are critical for any school-related policy, program or practice to be effective. Clearly, districtwide adoption of effective practices that will identify eligible children who are not enrolled in Medicaid or CHIP requires major coordination.

A Role for Schools

When about two-thirds of uninsured children are eligible but unenrolled in Medicaid or CHIP, it's a strong signal that more should be done to help connect students and families with affordable coverage.

Nearly 90 percent of nonparticipating eligible children live in families with at least

one working parent who either cannot afford health insurance or does not receive it as a benefit of employment.

There may be no better way to reach uninsured children than in schools, through those individuals who come into contact with children and families every day. Medicaid and CHIP outreach and enrollment assistance is especially important during the recession. Newly eligible families may be unfamiliar with public programs. As employees of a trusted institution, educators can talk credibly with families and may know which families need medical services. Schools are the single best place to link eligible low-income children with health coverage.

The Affordable Care Act represents the most significant government expansion and regulatory overhaul of the U.S. health care system since the

passage of Medicare and Medicaid in 1965. Full implementation of the act is needed for schools to continue gains in promoting health coverage for eligible students.

"Although the challenges public education faces — fiscally, economically, politically and socially — are complex, there are discrete solutions that we can leverage right now to transform learning — one of them being making sure that eligible students have health insurance," Dan Domenech, AASA executive director, says.

For more information about this initiative, visit www.aasa.org/childrensinsurance.aspx.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF KENOSHA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT, KENOSHA, WIS.

PHOTO BY LIFE TOUCH

providing a nurse practitioner to serve at the three sites with a physician to oversee the delivery of medical services.

We identified an appropriate space to be used for the health clinics in each school. The rooms were chosen with regard to size, access to water, access to an outside door (for entrance to the clinic when the school would not be open), Internet access, phone hookup and location in the building. The school district's facilities department took responsibility for the painting, carpentry work and setup of the clinics, while the community health center picked up the cost for all materials and equipment.

We had hoped to open the health centers in January 2012, but ultimately decided it best to wait until the start of the 2012-13 school year. During the intervening six months, the school district forged an agreement with the community health center.

Five Ways to Help Uninsured Children

AASA and the Children's Defense Fund have developed these five steps school districts can take to enroll uninsured school-age children in health coverage.

- ▶ **IDENTIFY UNINSURED CHILDREN.** Add a health question to school enrollment cards to identify every uninsured child by campus. Modify school district databases to collect and report data on uninsured children to principals at each site.
- ▶ **TRAIN KEY SCHOOL SYSTEM STAFF.** School nurses, clerks, administrators and early childhood educators should be informed about federal support for children's health coverage so they can assist families in applying.
- ▶ **DISSEMINATE INFORMATION.** Inform families about children's health coverage programs through school health fairs, parent nights, automated phone calls, and flyers in packets about free and reduced-price lunch. Provide application assistance to families and connect with community partners to link uninsured students with coverage. Access consumer materials from www.healthcare.gov and www.insurekidsnow.gov.
- ▶ **FORM PARTNERSHIPS.** Find community groups that can help parents complete applications by phone or mail or in person. Connect families with community health centers, health departments, and state Medicaid and CHIP agencies to receive current, reliable information. Allow parent use of school computer labs to apply electronically.
- ▶ **SUSTAIN YOUR EFFORTS.** Develop districtwide plans to link uninsured children with health coverage as part of ongoing school district operations, not a onetime deal.

— SHARON ADAMS-TAYLOR

The additional time also enabled us to plan for strategic marketing and create operating procedures, which included developing permission slips, information sheets, a letter to parents explaining the available services and a list of frequently asked questions for parents, guardians, students and staff. This information was mailed to homes along with student enrollment packets.

The marketing plan for the fledgling health centers culminated with a distinctive postcard that was sent home in students' backpacks from the three schools at the end of the 2011-12 school year to be posted as a reminder of the new medical services available. We made presentations to school staff to explain the role of the school-based clinics.

In April 2012, the nurse practitioner spent a week at one of the schools to observe the workings of the office, the health information person, the school nurse and the principal. The nurse practitioner gathered information on how she and the community health center's medical services could support the students and their families. These insights also helped us plan where the nurse practitioner would be assigned and when, as we scheduled her to work 12 hours a week at each location.

Basic Services

Much of our attention has focused on the specific services to be offered at the health centers. In fact, these discussions continue to take place at almost every meeting. We initially limited the services to ensure we weren't taking on too much and intend to expand services over time.

We started by offering these services, which are promoted in our materials to the schools' families:

- ▶ **PREVENTATIVE CARE:** Well child health checks, immunizations, Seal-A-Smile dental sealant program, sports physicals and health education with child and parent.
- ▶ **ACUTE HEALTH CARE:** Diagnosis and treatment, referrals as needed, follow-up visits as needed, and health education with child and parent.
- ▶ **CHRONIC HEALTH CARE:** Monitoring and treatment of medical needs based on condition and health education with child and parent.

The kickoff for the school-based health centers began with staff from the Kenosha Community



Sue Valeri (left), director of special education and student support in Kenosha, Wis., joins a nurse practitioner in one of the district's three school-based health clinics and during a classroom visit for a discussion of healthy personal habits with students.

Health Center attending open houses at all three schools, where they registered families and answered questions. The three principals encouraged families to tour the health centers and become familiar with the offerings. We used other incentives to encourage student and parent visits, including book giveaways for children, raffles for prizes donated by local businesses and health product giveaways.

During the first seven months of the 2012-13 year, patient visits to the three school clinics ranged from 103 to 126. At one of the elementary schools, acute visits (for addressing earaches, sore throats, common colds and the like) represented about two-thirds of the encounters. At a second school, health check-ups accounted for two-thirds of the activity, and there were three visits for tests of lead in students' bloodstreams. The third school administered 14 immunizations, mostly during the winter months.

Expansion Plans

As we approached the end of 2012-13, our plans for the new school year include opening a center at one more elementary school and possibly one middle school and growing the programs at the current schools. We are also exploring the addition of mental health care services for students. The health centers cur-

“As we approached the end of 2012-13, OUR PLANS FOR THE NEW SCHOOL YEAR include opening a center at one more elementary school and possibly one middle school and GROWING THE PROGRAMS at the current schools.”

rently do not have access to a psychiatrist or a physician who specializes in mental health. We will continue that conversation, as we clearly see the need for expanding into this area.

The first year of operation of the school-based clinics represented an exciting opportunity for the Kenosha Community Health Center and Kenosha Unified School District. Our goal is to help students and families and ensure health care needs do not interfere with student learning. Ultimately, we hope to build the capacity to offer preventative, acute and chronic health care services to all of our district's 22,600 students who might need them. ■

SUSAN VALERI is director of special education and student support in the Kenosha Unified School District in Kenosha, Wis. E-mail: svaleri@kUSD.edu.

Competitive Foods in Schools

In pursuit of healthier students, what can districts do about snacks and beverages that underlie school fundraisers?

BY MARIAN KISCH

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS MOVE PAST

the fruit and vegetable bar, peering at the strange foods, pondering which ones to taste. There are 26 choices, one for each letter of the alphabet.

Twice a year at the Balsz Elementary School District's Health and Wellness Fair, students taste radishes, blueberries and zucchini for the first time. And they're being introduced to fun facts about unusual foods such as jicama, kiwi, quince and UGLI fruit, all in an effort to encourage students in the Phoenix, Ariz., district to make healthier choices when they eat.

Candy, cookies, sports drinks and sodas are the food staples students expect to find available at their schools. But so-called "competitive foods" — the

snacks and beverages sold in vending machines, school stores and snack bars and as a la carte items in cafeterias — soon will be subject to new federal nutrition standards. As part of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, the U.S. Department of Agriculture recently released the final nutritional standards governing the availability of competitive foods in schools.

The new rules are expected to take effect at the beginning of the 2014-15 school year, giving school districts one year to prepare. According to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, fewer than 5 percent





of districts currently follow policies on the nutritional value of competitive foods and drinks.

A few school districts already have moved toward healthier options, both in their regular breakfast and lunch offerings, as well as in competitive foods. In part to deal with the obesity epidemic, these schools have eliminated vending machines completely or stocked them only with healthy snacks and limited beverage options to water, 100 percent fruit juice and low-fat milk. School stores in some districts no longer sell unhealthy foods, while their food service

operations carefully monitor calories, sugar, sodium and fat content in the foods offered to students and reduce portion size. Salad bars are popular additions to cafeterias, while in-school fundraising events and school parties sometimes include restrictions.

AASA is one of several associations working with school districts in this effort. The Alliance for a Healthier Generation, which started in 2006 with 231 schools, now works with 16,000 to negotiate with food manufacturers to offer healthy snacks and beverages. The alliance also provides specific healthy

food guidelines. The School Nutrition Association offers training and resources, especially when new federal regulations are adopted. The Center for Science in the Public Interest has taken a stand on competitive foods and beverages, pushing for healthy granola bars, trail mixes and fruit cups in vending machines, while standing against high-calorie, sugar drinks and sports beverages.

The phrase “competitive foods” relates to snack foods and drinks that are sold in schools outside of the national school lunch and breakfast programs.



The reason they are called competitive foods is because they compete with the school meals program, where foods must meet particular nutritional requirements.

Generational Poverty

School districts have taken various measures to introduce healthier foods, some writing new policies, others using gentle persuasion. Often these approaches have far-reaching effects.

Jeffrey Smith, superintendent of the Balsz schools, puts student wellness on the same level of importance as academics. “If kids are healthy, they will learn more and will be more successful,” says Smith. He has tried to change people’s viewpoints about healthy living in his high-poverty, rural district of five schools as a way to “change generational poverty.”

Although the district has a basic written policy regarding competitive foods, the superintendent is working with AASA and the Arizona School Boards Association to develop a more comprehensive approach that will govern all aspects of snack foods and beverages on school grounds. Ultimately, he believes, this could be a model for the state and beyond.

In his daily work, Smith uses persuasion and collaboration to change individual behavior. “People

Superintendent Jeff Smith (right) of Balsz Elementary School District 31 in Phoenix, Ariz., is working with AASA on a comprehensive district policy governing snack foods and beverages on school property.

AASA Builds Relations on Competitive Foods

SCHOOL LEADERS NATIONWIDE ARE working with AASA to promote better competitive-foods policies and practices. Through a two-year grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, administered by the Leadership for Healthy Communities, AASA has established a cohort of mentors and mentees from Arizona, Maine, Michigan, Nebraska, North Dakota and Wisconsin to work on this effort.

The goals are to build meaningful relationships between mentors, whose schools have strong competitive-foods policies, and mentees, whose district don’t, and between AASA and all participating districts, and to create and implement poli-

cies at the district level.

AASA recruited mentors and mentees through its network, e-mail lists and state superintendent associations.

In the project’s first year, AASA has aided districts in relationship building and policy adoption. In 2013-14, they will work on implementing those policies. AASA also will establish a second cohort to expand the work.

After an initial face-to-face meeting at AASA’s 2013 national conference, the groups have communicated regularly via conference calls and e-mail, raising and answering questions and sharing experiences and expertise about providing

healthy snacks and beverages. AASA provides resources through webinars.

“We are seeing a lot of relationship building,” says Sapna Batheja, AASA’s project manager. “Increasing access to competitive, nutritious foods is imperative to creating the optimal learning atmosphere for students, as healthy students are better learners. School administrators are in the right position to foster this environment.”

Further information on AASA’s Competitive Foods initiative and answers to questions about participating districts are available from Batheja (sbatheja@aasa.org or 703-875-0732).

— MARIAN KISCH

don't do it because it's coerced, but because they feel it's the right thing to do. I don't want to have a written policy just so I can nail people if they're doing something wrong," he says.

Smith focuses on in-school food choices. Most Balsz schools are devoid of vending machines, except for staff lounges and those that sell bottled water. He seeks alternative ways to support athletic teams and other organizations that have been dependent on profits from sales in these machines.

When the superintendent noticed the student council at one school selling Popsicles after lunch, rather than unilaterally ban the practice outright, he spoke with the officers about other ways to accomplish their goals. Now students solicit sponsors for an exercise program, with the proceeds going to the council.

Smith also reaches out to the community to change unhealthy habits. He's started school/community gardens, arranged for food distribution four times a year at selected school sites in cooperation with the local food bank, educated parents at weekly talks and invited representatives from the local dairy council to speak to school audiences.

Balsz was recognized by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's HealthierUS School Challenge in 2012 for excellence in nutrition and physical activity.

One of the recognized schools, Griffith Elementary, has changed school practices to promote healthier eating and increased activity — breakfast in the classroom, a Food Day Fair for families and community members, and a weekly Zumba class for staff and families.

"At Griffith, better health and wellness support for our students, staff and community means better learning and behavior at school and better community relations," Principal Alexis Wilson says.

"This is a powerful way to change people's lives, but it's often overlooked in the busy life of a leader who has so many pressing needs every day," Smith adds. "But it is potentially life changing for these kids, who may live longer and be more successful. Embrace it and you can see powerful results."

Fueling Up

In Cabell County, W.Va., the high-poverty, rural/suburban district based in Huntington, with 28 schools, has been moving in the direction of healthier foods for several years. But it had a long way to go. In 2010, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention named Huntington the unhealthiest city in the nation. Since then, the county and the state have enacted policies to restrict unhealthy competitive foods in public schools.

The school district introduced a program to encourage more physical activity by students. Sev-



Tony Swan, principal of Fairview Elementary School in Klamath Falls, Ore., donned a chicken suit to perform the "chicken dance" at his school's fund-raising walkathon.

eral elementary schools participate in a walking program with the local hospital that includes health screenings and prizes. At Enslow Middle School, the West Virginia studies class "walked across the state," adapting lessons to the sites and history of the counties they traveled through. Enslow also sponsored a "biggest loser" contest among staff members over personal weight loss.

"Over 50 percent of the calories that students consume are done so during the school day," says Lisa Riley, Enslow's assistant principal. "That is why it is so important we do our best to manage these calories and make sure that we offer the most nutritious options possible."

Enslow students may purchase healthy products from vending machines directly before and after school, not during lunch. The school made the changes gradually, moving from french fries to baked fries and finally to sweet potato fries. The school offers taste tests of foods such as vegetarian chili or smoothies with spinach and other vegetables.

One popular addition at the district is the Fuel Up to Play 60 competition, sponsored by the National Dairy Council and the National Football League, to promote in-school nutrition and physical activity. "The idea is to fuel up with healthy foods so you can play for 60 minutes," Riley says.

Through the introduction of taste tests and a school walking club, Enslow earned more points in the Fuel Up Competition than any other school in the nation in 2011, receiving a \$40,000 grant that was used to renovate the cafeteria and buy

a \$20,000 exercise system. The school has since added an indoor fitness trail and hired an after-school fitness coordinator.

Walking In, Candy Out

When Tony Swan became the principal at Fairview Elementary School in Klamath Falls, Ore., seven years ago, he found the school was selling chocolate bars and beef jerky sticks to raise money during the school day. He soon ended that practice, which he admits made club sponsors and booster groups nervous: “How were they going to raise money for the various activities they support?”

In reality, according to the National Alliance for

Nutrition and Activity, schools do not lose revenue if they switch to selling healthier food. Initial revenue declines may occur, but sales rebound and total revenue increases at most schools because monies from the sale of regular meals increases. Also, most school districts typically keep only 33 percent of the funds collected from vending machines.

In the case of Fairview Elementary, Swan worked with the clubs on more acceptable alternatives. He suggested a walkathon, with students getting flat-rate pledges of \$10 or more from family and friends. Now, once a year, all Fairview children walk around the high school track for 1½ hours to loud music and prize announcements. Parents and community

Trimming Bellies and Costs: In-House Cafeteria Operations

BY WILLIAM F. CLARK

For more than a decade, the New Haven, Conn., Public Schools had outsourced the management of its food service program, based on the assumption we could not handle this complex system and balance the budget. New Haven was able to write a check and know that we were complying with the myriad of bureaucratic federal and state requirements relating to meal programs in the schools.

The downside of this arrangement was that the profit for the management company, not unlike other food services firms, was achieved though their food purchasing. In fact, corporate profits were driven by an incentive to purchase more food products. The company looked upon such purchases as a revenue stream with a variety of credits (cash) coming back to the firm from the sellers of bulk purchases. While lip service was paid to healthy food options, the not-so-hidden reality was that processed food and bulk corporate purchasing were the easiest and most efficient means to corporate gain.

While the district used corporate managers, the local union staff handled the cafeteria work of cooking, delivery and service at each of our 47 schools. The cost of staffing, along with that of food purchases and management company fees, exceeded the reimbursement rates

for meals served, leaving the New Haven school board to subsidize the program annually at a cost of nearly \$2 million.

Parted Company

In 2008, we challenged the management company to be more efficient, more conscious of serving healthier food and purchasing local, fresh produce wherever possible. This proved to be inconsistent with the corporate structure. Healthier meals and local purchasing, the company contended, would necessarily mean greater costs, which they intended to pass along to the New Haven district, deepening our deficit.

We did not accept that conclusion and parted ways with the company, choosing to take the entire operation in-house. The results on the food-quality side have been tremendous. We redesigned our bidding and connected with various partners to secure locally grown and fresh foods. We joined with local growers, including some of our own schools, to find ways for local yields to make their way onto our menus.

We revamped the cafeteria menu to stop cooking multiple choices of meals, which had led to corporate profit and considerable food waste daily. We focused on one awesome meal of the day that exceeded all state and federal requirements with respect to meal components. We supplemented

that meal with a deli sandwich option and ultimately a salad bar in every school. The results are healthier meals for students. More fruit and vegetables, more fresh, scratch-cooked items and more satisfied students. No fried foods, no unhealthy snacks, no flavored milk.

Staff members are happier serving food they prepare themselves. They present and serve the meals with pride, and their positive attitude translates to the students who are more inclined to accept and eat the cafeteria meals. More meals consumed results in more revenue.

Over the last 10 years, New Haven has experienced the same inflation as any other school district. Wages, benefits and cost of food products are the main inflation drivers.

The choice to serve healthier food and the elimination of processed foods has increased the food cost delta, as well. These increases have not been offset by corresponding gains in federal reimbursement rates, which have remained relatively flat over the same period.

While we have secured a few outside grants to support the healthier choices, these do not cover the inflationary costs. Thus, school districts are faced with the challenge of either setting aside more funds to supplement and balance the meals program or making cost-cutting decisions on food quality, preparation,

organizations urge them on. Families join the walk, some pushing strollers.

To create even more of an incentive, Swan recently agreed to wear a chicken costume and do the “chicken dance” if students raised more than \$4,000. When they generated \$5,000, Swan donned a rented costume and gamely performed the routine while circling the track.

Another elementary school sponsors a similar walkathon, and Swan expects additional schools to join in the coming year. The district is on board with these activities, as well as ensuring its competitive-foods policy meets strict dietary guidelines and nutrition- and fat-content analyses.

Food Ambassadors

School districts’ food service departments sometimes come up with creative ways of including students in decisions about food offerings. Roger Kipp, who manages food services in the Norwood, Ohio, School District, established a student culinary council of 20 high school students, culled from leaders in their peer groups.

“They help us make decisions and changes as well as helping to educate and influence their fellow students,” he says.

Kipp brings in vendors so students can taste the food and offer their opinions about what they like or dislike. The director admits there’s no use in offering

purchasing and labor. Assuming a modest inflation of compensation and food costs over 10 years, New Haven should have seen an increase in its deficit of 2 percent to 5 percent, at least.

Positive Choices

By adjusting bids and creating competition for the selling of healthier foods to New Haven students, we have found that competition can be used to offset inflation costs. By focusing on preparing one really tasty and healthy meal of the day primarily through our central commissary, we have focused our menu and purchasing to a specific set of items, which repeat and allow for predictable costs and revenue streams. Slight adjustments to these recipes result in additional menu options without changing the purchasing, thus keeping the product costs and labor stable.

Finally, outreach efforts such as menu boards and nutrition lessons in the cafeterias during meals better educate students about positive meal choices. This results in students being more confident about trying the fresh fruits and vegetables they may otherwise not be exposed to and thereby become better consumers of healthier eating inside and outside of school.

Now, five years since transitioning back to an in-house operation and by committing to the strategies outlined here, New Haven has been able to fund its food division at the same level financially as the corporate-managed operation.

Yet the business side of this process remains complex and challenging. Our next step is to use better private-sector metrics



William Clark (far right), chief operating officer at the New Haven, Conn., Public Schools, with one of the school district’s own food trucks.

to reduce waste, inventory and purchasing while maximizing claimed meals. To be fair, the corporate folks and their systems have this down to a science. Our school district needs to do a better job at it, and if we do, I am confident we can actually provide healthy meals while lowering the local commitment to balance the budget.

Based on a recent state audit, we are taking corrective action on the process side of food operations (forms, claims, etc.). The state praised our food quality, including our meeting or exceeding healthy food standards, but the auditors noted our need

to improve on the central-office side. Once we do, we look to become a model district.

Considering the inflationary costs of food, salaries and benefits over time, our district has saved money by keeping the local contribution flat. The difference is we have done it with healthier meal options. The focus is on the physical well-being of our students, not a corporation’s bottom line.

WILLIAM CLARK is the chief operating officer of the New Haven Public Schools in New Haven, Conn. E-mail: william.clark@new-haven.k12.ct.us

Avenues for Introducing Healthy Foods

Improving competitive-foods policies and practices in a school district can be cumbersome and contentious. School administrators who have been down that road raised some points that could benefit colleagues.

► **Educate and involve all stakeholders.** In the Archuleta School District in Pagosa Springs, Colo., leaders reached out to influential people in the community, asking for their views about how to address the health of its students. Assistant Superintendent Linda Reed says dissenters should be invited into the process, along with students, who are those most affected by policy changes. The latter group can become your best ally or your worst enemy if left out of discussions. Respect cultural differences, too. Keep the school board informed so the members will be prepared if complaints reach them.

► **Invite food service personnel into the classroom.** In Norwood, Ohio, food service workers bring common and exotic fruits and vegetable into the classrooms for a “show, taste and tell.” They discuss the origin, characteristics and preparation methods for each item and allow students to sample each one. Students are encouraged to say, “That’s not my favorite,” rather than “That’s gross” if they don’t like the food item, so as not to influence others. Food service staff also read relevant stories in the classroom — for example, *Green Eggs and Ham* on Dr. Seuss’ birthday.

► **Offer alternatives to fundraisers.** Instead of selling chocolates, beef jerky and cookie dough, Fairview Elementary School in Klamath Falls, Ore., focuses on healthy activities like walkathons, running or walking races with sponsored participation and raffles for sports equipment.

► **View change as a marathon, not a sprint.** At Enslow Middle School in Huntington, W.Va., the school leadership made changes slowly to minimize resistance from students and parents. They also empowered students to contribute to the process.

► **Eliminate food rewards in the classroom.** Winners of class competitions at Fairview Elementary receive a trip to a gymnastics academy, jump playhouse or trampoline gym instead of a pizza, soda and junk-food party.

► **Partner with organizations to promote good eating habits.** Kid Power’s Operation Lunch Line, an interactive musical program offered to 4th graders, has been successful in promoting good nutrition and physical activity in Norwood. High schoolers act as wellness ambassadors during the program.

► **Apply for outside grants and insurance reductions.** Check with partners, nonprofit groups and foundations about grant awards for health and wellness projects. Also, ask your insurance company about reducing your district’s health insurance premiums for staff health and wellness activities.

— MARIAN KISCH

foods students don’t like and won’t purchase.

During the culinary council’s meetings, which first ran weekly and now take place monthly, there’s an educational component in which council members learn about nutrition, portion control, calories and other aspects of healthy eating. Whenever something new is to be introduced in the cafeteria, Kipp admits he’ll proceed in an understated manner, something he calls a “soft” change. The students on the council will spread the word and explain why the shift is being made — for example, when spring rolls were about to replace french fries on the lunch menu. The students also pass out samples of healthy foods and encourage their friends to give it a try. They are the healthy-food ambassadors.

Stricter Policy

Larger school districts, such as the Chicago Public Schools, have a challenge in changing attitudes and behavior across hundreds of schools. In November 2012, the district adopted a strict competitive-foods policy for its 630 schools. District leaders solicited input widely, talking with parents, principals, students and community representatives, and delved into health guidelines, medical research and other appropriate resources. They were determined to improve their policy regardless of the new USDA guidelines.

Chicago’s policy details what competitive foods can be sold. In vending machines, that means bottled water, 100 percent juice drinks and milk in containers of less than 8 ounces, are allowed. All carbonated beverages are banned. Vending machines, which are permitted in middle schools and high schools, contain snack foods that cannot exceed guidelines regarding fat, sodium and calories. School stores are prohibited from selling any food products during the school day, and a la carte options have been dropped from the cafeteria menu.

In 2012-13, 25 elementary schools piloted the new guidelines. Leslie Fowler, executive director of nutritional services in Chicago, insisted the healthier options worked. The pushback surprisingly came not from students but from some principals, who were leery about enforcing the new “cupcake policy,” which allowed only two schoolwide celebrations a year involving snack foods. Even those educators now are on board, Fowler says, and the food services personnel, when asked, will attend parties and plan activities around healthy options.

A Healthier Future

The federal government’s new competitive-foods guidelines, by all accounts, will be comprehensive and deal with the significant problems in children’s diets today. According to Margo Wootan, director

Students at De Diego Elementary Community Academy in Chicago enjoy the fare of restaurant professionals at a Chefs Move to School program, part of first lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move! initiative.



of nutrition policy at the Center for Science in the Public Interest, the guidelines are “in desperate need of an update.”

She points out that improving the nutritional quality of a la carte foods also helps erase the stigma for low-income children who get free lunches and their wealthier schoolmates who are buying a la carte foods.

Sandra Ford, president of the School Nutrition Association, whose organization represents school districts' food service operations, believes offering healthy choices for students is the right thing to do, even though they can cause a drop in sales. In its response to the proposed USDA regulations, SNA has asked that the same rules regarding the nutritional standards of foods served in school breakfast and lunch apply to foods sold outside these programs.

“They should not impose a different set of guidelines,” says Ford, who works as director of food and nutrition at Manatee County School District in Bradenton, Fla. For example, different definitions exist for fruits, vegetables and grain foods. The food service association wants both flexibility in what is served to students as a la carte items and accountability included in the policy. Once the new regulations are put into practice, the association will help its members adjust, Ford says.

Parents also are campaigning for healthier foods in schools. Ginny Ehrlich, former chief executive officer of the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, says, “Parents do not have control of what their children eat while in school, so they want to be assured they are consuming healthy foods.”

The elimination of sports drinks from school vending machines may generate the most controversy. “They are pure sugar and don't belong in the school,” Wootan says. “But lots of kids and adults don't realize this and think they are needed for physical activities. Not so. Water is adequate for hydration during the school day.”

According to Ehrlich, studies show that students who eat breakfast at school perform better on tests and have fewer behavior problems. Those who perform better on state fitness tests also tend to get higher scores on state math and reading tests.

“We're seeing a culture change,” she says, “where less-healthy options are being replaced with healthy foods and beverages. Everyone is buying into it.” ■

MARIAN KISCH is a freelance writer in Chevy Chase, Md. E-mail: mariankisch@verizon.net

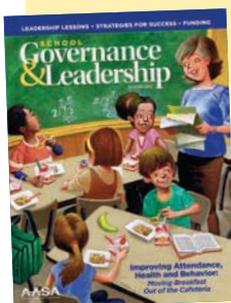
Additional Resources

Selective informational resources on competitive foods and healthy eating in schools.

AASA

▶ “School Administrators for HEALing of Our Children and Youth,” the association's web page on competitive foods, www.aasa.org/content.aspx?id=26206.

▶ *School Governance and Leadership*, Winter 2013 issue on school breakfasts and childhood obesity, http://bit.ly/AASA_School-Breakfast



Miscellaneous Organizations

▶ Alliance for a Healthier Generation, http://bit.ly/AHG_HealthyVending

▶ Center for Science in the Public Interest, www.cspinet.org

▶ National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity, www.nanacoalition.org

▶ Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Childhood Obesity, www.rwjf.org

▶ School Nutrition Association, www.schoolnutrition.org

Superintendent Resources

www.aasa.org/Resources.aspx

From professional development to toolkits to multimedia, AASA provides the resources you need to help you and your team succeed.

AASA Websites



aasa.org



aasaconnect.org

Also:

- AASA Job Bulletin
- National Conference on Education
- Buyers Guide for Educators
- Legislative Action Center
- AASA Closing the Gap

E-Journals/Newsletters



The Leader's Edge



News of the Nation

Also:

- AASA New Superintendents E-Journal
- AASA Executive Briefing
- Legislative Corps Weekly Report
- Policy Insider

Other Publications:

- School Administrator
- Health-Related Publications
- Journal of Scholarship & Practice

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Key speakers, topical sessions and awards, a photo gallery, a Twitter feed, blogs with daily postings, and more!

Rethinking Our Approach to **SCHOOL DISCIPLINE**

Alternatives to suspension and expulsion
and the zero-tolerance practices of the past

BY MICHAEL D. THOMPSON

In the wake of recent school tragedies, nobody understands better than school leaders the challenges in creating a welcoming and supportive learning environment while maintaining order and safety.

While more school districts look to move away from zero-tolerance policies of the past, educators continue to feel the pressure to remove disruptive students from the classroom. Yet disciplinary strategies that remove students from school have been shown to increase the likelihood of a host of negative outcomes, including dropping out of school and juvenile delinquency. Research also shows children of color and those with disabilities, particularly emotional and behavioral disor-

ders, are disproportionately affected by exclusionary disciplinary actions and are overrepresented in the juvenile justice system.

As such, an increasing number of districts and schools are implementing alternatives to suspension and expulsion; improving resources for administrators, teachers and other school staff; and providing the supports and services to get students back on track.

Recent Research

A 2013 report by the University of California, Los Angeles, Civil Rights Project found approximately 2 million, or one in nine, middle and high school students were suspended at least once in the 2009-10 school year, according to

“The good news is that school discipline issues never have been in a brighter spotlight nor have they had such extensive grassroots momentum.”

U.S. Department of Education data.

The high rates of exclusionary actions are consistent with the 2011 Council of State Governments Justice Center’s “Breaking Schools’ Rules” study, which followed nearly every 7th-grade public school student in Texas over a six-year period. The study found the majority of students — nearly 60 percent — had been suspended or expelled during that time. The overwhelming majority of suspensions resulted from actions that occur at the discretion of school leaders the latitude to deal with misbehavior (discretionary suspensions), not due to mandatory removals.

Furthermore, the study found that African-American students and students with special needs were disproportionately disciplined for discretionary violations, such as disrespect, tardiness and disruptions. Nearly three of four students who qualified for special education services during the study period were suspended or expelled at least once, with students whose record reflected they had been coded as emotionally disturbed having nearly a 24 percent higher probability of being suspended or expelled for a discretionary reason.

In addition to confirming the negative academic and juvenile justice-related outcomes associated with exclusionary disciplinary actions, the study also examined schools that had similar characteristics and student populations and found these schools varied significantly in how often they suspended or expelled students. (“Breaking Schools’ Rules” is available at <http://csgjusticecenter.org/youth/breaking-schools-rules-report>.)

The growing body of school discipline research makes a compelling case for school districts and individual schools having the ability to reduce their dependence on out-of-school suspensions and expulsions to manage student misbehavior. Many schools are implementing innovative strategies to create alternative options with promising results; yet significant barriers prevent these efforts from reaching scale. This is due, in part, because they require internal and external resources and collaboration from multiple systems, notably health and other social service providers, law enforcement, courts and probation departments.

Practitioner Needs

Educators long have recognized what research increasingly confirms: Students succeed in an environment where they feel safe, supported and connected to each other and the adults in the building. Likewise, when students

are actively engaged in learning, they have improved academic, social and health outcomes and fewer behavioral problems. The safest schools are marked with high levels of student engagement and strong relationships among students, parents and educators.

Many educators agree suspensions and expulsions should be a last resort, reserved for the most serious offenses. The emphasis should be on preventing student misbehavior by proactively establishing structures and policies to improve school climate, encouraging positive student behavior and implementing targeted and intensive behavioral health strategies. School districts struggle, however, with finding the resources to address the range of students’ behavioral health needs. They are also often unaware of best practices and promising strategies for nonexclusionary interventions that can be tailored to the needs of their students and their district capacity.

In response, the Council of State Governments Justice Center is leading a consensus-building project that is convening experts in education, behavioral health, school safety, juvenile justice, social services, law enforcement and child welfare. Youth, parents, advocates and community partners also play a critical and active role in the project. The initiative will develop a comprehensive report with policy and practice recommendations and implementation guidance to minimize dependence on suspensions and expulsions to manage student behavior; improve students’ academic outcomes; reduce their involvement in the juvenile justice system (including alternative strategies to school-based arrests and direct court referrals when appropriate); and promote safe and productive learning environments. (More about the School Discipline Consensus Project is available at <http://csgjusticecenter.org/youth/projects/school-discipline-consensus-project>.)

Growing Spotlight

The good news is that school discipline issues never have been in a brighter spotlight nor have they had such extensive grassroots momentum. Even as the consensus project progresses, policymakers and practitioners are prioritizing school discipline as a key education, health and social justice issue. President Obama’s 2014 budget proposal includes several new investments related to school mental health, school climate improvement efforts and school security, which flow from the president’s post-Newton, Conn., “Now is the Time” report.

Further, as a result of the commitment and hard work of local communities, advocacy groups, educators and other agents of change, several states, districts and individual schools have undertaken significant improvements to school discipline systems with the goal of keeping students in the classroom, improving school climate and safety, and supporting behavioral health needs of all students.

Several states have convened legislative and stakeholder task forces to develop recommendations, and some have passed legislation or regulations revising school discipline policies or are providing additional support to educators to develop alternative strategies to suspensions and expulsions. Among the noteworthy:

- ▶ The Colorado General Assembly passed legislation in 2012 amending grounds for suspensions and expulsions, requiring training for school resource officers and requiring school boards and districts to revise codes of conduct and disciplinary codes to keep kids in school.

- ▶ The California Legislature passed five bills last year reforming school disciplinary policies. The legislation provides additional decision-making flexibility to school administrators authorizes the use of alternatives to suspensions and expulsions, and prohibits schools from denying enrollment to students who have had contact with the juvenile justice system.

- ▶ Several other states, including Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts and Washington, have introduced or are considering legislation related to limiting the use of suspensions and expulsions, supporting students' behavioral health needs, requiring the collection of discipline data and improving school safety measures. Some jurisdictions are addressing civil rights actions related to school discipline.

Local Developments

At the local level, promising approaches and practices are emerging. Among them:

- ▶ Providing training and professional development to educators, specialized instructional support personnel and school resource officers related to alternatives to suspension and arrest, creating positive learning environments and providing supports to students with particular behavioral health needs;

- ▶ Implementing alternative strategies to suspensions and expulsions, such as restorative justice, peer mediation and youth courts;



Michael Thompson directs the Council of State Governments Justice Center, which is trying to improve behavioral support systems for students.

- ▶ Establishing student support teams to identify students with acute behavioral health needs, provide necessary supports and monitor students' progress;
- ▶ Developing school-based health centers that provide mental and behavioral health and substance abuse services; and
- ▶ Reforming truancy and ticketing policies and school policing protocols.

Additionally, over recent months, school districts including Buffalo, Denver, Chicago, New York City and Los Angeles have revised their disciplinary policies and codes of conduct to provide administrators more flexibility in handling disciplinary matters, limiting the maximum length of time for suspensions and preventing some infractions from being punished by out-of-school suspensions.

School system leaders remain at the center of these activities and have an unparalleled opportunity to advance the national discussion about school discipline, school safety, climate and behavioral health, as well as move the field forward with the support of multiple stakeholders and the engagement of youth, families and communities. ■

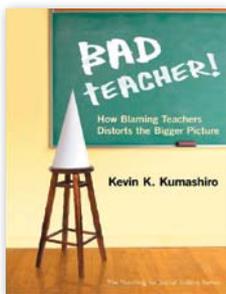
MICHAEL THOMPSON is director of the Council of State Governments Justice Center in New York, N.Y. E-mail: mthompson@csg.org

“School system leaders remain at the center of these activities and have an unparalleled opportunity to advance the national discussion about school discipline, school safety, climate and behavioral health ...”

BOOK REVIEWS

Bad Teacher! How Blaming Teachers Distorts the Bigger Picture

by Kevin K. Kumashiro, Teachers College Press, New York, N.Y., 2012, 103 pp. with index, \$21.95 softcover



From the outset, *Bad Teacher! How Blaming Teachers Distorts the Bigger Picture* seems seriously mistitled. Although the theme of the attack on teachers runs

through its 89 pages, the book is more of a general criticism of the current reform movement in education, which author Kevin Kumashiro believes is actually making things worse in schools.

Kumashiro, director of the Center for Anti-Oppressive Education and a professor of Asian-American studies and education at the University of Illinois at Chicago, concludes his work with three questions, none of which mentions teachers.

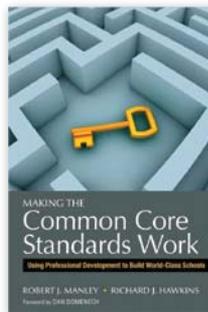
What seems to constitute good schools today, he contends, is the ability to raise standardized test scores. It stands to reason that those who do not raise student scores are employing poorly performing teachers.

A major theme of this book is that current education reforms are based on common sense, unsupported by genuine research. Yet these measures are promoted by politicians and foundations that are contributing major support to their own notions of school reform in K-12 education systems.

Reviewed by Leonard H. Elovitz, associate professor of educational leadership, Kean University, Union, N.J.

Making the Common Core Standards Work: Using Professional Development to Build World-Class Schools

by Robert J. Manley and Richard J. Hawkins, Corwin, Thousand Oaks, Calif., 2013, 261 pp. with index, \$38.95 softcover



In *Making the Common Core Standards Work*, two long-serving superintendents, Robert J. Manley and Richard J. Hawkins, address the myriad of issues and conundrums associated

with the Common Core standards.

Manley and Hawkins, now professors, view the Common Core standards, which were approved by the National Governors Association in 2010. Now, having

been adopted by at least 45 states, they have morphed into the Common Core State Standards. The authors have moved beyond the critical analyses of the Brookings Institution and the negative commentaries of Diane Ravitch, Linda Darling-Hammond and others. They have accepted the challenge, complexities and opportunities in this most recent iteration of national reforms dating from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.

Written for school leaders and those who train them, the book provides a jargon-free blueprint for implementing and exceeding the new standards, using targeted professional development. Detailed and realistic strategies are supported by examples and anecdotes from a wide and diverse range of schools.

Topics include adapting and aligning existing curricula to meet grade-level goals for language arts and mathematics and designing formative and summative assessments that monitor and measure mastery of the standards.

Reviewed by Charles Rudiger, professor, Dowling College, Oakdale, N.Y.



WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK ...

“Through a case-study analysis, I was motivated to capture how one district, over a 14-year period, used external experts to address a wide range of student and staff needs. I also wanted to help preserve our district’s history of the use of external experts.”

THOMAS F. EVERT, RETIRED SUPERINTENDENT, JANESVILLE, WIS., AND AASA MEMBER (SINCE 1995) ON CO-AUTHORING WITH AMY VAN DEUREN *MAKING EXTERNAL EXPERTS WORK: SOLUTIONS FOR DISTRICT LEADERS* (ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD, 2011)

MORE BOOK REVIEWS

www.aasa.org/SAreviews.aspx

Becoming a Strong Instructional Leader: Saying No to Business as Usual

by Alan C. Jones

REVIEWED BY JEFF SMITH

The Leader’s Guide to 21st Century Education: 7 Steps for Schools and Districts

by Ken Kay and Valerie Greenhill

REVIEWED BY DIANE E. REED

Leading for Powerful Learning: A Guide for Instructional Leaders

by Angela Breidenstein, Kevin Fahey, Carl Glickman and Frances Hensley

REVIEWED BY LARRY L. NYLAND

Living the Questions: A Guide for Teacher-Researchers

by Ruth Shagoury and Brenda Miller Power

REVIEWED BY VICKEY M. GILES

ABSTRACT

Family/Work Conflicts

Women superintendents do not find work and family demands to be in conflict, according to a 2013 doctoral dissertation completed at Columbia University's Teachers College.

Rather, according to researcher Debra Ann Reecks-Rodgers, the demands present themselves simultaneously. "Role accumulation was a more salient descriptor of their experiences than role conflict," she says.

Through family and workplace resources, a balance was achieved, especially with regard to self-imposed work demands. Family demands were rarely considered untenable issues.

Strategies used by the women superintendents were primarily personal adaptations to the issues, the study found. Professional experience, district type and size, and family composition were factors that affected the women's strategies and successes.

(Copies of "Challenges, Not Barriers: The Work and Family Issues of Women Superintendents" are available from ProQuest at 800-521-0600 or disspub@proquest.com.)

BITS & PIECES

Financial Literacy

The Council for Economic Education has introduced the National Standards for Financial Literacy, a framework for a K-12

personal finance curriculum.

The council promotes a real-world understanding of economics and personal finance.

For more information, visit www.councilforeconed.org.

Reading Programs

The What Works Clearinghouse (<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc>) has released two reports that review research on programs designed to improve reading skills.

Read Naturally is a supplemental reading program designed to improve the reading fluency and comprehension of elementary and middle school students using a combination of books, audio CDs and computer software.

Fast ForWord is a computer-based reading program intended to help students develop cognitive skills by adapting the nature and difficulty of the content based on individual student's responses.

Online Classes

CLC Network, a national nonprofit that promotes the development of people with disabilities, will offer six online classes this fall for academically talented, middle-school-age students in honors English and math, including algebra and geometry.

Courses are aligned with Michigan content standards and are taught by certified teachers.

For more details, visit <http://courses.clcnetwork.org>.

Digital Edition

Check out the new page-turning-style, electronic edition of *School Administrator*. You can find it at <http://schooladministrator.aasa.org> each month.

The digital edition allows readers to easily access complete, searchable magazine issues online via desktop or mobile devices. This new format also enables users to download and print article PDFs and share links on social media.

AASA Conference Registration

Early-bird registration has opened for AASA's National Conference on Education from Feb. 13-15, 2014, in Nashville, Tenn. Access the discounted signup at www.aasa.org/nce.

The conference will feature superintendents with proven case studies to share plus keynote speakers on the vital school topics of the day and chances to meet representatives from more than 200 firms and nonprofits in the K-12 field.

SchoolAdministrator | SEPTEMBER

LIVING, DEALING AND LEADING IN COMPLEXITY. Jim "Torch" Lytle and Harris Sokoloff of the Graduate School of Education at University of Pennsylvania sort out the complex web that defines the superintendency today. On the same theme: Jay Badams on the community context; John Barry on the unexpected; and Richard Colvin on the media.

PLUS

- ▶ Randy Refsland: My year of learning in China
- ▶ Infographic: Hesitancy among superintendent applicants
- ▶ Ethical Educator: The case of a clock watcher
- ▶ Legal Brief: Recruiting foreign students



Healthy Schools = Healthy Students



STUDENT HEALTH ALWAYS has been an important issue to me, so it is more than appropriate, in fact it is ironic, that my first column as president of AASA appears in an issue of our magazine that examines the links between children's health and learning.

In my work as a school psychologist and later as director of student services, I consistently dealt with issues related to children's mental and physical health and learning. It's helpful to know that research points to a strong link between health and learning and achievement.

Educators can have a strong, positive effect on children's health by teaching about physical well-being and promoting healthy behaviors. If we want children to be successful learners, we, as superintendents and administrators, need to be strong advocates for children's mental and physical health. We must promote good nutrition, immunizations, vision and hearing screenings, health education and safe, nurturing school environments.

Healthy students and effective learning require healthy schools and school districts. One of my goals as AASA president this year is to encourage schools and districts to be healthy places for our children to learn. We must be able to spread the word that the majority of our public schools are healthy and that their students demonstrate good academic, social and emotional health.

For more than a decade, the Abington, Pa., School District motto has reflected our mission: Excellence Is Our Standard and Achievement Is the Result. As superintendents and administrators, we play a pivotal role in ensuring that America's students receive a quality education that prepares them for college and career success. We can do that only by guaranteeing that, as a nation, educational excellence is our standard. We need to be united as educational leaders on issues that will continue to influence, in effect, the health of public education and

student achievement in America.

Unfortunately, public education seems to be under attack by some sectors of society. We face such challenges as decreased funding, increased regulations and growing pressures on teachers and administrators to do more with less. Although no vaccines can protect against such attacks, we need to immunize public education to protect its health in the same way that immunizations help protect students from sickness. We can help immunize public education by developing a strong mission, taking concerted actions to support that mission and disseminating important information about the achievements — and the needs — of our schools and school districts through state organizations and AASA.

Superintendents and administrators must promote the fact the majority of school districts successfully foster student achievement. Too often in the past, we have not communicated the successes of public education. But I am pleased that, as individuals and as an organization, we are making strides in communicating the message that most public schools are succeeding.

As AASA members and as educational leaders, we can and must constantly and consistently spread and reinforce the message that excellence in public education is our national standard and that achievement for all students must be the result. A healthy, strong AASA with a committed and expanded membership is crucial to communicating the messages and actions that advance the health of public education.

As president, I will encourage the AASA membership to be effective educators, leaders and outspoken cheerleaders for our schools and to continue to be strong advocates for public education. It is through a strong AASA and its state affiliates that we can advocate for healthy public schools with healthy students that can produce a healthy future for everyone. I pledge to do my part. Can I count on you?

AMY SICHEL is AASA president for 2013-14. E-mail: AmySichel@Abington.k12.pa.us

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2013-14

(terms expire June 30 of the year indicated)

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Abington, Pa. (2014)

IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT

Benny L. Gooden
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Executives Liaison*
(Ex Officio)

Public Approval in the Face of Poverty



A NEW SCHOOL year is about to start. For the past five years, school systems have suffered the worst economic decline since the Great Depression and, to add insult to injury, the effects of sequestration this year will add to the economic malaise.

Nevertheless, public education in America is the best that it has ever been. How can that be, you say? Media accounts abound as to how our schools are failing, with privatization, vouchers, charter schools and choice offered as our only salvation. Not true.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, the number of students attending schools considered “dropout factories” has declined by 41 percent since 2002. The number of dropout factories has declined by 29 percent since 2007. A total of 1.1 million fewer students are attending such schools. Today, the dropout rate, which has been declining steadily since 1972, is the lowest it has ever been. Conversely, high school completion rates have been trending up, and we have the highest high school graduation rate in decades (78.2 percent during 2009-10).

College enrollment is at a high point, and more Hispanic students are pursuing postsecondary education than ever, 31.9 percent in 2010. As a matter of fact, minority college enrollment has increased for all groups. The educational attainment for all 25- to 29-year-olds is up. Ninety percent have achieved a high school diploma, 63 percent have had some college, and 33 percent have earned at least a bachelor’s degree. The same can be said for the population 25 and older, with higher numbers in the same three categories.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress, known as the Nation’s

Report Card, indicates that 9- and 13-year-old students have achieved the highest scores in math since 1973. The same can be said for reading scores. Black and Hispanic students have attained the highest scores since 1971. These are not the numbers you would expect to see for a failing school system. Results from the 2009 NAEP High School Transcript Study show that today’s high school graduates are earning more credits and completing higher curriculum levels.

“Much is made of our poor showing on international tests but little is said about the fact that the United States HAS THE HIGHEST RATE OF CHILD POVERTY among peer countries at 23.1 percent.”

Approval Ratings

Most parents are pleased with the education their children are getting. According to the 44th annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, 77 percent of America’s parents gave the school their oldest child attends a grade of A or B. Those are the highest grades parents have assigned to their oldest child’s school since the poll began. Twenty years ago the number was 64 percent.

Interestingly enough, when the same question is posed to the general public about the schools in their community, the number drops down to 48 percent, yet that number has been increasing steadily since 1992 when the number was 40 percent.

Finally, when the public is asked to rate public schools in the nation

as a whole, only 19 percent give them grades of A or B. However, 20 years ago the number was 18 percent, so not much has changed. The conclusion to be drawn here is that the parents with children in school have given those schools today the highest ratings in the history of the poll, but as familiarity with the school lessens, from my community to the nation as a whole, the ratings decrease. To know our public schools is to love them!

Ugly Reality

Our schools, on average, are the best they have ever been. Yet the one positive element of No Child Left Behind was to disaggregate the standardized testing data, revealing that our low-income students still lag significantly behind the performance of middle-income-and-higher students. There is no question that poverty is the single greatest factor limiting student achievement. Much is made of our poor showing on international tests, but little is said about the fact that the United States has the highest rate of child poverty among peer countries at 23.1 percent. Finland, the country against whom we often are compared, ranks near the top on international tests. The nation has a child poverty rate of 5.3 percent. Shame on us.

We need to acknowledge that poverty is not an excuse; it is an ugly reality in America. As long as we are dependent on the local property tax to be the primary source of funding education, we will continue to have inequities in academic achievement between the haves and have-nots. If we do not have the will to make the necessary changes, we should not use the low-achieving systems we have allowed to exist to define our entire educational system as a failure.

DANIEL DOMENECH is AASA executive director. E-mail: ddomenech@aasa.org

A Deserved Final Bow for AASA's Chief Advocate

Bruce Hunter retires after 30-plus years of the rough-and-tumble on the Hill lobbying on behalf of public school leaders

BRUCE HUNTER HAS SPECIALIZED in inside-the-Beltway politics for more than 31 years. He navigates with ease through the maze of the congressional bill-making processes, appropriations and hearings. He knows who really wields the power on Capitol Hill, whether that's the chair of the education committee or a staff member who has a politician's ear.

While Hunter, AASA's associate executive director for advocacy, policy and communications, may know his way around Washington intimately, he is not of Washington. And as he prepares to retire this month, Hunter says he has few regrets about leaving the city where education laws and federal mandates often are handed down without exploration of the consequences to those on the ground working in school districts and classrooms.

"All of my best friends work

somewhere in America in the school business," Hunter says. "I never had to avoid conflict because I thought it would make someone here in Washington unhappy, since my most important reference group has never been here."

Over the last three decades, the 70-year-old native of Glenrock, Wyo., has seen federal legislation, funding formulas and policy notions come and go, and ideas often get recycled. He's forged relationships with both Republicans and Democrats, entertained many with his personal stories, and occasionally rubbed some the wrong way with his direct approach and language. But to the end, he's always efficaciously acted on the views of AASA members, says Mary Kusler, who was hired by Hunter to be a legislative specialist at AASA in 2000 and now directs government relations at the 3-million-member National Education

Association.

"I have never met somebody who knew the school business better than he did," Kusler says. "I'm around education advocates every single day of the week, but nobody has the concept of what is actually happening in school buildings more than he does."

'Absolutely Alone'

Hunter's dedication to promoting the needs of those running the nation's 13,650 school systems also can translate into stances not always popular in Washington. One of AASA's most controversial decisions was to not endorse the federal No Child Left Behind Act as it was being passed into law in 2001. Though some other professional groups had concerns about the bipartisan law, there was great pressure from both Republicans and Democrats, as well as the administration of President George W. Bush, to back the legislation, Hunter says.

"We said it wouldn't work, and we were absolutely alone," he contends. "Nobody else was with us."

AASA, the only national organization that didn't sign on to the sweeping federal legislation, took that position after extensive discussion with its members, particularly the association's legislative committee. Hunter says superintendents told him the central features of the bill would have unintended consequences, misdirect the work of school districts and create the wrong set of incentives. Many of those fears ultimately became reality.

One reason for AASA members' clear views on NCLB, as well as other legislative and fiscal matters, is Hunter's keen ability to frame

A Unique Interviewing Style

OVER THREE DECADES of hiring staff to work on federal advocacy matters at AASA, Bruce Hunter became rather adept at landing young talent. But his interviewing style could be nerve-wracking for the final candidates.

Hunter would generate a lengthy list of challenging questions and ask the interview candidate to answer them all, in any order, in 45 minutes. He also always required a writing sample.

"I try to sit there stone-faced and provide no visual cues," he says. "It's always very clear who the best choice should be."

He's had candidates walk out of the interview and immediately tell friends they didn't get the job, only to be offered the position shortly after. "I want people who are quick on their feet," Hunter says. "If a person can handle that, and write, then you've got a winner."

The stress of the moment was worth it in the long run, says Mary Kusler, who was hired by Hunter to be an assistant in 2000 and now is the director of government relations at the National Education Association. "I can tell you I would not be where I am in my career without him," she says.

— MICHELLE DAVIS

policy and legislation in a way that is understandable and helps members see the path such enactments might take from Washington to school classrooms, says Benny L. Gooden, superintendent for 27 years in Fort Smith, Ark., and an active player on legislative affairs.

“Everybody knows that if Bruce tells you something about the federal scene, it’s pretty much spot-on. You can bank on it,” says Gooden, immediate past president of AASA. “He doesn’t speculate.”

That puts Hunter in constant demand on the meeting circuit. He’s spoken at conferences and AASA’s state affiliate events many times during his tenure. “He always explained complicated issues in terms we could easily understand and make sense of,” says 18-year member Darline Robles, the former superintendent in Los Angeles County and Salt Lake City, Utah. “When the legislation comes out, he has the history and knows how it got to that point. He didn’t try to drive our agenda, and he’s a good listener.”

The last quality comes in handy in Washington, where Hunter has “assiduously worked at being bipartisan,” says Jack Jennings, the former president of the Center on Education Policy, who has known Hunter since he came to Washington.

“He doesn’t shut the door to either side,” adds Jennings, a former top staff member on the House committee overseeing education. “Some lobbyists tend to favor one side or another, but Bruce has always put the interests of school districts and administrators first by trying to further those interests with whatever party is in office.”

Personalized Scenarios

Because of his intimate knowledge of the way issues play out in the field, Hunter says he learned over time the most effective way to sway proposed legislation. Rather than personally



AASA’s Bruce Hunter (right) interacting with Robert McCord of Henderson, Nev., an active 28-year member of the association.

attempt to influence lawmakers, he arranged for superintendents, usually from far-flung communities of all sizes, to speak directly to the politicians and their key staff members.

Unlike many other professional associations and trade groups, when AASA members travel to Capitol Hill to testify before committees, the organization does not write their testimony, preferring that members tell their own stories. Hunter is known for figuring out who in the field would have the most impact and then encouraging them to share their schools’ situation with the most appropriate lawmaker.

More than two years ago, Hunter took advantage of an existing relationship between Gary Amoroso, who was then superintendent of the Lakeville, Minn., school district, and Rep. John Kline, R-Minn., chair of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce. When Kline held his first hearing on reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act, also known as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act or ESEA, Amoroso was a witness, and he provided testimony about the difficulties posed to school districts by the law.

Afterward, Hunter arranged for the two men to meet more privately to chat about the issues one on one.

“The fact that these two people knew each other, liked each other and respected each other made our case for flexibility (in ESEA) so strong,” Hunter says. “When the chairman’s bill came out with lots of flexibility for school districts, I wasn’t surprised.”

Victories for Kids

Many of Hunter’s perspectives and his legendary stories stem from his youth. Those tales often touch on his rural upbringing in Wyoming, where the closest house was 30 miles from his own and where he’d spend hours unsupervised with youthful friends at a nearby creek. His mother’s family raised cattle and sheep, and Hunter worked on the ranches as a boy, which taught him applicable lessons for the Washington work world.

“The weather dictates a lot, and what you want may not be what you get,” he says. “You learn to roll with the punches, get the best deal you can and then try again the next time around.”

His early career as a teacher of

junior high school social studies and English in Shoshoni, Wyo., also deepened his respect and admiration for educators in rural areas. Before com-

ing to work for AASA, Hunter also trained Head Start teachers in West Texas, taught sociology at Eastern New Mexico University, was a policy

analyst and grant administrator for the Education Commission of the States in Denver, Colo., and spent almost a year pushing the legislative agenda for the Council of Chief State School Officers.

Those early experiences meant he developed a special affinity for rural school issues — which can be overshadowed by news of urban schools that dominates media headlines. One of Hunter's biggest professional successes in Washington was his substantive role in conceiving the Rural Education Achievement Program. He persuaded lawmakers to establish and fund the program, which provides modest grants to rural districts.

"I saw that small school districts needed help but didn't have the administrative capacity to apply for big grants and also didn't have the capacity to be effective with dollars that were highly targeted with a long list of what you could and couldn't do with the money," Hunter says.

He convened a focus group of rural school district leaders who told him they didn't need large sums of money, just a lot of flexibility. They created the outlines of the program that, at the time, offered up to \$50,000 to districts, along with great leeway on how the dollars could be used. Hunter convinced both Rep. Bill Goodling, R-Pa., the then-chair of the House education committee, as well as the staff of Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., who chaired the Senate education committee, to move forward on the rural initiative. It was funded in 2002 under the No Child Left Behind Act. It still exists today to aid school systems with fewer than 600 students.

Hunter considers that program just one of his lasting legacies. He was instrumental in the adoption of negotiated rulemaking or "neg reg," which allows AASA and other education stakeholders to collaborate with the U.S. Department of Education on the initial development of rules governing new education programs. Nick Pen-

His Colleagues' Favorite Recollections

Editor's Note: *School Administrator* invited five former and current colleagues to contribute short articles highlighting their most vivid recollections of Bruce Hunter's distinct operating style. Their full accounts appear as a Web Extra on the August contents page of magazine's online edition: www.aasa.org/SchoolAdministrator.aspx.

The contributors are Paul D. Houston, former AASA executive director; Kari Arfstrom, Noelle Ellerson and Nick Penning, all of whom work or worked in legislative affairs at AASA; and Darrell Rud, a former member of the AASA advisory committee on state and national relations.

PAUL HOUSTON: *"He is a wise man who feels his job is to serve the members. He taught a fledgling executive director that lesson as well. He also is courageous and willing to be shunned if he believes it is the right thing to do."*

KARI ARFSTROM: *"Bruce made it a habit to not carry anything with him into meetings. I'd lug around my purse, briefcase, copies of documents, etc., and Bruce would walk in, maybe with a pen. Again, he kept it all upstairs! Not that he wasn't willing to share; he was more than willing to impart strategy, anecdotes, theories and history with whomever asked."*

NOELLE ELLERSON: *"It will be surreal to walk into the office come Sept. 1 and not have Bruce to rehash the weekend with, to harass about the Denver Broncos or, eventually, to run through the legislative strategy for a federal reauthorization or an especially wacky legislative proposal."*

DARRELL RUD: *"I've witnessed these effective 'schmoozing' tactics on multiple occasions, most notably during AASA's federal advocacy conferences when Bruce would debrief us while keeping congressional representatives and their staff members on their toes with his pointed questions."*

NICK PENNING: *"Bruce [spoke] out of turn in what was supposed to be strictly a photo opportunity with Sen. Majority Leader Robert Byrd, D-W.Va., to ask that Byrd ensure the federal tax exemption for state and local sales taxes be retained in the 1986 tax reform bill that was still in process."*

ning, a former longtime AASA colleague of Hunter's, called the change "groundbreaking" and said it has affected the reach of new programs.

Hunter's vigorous Hill advocacy also succeeded in shifting the formula for funding the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Previously, 25 percent of IDEA federal funding went to the state and 75 percent went to school districts. However, lawmakers altered the distribution, now directing less than 15 percent to the state education agency and about 85 percent of federal IDEA dollars to the local districts. Lawmakers also included a poverty factor in the formula for distributions to school districts because low-income schools often have more students with disabilities — something Hunter strongly advocated for.

Along with other lobbyists, he also worked to change vocational education funding from competitive grants to a formula-driven system, which AASA members believe helps them support all students instead of putting needed dollars toward possibly unproven programs. Similarly, Hunter successfully lobbied to change the percentage of low-income students at which an entire school would qualify for Title I funds from 75 percent, which he considered much too high, to 40 percent.

"These were victories that affected kids by moving dollars to where kids were and by creating better learning environments for them," Hunter says.

Mutual Admiration

Still, there have been disappointments. Congress has yet to pass a much-overdue reauthorization of ESEA, while full funding for IDEA is unlikely to become reality anytime soon. His successors in the federal advocacy department at AASA can pick up those battles by building on the firm arsenal of strategies and tactics he's built.

But it's likely that Hunter, who

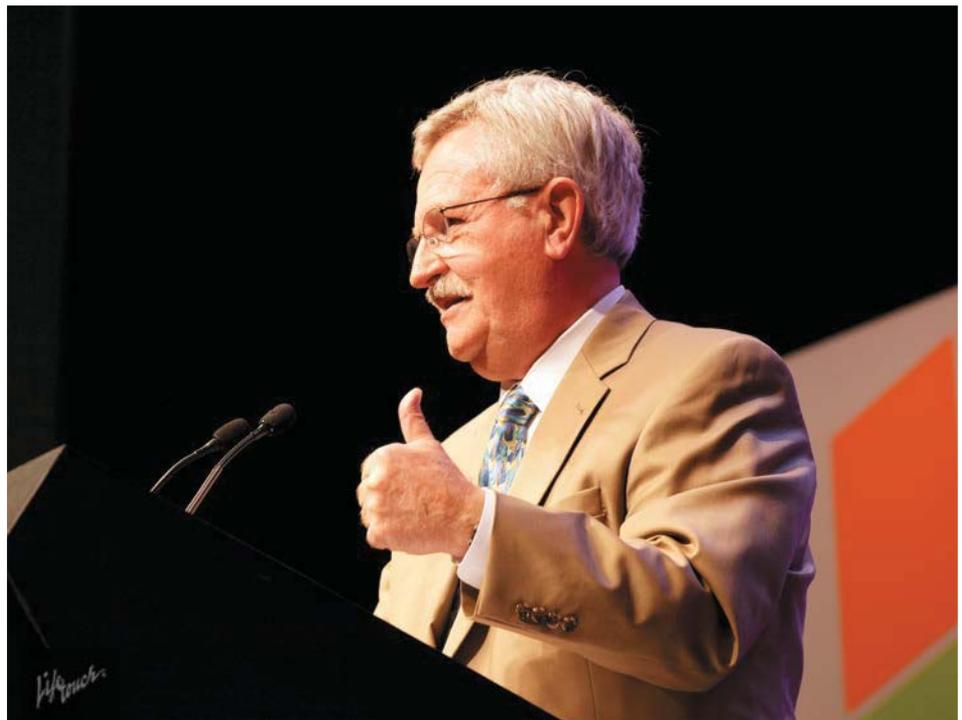
A Colorful Character

JUST ABOUT ANYONE who has accompanied Bruce Hunter on a visit to Capitol Hill or talked strategy in his office at AASA headquarters would describe him as a "colorful" character. His stories flow easily and endlessly — about growing up in Wyoming, living as the youngest sibling with three sisters, and his consumption of SPAM (a favorite meal in his formative years). His repertoire of anecdotes captures the evolution of advocacy work in Washington over the years since Ronald Reagan was serving his first term in the White House.

He's also well-known for his direct style, which sometimes is expressed with strong words, says Jeff Simering, director of legislative services at the Council of the Great City Schools. "I don't know if it's his upbringing in Wyoming, that cowboy mentality, but he uses fairly colorful language. It can be pretty effective. He can put an interesting spin on a point."

When he was pressed asked to give a few examples, Simering politely declined. "Most of those examples would be R-rated."

— MICHELLE DAVIS



Bruce Hunter has been a popular presenter over the years on the conference circuit among AASA's state affiliates coast to coast.

plans to relocate in about a year to a suburb of Phoenix, Ariz., to watch spring training baseball and spend time with his children and grandchildren, will be remembered more around the halls of Congress for his colorful character, direct manner and devotion to pushing forward the agenda of AASA's members. That last part, Hunter notes, always has been easy.

"I have such enormous respect for our membership and for school superintendents. I've never been asked to do anything for the people who hold those jobs," Hunter says. "All our policy is aimed at what's good for kids."

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

Creating a Positive Schoolwide Culture

THE CYPRESS-FAIRBANKS, TEXAS, Independent School District, one of the largest in the Lone Star State, was under tremendous pressure to improve student achievement and teacher effectiveness when it learned about 300 4th graders had scored below proficiency on the state's standardized math test.

District leaders turned to Quantum Learning, a 30-year-old firm based in Oceanside, Calif., with a track record of turning around student performance and behavior based on research in hundreds of schools districts. More than 100,000 educators and 10 million students have been exposed to the QL culture of learning.

Cypress-Fairbanks' hard work with QL paid off. More than 80 percent of students passed the state test after completing the research-based program.

Research of Quantum Learning's impact on achievement in multiple settings has shown statistically and educationally significant increases in math, reading, writing and achieve-

ment tests, according to William Benn, an external evaluator with the California Department of Education.

School Transformation

Schoolwide professional development, instructional coaching and consulting support are the ways that QL implements its systems to increase teacher effectiveness and improve student performance.

We give thoughtful attention to social and emotional aspects of individual and group learning. This culture is important for mastering rigorous subjects aligned with Common Core and other state standards. Unless emotions and social engagement are deliberately addressed, research suggests students won't have the confidence to voice their opinions and participate at high levels, which is necessary for collaborating effectively and thinking critically.

In addition to academic achievement, QL has been shown to improve behavior. Our culture of learning

embraces what researchers call non-cognitive skills, personality traits and character. Teresa M. Zutter, director of the First Star Greater Washington Academy in Washington, D.C., says, "We saw a lot of genuine improvement in behavior, with many more acts of kindness, courtesy, self-regulation and safe risk taking."

One School at a Time

With Quantum Learning, change occurs one school and one district at a time. Each school has its own culture, strengths and challenges, and each district has its own structure, programs and resource realities. QL collaborates with local leaders to create programs based on specific needs.

"Quantum Learning empowers teachers to help students think at high levels and act responsibly," says Larry Perondi, superintendent of Oceanside, Calif., Unified School District.

Lana Mock, director of instruction at Kahla Middle School in Houston says her campus, considered one of the most economically disadvantaged in the district, made great strides. "Out of 16 middle schools, we were one of only five recognized by the state," Mock adds. "My teachers will tell you that hard work and Quantum Learning are the reasons our students are so successful."

Quantum Learning Network includes Quantum Learning Education, 8 Keys of Excellence, Super-Camp and a range of educational products. Each division uses the QL system to transform the educational process and inspire excellence. The result: Students who love to learn and teachers who love to teach.

BOBBI DEPORTER is president of Quantum Learning Network in Oceanside, Calif. E-mail: bdeporter@QLN.com

AASA School Solutions Center

These firms make up the AASA School Solutions Center. NJPA is a premier member.

NATIONAL JOINT POWERS ALLIANCE, national contract purchasing solution, www.njpacoop.org

ECRA GROUP, research, analytics and accountability solutions, www.ecragroup.com

EDBACKER, crowd fundraising for education, www.edbacker.com

HMS EMPLOYER SOLUTIONS, dependent healthcare eligibility audits, www.dependentcheck.com/about/partnerships/aasa

HOPE FOUNDATION, professional development for leadership teams, www.hopefoundation.org

THE JASON PROJECT, STEM education through exploration, www.jason.org

K12 INSIGHT, develop strategic communication initiatives to engage and collaborate with stakeholders, www.k12insight.com

MEDEXPERT, medical issues management services, www.medexpert.com

ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH, organizational audits of human capital, www.organizationalhealth.com

QUANTUM LEARNING, transformative schoolwide professional development, www.QuantumLearning.com

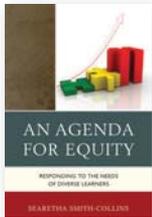
SCHOOL LEADERS RISK MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION, focus on federal legislation and litigation, www.slrma.org

School districts should do their own due diligence before signing contracts with companies that belong to the AASA School Solutions Center.

Six New AASA Books for School Leaders

Check out these titles!

The American Association of School Administrators regularly co-publishes new books on critical topics in education for superintendents, principals, other school administrators, and school board members.



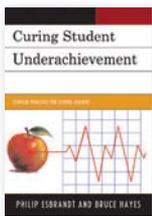
An Agenda for Equity Responding to the Needs of Diverse Learners

Searetha Smith-Collins
Rowman & Littlefield Education

Using Response to Intervention as an innovative model, *An Agenda for Equity* analyzes the ability of recent educational

reforms for increasing enduring, equitable effectiveness and improving conditions for teaching and learning for both teachers and students.

\$70.00 hardback • \$25.95 paperback • \$24.99 eBook



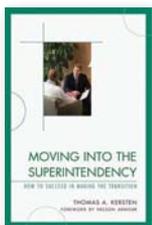
Curing Student Underachievement Clinical Practice for School Leaders

Philip Esbrandt and Bruce Hayes
Rowman & Littlefield

This book introduces practicing leaders and leaders-in-training to the protocols of clinical practice. The authors find that clinical

practice identifies the root causes rather than the symptoms of problems, focusing valuable time, resource, and energy on prescriptions with greater promise for improved performance health. The concepts of diagnosis, prescription, and prognosis establish a foundation for improved planning and problem-solving.

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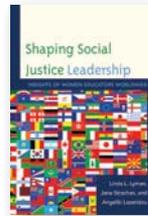
Moving into the Superintendency How to Succeed in Making the Transition

Thomas A. Kersten
Rowman & Littlefield Education

This book provides novice superintendents with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in their new roles. Thomas Kersten, a highly experienced school administrator,

shares the most practical and useful strategies that will help new superintendents optimize their early successes.

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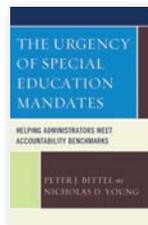


Shaping Social Justice Leadership Insights of Women Educators Worldwide

Linda L. Lyman; Jane Strachan and Angeliki Lazaridou
Rowman & Littlefield Education

This book contains evocative portraits of twenty-three women educators and leaders from around the world whose actions are shaping social justice leadership. Each carefully crafted portrait highlights an aspect of a chapter theme, followed by practical insights. The chapters develop a range of cultural comparisons, illustrate imperatives for social justice leadership, and examine values, skills, resilience, leadership pathways and actions.

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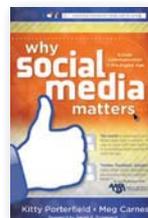
The Urgency of Special Education Mandates

Helping Administrators Meet Accountability Benchmarks

Peter J. Bittel and Nicholas P. Young
Rowman & Littlefield Education

Seasoned educators share their expertise in a wide range of important subjects that collectively promote an understanding of how to transform special education programs and service delivery in public school settings. The authors cover a variety of useful topics in special education, ranging from finances, monitoring the assignment of paraprofessionals, and transportation, to legal considerations and methods of promoting parent engagement.

\$45.00 hardback • \$23.95 paperback • \$22.99 eBook



Why Social Media Matters School Communication in the Digital Age

Kitty Porterfield & Meg Carnes
Solution Tree

Here's everything you need to know to begin building a social media platform that nurtures relationships and garners support from your key stakeholders, including step-by-step instructions on how to use three of today's most popular tools for social media: Twitter, Facebook, and blogs. Written by two school communication veterans, this book focuses on the why as well as the how of effective school-community communication in today's world.

\$19.95 paper

AASA co-published books can be ordered directly from the publishers lists. For more about AASA co-published titles, visit www.aasa.org/books.aspx.



Jennifer P. Cheatham

After four years in the Chicago Public Schools as chief of instruction and chief area officer, Jennifer Cheatham has moved into the superintendency in Madison, Wis. Previously, she worked for Partners in School Innovation in San Francisco and in the San Diego Unified School District as executive director of curriculum and instruction. Cheatham also was a teacher and teacher mentor in the Newark, Calif., schools. A member of AASA for a year, she holds an Ed.D. from Harvard, where she was enrolled in the Urban Superintendents program.



Sandra B. Smyser

Following a four-year tenure as superintendent of the 6,400-student Eagle County, Colo., district, Sandra Smyser has assumed the top district post in Poudre, Colo. She earlier served in superintendent and assistant superintendent posts in three California systems: Las Virgenes Unified, Carpinteria Unified and Solvang Elementary Schools. A member of AASA for eight years, Smyser was honored as Colorado Superintendent of the Year for 2013. She earned a Ph.D. in special education from the University of California, Riverside.



Eugene Mancuso

The new superintendent of the 2,400-student Honeoye Falls-Lima Central School District in western New York is Gene Mancuso. He worked during the past seven years in the Penfield, N.Y., Central Schools as assistant superintendent. Earlier, Mancuso served as a principal over seven years in schools in the Penfield and Wayne, N.Y., districts. He started his education career in elementary schools in the Calvert County and St. Mary's County systems in Maryland. Mancuso became an AASA member in 2007.



Steven E. Stein

The Peotone, Ill., Community Unit School District 207-U this summer will welcome Steve Stein as superintendent. He is moving from nearby Mokena, Ill., where he has been superintendent since 2011. His career began as a teacher and athletic director in Beecher, Ill., before spending four years as a U.S. history teacher in Peotone. A member of AASA since 2002, Stein is scheduled to finish his Ed.D. at Northern Illinois University this summer.

APPOINTMENTS

- Susan Borden**, from superintendent, Germantown, Wis., to superintendent, DeForest, Wis.
- Ernie Brown**, from director of human resources to superintendent, Tigard-Tualatin School District, Tigard, Ore.
- Chris Clouet**, from superintendent, White Plains, N.Y., to superintendent, Tarrytown Union Free District, Sleepy Hollow, N.Y.
- Winfried Feneberg**, from assistant superintendent, School Administrative Unit 55, Plaistow, N.H., to superintendent, Windham, N.H.
- Craig Gerlach**, from superintendent, Monona Grove School District, Monona, Wis., to superintendent, Jefferson, Wis.
- Jeffrey Moss**, from superintendent, Lee County School District, Sanford, N.C., to superintendent, Beaufort County, S.C.
- Brad Saron**, from superintendent, Cashton, Wis., to superintendent, Chippewa Falls, Wis.
- Teresa Sayre**, from director of instructional services to superintendent, Phoenix-Talent School District 4, Phoenix, Ore.
- Ranet Tippens**, from superintendent, El Reno, Okla., to superintendent, Edmond, Okla.
- Thomas Ward**, from superintendent, Dixfield Maine, to superintendent, Mt. Blue Regional School District, Farmington, Maine

RETIREMENTS

- Ben Bergreen**, superintendent, Phoenix-Talent School District 4, Phoenix, Ore.
- John Brady**, superintendent, Amity Regional District 5, Woodbridge, Conn.
- Robert Dyer**, superintendent, La Grange-Highlands School District 106, La Grange, Ill.
- Gene Johnson**, superintendent, Shawnee Mission, Kan.
- Gary S. Mathews**, superintendent, Newton County, Ga.
- Howard W. Smith**, superintendent, Tarrytown Union Free District, Sleepy Hollow, N.Y.

DEATHS

- Emanuel Axelrod**, 75, retired superintendent, Orange-Ulster BOCES, Goshen, N.Y., March 21
- Roderick Bickert**, 85, retired superintendent, New Trier, Ill., May 7
- John F. McEwan**, 65, retired superintendent, Whitman-Hanson Schools, Whitman, Mass., May 15
- Krista I. Paynton**, 54, superintendent, Bristol County Agricultural High School District, Dighton, Mass., May 9

SIDELIGHT

Ever since operating his own chicken pen at age 9 and temporarily taking in a pet skunk, **PAUL BLANFORD** has had an affinity for wildlife. Now in his fifth year as superintendent in the 340-student Elmwood, Wis., district, Blanford today tends a 40-acre farm just outside of town, home to five horses, four steers and about 200 chickens, along with an acre of vegetable crops for his pickling and preservation. He annually hosts a farm dinner for the school district's 60 staff members. "It's seasonal, so I never get tired of it," says Blanford, an AASA member since 2006. "I enjoy all the things that you can do outside."



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

Engaging the Village To Educate

BY BETSY SAMSON

MIDWAY THROUGH THE 2005-06 school year, Wanda Cook-Robinson took the helm of the 7,300-student Southfield, Mich., Public Schools, about 15 miles northwest of Detroit. The job came with a \$16 million structural deficit and student achievement well below state averages. But Cook-Robinson had a plan.

“We were losing funding, losing enrollment. I knew we had to turn to our community, to our businesses, and tap into Southfield’s many resources,” she says. “I thought, ‘It’s truly gonna take the village.’”

Cook-Robinson, who grew up in greater Detroit, has been a Southfield resident for nearly 30 years and knew the area is home to more than 100 Fortune 500 companies and 9,000 smaller businesses. She began engaging the community to work collectively on the district’s issues.

“She’s not one to say, ‘I’m the superintendent, I’m doing this myself,’” explains Southfield Mayor Brenda Lawrence. “She makes sure she doesn’t leave any opportunity untapped when it comes to working with the community.”

Financial contributions, while always appreciated, are not the primary emphasis. “These organizations are not just giving us dollars here and there,” Cook-Robinson says. “They’re giving us true participation.”

Among the 52 active partnerships, including several dozen connected to higher education, is Revolution Read, a communitywide initiative to get every student reading at grade level by the end of 5th grade.

She asked community leaders to model the importance of reading beyond classroom assignments. For the program’s kickoff, local celebrities and politicians, including the mayor, were among the public readers. The superintendent also solicited support from Scholastic Inc. In the second

BIO STATS: WANDA COOK-ROBINSON

CURRENTLY: superintendent, Southfield, Mich.

PREVIOUSLY: associate superintendent for instruction, Southfield

AGE: 59

GREATEST INFLUENCE: My 1st-grade teacher, Mrs. Stinson, really opened the world of education for me by teaching me how to learn.

BEST PROFESSIONAL DAY: Standing at the graduation ceremony of our first graduating class from University High School Academy with my hands on my hips and saying, “How do you like your return on your investment?”

BOOKS AT BEDSIDE: *Enhancing Professional Practice* by Charlotte Danielson; and *Closing the Achievement Gap* by Noah Borrero and Shawn Bird



BIGGEST BLOOPER: I made the mistake of communicating with one board member instead of all seven. I quickly learned while one may ask the question, all get the answer.

WHY I'M AN AASA MEMBER: What I value the most is the networking aspect and being able to call a fellow member and say, “How did you handle this?”

year of the program, reading scores are moving upward.

Lawrence recalls Cook-Robinson’s infectious optimism when the superintendent approached her about Revolution Read. “She said what she does all the time. She told me, ‘I have a great idea, and you’re gonna love it!’”

A finalist for 2013 National Superintendent of the Year, Cook-Robinson earned her Ph.D. in instructional technology. She says the degree refined her goal to “create systems where each student can reach their optimum capacity.”

A self-described instructional architect, Cook-Robinson draws heavily on this background in her efforts to personalize instruction in Southfield’s classrooms. In late 2011, Michigan lifted its cap on charter schools, eight of which are now in the Southfield community. The superintendent viewed the situation as an opportunity for improvement. To bet-

ter serve students’ individual needs, she led the district in redesigning its elementary curriculum so each building has a different thematic focus.

To offer more course options at the high school level, the district introduced the strictly academic, college-prep-oriented University High School Academy in 2008.

True to form, Cook-Robinson sold the community from the outset, working with parents, teachers and school board members, as well as tapping into outside resources.

For Cook-Robinson, the college-prep academy is the fulfillment of a personal ideal. Its first graduating class of 66 boasts a 100 percent graduation rate, 100 percent college matriculation and an aggregated \$3.6 million in scholarships. The school’s motto: Built by Southfield.

BETSY SAMSON served as *School Administrator’s* editorial assistant. E-mail: magazine@aasa.org

Terror in the Workplace

Christopher Brown, superintendent of the West Genesee Central Schools in the suburbs of Syracuse, N.Y., wanted the world to know he has his phobias like everyone else who subscribes to his Twitter feed. “Early this summer, I walked into my office and found a snake. Today it was a killer spider,” he reported, along with posting a photo of the scary arachnid.

Questioned subsequently about how he responded to the latest terrors in his office, Brown said he bravely captured the snake in his bare hands and the spider in a paper towel and released both safely into the nearby woods.

“Having been a superintendent in the Southern Tier previously, I have seen a bear, a fox, a rabid raccoon and too many deer to count including a six-pointer that scraped his antlers up against the front door of the school. These were all on the OUTSIDE!” Brown said.

Nutty Moniker

At Live Oak High School in Morgan Hill, Calif., the home team competitors are known as the Acorns, so it should be no surprise that the cheering squads encourage spectators in the stands to “Go Nuts!”

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. Fax: 703-841-1543. E-mail: magazine@aasa.org. Upon request, names may be withheld in print.



A Dog's Life

Several of the schools in the West Des Moines, Iowa, Community Schools lost access to the computer network, so Brian Abeling, the district's technology director, headed out to troubleshoot the fiber optics path among the schools.

Because the fibers pass through large metal cabinets near street intersections, Abeling had to do some outside work near an intersection in town. While on his knees working in the cabinet, a dog approached him from behind. When he turned around, he discovered he was eye to eye with a Rottweiler. “As my eyes followed his leash, I found that there was no one on the other end. ... He had managed to break free.”

A UPS driver, sizing up the situation, stopped his vehicle, held the dog at bay, found the owner and then went on his way.

Quipped Abeling: “I certainly have a newfound appreciation for the men in brown.”

Memorable Finale

Sandra Wolfe had spent 40 years as an educator, but it was her final week before retirement last fall that will rank among the most memorable.

As deputy superintendent in St. Lucie County, Fla., she was asked to spend her last five days as acting superintendent while Superintendent Michael Lannon was out of the country. This meant Wolfe had to make the decisive call to keep the schools open with the approach of Tropical Storm Isaac. The weather turned especially foul during the school day, frightening parents and children. The district scrambled to get everyone home.

Wolfe didn't make it home herself until after 8 p.m. During a retirement tribute at the end of the week, she heard the school board's vice chair say, “You are my hero, Sandy.”

(SOURCE: TCPALM.COM, STUART, FLA.)

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