



# NEW SUPERINTENDENTS JOURNAL 2016-17

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Read what superintendent colleagues are blogging about on  
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Dear Colleague:



Congratulations on becoming a superintendent. It is an honor for me to contact you. As a chief executive officer you are not only the head of your school district, but also an ambassador for the community. On behalf of AASA and the more than 13,000 superintendents we serve nationwide, let me welcome you to your new position.

I was a superintendent for nearly 30 years on Long Island and in Northern Virginia. I now have the opportunity to engage with scores of superintendents across the country and it's clear to me that the superintendency is the toughest job in America.

That's why I am pleased to present the 2016-17 edition of the *New Superintendents Journal*. This publication contains a number of articles taken directly from our award-winning magazine, *School Administrator*, to help you begin your superintendency.

AASA is The School Superintendents Association. We are the largest organization serving school superintendents in the nation. We:

- Lead advocacy efforts in Congress and the White House on behalf of children and public education. We have many resources to support your work, including a policy blog ([aasa.org/policy-blogs.aspx](http://aasa.org/policy-blogs.aspx)) posting the latest legislative updates, reports and information.
- Promote the whole child by sponsoring cutting-edge programs focusing on issues such as children's health, nutrition, school environment, childhood obesity and bullying. AASA's Children's Programs department is centered on work that drives systems change and increases educational equity.
- Administer the National Superintendent Certification program, a professional development initiative to prepare the next generation of superintendents. In addition, AASA offers a broad range of other leadership programs including the AASA Collaborative, Aspiring Superintendents Academy, Digital Consortium, Rural Superintendents Collaborative, STEM Leadership Consortium, Urban Superintendents Academy and our newest initiative, the Personalized Learning Cohort.

AASA is the gathering place to meet colleagues, build networks and engage in the issues that matter most to you. I encourage you to attend our National Conference on Education, March 2-4, 2017, in New Orleans. Year after year, NCE has been most the comprehensive professional development and networking event for school superintendents and administrators. I hope you'll consider joining us.

For more information about AASA, I invite you to check out our website at [www.aasa.org](http://www.aasa.org). We recently launched My.AASA.org, our online portal that provides members with exclusive content, education policy resources and reports, engagement opportunities, communication tools and special offers.

Once again, congratulations.

Sincerely,

Daniel A. Domenech  
Executive Director  
AASA, The School Superintendents Association

### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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### ABOUT AASA

AASA, The School Superintendents Association, founded in 1865, is the professional organization for more than 13,000 educational leaders in the United States and throughout the world. AASA's mission is to support and develop effective school system leaders who are dedicated to the highest quality public education for all children. For more information, visit [www.aasa.org](http://www.aasa.org).



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Co-editors of *The New Superintendents Journal* are James Minichello, AASA director, communications and marketing, and Robert McCord, professor emeritus at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Jay Goldman, editor of AASA's *School Administrator* magazine, edited the original articles when they appeared in the magazine.

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## **WANDA SHELTON**

Former Superintendent  
Lincoln County School District,  
Fayetteville, TN



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# What Does the Public Want From Our Schools?

Several prevailing themes raised by the latest PDK/Gallup Poll that superintendents could incorporate into their own leadership narrative

BY JOSHUA P. STARR

One of the hardest things for a superintendent to do is construct his or her own narrative. Superintendents are stewards of their community's values — as manifest through the elected school board. Schools, the larger community, and the culture of a locale were there long before the superintendent, and will be there long after.

For superintendents who are from the community, it can be hard to differentiate themselves from the system and culture in which they grew up and the people with whom they grew up. For a superintendent new to a community — as I was both in Stamford, Conn., and Montgomery County, Md. — there are learning and trust-building curves on all sides.

Constructing your own narrative is made even more difficult given the political climate that surrounds a school system and the multiple layers of governance that exist — from school boards to local funding authorities and regulatory agencies, state departments of education and the federal government. There's not a lot of wiggle room for superintendents to move beyond what's required and expected, especially in an era of declining resources.

Yet the need to create a narrative, a compelling vision of *why* the superintendent is doing what he or she is doing is more important today than ever before. The results of the 2015 PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools show that the public wants leadership from the local level and is dissatisfied with the current national agenda. The public is hungry for leadership — and superintendents are well positioned to provide it.

## Parental Priorities

Respondents to our 2015 poll want higher standards for students and teachers, although Common Core State Standards and standardized testing aren't

necessarily seen as the vehicles to get there. The public believes that who is teaching and what they're teaching are the most important factors in determining school quality. This provides a powerful opportunity for superintendents to engage the community in constructing a narrative about school improvement that reflects the context of the community.

When I was superintendent in Stamford, Conn., a diverse school district of 15,500 students, I was challenged with de-tracking the middle and high schools. There had been rigid tracks of classes for decades, with black, Latino and poor students in classes with lower standards than white and more affluent students.

In order to sell the reforms to the community — especially skeptical white parents — I had to ensure the instruction their kids were going to get in the new heterogeneously grouped classes was going to be better than what they had before. So we created core assignments in social studies, identified core texts in English, revised the science curriculum so that at least 40 percent would be hands-on and made math more engaging. In addition, we provided significant professional development to teachers so they were prepared to teach a higher standard to mixed groups.

While there was certainly resistance from some who just didn't like heterogeneous grouping, most parents were fine with it because the standards for both students and teachers were higher than they had been, and students were able to achieve them. I was able to sell the idea because it was grounded in what people are most interested in: the quality of instruction.

## Equity and Economy

Respondents to the 2015 poll want the youth of America to graduate with a sense of hope and be engaged in school, and they want a stronger link

between school and future career success. This provides another opportunity for superintendents to construct a local narrative about how to improve schools and student outcomes.

The two major challenges with increasing the alignment between schools and careers are history and accountability. American public schools always have served as the great sorting mechanism for American society with less-advantaged students placed in classes that prepare them for lower-level careers than more-advantaged students. The demands of both the 21st-century economy and the equity agenda make this irrelevant today, yet we must constantly work to resist its gravitational pull.

Moreover, current federal and state accountability systems do not reflect the desire among parents, educators and the business community to increase career readiness in schools. When I was superintendent in Montgomery County, we began engaging the business community in conversation about increasing career readiness. I always would begin by sharing with them that the primary thing I was accountable for was student achievement on state standardized test scores in English language arts and math. In Montgomery County, like many districts, we also held ourselves accountable for Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate and SAT scores and disaggregated the data to ensure equity.

The situation becomes more complicated when local budgets are challenged and every year more vulnerable students enroll. So the call for an increased alignment between a public school education and career readiness is easier said than done.

Yet superintendents can construct their own narrative by focusing on curriculum — and poll respondents support the idea that what students are being taught matters greatly. In Montgomery County, we began engaging the business community, as well as retired scientists, in the design of curriculum that would be aligned to career expectations. Because task predicts performance (an idea best propagated by Harvard's

Richard Elmore), we looked at how to use real-life problems within the day-to-day work of students. What kind of math does a financial analyst have to do? What are real problems that scientists or engineers are trying to solve?

Increasing career readiness won't happen through internships alone. It has to happen through curriculum reform and professional development.

## Choice Vehicles

While poll respondents generally are not supportive of the overemphasis on standardized test scores, they do support the idea of choice. Choice looms large in the current national education reform debate, although charters and vouchers are typically the only choice mechanisms discussed. Yet many respondents say they don't have enough information about options within their community.

In both school systems where I served as superintendent, we had robust magnet programs — a long-standing choice option that isn't being discussed enough today. However, parents often complained they didn't understand how the process worked, and frankly, they were right. The complex regulations, admissions guidelines and mythologies that exist about who gets to go to which school and why can be a black box for families. School systems have an obligation to provide accessible information about choice options, but more importantly, they can use the desire for choice to respond to local needs.

Choice programs can promote racial integration, as many magnets were designed to do. They can leverage a community's linguistic diversity through dual language programs for interested families. Or a local industry can partner with a school to align workforce development needs with the school instructional program. However choice manifests itself within a local school system, it's worth a superintendent's time to engage the community in conversation about what options people want. It enables a focus on the future rather than a reaction to the present state and federal policies.

## Differing Perspectives

Finally, this year's poll results show that different demographic groups do not agree on certain issues. While resounding unanimity exists on issues such as teacher quality, no consensus exists on the use of standardized tests by respondents from different racial groups.

The ramification for a superintendent of a diverse district — as both of mine were — is that the leader has to ensure multiple voices are represented in conversations about the future of the district. Whether it's a budget working group, parent advisory council, community forum or a strategic planning group, superintendents today have to work extra hard to bring into the fold people from different perspectives and backgrounds. I've certainly found that the traditional structures, such as a PTA leadership committee, tend to reflect narrow perspectives. And, I've been able to garner wider support for reform initiatives by going to community leaders and members who aren't involved in formal power structures.

Regardless of the issues within a particular school district and state, the American public believes in its local schools and its personnel. Because education is a local issue constitutionally, it's incumbent on a superintendent to seize the opportunity to lead in a way that jives with the community's values. The public wants the superintendent to lead the way. The superintendent has to embrace the opportunity to create his or her own narrative. ■

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Together, we're a part of an organization that advocates for us, provides leadership development and creates programs to specifically address our needs. While I respond to the challenge of preparing all students in my own school district to flourish in the 21st-century global society, it's rewarding to know that I have a strong voice at the federal level — a voice that's actually being heard. ”

**PATRICE PUJOL**

Former Superintendent  
Ascension Parish Public Schools



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# Board Relationships 101: Five lessons of a battle-tested superintendent

BY TERRY B. GRIER

When an attractive superintendent's job is dangled in front of an eager educator by a search firm executive, we rarely consider how our relationships with a school board and its individual members can make or break our leadership. That's because the programs intended to prepare us to lead school districts either don't address the subject enough or fail to do so in an authentic, real-world way.

Thirty-one years as a superintendent serving in eight districts across six states equates to countless configurations of school boards and infinite lessons in the workplace. What follows are some lessons I learned through hard reality. From my experiences, including my public mistakes, perhaps others can learn how better to forge and manage strong relationships with school boards collectively and members individually.

## **Lesson 1: Do your homework before interviewing for and accepting a superintendent's job.**

Google is your best friend in this exercise. As you research a prospective new position, always look for indications of whether your vision and beliefs align with the board that has invited you to an interview. Read news accounts of the board's activities. Look carefully for information about how the board and district relate to teachers' unions, local business, other governmental entities, religious organizations, etc.

Find biographies of the individual members. Know their spouses' and children's names, how long they've served on the board, their "hot button" issues and their key ties to the community. In short, go into your interview knowing as much about the board and its members as they know about you.

**My experience:** Early in my career, I was offered seven jobs in six states one year. Driven by ego, I did no due diligence and simply took the job with the largest student enrollment and largest salary. This district was 30 percent minority, with a growing Latino population, yet

there were no Latinos or African Americans on the school board or in the superintendent's cabinet.

It didn't take long to realize my values deeply conflicted with the majority of the board. When discussing the possibility of reorganizing my senior staff to include Latino and African-American members, the board president warned me the community wasn't ready for such a move.

Then, when we were considering what to include in a bond referendum and I proposed air conditioning for schools in minority neighborhoods, one board member said, "They don't have air conditioning in their homes. If we air condition their schools, it will just make them sick." Fortunately, I won on that one. Unfortunately, I alienated some board members in winning.

When I look back on my time in that district, I realize I certainly made my share of mistakes — most centered around trying to handle conflicts that arose from huge differences in our values and beliefs. Don't fall into the trap of hoping people's values or beliefs will change or that you as "the magnificent leader" can alter them.

## **Lesson 2: The only certainty about your board is that, if you stay around long enough, it will change.**

So you did your due diligence. The board liked you, and you felt comfortable with them and took the job.

Then the next election comes, and you find yourself dealing with different personalities and philosophies. In a worst-case scenario, new board members are elected by special-interest groups or others who turned the election into a referendum on your leadership. Stay above the politics that are a natural part of electing board members and move forward to forge relationships.

Often, candidates' perspectives change once they are elected, and you can help shape new members' knowledge acquisition and growth as public servants.



Orientation is a powerful tool to introduce you and your staff to new board members, provide data and hold one-on-one discussions about issues and concerns.

**My experience:** In one system I led, the teachers' union spent a large amount of campaign money and managed to elect a board majority. I made it clear to my staff we could not discuss union influence and would keep our focus on student outcomes. No sooner had the new majority president been sworn in at the first meeting than we realized we would have to do business differently. The reconstituted board questioned every staff recommendation and delayed decisions until they could "receive additional information."

Instead of fighting union influence and trying to work with the board our old way, we simply modified how we made program recommendations. We used teams of teachers who had been part of the decision-making process to make formal presentations and recommendations to the board. The board had a tough time opposing recommendations coming directly from teachers.

**Lesson 3: You're the boss. Make sure your contract gives you authority to make all personnel decisions, especially organizing and assigning staff.**

Finding the right positions for your players can mean the difference between winning and losing, and identifying players who share your values, beliefs and commitment is critical. The ability to determine the organizational structure of your district allows you to focus on your strategic direction. I make it a point to inform board members before announcing major changes.

When your board members are part of identifying priorities, it is easier for them to understand and support your actions in making sure the best people are in place to do the work. In Houston, my contract gives me the authority to organize the central-office staff and to hire and fire employees. Terminated employees have the opportunity to appeal to the board.

**My experience:** In one district where I was heavily recruited, the school board had a reputation for micromanaging personnel decisions. During our time together, I raised their direct involvement in personnel selections. They agreed to add a provision in my

contract that clearly defined our roles in the personnel selection, assignment and evaluation process.

One of the biggest surprises of my career occurred during my first board meeting in this district. During the closed session, we made 17 principal appointment recommendations. Immediately, a board member asked that I share the entire applicant list, by school, ranking candidates in order of preference. I reminded them of the selection process they agreed to during my interview. One smiled and said, "Yes, but that was when we were trying to recruit you."

We got through the evening, but they did not approve any of my principal recommendations. It took weeks of work and my threatening to open schools without principals in place before the majority reluctantly agreed to our recommendations.

**Lesson 4: Don't play politics with the board or get involved in intrigue or bad-mouthing. It will backfire.**

You could be having trouble with one board member or the entire board. And you might be totally justified — the board could be completely dysfunctional or self-serving. When you speak negatively about the board or a member, it can come back to haunt you. Stay above the fray, and always maintain a professional demeanor. You also should take a clear look in the mirror and assess whether you are causing or adding to the problem.

One of my colleagues taught me a valuable lesson years ago. Addressing a professional conference, he told about working for a fantastic board of education that always focused on the welfare of students. Everyone present was surprised because reports of his challenging relations with the school board in general and one member in particular were in the news media.

Following his remarks, I asked him about what he had shared. "Well, I may have stretched things a little," he said, "but I've found that school boards, like most people, often rise to your level of expectations. It gets back to my board when I speak well of them, and I don't ever forget that it would get back to them if I did not."

**My experience:** Early in my career as a superintendent, a board member made me aware of her unusual and powerful "arrangement" with my predecessor. She had

several family members employed by the district, and the superintendent reviewed all recommendations with her prior to bringing them before the board. I let her know I accorded all board members equal respect and communicated all information to them at the same time.

Trouble began the next day. Rather than returning to talk to the original board member, discussing the situation in closed session with the entire board or simply remaining above the fray, I made the mistake of talking to each of them one-on-one to get their advice. Foolishly, I did not anticipate that several of them would go back to her and characterize me as talking negatively behind her back.

When the matter was finally discussed in closed session, the conversation wasn't about her actions but rather about my professional behavior. Lesson learned.

#### **Lesson 5: Be willing to share leadership with your board.**

I'm not suggesting micromanagement or establishing board committees. Instead, offer board members opportunities to engage in macromanagement, a concept I've introduced in several districts with varying degrees of success.

Monthly board work sessions can be used to engage members in discussions that give them direct, public access to high-level administrators for questions and conversations. These sessions, along with an annual retreat, can help generate a plurality of perspectives and can frequently uncover new problems or concerns. If you have board members who are elected to represent single-member districts, suggest they visit schools in other parts of the city for a different perspective.

**My experience:** Helping immigrant students assimilate into a new culture — and teaching them English — has long been a controversial topic in many districts. In one district, some board members had supported the practice of early-grade Spanish-only instruction and testing, and superintendents and their board colleagues didn't rock their boat, even though the results often were questionable. Each time I proposed looking at ways to introduce English at an earlier age, the political resistance was intense.

Reality hit when students were thrown into English instruction and faced testing in 4th or 5th grade where their lack of proficiency was apparent. Test scores plummeted, and these students became prime candidates for failure and dropping out. We decided to brave the politics, engaged the board and together looked for a better way.

Through board workshops and brainstorming, visits to districts that offered other programs where instruction occurred simultaneously in English and Spanish, and review of current best practices for teaching a second language, the school board relented. We developed dual-language programs in every board member's community. The program became popular with English-speaking families and satisfied those who were afraid if we stopped teaching Spanish in favor of an English immersion program, students would lose their native language skills.

Dealing with a school board isn't so very different from dealing with family. You may only get together with them occasionally, but they can impact your life every day if you don't offer your attention and respect. Some may be supportive and loyal to family values, while you may encounter a "strange-behaving uncle" on occasion who does everything possible to create dysfunction and chaos.

Eventually, you do all come to the table — and your relationship with each individual and with the group ultimately will determine your own success, the fate of your goals and those of the youngsters you serve to educate. ■

**Terry Grier** is former superintendent of the Houston Independent School District in Houston, Texas.

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This article was originally published in AASA's monthly magazine, *School Administrator*, in October 2015.

# IF YOU'RE NOT ENGAGING, YOU'RE NOT ENGAGED



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// As educators, we know the power of collaboration. We know that our greatest resources lie in relationships with our colleagues and community partners. Beyond the vast professional development tools offered by AASA, I can't say enough about the support and counsel the organization affords its members. AASA brings a level of expertise to the table that is invaluable. //

## **RUSSELL BOOKER**

Spartanburg School District 7  
Spartanburg, South Carolina



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# One Day, One Task at a Time

Strategic changes to work routines help a superintendent better manage his work and life

BY MICHAEL S. SNELL

**If** I followed you from the time your alarm clock rang in the morning to the time you put your head on the pillow at night, what would I see? What personal and professional habits do you engage in most frequently throughout your day?

The real question is this: Do your habits help you to be the best leader, the best time manager, the best superintendent you can be in an overscheduled and increasingly demanding world?

We all have 24 hours a day, yet our habits and routines determine whether we make the most of those hours. This is an overview of the habits that help me be more productive, organized and proactive in handling personal and professional challenges.

## The Daily Set-Up

Your day should begin with what I call the “daily set-up.” Complete this no matter what time you arrive at the office. The goal is to spend 15-20 minutes on this activity and emerge with a written action plan for the day.

The action plan ideally empowers you to manage anything else that crops up from that point and to determine whether the interruption is worth veering from your plan, even briefly, to address.

My daily set-up, with four steps, looks like this:

**Check-in:** I touch base with my executive assistant when I arrive, which is usually 30 minutes after my assistant’s arrival. She updates me on any pressing issues that have occurred. I unpack my briefcase, plug in my technology and get a cup of coffee while we continue to check in. Once back in my office, we part ways with my office door closed.

**Process in-basket and task list:** I process in-basket items. I review my task list from the day before and note any handwritten items I need to enter into my calendar/task software. The goal of processing your

in-basket items and prior day’s task list is to address any of the “loose” items and either complete them with signatures or approvals or file for future completion. If you do this every day, your in-basket should remain relatively empty.

**Review tasks:** My goal each day is to have no more than 10 items on my to-do list. Each item requires a daily review to determine its importance. If it is not one of the 10 on the list for today, I determine the “float factor,” or the amount of time I can push off the task prior to completion. The goal is to come up with 10 items that make the cut, and ultimately, determine what must get done today.

**Review schedule:** Once you determine your 10 tasks, you can schedule time to complete the “must be done today” tasks. When finished, print a one-page sheet that displays your calendar and tasks. I carry a printed copy of my schedule throughout the day. This allows me to write additional notes or tasks to add to my list when setting up the next day.

The final task is to open your office door and greet your day. It is a good time to revisit your day’s prioritized plan of action with your assistant. I work with people who do this at the end of each day or over lunch to calibrate activity in the middle of the day. This is an excellent start, but most jobs require more than just a daily perspective.

## Weekly Routine

A weekly, 30-minute meeting between you and your assistant helps you review the current week and forecast weeks and months ahead. My assistant and I meet weekly, usually on Fridays. My assistant comes prepared with a copy of the week’s schedule, my schedule for the next three weeks and a list of monthly tasks for the year. Here is a sample agenda of one of our weekly meetings that can be adapted to fit your own weekly session needs.

**Review the past week.** We review each day's schedule and any completed items, events attended, etc. This is a great way to identify follow-up items to complete in the coming days and weeks. We also identify any routine activities that should be placed on our monthly task lists.

**Look three weeks out.** We review the upcoming three weeks and determine scheduled events or appointments, whether in the office or on the road. For example, we identify tasks to be completed before an upcoming appointment and what information I need from my team members in advance of the appointment. My assistant and I identify the need, write it down and create a task to be reviewed and completed.

**Project three months out.** During my first year as superintendent, my assistant and I created a master list of tasks to be completed by my office each month. This includes items other administrators complete because ultimate responsibility for the school district rests with me. For example, the April list includes items such as sharing the annual report publicly, planning for the spring town meeting, reviewing cyclical agenda items in advance of the May board meeting and more. We continuously ask ourselves what tasks should be placed on our list.

## Monthly Routine

My monthly calendar contains one recurring, 60-minute appointment. This appointment, called "Leadership Lunch With Me," is time to review, reflect and plan. You will need to prepare a list of questions to take with you. The goal is to review your successes, challenges and personal/professional status since your last lunch.

Here is how my lunch typically goes:

**Pack a bag.** Before you leave the office, make sure you have a notebook, pen and list of questions. (I have provided a starter list of questions below.)

**Pick a spot.** I usually find a nice sit-down restaurant and order something a little more expensive than normal. Once a month, you are worth it!

**Reflect.** After you order, review your questions one by one. Take a moment to think deeply and answer honestly.

**Write.** Record your reflections in your notebook so you can review with yourself at your next lunch to see what has changed or where you have grown. You also can use a technology tool such as Evernote to capture your thoughts.

It's important to develop questions to focus your time. The goal is a sustained, big-picture conversation that carries over to the next month. Here are some sample questions for your lunch:

- What challenges can I learn from?
- What successes can I learn from?
- What do I need to do/learn/read to become a better leader?
- What is the most important decision I am facing? What is keeping me from making it?
- How would I like to be different next month?
- How am I different from my last lunch?
- What would I say to me, if I were sitting across the table from myself?

When I first started this routine, I felt a little awkward. There is always so much to do and a longer lunch alone didn't fit the whirlwind nature of this job. However, I now look forward to it and enjoy the time and reflection about my different roles and different aspirations.

## Yearly Routine

This one is simple. Once a year, take time to review your status regarding your professional and personal life. I conduct my yearly review during my summer trip to the beach. I review my year and make plans for the next. The operative question is this: One year from now, what is it that I would like to have accomplished?

Key areas to consider during your yearly review:

- Think about where you are in your current profession and where you would like to be in the future. I use this time to reflect on the relationships in both my personal and professional life that are critical to my success. This results in creating action steps and placing them on my task list.
- The yearly review is also a perfect time to review your year of "Leadership Lunches with Me" and identify keys to your past that can inform your future.

- Review your calendar from the past year — first by yourself, then with your assistant. Ask yourself the following: *What is the usual weekly flow? How often do I meet with my team? Where in my schedule do I prioritize time for family/personal life? How many nights per week am I out?*

## Next Steps

So there they are, four routines with simple yet strategic components that should add to the habits or routines that make you an effective organizational leader. We all have 24 hours provided daily, whether we ask for them or not. What you do with those 24 is up to you. ■

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# Personalized Education on the Systems Level

A districtwide transformation for student learning involves more than a schedule adjustment or a new grading scheme

BY MORTON SHERMAN

**T**he Falls Church, Va.,-based Inova Health System launched its Center for Personalized Health to much fanfare this year, which it says will “enable individuals to live longer, healthier lives.”

While the concept of personalized medicine, which tailors health care to a patient’s individual characteristics and preferences, is gaining steam, so is personalized learning, which similarly customizes education to the individual student’s needs.

In fact, we’re hearing encouraging pronouncements from school districts across the country:

- Valerie Truesdale, chief of technology, personalization and engagement of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in Charlotte, N.C., says her district empowers students to take ownership of their learning by providing them with multiple ways to demonstrate mastery learning in order to become successful 21st-century citizens.
- Ken Grover, principal of Innovations Early College High School in Salt Lake City, refers to “cultivating a personalized education for every student” and says, “... students are better served in this customized, self-directed learning environment that is rich with technology.”
- William Hite, superintendent in Philadelphia, describes personalization as “that which creates deep relationships so that students are well known to the adults in the school.” Personalization, he adds, is “at the core of forming new schools.”

## Common Factors

Without changes at the system level, individual classroom improvement efforts will struggle to succeed. Consider the fictional English teacher Horace Smith in Ted Sizer’s *Horace’s Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School* (1984). He was dedicated and knowledgeable but he found

the standardized environment of schools diluted his efforts as he dealt with rushed classes, mindless tests and standardization from outside his school.

We want to create school systems where wonderful teachers, staff and administrators have the chance to succeed with their students.

Commonalities among the inspiring K-12 education models of personalization are these:

- **Adding meaning to student assessment with less reliance on standardized testing.**

A personalized approach to assessment requires the school district to build consensus on what students should know, do and understand. Specifically, districts need agreement on what is truly worth learning. Schools must consider the intellectual dispositions and habits of mind of students, as well as the work competencies they will require as lifelong learners.

Personalized school systems also must consider goals related to students’ development beyond their academic and intellectual growth. How, for example, will we monitor students’ development of career competencies and access to emerging career pathways? How will every learner develop a commitment to lifelong habits of healthy nutrition and physical well-being? What data will we use to monitor students’ social and emotional development?

A personalized curriculum requires each student to demonstrate higher-order reasoning skills. In a world history class, for example, learners will explore themes and patterns of historical interaction through various lenses, including political, economic and cultural historiography. This focus on conceptual depth of understanding results in better standardized test performance because learners internalize the content rather than mechanically retrieving it in isolated instances.

- **Maximizing the impact of technology and support resources to address the digital divide.**

Personalized education requires an individualized education plan be developed for each student, not just those in special education. Technologies can make this daunting task feasible.

Using a blended approach, for example, the teacher can identify a subgroup of students whose formative assessments indicate they are at a similar point in the instructional continuum. The teacher can deliver a lesson to that subgroup, then have them engage in individual activities on their laptops to reinforce the lesson, assess the degree to which they have mastered the concept and provide additional activities for those students who need improvement. Each student proceeds at his or her own pace until mastery is reached and the teacher groups and regroups students based on the degree of mastery attained.

Using technology to profile students allows us to go beyond what the student knows and doesn't know. From a student's previous responses, instruction and a lesson plan can be tailored to the student's interests, motivations, attention span, knowledge and skills.

- **Personalizing health, social and psychological services for students and their families.**

Counselors, social workers and psychologists are invaluable partners in a personalized learning environment. Through increased classroom presence and interaction, they can work with instructors to help students feel emotionally supported and socially engaged. Personalization for students with challenges such as limited English proficiency or disabilities, may necessitate additional access to intervention services.

If the purpose of 21st-century personalized education is to prepare students for success in our ever-changing global environment, a holistic set of services should be accessible to them throughout their K-12 schooling. The common siloed approach to student services can be replaced with an organic, integrated design that allows teachers the time and ability to monitor student progress with social services professionals.

Postsecondary education and career preparation becomes a fundamental part of the curricula. All

students will have individualized career and academic plans, beginning in the early grades. The plans will become part of students' personal electronic portfolio, which allows instructional and social service personnel to monitor progress and provide appropriate acceleration, enhancements and interventions as needed.

- **Including parents and members of the community as partners.**

Personalized individual learning plans aren't simply sent home for parents' signatures; they involve the parents every step of the way with parents understanding the learning plan and accepting their role in supporting their children. Many districts have created parent academies to support parents in learning languages or other literacies. Perhaps every school should have a parent academy.

Communities also must do their part to support the education of their children. Organizations may organize internship or shadowing programs to help students explore different pathways in a field of the child's interest. For example, at City Arts and Technology High in San Francisco, juniors and seniors secure internships where they are mentored by an on-site professional and regularly visited by their school adviser. MetWest High School in Oakland, Calif., is one of many that place student internships at the center of their mission.

As we ask children to learn in new ways, with ever-increasing expectations, the reality that most children in public schools now live in poverty compels us to change the way we involve those who impact students most directly. Providing family connections to the learning, and looking at parents and neighborhoods as assets rather than blaming them for the students' learning struggles will create greater opportunities for closing the opportunity gap and leading to student success.

## Schooling's Purpose

The question of what it means to truly prepare a student for the world of work in the 21st century — particularly in a perpetually tight job market — seems more complex than ever.

Is the primary purpose of schooling to narrowly prepare students to perform specific technical skills for specific,

predetermined positions? This seems like a limiting and even potentially dangerous path to pursue. What about the idea that public education is intended to create literate, productive, participating citizens in order to sustain our democracy? Can't we prepare students for work as well as a full, engaged life? Just as our comprehensive high schools and vocational schools need to personalize approaches to learning, so must they ask questions about the broad and inclusive purpose of education so that the knowledge and skills of this unfolding century serve as the guide.

The skills to enter the working world today differ vastly from previous generations. Like many others, my father never graduated from high school, earning a living working with his hands as a mechanic. Despite his limited education, his advice on this subject was deeply insightful: "You can choose to be a mechanic," he told me, "but don't let your bad choices make that decision for you." Are we preparing our children to make such an active choice?

Today, entering the workforce no longer means just going out to the shops or the fields, getting your hands dirty. The skills, attitudes and base-knowledge needed to successfully navigate within the working world are very different. Mike Rose's *The Mind at Work: Valuing the Intelligence of the American Worker* presents a view of the combination of cognitive and manual skills needed in occupations that our society has mistakenly devalued.

## A Sweeping Reimagination

There are significant implications of personalized learning for administrators, board of education members and community leaders. Supporting the conditions that allow for personalized learning means not just adjusting schedules, but also looking at policies, grading practices, differentiated staffing, communication and even the structure of school facilities.

Design-based teaching promotes a new way of looking at student learning and teacher support. This pedagogy compliments what many see as the core to personalization: design based learning. Just as students construct, design, their learning paths, so do teachers collaborate as they design the teaching and resources necessary for student success. No more "If it's Tuesday, we must be on page 72" mentality.

Educators must be flexible, engaged and absolutely committed to the success of *every* student. They must capitalize on the power of parent, community and cross-institutional partnerships to expand student access to a range of mentors.

## New Opportunities

As educational leaders design new approaches to learning and teaching, the reality is that we have a good base on which to move ahead (e.g., graduation rates are the highest ever, according to the U.S. Department of Education). We also must be candid that with the majority of school-aged children now living in poverty, merely tinkering with schools just doesn't cut it.

The major opportunity ahead of us is based on three essential questions I learned a long time ago:

- What are we going to teach?
- How are we going to teach it?
- How do we know if the students learned it?

These questions are certainly an oversimplification of the work of district and school leaders. The reimagination of schooling through the lens of personalization to help all students learn at the highest possible levels moves away from the Common Core debates and associated assessments to the heart of teaching and learning. ■

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This article is adapted from the author's book *Personalizing 21st Century Education: A Framework for Student Success* (Jossey-Bass), co-authored with Dan Domenech, AASA executive director, and John L. Brown, director of curriculum for Alexandria, Va., Public Schools.

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# Creating Emotionally Intelligent Schools

Training in social and emotional learning skills begins with educators

BY MARC A. BRACKETT AND JANET A. PATTI

*“Great student achievement cannot be sustained without developing the social and emotional skills of children and all the adults who serve them.”*

• Fran Rabinowitz, Interim Superintendent, Bridgeport, Conn.

Educators and students experience a wide range of emotions daily. Think about it. Each day as a superintendent you experience dozens of pleasant and unpleasant emotions from the minute you open your eyes to the moment you fall asleep. Emotions matter for attention, memory and learning; for sound judgments and decision making; for maintaining healthy relationships; and for well-being.

Our ability to use emotions wisely can make the difference between our success or failure at home, school and work. That’s why more and more superintendents are recognizing that a formal education in social and emotional skills is a prerequisite to personal, social and academic growth.

## Benefits Cited

Historically, emotions were viewed as being disruptive to reasoning. In 1990, Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer wrote a seminal article that both challenged the then-disparate fields of emotion and intelligence and synthesized them into a unifying theory. They introduced emotional intelligence as “the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and action.” That article, appearing in *Imagination, Cognition and Personality*, a quarterly research journal, paved the way for a great deal of research and school-based reform efforts.

In the mid-1990s, a group of researchers, advocates and educators interested in the healthy development of children formed the Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning ([www.casel.org](http://www.casel.org)). Its goal was to provide a framework for schools to teach social and emotional learning, or SEL, so that all children could develop the skills necessary for school and life success. These

skills include self- and social awareness and regulation, responsible decision making and problem solving, and relationship management.

The benefits of SEL are now established. A 2011 meta-analysis of more than 200 studies showed that students in schools using SEL programs (as compared to students in schools that did not) had a 22 percentile increase in social and emotional skills, an 11 percentile increase in academic achievement, a 10 percentile decrease in emotional distress, a 9 percentile decrease in behavior problems and 9 percentile increases in both positive attitudes about school and prosocial behavior. Research conducted by our team extends these findings to include positive shifts in classroom climate and teacher instructional quality.

What does this mean for those who lead school districts? While social and emotional learning has been shown to influence important outcomes, without institutionalizing SEL practices through training and garnering support from all stakeholders, even the best programs eventually disappear or fail. Moreover, little attention is paid for professional development for educators who implement SEL programs.

While recommendations for teaching SEL are increasingly visible in state education policies, funding efforts to support the standards are minimal. Furthermore, most teacher preparation programs do not have dedicated training in SEL, and only a few school leader preparation programs do.

## Adult Development

At the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence ([www.ei.yale.edu](http://www.ei.yale.edu)), we recognized early on that developing leaders is critical before SEL could be

implemented effectively in the classroom. RULER (an acronym for the emotional intelligence skills of recognizing, understanding, labeling, expressing and regulating emotion) is the center's evidence-based approach to SEL that is grounded in emotional intelligence theory and systems theories.

RULER ([www.ruler.yale.edu](http://www.ruler.yale.edu)) is built upon decades of research showing that emotional intelligence is essential to effective teaching, learning, parenting and leading. The five key skills of emotional intelligence that we teach to youth and adults are:

- Recognizing emotions refers to identifying emotions in the face, body and voice of others and in our own thought process and physiology.
- Understanding emotions pertains to the causes and consequences of different emotions, including their influence on thinking and behavior. For example, anger occurs when we perceive something as unfair, whereas disappointment arises as a result of unmet expectations.
- Labeling emotions refers to having a rich vocabulary to describe a wide range of emotions, including basic ones like happiness and sadness and complex ones like shame and elation.
- Expressing emotions is the ability to communicate different emotions appropriately and effectively with different people across multiple contexts and cultures.
- Regulating emotions involves the use of effective thought and action strategies to enhance joy, decrease stress or improve contentment.

RULER tools and strategies provide schools with the opportunity to shift school climate, create a common language, and develop the emotional intelligence skills of all stakeholders — school administrators, teachers, support staff, cafeteria workers, bus drivers, parents and students.

## Influential Skills

Emotionally skilled teachers are more likely to demonstrate empathic behavior, encourage healthy communication and create more open and efficacious learning environments so students feel safe and valued. Teachers' emotional skills also influence student conduct, engagement, attachment to school, academic performance and even their own job satisfaction.

Leadership is second to teacher effectiveness on student outcomes. For this reason, RULER begins with educating superintendents in emotional intelligence. Together with the educators, staff, families and students in their districts, they model emotional intelligence in everyday interactions. This increases the possibility of effective implementation and lasting results for students.

Most superintendents indicate they spend more time dealing with relationship issues than on any other task. Emotional intelligence is at the core of a superintendent's capacity to build and maintain positive and trusting relationships.

Soon after Alexander (a pseudonym), superintendent of a district with about 7,000 students on Long Island, N.Y., completed his training and coaching in emotional intelligence, the principals and school board members in his district commented on the positive changes they saw in his ability to manage stress and difficult conversations. He was able to move from using ineffective emotion-regulation strategies, such as assigning blame and negative self-talk, to using effective strategies. These included positive self-talk and cognitive reappraisal — that is, putting a positive spin on a situation, which helped him pause and build empathy before he acted.

When Alexander was ready to adopt RULER districtwide, he didn't struggle with getting buy-in from key stakeholders because he walked the talk. Research in his district showed that RULER had a positive impact on students' well-being, leadership skills, behavior grades and academic performance.

## Sustainable Use

Emotionally intelligent superintendents understand that breaking through traditional mindsets about emotions is a prerequisite to effective, districtwide implementation of social and emotional learning. This includes challenging their own mental models about emotions and having the courage to challenge potentially longstanding organizational ones.

Implementation means keeping social and emotional skills front and center as part of the district's mission. It means integrating SEL into the district's core values, vision, strategic plan and expected performance goals for principals.

*Continued on page 24*



## Getting in Touch With Your Emotions

Developing a greater understanding of emotions can help you to take better care of yourself, make more informed decisions, support your team and create the best possible climate and culture in your school district.

To build greater emotional awareness, ask yourself these questions:

- How do I feel most mornings? Tired, rejuvenated, stressed, energized?  
Consider your morning routine and commute to work.
- How do I feel throughout the workday? Frustrated, inspired, disappointed, grateful?  
Consider your e-mails, phone calls and meetings.
- How do I feel at the end of the workday and evening? Exhausted, relaxed, tense, joyful?  
Consider your commute home, time with family and required attendance at events.
- Are your emotions working for you or against you in your role as an organizational leader?  
In what ways do your daily feelings influence your effectiveness?

— Marc Brackett and Janet Patti

## How Emotionally Intelligent Are You?

Answer the following questions to consider your own emotional intelligence skills.

- *Recognizing emotion.* Do I pay attention to my own and others' emotions? Do I read people accurately? Do I pick up on subtle cues to shift conversations?
- *Understanding emotion.* What makes me feel angry, stressed and excited at school? What are my top "triggers" at work? How do I tend to react when someone pushes my triggers?
- *Labeling emotion.* How advanced is my emotion vocabulary? Can I list 10 "shades" of happiness or sadness? Do I use a wide range of "feeling" words in my daily conversations?
- *Expressing emotion.* How comfortable am I expressing the full range of emotions at work, such as disappointment, frustration, pride and peacefulness? What rules have I created at work around emotions?
- *Regulating emotion.* How skilled am I at dealing with the wide range of emotions I experience as a superintendent? What strategies — both effective and ineffective — do I use to manage anger and stress? To inspire my team? To calm others after a tragedy?

— Marc Brackett and Janet Patti

## Additional Resources

To learn more about RULER, a districtwide approach to SEL developed at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, visit [ei.yale.edu](http://ei.yale.edu).

To learn more about CASEL, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, visit [www.casel.org](http://www.casel.org).

To access SEL-related resources for building a more positive school climate, visit [inspired.facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com/inspired).



*Continued from page 22*

Recognizing this, Fran Rabinowitz, interim superintendent in Bridgeport, Conn., participated in extensive training in SEL and then provided professional development for each of her principals, including coaching to implement RULER. She also hired two SEL coordinators to organize and provide continuous professional development for both school leaders and trainers at each school. That way the implementation process could be monitored through repeated inquiry cycles.

Similarly, but on a much larger scale, Carmen Fariña, the New York City schools chancellor, recently introduced emotional intelligence training and coaching for many of her newly appointed superintendents. With the broadening of their role from evaluator to instructional coach, the chancellor realized that emotional intelligence skills are tantamount to the superintendents' ability to support their principals' personal and professional growth.

A primary goal of the emotional intelligence training is to strengthen the communication and collaboration between and among superintendents and principals. The accompanying coaching provides opportunities for self-reflection on one's leadership skills and the space to problem solve, set goals, enhance their skills and prepare for the future implementation of SEL.

Dolores Esposito, executive superintendent of leadership in the NYC Department of Education, says the chancellor wants to "empower NYC superintendents to embrace reflection as a habit of practice through emotional intelligence development and coaching. This opportunity has proven to be transformational."

Principals, after hearing from their superintendents, have now expressed interest in emotional intelligence training because, says Esposito, they see it as a critical component of their own and their teachers' growth, and most importantly, the academic and social-emotional growth of their students.

## Rising Stress

In a recent study, we found that teens nationwide are not in the best emotional shape. They are experiencing negative emotions such as stress and boredom nearly three-quarters of the time they are in school, and their stress levels are edging beyond those of adults. These negative emotions are keeping students from achieving personal and professional success. Teachers and principals also are experiencing greater stress and burnout than ever before.

As a nation, we need to equip our students and educators with the skills they need to succeed. Superintendents are the gatekeepers of systemic change in their school districts. Our hope is that all superintendents will adopt evidence-based approaches to SEL to help cultivate a healthier and more effective and compassionate society. If we want young people to succeed socially, emotionally and academically, schools must be places that bring out the best in them. ■

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# Bursting Bubbles: Assessing the New Tests

Will the Smarter Balanced and PARCC assessments enable teachers to gauge how well students are mastering skills and content for college and career readiness?

BY ANDREW S. LATHAM

The era of Common Core testing is upon us. Many states — whether in the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium or the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers — are preparing to launch their assessments either this spring or next.

The development efforts of both state collaboratives, supported with a staggering \$360 million in federal funding, were ushered in with great fanfare in 2010, with the promise they would produce “next generation” assessments that would dramatically improve how we measure students’ readiness for college and careers. The closer we have moved to implementation (which began in February and March in more than 20 states), the more charged the rhetoric has become, with strident battle lines being drawn between supporters and detractors and very few ambivalent people left in the middle.

Beyond the more contentious points being debated, it may be useful for school system leaders to analyze a few Smarter Balanced and PARCC questions to get a sense of how different and effective the new tests may be.

## Sundry Standards

First, a disclaimer. The company I work for, WestEd, has completed both project management work for Smarter Balanced and test development work for PARCC, so I am not an objective observer. In general, I support Common Core standards, as well as the notion that when it comes to assessment, pooling development resources and working toward measuring student performance on a single set of challenging standards has the potential to lead to much more innovative and accurate measures of student learning than have been available in the past.

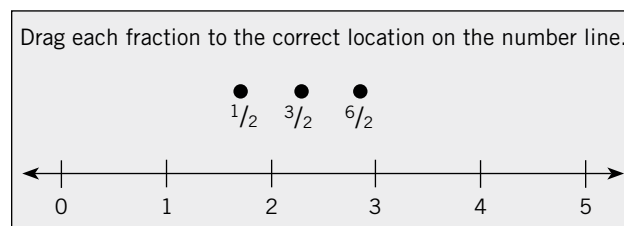
This does not make me a blind adherent, however. Clearly, both programs face considerable challenges,

and not even the staunchest advocate would predict a smooth launch and seamless transition to the new assessments.

As for the tests themselves, let’s begin by debunking the notion of homogeneity across state assessments in the past. Prior to the introduction of the Common Core, almost all states were developing their own state standards and assessments, and the rigor and quality of both were all over the map.

One 2014 study, written by Gary Phillips of the American Institutes for Research, estimated that state standards varied by as much as three to four grade levels between the least and most rigorous states. And the tests developed to measure these standards ranged from traditional paper-and-pencil, multiple-choice tests to computer-delivered instruments that included open-ended questions requiring students to construct their responses. For this reason, any comparison of old with new glosses over the significant variability among the old tests and must be interpreted with caution.

Both Smarter Balanced and PARCC are designed for computer delivery, significantly expanding the types of items that can be administered and scored automatically in real time. Consider the sample 3rd-grade math item from PARCC below.



Source: [www.parcconline.org/samples/mathematics/grade-3-mathematics](http://www.parcconline.org/samples/mathematics/grade-3-mathematics)

On a paper-and-pencil test, a comparable item most likely would contain a number line with five dots at

various plausible points and ask the student to identify which dot represents a specific fractional value. By guessing alone, the student would have a 20 percent chance of answering correctly. To be sure, the traditional test also might ask the student to draw three dots representing the same three fractional values shown in the PARCC item, but if it did, that task would need to be hand-scored, increasing the expense of administration and the possibility of errors in scoring, as well as extending the time required to report scores.

Note that the PARCC question probes the student's depth of understanding in a manner consistent with the intended richness of the Common Core standards. Instead of presenting a single fraction, it presents three. All three have the same denominator, so students are encouraged to recognize fraction patterns and relationships (i.e., if they all share a denominator, the value increases as the numerator increases). One of the fractions is also a whole number. Thus, one relatively straightforward PARCC question provides a more nuanced measure of student understanding than a simpler, more traditional paper-and-pencil variant might.

## Higher-Order Thinking

Now consider a sample 4th-grade reading task from Smarter Balanced below.

Read the sentences from the passage. Then answer the question.

"My grandma pulled the ball out, unwrapped it, and held it out for us to see. The ball was scarred almost beyond recognition. It had dog bite marks, dirt scuffs, and fraying seams. Right in the middle was a big signature in black ink that I had somehow overlooked. It was smudged now and faded, but it still clearly said 'Babe Ruth.' I began to shake inside."

Click on two phrases from the paragraph that help you understand the meaning of scarred.

Source: <http://sampleitems.smarterbalanced.org/itempreview/sbac/ELA.htm>

The Common Core English language arts standards emphasize the ability to derive meaning from texts as being essential for college and career readiness.

A more traditional question might simply ask the student to select the correct definition of "scarred" from five options, again opening the door to guessing, but also measuring a student's vocabulary more than his or her ability to interpret context clues. In this example, the student isn't even asked to define the word, but instead must identify those specific areas of text that shed light on its definition. Guessing is largely eliminated, and the construct measured is textual interpretation, not vocabulary knowledge.

Listening skills also have a place in the Common Core. One set of Smarter Balanced sample tasks involves students watching a brief video on their computer about astronauts and gravity, then answering a few questions based on the video. At first, I was skeptical. Is pulling information out of a video really a necessary college and career skill? On further reflection, I realized I probably was being a bit of a Luddite.

When my own two high schoolers conduct research for a project, they don't go to the library, they go to the Internet. For better or worse, video appears to be a ubiquitous medium through which the current generation of students will commonly access and interpret information. Moreover, recent research on the use of video in the classroom has shown that watching short, dynamic videos provides a sensory experience that produces a greater depth of understanding of new concepts and ideas. Using videos and other media in assessments allows for a deeper measure of comprehension through a more immersive experience.

One popular refrain from the many detractors of the new assessments is that the tests still contain lots of multiple-choice questions so, by definition, they aren't really measuring higher-order thinking skills. But while multiple-choice questions are clearly more limited than constructed-response ones, it's a mistake to think they can't measure complex reasoning or skills, particularly when coupled with constructed-response questions.

This type of coupling is common among the sample questions from Smarter Balanced and PARCC. A typical example might ask students to select the main idea of a passage from among five options, then to explain which parts of the text they used to derive this main idea. To receive full credit, the students must

provide a reasoned, text-based rationale in support of the multiple-choice selection.

It's too easy to be dismissive of multiple choice. To be sure, relying solely on multiple choice would limit the depth of knowledge that can be assessed. But the new tests don't do that. They integrate multiple choice with healthy portions of constructed-response questions that take advantage of various technological innovations. Plus not all multiple-choice questions are created equal.

The new assessments make liberal use of multiple-choice variants, such as multiple-select items that can present up to seven response options from which a student must select all that are correct. With so many possible combinations, the student must have a full understanding of the concept being tested to select the single correct combination.

Many pragmatic reasons explain why multiple-choice questions have dominated the first century or so of standardized assessments: They are far less expensive to develop and validate; require much less student testing time to complete; can be scored automatically and, thus, quickly; and tend to produce more reliable scores than constructed-response items. The trick, then, is to provide an integrated mix of multiple-choice and constructed-response tasks that try to balance all the pressures of providing rich, authentic measures of student learning with the need to hold rising test administration and scoring costs, as well as student testing time, in relative check.

## Performance Tasks

Perhaps the most interesting tasks in the new assessments are the PARCC and Smarter Balanced performance tasks in both mathematics and English language arts, which can take anywhere from one to two hours to complete. These tasks typically require students to interpret multiple resources, sometimes using multiple media, to address a series of questions that require them to demonstrate strategic and extended thinking by researching, hypothesizing, modeling, comparing and/or problem solving.

When most people think of next generation assessments, they probably think of these types of tasks, which can be used to great effect when integrated seamlessly with

instruction as formative assessments. But as promising as they are, when used in standardized accountability assessments these kinds of tasks can significantly increase testing time and be exceedingly expensive and difficult to score accurately and reliably. So the new tests must strike a balance. Smarter Balanced includes just one performance task for each content area at each grade level, and PARCC currently includes two or three.

## Gauging Mastery

Will the Smarter Balanced and PARCC tests justify their \$360 million price tag? It's certainly possible for individual states to produce their own rigorous standards and innovative computer-delivered tests — and some states already have done that. But few would argue this high quality cuts across all state programs.

The consortia tests represent an intriguing and expensive gamble, founded on the belief that by pooling resources and developing common assessments to a single set of high standards, states can disruptively innovate to expand the depth and breadth with which we measure our students' learning. The question isn't necessarily how well students will do. Most people predict that scores will be relatively low in the first year because in most cases the Common Core standards are more challenging than the state standards they replaced.

The more pertinent question will be whether states, districts, schools and teachers find the results meaningful and useful in determining how well their students are mastering the skills and content deemed necessary for college and career readiness. ■

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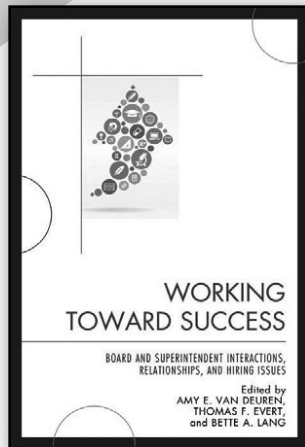
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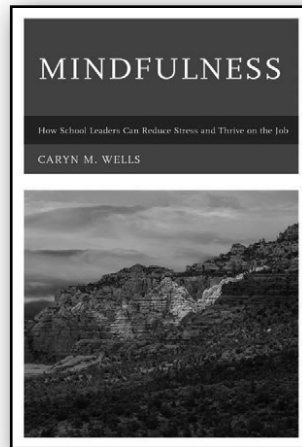
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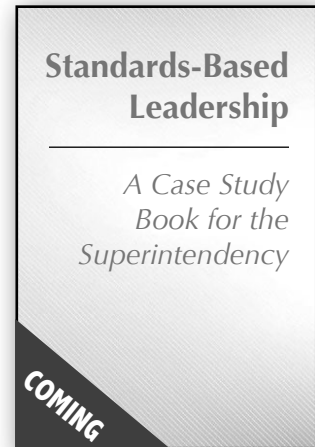
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# The Productivity of Rural Schools

How some remote districts generated higher-than-expected learning results without proportionately higher spending

BY MARGUERITE ROZA

Superintendent Kevin Newsom in Brackettville, Texas, was faced recently with replacing a \$7 million building in his school district, which sits two hours west of San Antonio. Several of his predecessors had tried to pass bonds to pay for this need but were unsuccessful, straining community relations in a town where roughly one-third of the 1,700 residents live in poverty.

When Newsom had the building re-assessed, it turned out that a renovation would be better — and more cost effective.

“For \$600,000, we added tiles, remodeled and gave that building a face lift,” he says. Then, using modular buildings, the school district spent \$1.4 million to put in a 10-classroom facility with computer rooms, a biology lab and space for a nursing program. The district used a work-around to spend existing funds for the renovation and addition.

“We didn’t pressure our taxpayers, and we got done what we wanted for \$1.4 million versus \$7 million,” Newsom says.

He hopes this will help restore positive community relations and demonstrate to taxpayers that the 600-student Brackett Independent School District is fiscally responsible and not likely to jump to tax levies as a first solution.

School leaders make tradeoffs like this all the time. But Newsom’s remote rural district is considered a productivity superstar, one of 30 interviewed by the Edunomics Lab at Georgetown University to learn what made them so.

## Outliers’ Productivity

Rural school systems are often knocked for being expensive, lacking teacher talent and producing poor student outcomes. On average, remote rural districts

live up to their reputation of being expensive and yielding lower student outcomes. They have the lowest average return on investment, or ROI, across urban, suburban and town school districts, meaning that even with their higher costs, rural student outcomes are lower than the state’s norm adjusted for the mix of student needs.

But another part of the story suggests being rural might actually be an asset.

Some remote rural districts are outliers, beating the odds by producing higher-than-expected results without a proportionately higher per-pupil price tag. They’re outliers because their outcomes greatly exceed those predicted by their mix of students and by their available funds when compared with other systems in their state. In fact, our analysis shows rural districts have the highest odds of being a productivity outlier — nearly 1 in 5 — compared with other urban, suburban and town districts.

Our study wanted to find out why these productivity superstar rural districts have such good bang for their buck. (Neither homogeneity, relative affluence nor size, compared with other rural remote systems, seemed to play a role.)

Leaders pointed to no single factor or program to explain their superstar status. But as we talked with these superintendents some common themes emerged: The importance of human relationships (with an emphasis on people over programs), strong commitment to and accountability for students, strategic use of data tied to students and a clear focus on tradeoffs and what investments “buy” in terms of outcomes.

While we tried to unearth potential common denominators that might explain these rural systems’ assets, we quickly realized that every district has its own mix of variables that may contribute to its secret



productivity sauce. And not every highly productive rural system has a tight-knit community that wholeheartedly supports its local schools and agrees in lock-step about how to best serve its children and respect its taxpayers' pocketbooks.

Our conversations offer an impressionistic starting point to better understand rural productivity. Only future study will help us drill down further.

### **Factor 1: The human touch with students, staff and the community**

Strong relationships weren't a given in these communities. Leaders worked hard to build and sustain them. The human touch played out in many ways as these districts sought ways to motivate and engage each student as an individual. Leaders worked to develop a culture of leaving no one behind. Several districts mentioned adopting a mastery model.

"Our motto is 'small school, big family,'" says Marlen Cordes, superintendent of Kaleva Norman Dickson Schools in Brethren, Mich., where some 70 percent

of students in the 350-square-mile district are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. "Building relationships, that's the best (and most important) thing we do. All our kids eat breakfast in the classroom every day. That's when teachers really get to talk to the kids. The one thing we have going for us is we know our kids. For many, school is the best part of their day. The students work as hard as they can because they don't want to let the teachers down."

Many superintendents grew up in the rural area where they now work. And some leaders intentionally sought to hire other natives who they thought would stay and feel invested. Rural superintendents emphasized the importance of getting and keeping the right people. And they expressed a willingness to let people go if circumstances warranted (be they budget or performance related). Many leaders mentioned the significance of their teachers' professional learning communities around teacher retention and leadership (giving teachers the latitude and resources to do what they feel works best) and student outcomes.

## **Identifying 'Superstars' in Rural Settings**

To determine whether school systems performed better than predicted, we used the Center for American Progress's Production ROI index. This index predicts the level of achievement a school district should have relative to other districts in the state, accounting for its mix of student needs and spending level.

The model adjusts for spending level and the percentage of students who are English language learners, students who are identified as needing special education and students who qualify for free lunch.

We contacted all 107 outlier districts identified from the data in 23 states. Thirty districts, representing 18 states, responded to our request for a phone interview. We asked leaders in those 30 districts why they thought they received their productivity results.

To be clear, not all 107 districts identified for their excellent return on investment have produced student scores in the top tier overall for their state. The ranking on CAP's productivity measure compares students' actual performance with the district's predicted performance relative to peers.

For example, a school district with high concentrations of poor students or students with limited English proficiency may have higher achievement than is the norm for that mix of students and higher than the norm at a particular spending level, but have overall performance that doesn't reach the highest level. Only districts where students' actual performance surpasses predicted performance were considered ROI superstars.

While spending varied somewhat across these districts, on average they spent about 5 percent less than the norm for districts in their state. But all these outlier rural systems performed better than predicted by the mix of students they serve and the funds they have.

The outlier productivity districts we identified are all categorized by the National Center for Education Statistics as "rural remote," which means the district is in a "census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster." Some of the districts we talked with are primarily farming communities. Others center on a main employer, such as a hospital or small factory. Still others draw on retirees or tourism.

— Marguerite Roza



The “community” in these remote rural districts isn’t some faceless force. Stakeholders in these small communities tend to overlap — local business leaders aren’t some anonymous business community but also local voters and parents — and may be less fragmented than in larger ones.

### **Factor 2: Sense of flexibility, creativity and self-reliance**

These school districts’ remoteness seems to foster a sense of self-reliance and resourcefulness. They seem accustomed to solving their own problems.

The Delhi, N.Y., district stopped paying for its regional career and technical education program at BOCES, the Boards of Cooperative Educational Services, to create its own career technical college program with a community college across the street. District leaders say they are saving money while offering students more course options.

A teacher in Wyoming’s Lincoln County School District 2 came up with a homegrown, teacher-led professional development program, known as Fusion, that’s now used districtwide and elsewhere across the country. Teachers choose what area they want to grow in, get time during contract hours to study best practices in that area and are rewarded for improving their skills.

“Our staff development has been huge in growing our teachers,” Alan Allred, superintendent in Lincoln County, says. “People are programs. We invest in our people and we retain them.”

### **Factor 3: Making conscious tradeoffs**

We asked these highly productive school districts how they could afford what they did without spending more on average than their peers. District leaders talked about the problem-solving process and conscious financial tradeoffs they made — many made specifically to be able to better support teachers and, ultimately, students.

Superintendent Chris Stevenson in Harper, Texas, gives all staff, from the lunch lady on up, a holiday bonus of \$800 to \$1,200 based on the district budget (some years it’s not possible) and student performance.

“We wanted an incentive plan that we could celebrate as a district, and if we aren’t doing well, then we work on it together,” Stevenson says.

His 600-student district does without a lot of teacher aides or support staff. And when someone leaves or retires, leaders look very closely at whether or not to re-staff the position.

### **Factor 4: Respect for costs**

Leaders seem to have a general frugality, an awareness of the price for everything and what each dollar bought. They appear cautious in asking their community for money and only ask when it’s really needed.

Anthony Marinack, superintendent of the roughly 700-student Tri-County Area School District in Plainfield, Wis., recognizes the need to work strategically with the “haves” in a community to avoid fundraising burnout (knowing whom to ask, when to ask and being careful about how much you’re asking).

“You have to get creative in how you are going to get funds. You have fund-raised them (the community) to death. Families can’t afford it,” Marinack says, noting roughly 60 percent of his students are eligible for federal free or reduced-price school meals. “I hit up the wealthy potato farmers in my area every now and then to support our great programs. If I need sports uniforms, I try to hit up a farmer who’s had a good year.”

### **Factor 5: Using data to directly help students and teachers versus system management or compliance**

Many of the rural superstar superintendents see every number as a person. They focus on using data to identify and help struggling students. Districts had a clear process for reflecting on what worked and what didn’t work and making future budget decisions based on that evidence. They also used data to drive professional development and staffing decisions.

About an hour north of Green Bay, all teachers in the Crivitz, Wis., school district attend an annual summer data retreat to set explicit goals, timelines and clear methods for checking and evaluating data throughout the year. The state evaluation system requires teachers to set goals for themselves known as SLOs, or student learning outcomes. Crivitz teachers set their SLOs based on gaps that surfaced during the summer data retreat and tweak their practice as needed to meet the goals. Teachers review benchmark tests during the school year. If gaps surface for certain students, teachers and administrators together craft a plan to target them.

## Doing the Most With What They Have

In interviews the Edunomics Lab at Georgetown University conducted with leaders of outlier rural districts — those where student outcomes exceeded predictions — we found each rural district had its own story. What was clear was that every highly productive rural school system has found its own way to success, rooted in its own unique local context, with its own mix of variables that may contribute to its secret productivity sauce. Here are excerpts of what we heard from three representative superintendents.

— Marguerite Roza

### Bret Miles

#### Superintendent in Holyoke, Colorado, 2009–2015

*Located 13 miles from the Nebraska border in Colorado's far northeast corner, Holyoke is a predominantly agricultural community with about 600 students in K-12. The community is home to Seaboard Farms, a large hog production corporation.*

"I grew up in Holyoke and graduated from the local high school. ... When I came in as superintendent, the school board had identified two main problems ... low levels of teacher buy-in and declining community support.

"Within the district, we built a Standard of Excellence Team comprised of teachers, parents and business leaders to analyze student achievement, set goals and get community buy-in. ... It's this kind of genuine accountability that comes in a small rural district that isn't understood in the bigger picture of the accountability movement. ... "With our budget crunch we had to reduce personnel, fortunately mostly through attrition. We don't have teacher aides for extra classroom support anymore. ... Our base salary hadn't changed in 10 years. That's not good, but it's our reality. We've just asked teachers to take on more. But our leadership team is a teacher team. Teachers feel valued. Some 90 percent of our teachers say they feel the district is moving in the right direction and they feel supported. ...

"Maintaining that positive climate is an important part of every decision. We go to the teachers to make sure they can get on board with every strategy we implement. ... We've changed our curriculum, grading policies and technology expectations. We've been recognized for closing our socio-economic achievement gap. Some 44 percent of students are Latino and about a quarter are English language learners, some 50 percent are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. This was possible only because of the high staff buy-in. With just 50 teachers, we can really make sure we communicate with and hear from everyone."

### Pam Kruse

#### Superintendent in Mason, Texas 2009–present

*On the western side of Hill Country by the scenic Llano River, Mason (population 2,200) sits in one of the state's most rural counties, where farms and ranches dominate. About 700 students are enrolled in the district.*

"I've worked in Mason schools for 28 years. ... Our teachers are very involved in individual students' learning so they know what each of them needs. And we've really set up our district so that no student can just fall through the cracks.

"On Fridays, we have 'prime time' that provides remediation in each subject for the elementary grades. ... In January, we give our benchmark for the tests in the spring. If we see kids who have trouble, we put them into a tutorial group. In junior high and high school, at every level we have remediation built into the schedule. ...

"We spend at least 90 percent of our budget on staff. Of the federal money we receive, approximately 98 percent of that goes to salaries. Our philosophy is the more staff we have, the better off the kids are. ...

"We're trying to upgrade all of our facilities, but mostly that's an area where we've done without because we wanted to focus on instruction. We have a 1952 school building for preK-8 and a 1976 building for our high school. ... There's not a lot of money here and not a lot of ways to make money here.

"But my teachers go the extra mile ... I have teachers who come up here at 7 in the morning and who are here at 6 at night to tutor the kids. ... I've had teachers from other districts say to me that there's just no place like Mason where everyone cares so very much about the kids. I can't take credit for that. That has always been a part of Mason."

## Mark Platt

### Superintendent in Hart, Michigan 2013–present

*About six miles inland from Lake Michigan, Hart sits in an agricultural zone with several fruit and vegetable processing operations. One of the county's top employers is the world's largest maraschino cherry producer. Tourists come for beaches and looming sand dunes. The district enrolls about 1,300.*

"Before I became superintendent, our district had purposely closed outlying schools and created a central campus. ... The first thing we did when I took over ... was start to better manage the things we had control over. We have one campus with four buildings, an early childhood center plus elementary, middle and high school. We have one bus run, with everyone on it from K-12. We've saved a lot of money.

"Those savings let us invest in a consistent, quality elementary school literacy program and every teacher gets trained in it. ... And we've invested heavily in leadership. It's very important to me that the principals and I be the educational leaders. I don't spend a ton of time on finances; I have a finance director. ...

"Of course, there's value in sending teachers to training, but the staff members I have the greatest return on are my principals. ... Because they are educational leaders, they can create great PD in their own building that's responsive to their school's specific needs. ... We're the only district in our state where all of our principals have gone through a 10-month Leadership Matters specialty endorsement program. It focuses on coaching, collaboration, reflection, courage, intentionality and technology.

"We don't have a lot of discretionary money, but when we do have extra dollars to spend, it's almost always on instruction. We just used general fund dollars for a one-to-one Chromebook program in our secondary school. ... We wanted to give kids greater access to broader course offerings through the Internet."

"We have 50 teachers, 50 student learning outcomes that are connected to that data retreat. Each teacher is attacking the data gaps in his or her classroom," says Crivitz superintendent Patrick Mans. The system is "much more responsive and timely" in using student data throughout the school year to make instructional changes.

### Factor 6: No magic productivity plan but food for thought

Our superintendent interviews produced no magic productivity plan, no "adopt program X and you'll get stellar result Y" or "make tradeoff X and you'll save Y dollars." While we need more research to give deeper insight into what makes these superstar rural systems tick, even nonrural leaders may glean something useful from their rural peers' advice:

- Focus on teachers, students and community.
- Make relationship-building a clear part of district leadership strategy.
- Stay focused on the outcomes the money buys.

Our conversations with rural leaders make us wonder whether the broad national focus on "systems" means that many districts (rural and nonrural) have lost some of the human elements to schooling that may prove an advantage in any setting. ■

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# safety & security

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# Concussion Schooling for Students

An Ontario school district adds mandatory instruction to change the culture over an emerging public health concern

BY REBECCA RICHARDSON

For far too long, we have been focused on the treatment and glorification of concussions in sport. Professional athletes are seen as heroes, fighters and “tough guys” when they play through injury, especially a brain injury.

The time has come to flip the switch on this growing public health epidemic. What about the prevention of injuries and the promotion of healthy, active living? What messages are we sending to our children about the need to be happy, healthy and physically active for life when the images they see and the stories they hear are in contradiction to that?

The 60,000-student Halton District School Board in Ontario, Canada, working with a noted sports medicine physician, set out to change this picture and the unfortunate message that students receive about minimizing the potential severity of injury. A 9th-grader sized up the current situation this way: “Outside of school there aren’t people who will go out of their way to make sure you know about this information. This is mandatory for people to know about it, so it falls into things we need to know and things in general for our safety. It is kinda their responsibility to teach us this stuff and to learn it from teachers who do research and are specialized in it.”

## Practical Know-how

The best place for messages about student health to be shared and to create a culture of change is through education. This was the topic of discussion at the first International Concussion Summit in Niagara Falls, Ontario, in 2012, between Dr. Paul Echlin, primary care sport medicine specialist who practices at the Elliott Sports Medicine Clinic in Burlington, Ontario, and Joanne Walsh, instructional program leader for health and physical education with the Halton schools.

While they may have been focused on Canadian affairs, they could just as well have been discussing the state of scholastic athletics across the national border. Recent U.S. data, reported in 2014 by the American Association of Neurological Surgeons, showed “a 100 percent increase among 8- to 13-year-olds and a 200 percent increase among 14- to 19-year-olds in sports-related emergency room visits for concussion.” Of course, concussions can and do occur outside of competitive sports, be it through recreation, play or normal daily tasks.

Walsh and Echlin recognized the impact educators have on providing students with practical knowledge and how to use it to solve problems related to healthy living, such as recognizing signs and symptoms and assessing and advocating for protection against potential brain injuries.

The Ontario Health and Physical Education curriculum lends itself to these important lessons relating to personal safety and living skills. Content areas include self-awareness and monitoring, communicating the risk of injury and potential death, and assessing situations for potential danger overall.

## Instructional Goals

Originally titled the Halton Student Concussion Education Project, the resource was piloted in five 9th-grade classrooms in various schools. Teachers facilitated discussions, using 12 online modules, to engage students in conversations about the seriousness, signs and symptoms, and actions to take when they or a teammate or friend has a suspected concussion. The resource has been updated to include the internationally recognized 6-Step Return to Learn/Return to Physical Activity Plan.



Haltons' original two goals were these:

- First, provide teachers and students with the tools and skills necessary to advocate for the personal safety of themselves and others, thus enabling students to become agents of change in society to deliver important messages; and
- Second, change the culture's perceptions that a concussion in athletics is a badge of honor. Suffering a concussion is a serious medical condition.

The format of the e-modules contained in this educational resource starts with an activity-related scenario and includes a set of multiple-choice questions. Upon answering the questions, the software program provides the user with two additional options: (1) to examine discussion points and learn more in depth and (2) to link to related videos and articles collected in the sport concussion library.

## 9th-Grade Mandate

To address concussions among youth, the Halton District School Board started its concussion education program in September 2014. The 9th-grade module became a mandatory part of the Healthy Active Living course, which is taken by every high school freshman. The Ontario government mandated all school boards in the province offer a concussion education program beginning in January 2015. Because we had much of the programming and expertise in place, we started our program earlier. It has gained much attention outside of Ontario through extensive media coverage, resulting in information sharing and educator visits to Halton.

In April, two students from Miami, Fla., brothers Billy and Jake Reis, visited one of our schools in Burlington and witnessed firsthand the e-modules and student learning in action. They are the co-founders of an organization called Play Smart Stay Smart whose aim is to raise awareness and protect fellow high school athletes from injuries. They recognize the need to build knowledge and understanding among peers, coaches and parents around the prevention, identification and proper management of sport-related concussions. The stated purpose of their nonprofit organization (<http://playsmartstaysmart.org>) is "The student who plays smart would stay smart."

Since the inception of our concussion education program just a year ago, it has expanded to include students in grades 3 and 6, as well as being translated into French for immersion and French-speaking school districts. Both elementary school e-modules connect to curriculum expectations and have gone through pilot programming with teachers. Elementary teachers have found numerous ways of embedding the learning into their literacy and healthy living classes. Students have opportunities to demonstrate their understanding, for instance, by creating public service announcements or collaborating with others on performing original songs and raps.

## An Evidence Base

The sport concussion library is maintained by Echlin, a widely quoted expert on concussions whose principal research has focused on youth ice hockey players. The education tools, with medical advice and current research findings, enable teachers to expand their learning and address the questions students raise during the lessons. This summer, additional instructional materials, including teacher-created lesson plans, learning activities and student exemplars, were uploaded to the site to be ready for the 2015-16 school year.

The library is an excellent resource, a collection point for evidence-based research for students and teachers. A research paper, "The Sport Concussion Education Project: A Brief Report on an Educational Initiative From Concept to Curriculum," published last October by Echlin and fellow researchers on traumatic brain injuries in youth sports in the *Journal of Neurosurgery*, supports the districtwide approach we have undertaken. ■

## Additional Resources

The Halton Student Concussion Education Program has been accessible to other educators. The e-modules and other information about the program can be found at [www.sportconcussionlibrary.com](http://www.sportconcussionlibrary.com).

The e-modules were designed by a learning specialist to be interactive, thus improving understanding of concussion as a serious brain injury. The information on which these e-modules is based is derived from the latest published content on the topic.

Publicly accessible without cost through the Sport Concussion Library website, the materials are protected by copyright. The e-modules are designed to serve solely as education tools. They are not intended to resemble or serve as certification courses.

The sport concussion library's wealth of noncommercial, peer-reviewed information is suitable for researchers, athletes, parents, coaches and therapists/trainers, school district staff and physicians. The holdings include recently published journal articles, book chapters, thesis dissertations, relevant legislative initiatives, documentary films, testimonials for athletes and parents and online SCAT3 testing (along with archived SCAT2 testing) for physicians and teams with associated physicians.

The site also contains links to selected noncommercial educational sites (e.g., U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and ThinkFirst, an injury prevention foundation), as well as basic concussion information and select literature summaries.

— Rebecca Richardson

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# As Concussion Anxieties Rise, So Do Athletic Trainers' Ranks

BY JAY P. GOLDMAN

At the same time concussions among scholastic athletes are receiving heightened attention, a new study indicates just over a third of high schools in the United States have at least one full-time athletic trainer.

The study conducted by the National Athletic Trainers' Association, "Athletic Training Services in Public Secondary Schools: A Benchmark Study," appeared in the February issue of the association's *Journal of Athletic Training*. (The study is accessible at [http://bit.ly/athletic\\_training\\_public\\_schools](http://bit.ly/athletic_training_public_schools).)

The trainers' association, which deemed the results "encouraging," says 70 percent of U.S. public high schools have athletic training services while 37 percent have full-time trainers. Forty-seven percent of the schools reported providing full practice coverage each afternoon.

By comparison, the group's 1994 study showed only 35 percent of the schools used athletic training services.

Athletic trainers worked most commonly at interscholastic games and competitions rather than at practices, placing athletes at substantial risk for injury during a large portion of sport participation, the authors noted in their report. According to Safe Kids Worldwide, 62 percent of organized sports-related injuries occur during practices.

That realization is commanding nationwide attention. The National Federation of State High School Associations, the governing body for the rules used in interscholastic athletics competition, convened a concussion task force whose strongest recommendation called for reducing the amount of full contact in practice sessions during the high school football season, including the pre-season. (A summary of the task force report can be found at [http://bit.ly/minimizing\\_head\\_impact](http://bit.ly/minimizing_head_impact).)

During the past five years, the national federation has revised its guidelines for managing a student exhibiting symptoms or behaviors consistent with a concussion and has promoted an online training course for high school coaches on handling serious head injuries. The federation, which reports that more than 1.1 million students played high school football last fall, believes its preventative and treatment measures leave the sport "as risk-free as it has ever been."

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**A recent national survey found 37 percent of high schools nationwide employ full-time athletic trainers.**

However, the biggest disruption to the way school sports operate may come through litigation. The family of a high school football player in suburban Chicago who was allowed to remain on the playing field after sustaining a concussion is suing the Illinois High School Association, which oversees football at 600 high schools. The legal action, according to an account in May in *The New York Times*, makes it "the first state association that could face class-action scrutiny."

The suit seeks mandatory baseline testing for all high school football players statewide, stricter guidelines on resuming competition and the presence of medical personnel at practices. The family's attorney also wants the state association to create a medical monitoring fund to examine Illinois football players who have competed since 2002 for post-concussion symptoms.

Leaders of scholastic sports organizations fear such litigation will spread to other states and will require expensive measures be applied to all sports, not just football.

The wave of attention to the incidence of serious head injuries to scholastic athletes isn't likely to subside anytime soon. The Colorado School of Public Health is tracking injuries for the National High School Sports-Related Injury Surveillance Study, and a traumatic brain injury research center in North Carolina has taken a special interest in high school sports.

Superintendents can expect to make some unpopular decisions this fall if the recent past is any indication. Last fall, according to news media accounts, high school football games and entire seasons were cancelled in Cherry, Minn.; Colorado Springs, Colo.; Caro, Mich.; and Portland, Ore., because of concerns over the dwindling roster of healthy players. The same drastic actions had to be taken by administrators during the previous few seasons in West Seattle, Wash.; Bay City, Mich.; Lincoln, Mont.; and Plattsburgh, N.Y.

The bleak prospects are most pronounced in small, rural school districts, where limited rosters can be quickly thinned by a few injuries. Participation is reduced further by parents keeping their sons out of high school football because of concussion worries. Rolf Sivertsen, superintendent of the Midland Community Unit School District in Sparland, Ill., told *The New York Times*: "I worry about the future of football in all rural schools, not only in Illinois but across the country. Every time you turn on the television, all you hear is bad things about youth football." ■

**Jay Goldman** is editor of *School Administrator* magazine.

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Thursday, March 2

9am

Redesigning Professional Development  
Systems — Leadership, Feedback and Impact

3:45pm

Community Schools: Cultivating Opportunity,  
Equity and Agency

Innovative Strategies to Close the Homework Gap

Beyond Principal Supervision, Building a System  
of Support for Principal Success

Friday, March 3

10:45am

Leading Adaptive Change: A Systems Approach  
to Improving Instructional Effectiveness

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