

# “DRIVING” Learners Towards Mastery, Autonomy and Purpose

By Dr. Diane A. McCallum



**About the Author:** **Dr. Diane A. McCallum** is the proud principal at Waynesboro Area Senior High School and is in her 10<sup>th</sup> year serving the Waynesboro community. Dr. McCallum was the principal at Summitview Elementary School for the past four school years, also in the Waynesboro Area School District. She previously served as a middle school science teacher in the Pequea Valley School District and the Chambersburg Area School District (CASD), K-12 science curriculum supervisor (CASD) and assistant principal at both Waynesboro Area Middle School and Waynesboro Area Senior High School.

Dr. McCallum received a bachelor's degree in secondary education and earth and space science from West Chester University of Pennsylvania and a Master of Education degree from The Pennsylvania State University. She earned her principal's certification and Doctor of Education from Widener University and completed her Superintendent's Letter of Eligibility from California University of Pennsylvania.

Dr. McCallum and her husband, Curt, have two children, Allison and Zachary, who are currently pursuing their “First Choices” in Waynesboro schools.

The Waynesboro Area School District (WASD) embarked on a journey towards “First Choice” learning opportunities for our learners and staff in 2017. In a nutshell, our goal is to ensure all of our learners receive the academic, social-emotional, and career-readiness preparation and skills in order for them to be prepared for their “First Choice” upon graduation. Additionally, we have a goal of being the “First Choice” employer for those in our local community. As we worked as an administrative team to refine our definition of First Choice, WASD began working with representatives of the Pennsylvania Leadership Development Corporation and each administrator was assigned a mentor in 2019.

When I first started working with my mentor, Dr. Tom Butler, I was halfway through my second year as the principal at Summitview Elementary, one of four K-5 elementary schools in our district, having previously served as a teacher and administrator at the secondary level. I was blessed to have the opportunity to serve a high-performing building alongside dedicated teachers and staff members. Our K-5 students are eager to learn, and we enjoy tremendous support from our families and local community. Yet, when I looked at our data, all of those positives weren't translating to continued learner academic success. In fact, our school received Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI) designation from the PA Department of Education following the 2019 PA System of School Assessment (PSSA).

My meetings with Dr. Butler often came back to my feeling that something was missing. At his recommendation, I added the book, *DRiVE*, by Daniel Pink (2009), to my summer reading list. While written for business contexts, I quickly found myself writing in the margins, highlighting quotes, and thinking of things I could easily implement at Summitview to improve motivation, for both learners and staff.

Citing decades of research on the topic, Pink argues that we must strive towards providing opportunities for what he calls “Motivation 2.1,” or intrinsic motivation (p. 17). Ultimately, we hope to see learners completing tasks because the activity itself brings satisfaction to the learner (p. 75). When we are able to achieve this goal, learners gain a sense of control over the task (autonomy), an increased desire to improve at a task that matters to them (mastery), and a sense that the completion of the task does something to benefit others or has a higher meaning (purpose) (p. 62). I thought to myself, “yes!” This is what has been missing – learners need to see a purpose for what they are learning.

As I continued reading, I came to a vignette about an Australian software company called Atlassian. At least once per quarter, Atlassian employees have a “FedEx Day” – one workday to pursue whatever task they would like, with any other company employee and present their work at the end of the day (p. 90-91). Atlassian executives state that this freedom often leads to innovative ideas that would not have been thought of otherwise. Employees



Second grade learners create a “Beautiful Oops” after reading the book by the same name during “DRiVE Day,” Spring 2021.

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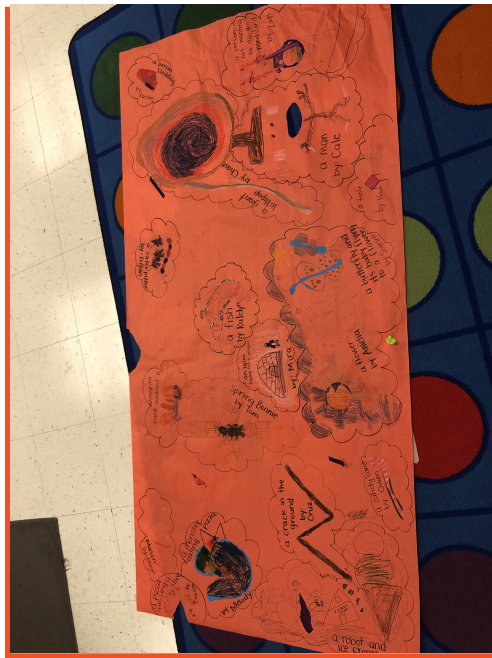
are intrinsically motivated by “FedEx Days” because they have complete control over their work for that day. Additionally, this activity has helped the small start-up compete globally with other software companies. As I was reading this section, I got to thinking – how could we do something like this in an elementary school?

The WASD calendar includes Act 80 early dismissals about once per month for professional development. Learners leave two hours early and teachers use this time for data analysis, professional development and other tasks as needed. Given that the early dismissal days are already shortened, I thought these days would be a good place to fit in a “FedEx Day,” and that six or seven such days per year was a good place to start!

I excitedly introduced the concept of “FedEx Days,” which we call “DRiVE Days” to my faculty during our opening meeting in August 2019. As expected, the room got pretty quiet when I told the teachers that these days were theirs so long as the learners attended related arts and lunch as scheduled. I expected teachers to use these days to give some additional enrichment or remediation or complete an activity they don’t normally have time to do. In reality, the staff embraced this idea and took it to places I hadn’t considered or imagined!

Our first “DRiVE Day” took place in September 2019. I was so thrilled for the students to arrive so I could visit classrooms and see what each teacher had planned. A fourth-grade English language arts teacher set up her classroom like a café, including tablecloths, menus and special lighting. Learners participated in a “book tasting” that allowed them to read a few pages of different genres of books. Later, this teacher shared that those learners were choosing a variety of books for independent reading instead of sticking with their favorite series or author. The first-grade teachers decided to spend time teaching learners to tie their shoes. This may seem silly if you haven’t spent much time in a primary classroom, but the time spent on “DRiVE Day” saved much time throughout the rest of the year!

One unanticipated outcome of holding “DRiVE Days” was an increase in collaboration between teachers. During the December “DRiVE Day,” my third-grade team of four teachers put learners into groups based on interest and created a rotation of winter-themed STEM challenges. The highlight was the marshmallow stacking competition. Teachers in kindergarten and fifth grade teamed up to provide reading buddies for our younger learners. Kindergarteners looked forward to seeing their fifth-grade buddy during the year. It was heartwarming to see many



**A completed “Beautiful Oops” created by a kindergarten class at Summitview Elementary.**

fifth graders continue to help their younger classmates at other times throughout the year.

School closure in the spring cut our “DRiVE Days” short last year, so I was eager to get them started again in the 2020-21 school year. Our district made the decision to re-open our schools last fall. Chromebooks have become a fixture in each classroom as we acclimated learners to virtual tools should we have to close our doors in the future. On our first early dismissal day, my fifth-grade team asked, “Can we just take the kids outside and get them away from screens?” I enthusiastically said, “That would be amazing!” I returned to my office from dismissal duty to an inbox full of the most beautiful leaf rubbing pictures created by our learners. The teachers and students enjoyed a day of being outdoors

and creating something beautiful that many had never done before.

Our most recent “DRiVE Day” coincided with our monthly character education program lessons (we use Teamology). We were learning about Teamology character, Paco, who makes positive changes. The lesson included a video of me reading the book *Beautiful Oops* by Barney Saltzberg, a class discussion of mistakes learners had made in the past and how those mistakes could be turned around in a positive manner. The concluding message of Saltzberg’s book is “when you think you have made a mistake, think of it as an opportunity to make something beautiful!” The lesson concluded with learners getting to create their own beautiful creations as well as a class creation. From there, teachers moved on to their selected “DRiVE Day” activities. A fourth-grade class discussed words and behaviors that “squish” others and then brainstormed words and behaviors to transform the “squishes” into kindness toward one another. A fifth-grade class had the opportunity to send love to someone using any format that they liked. I entered another room to see learners exploring the engineering process as they refined paper airplanes to go the farthest through a hula hoop. It was such a treat to visit classrooms and see learners engaged in a variety of different activities. Even behind their masks, it was evident the children were enjoying what they were doing.

Toward the end of his book, Pink states, “All kids start out as curious, self-directed... but many of them end up as disengaged, compliant. What’s going on? Maybe the problem is us – the adults who are running schools and heading families...” (p. 185). We, as principals, have the amazing ability to make a positive impact on the lives of hundreds of learners each year. That ability comes with a

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project Students have shared their enthusiasm for time spent in the CREATE Lab with the following comments:

*"I feel glad that I came, and I am proud of my painting."*

*"It was calming and very, very fun!"*

*"I felt like a pure artist."*

*"I liked it because we did new things."*

*"It was very fun and challenging."*

*"I loved it and want to come back every day."*

*"I felt inspiration."*

Additionally, teachers and students have the opportunity to integrate and transfer current knowledge and skills in a creative way. One mathematics teacher challenged the students to find "fractions at work" at whichever creative zone they chose. While the students were exploring their zones of interest, they were also looking for how fractions were a part of that zone. At the end of their time in the

CREATE Lab, students must share their findings and final products as part of their reflective process.

The CREATE Lab also offers an everyday space for teachers to bring creativity back into learning. Teachers have begun to shift their thinking to incorporate more of a creative growth mindset, rather than a fixed mindset about learning and teaching. This has resulted in a shift in the school culture. Students have begun to see learning as not only something that is provided to them, but something that they can control. Teachers have begun to shift their approach to strategies used in the classroom on a daily basis. The CREATE Lab has helped teachers continue to cultivate a love of teaching and reignite learning in the school setting. As students are experiencing the CREATE Lab, they are learning 'deeply' together and having fun!

For further information, please contact Mrs. Askins at [askins.kendal@pvbears.org](mailto:askins.kendal@pvbears.org)

#### References

- Gandini, L. (2005). *In the Spirit of the Studio: Learning from the Atelier of Reggio Emilia*. New York: Teachers College Press.
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tremendous responsibility to provide the necessary supports, encouragement and freedom to our teachers as they work to make learning more personal, purposeful and engaging to each child. "DRIVE Days" have been a small, but powerful way to continue fostering curiosity in our

learners and have been an important part of Summitview Elementary's "First Choice" journey!

For more information, please contact the author at [diane\\_mccallum@wasdpa.org](mailto:diane_mccallum@wasdpa.org)

#### References

- Pink, D. H. (2009). *Drive: The surprising truth about what motivates us*. Riverhead Books.
- Saltzberg, B. (2010). *Beautiful Oops!* Workman Publishing Company, Inc.

## Submit an Article for The Pennsylvania Administrator: Winter 2022 Issue

**Deadline to Submit an Article is December 10, 2021**

The Pennsylvania Principals Association is seeking articles for its Winter 2022 issue of *The Pennsylvania Administrator* magazine. This issue does not have a theme, so any education-related articles will be considered by the Editorial Review Board for publication. To submit an article for this issue, please send it to Sheri Thompson at [sherit@paprincipals.org](mailto:sherit@paprincipals.org) by Dec. 10, 2021. Go to [www.paprincipals.org/Publications](http://www.paprincipals.org/Publications) for article specifications.

**Please Note: Professional papers/dissertations WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED and will be returned for an immediate rewrite.**