

# And The Curtain Rises...

By Dr. Cathy L. Taschner



**About the Author: Dr. Cathy L. Taschner** is the Superintendent of Schools in the Schuylkill Valley School District, Leesport, Pa. Dr. Taschner has served as a middle and high school teacher, an assistant principal, a middle school principal, an assistant superintendent and a superintendent. She has worked with teachers and administrators throughout Pennsylvania to develop and implement organizational and instructional support systems for educating all students within general education settings.

As firm believer in equity and access, Dr. Taschner has worked closely with the Department of Justice, the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission (PHRC) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in creating schools that make all students feel welcomed and feel valued in their schools. Her work on equity received national recognition from the National School Boards Association, and her work on professional development also received national attention and was recognized by the National Council for Teacher Quality.

March 2020 took us all back to those seemingly simple laws of motion that we all learned in our high school physics classes. The pandemic, above all else, has certainly affirmed Newton's first law of motion. 'An object at rest stays at rest until acted on by an outside (unbalanced) force.' The pandemic has certainly been an 'outside, unbalanced force' and that force has moved education a considerable distance, in a very short period of time.

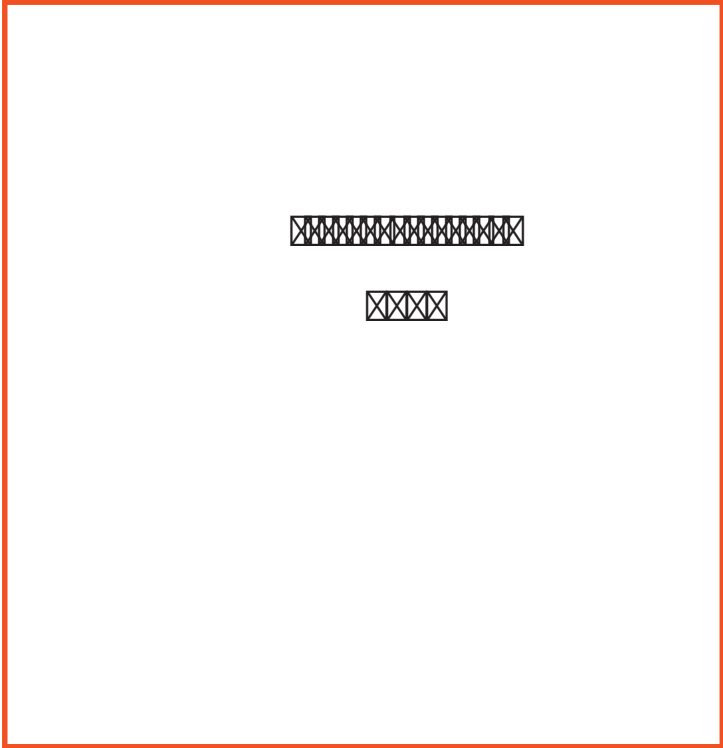
Few could have predicted the changes that would occur as a result of COVID-19, as they were without warning. And while COVID-19 may have affirmed the laws of physics, it has certainly challenged the long-standing ideology of educational "change theory" to which schools have so diligently studied and subscribed. The ability to promote, discuss, over communicate and prepare for change, as schools so often attempt to do, was not an option with COVID-19. Student, teacher and administrator anxiety increased to levels that exceeded those experienced in normal curricular or programmatic changes and the use normal political, social, media, or other formerly used channels of change resistance, was negated by the rate of change. Without warning, the "curtain was rising."

Most of us who have been educators remember the very first time our principal came to observe us as a new teacher. We remember the "small t" tension associated with opening your classroom to the principal and/or the assistant principal. Such visits were once or twice a year, (and perhaps not even that in some places) it was as if "the curtain" was rising and the audience was expanding. Then, within a short period of time "the curtain" was lowered and the classroom was again sheltered and isolated from the outside world. This is the isolation of which Kim Marshall writes in his book "Rethinking Teacher Supervision and Evaluation" (Marshall, 2013).

Fast forward to March 2020 when the curtain rose again.... but this time, to an audience far larger than the assistant principal or principal. The audience that teachers faced was no longer just students or building administrators. In an instant, the audience multiplied to 60 or more parents or caregivers every day for elementary teachers, and to potentially hundreds of parents/caregivers at the middle and high level where school typical school schedules might have teachers seeing six to seven classes a day. Suddenly, the profession of "teaching" which was formerly a rather private daily experience, became a very public profession. The silos within which teachers formerly worked were shattered by a single strain of a deadly virus.

## But teaching continued...

Undoubtedly, the response to this public display of our profession has been varied, but this article is dedicated to highlighting the amazing group of educators who have turned



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their cameras on, who opened up their classrooms and who have continued the amazing work that they had silently done for years. As the curtain rose, this passionate and purposeful group of teachers stepped onto a public stage that allowed the world to see and experience the imperative of public education.

Prior to the pandemic, most parents heard recounts of the classroom experience from their children and other than those who had the ability to be a classroom volunteer at times, most parents used their own personal school experiences as a comparative to the narrative provided by their children. Missing from that

exchange, and challenging to capture in words, was the complexity associated with teaching 25-30 students of varied ability, in a single classroom, every day. When the curtain rose, the parents more clearly saw the intricacies of teaching, the preparation, compassion and deep understanding of content that comes with years of developing a craft. More importantly, parents and caregivers got a glimpse of the reason that public schools have long been the creators of a global workforce that consistently produces our finest physicians, electricians, engineers, radio-logy technicians, computer scientists, researchers, automotive technicians and so much more.

While teachers across the nation quickly pivoted to the new reality of zoom recordings and virtual/live classrooms they also revisited that same nervous feeling of being observed the very first time. Meanwhile, many administrators like me took to encouraging teachers, providing resources and stood with pride and anticipation, just as we would at the grand opening of the latest show at the Fulton Theatre. We knew our teachers, we knew what happened in classrooms and we knew it would be spectacular. And it was!

### **Forward-thinking teachers, forward-thinking administrators, forward-thinking schools...**

Even as paper and pens became obsolete in the blink of an eye, teachers were not deterred. Supported by administrators who stepped in beside them, teachers took out their gaming pens and they Moodled, "Schoology-d", "Canvas-ed", Kahooted; and instead of "flipping their lid," they turned to Flipgrid, Seesaw and a host of other resources to ensure a continuity of learning was in place for students. This was the mindset of the forward-thinking educators who are the backbone of public education and who daily create the

**“ This was the mindset of the forward-thinking educators who are the backbone of public education and who daily create the possibility for the development of forward-thinking schools.”**

possibility for the development of forward-thinking schools.

### **Disruption and Rebirth...**

While vaccinations, the potential for new treatments and decreasing incident rates are encouraging and create conversations about a return to 'normal', the challenges of the pandemic have created a positive disruption and rebirth in schools. Every school is "in motion" and has the opportunity to actively engage in shaping the 'new normal' of our profession. Despite the varied locations, economics, sizes, demographics, socio-economic statuses, facilities, resources and challenges of our school communities, we all have a lived common experience. How

schools choose to use that experience and outcome from the experience will determine the trajectory of public education.

Disruption is often distasteful, traumatic and easily viewed through a lens of loss. However, schools that can leverage the disruption of the pandemic as an opportunity for encouraged curiosity and as a venue for new learning will be poised to lead in the rebirth and reawakening that is occurring in public education. Make no mistake about it, the pandemic has been traumatic, and it has accentuated the disparity that exists in communities, but it also opened the window to the possibilities of schools without walls, of classrooms without desks and of learning without seat time.

School partnerships will no longer be defined by how they can 'fit' into traditional schedules, but rather school schedules will take on a fluidity that blurs the lines between industry and education to a point at which there is little distinction between where one starts and the other ends. The pandemic was indeed a challenge, but the real challenge rests largely in remaining "in motion" and in reimagining schools that will continue to demonstrate the imperative, purpose and unparalleled impact of public education. So, let the curtain rise and remain drawn. The work of public education is center stage and there is much good work to be seen and yet to be accomplished.

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### **Reference**

Marshall, K. (April 22, 2013). Rethinking Teacher Supervision and Evaluation. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass.