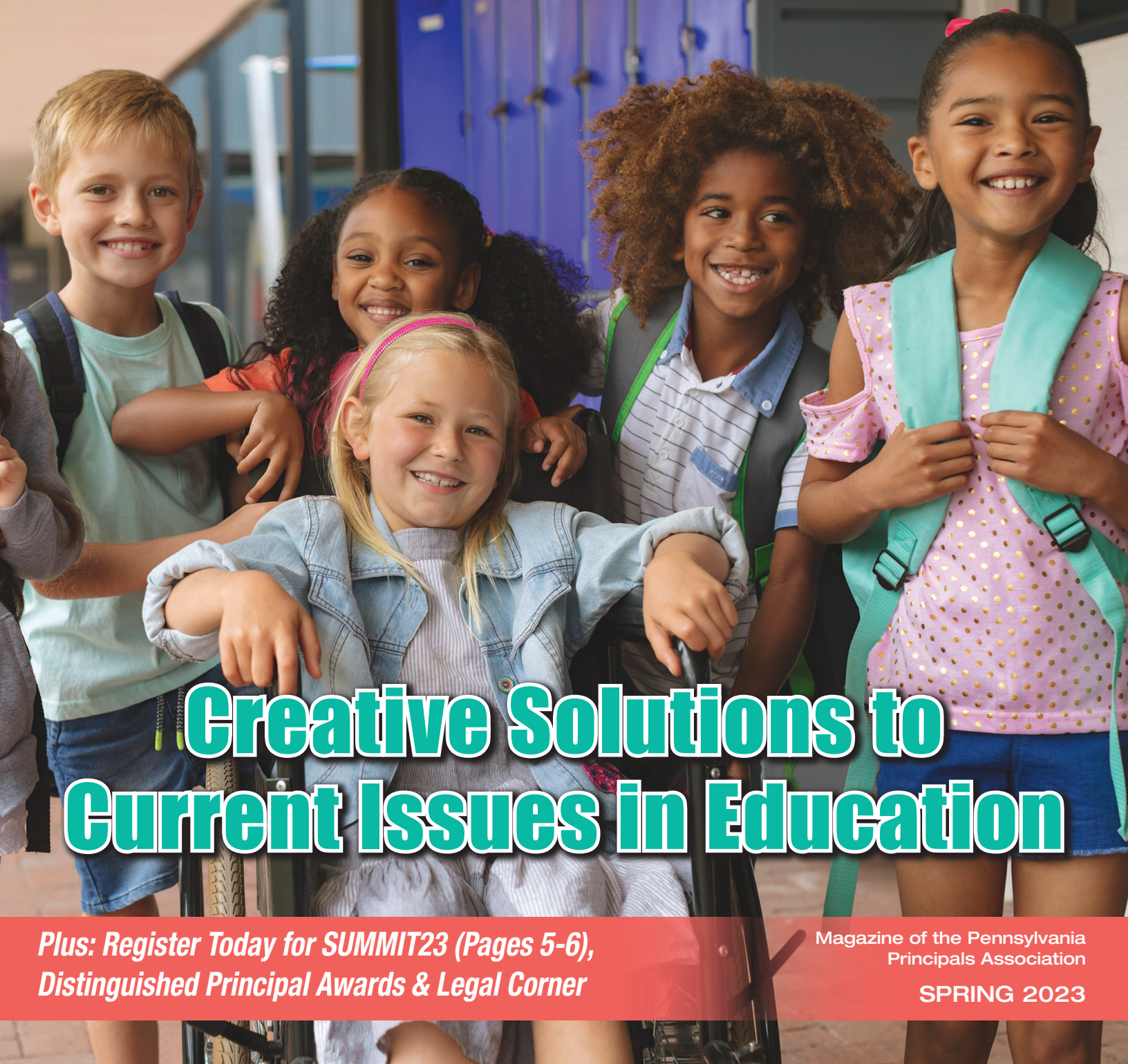


The Pennsylvania **ADMINISTRATOR**

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP



Creative Solutions to Current Issues in Education

*Plus: Register Today for SUMMIT23 (Pages 5-6),
Distinguished Principal Awards & Legal Corner*

Magazine of the Pennsylvania
Principals Association

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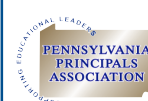
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Editor's Note ...

Another school year is in the books, so it may be time to do something for **you** – take that overdue vacation, visit with extended family, spend time with friends, attend a concert, catch up on your reading and/or enhance your leadership skills. The PA Principals Association is offering several opportunities to help you learn and grow over the summer. These include the **NEW** offering for first- and second-year principals, **Launching Leadership, July 27-28, 2023, in State College.**



(See page 13); and **Summit23, August 6-8, 2023, at the Alloy Doubletree Hotel and Upper Merion Area High School in King of Prussia.** Bring your administrative team and SAVE! Pre-Summit PIL sessions are being held on August 5 and August 6, 2023. (See pages 5-6)

This issue focuses on the theme, **“Creative Solutions to Current Issues in Education.”** Articles are based on this question, “What are your districts/schools doing, post-COVID, for the following?: Solutions to Staff Shortages, Solutions to Staff Retention and Recruitment, Solutions to Remediation Gaps (Instructional or Achievement-Based Interventions or MTSS) or Solutions to Accountability/Expectations for Learner/Emotional Behavioral Supports.”

Also, be sure to check out the regular features such as *Executive Director’s Notepad*, *Legal Corner*, *READERS FOR LEADERS* and *One Member’s Voice*.

Enjoy this issue!

Sheri L. Thompson, Editor

DATES TO REMEMBER

July 2023

10-12 **2023 NAESP Pre-K-8 Principals Conference**
Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center
National Harbor, Maryland

12-15 **IGNITE23 - NASSP School Leader Conference**
Gaylord Rockies Resort & Convention Center
Denver, Colorado

August 2023

6-8 **SUMMIT23 - For PA Educational Leaders**
Alloy King of Prussia & Upper Merion Area High School
King of Prussia, Pennsylvania

Attention Retired or Newly Retired PA Principals Members!

If you have recently retired or will be retiring soon, you are eligible to receive **one year of free membership** in the PA Principals Association before paying for a retired membership (visit <https://www.paprincipals.org/member-services/join-renew-pa-principals-association-membership/>).

Please contact the Director of Membership and Finance at quagliani@paprincipals.org or (717) 732-4999, ext. 116, to receive your free year or for more information. Also, if we do not have your updated contact information, we will not be able to reach you, please log in to www.paprincipals.org to update your membership profile at your earliest convenience.

SPECIAL FEATURES

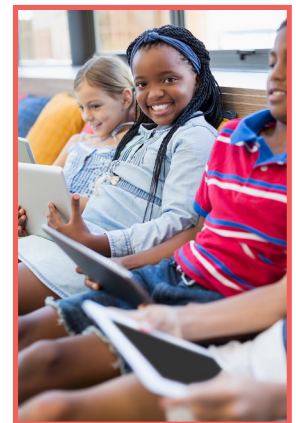
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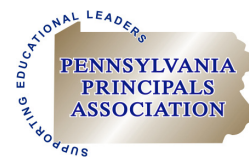
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Executive Director's Notepad . . .

Did I Cheat?



**By Dr. Eric C. Eshbach,
PA Principals
Association
Executive
Director**

I cheated.

There, I admitted it. No, I did not cheat my way through high school or college. Yes, I wrote my entire doctoral dissertation on my MacBook Pro, using data that I ran through SPSS (a statistical software platform). No, I have never tried to lie on my tax returns.

In all honesty, when faced with the deadline for this article and after recently listening to a conference speaker on artificial intelligence, I asked ChatGPT to draft an article for me. In fact, my input direction to ChatGPT was, "Write a five-paragraph article on the pros and cons of using artificial intelligence in K-12 public education." It took less than 30 seconds to generate the article below. The results may not impress you as much as they did me, but they lead to an amazing realization and conversation about the capabilities of technology and the impact it is having on our world.

Let's look at how ChatGPT helped me write my article and my interaction with this artificial intelligence. (The ChatGPT-generated article is in regular type. My comments are in italics.)



The Pros and Cons of Using Artificial Intelligence in K-12 Public Education

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has gained significant attention in recent years for its potential to transform various industries, including education. In K-12 public education, AI holds both promises and challenges. This article explores the pros and cons of using artificial intelligence in K-12 public education, highlighting the potential benefits as well as the concerns associated with its implementation. *Okay, I was not an English major, but I have always been told that I write well. I thought this was a great opening paragraph based on my input direction. It makes me sound like an educated professional. Good start, ChatGPT!*

1. Pros:

AI-powered Personalized Learning: One of the major advantages of AI in education is its ability to personalize learning experiences for students. AI algorithms can analyze vast amounts of data to understand individual student's strengths, weaknesses, and learning styles. This enables the creation of tailored learning paths, adaptive assessments, and customized feedback, helping students to learn at their own pace and achieve better educational outcomes. *An excellent way to begin is to explain exactly what AI is and how it can benefit students. While I would have changed some wording (such as adding the word "an" before "individual student's strengths..."), the paragraph is written well. The content also provides key understandings that we, as educators, have for what would be considered a strong function of any instructional program. That is, the fact that it can be tailored to the specific needs of the student.*

Intelligent Tutoring Systems: AI can act as an intelligent tutor, providing students with instant feedback and guidance. These systems can identify areas where students are struggling and offer targeted interventions to address their specific needs. Intelligent tutoring systems can enhance

Continued on next page

student engagement, provide immediate support, and free up teachers' time, allowing them to focus on higher-order instruction. *Intelligent tutoring is not a term I was familiar with before ChatGPT spat it out. It makes perfect sense, however, that AI performs the tasks of monitoring and adjusting in a nearly immediate time frame.*

Enhanced Administrative Efficiency: AI can automate administrative tasks, such as grading papers and managing records, reducing the burden on teachers and administrators. This efficiency gain allows educators to dedicate more time to instructional planning, student support, and other crucial aspects of teaching. *The fact that I used ChatGPT to write this article is evidence that this paragraph is accurate! While I have spent additional time digesting what it wrote for me, it has definitely freed up time I would have dedicated to mapping out my article, researching, writing, editing and producing a final draft.*

2. Cons:

Lack of Human Interaction: One of the primary concerns regarding the use of AI in K-12 education is the potential reduction in human interaction. Education is not solely about imparting knowledge but also about building social skills, empathy, and collaboration. Overreliance on AI systems may deprive students of valuable interpersonal interactions with peers and teachers, which are essential for their holistic development. *This is the argument we frequently hear about artificial intelligence. I cannot emphasize enough the importance relationships and human interaction have on our youth. We have all witnessed the downside to smartphones, gaming systems and even the one-to-one laptop programs we have promoted in our schools. Online education may work for some but not for all (as many of us observed during the pandemic), and for those who find it effective, there is still the need to build relationships and an understanding of other humans.*

Ethical and Privacy Concerns: AI systems require access to extensive amounts of student data to function effectively. This raises concerns about privacy, data security, and the ethical use of student information. Safeguards must be in place to protect sensitive data, ensure transparency in AI algorithms, and prevent potential biases that could impact student outcomes. *I am now concerned about the information I had to enter into ChatGPT to produce this article. Although I was not required to provide a credit card number or any personal data, is that information accessible on other platforms that use the same email address as the one I had to enter?*

Technological Barriers: Implementing AI in K-12 public education requires substantial technological infrastructure and resources. Not all schools have the necessary equip-

ment, connectivity, or expertise to integrate AI effectively into their classrooms. The digital divide could widen if AI implementation is not approached with equity in mind, leaving disadvantaged students further behind. *While I agree there is limited infrastructure, especially in our rural and poor urban areas, I somewhat disagree with this paragraph. ChatGPT is easily accessible on cell phones. When I last observed a group of students (even at the elementary level), there did not seem to be a shortage of cell phones.*

In conclusion, artificial intelligence has the potential to revolutionize K-12 public education by personalizing learning experiences, providing intelligent tutoring, and streamlining administrative tasks. However, concerns regarding reduced human interaction, ethical considerations and technological barriers must be addressed. The key lies in finding the right balance between AI and human instruction, ensuring student privacy and equitable access to AI technologies. With careful planning, AI can complement traditional teaching methods and support educators in fostering a rich, engaging, and effective learning environment for all students. *I fully concur with this paragraph. The question lies in how we, as educators, find that "right balance." Dr. Snell and I often talk about worthwhile student work and lament over our own children completing word search puzzles for homework or 50 math problems requiring basic multiplication. In an AI world, that type of student work becomes even more ineffective (not that it was ever effective). In an AI world, our teachers need to design work for students that requires creativity, collaboration, communication and critical thinking. We need to assign tasks that require human interaction. We need to expect our students to have in-depth conversations and interactions leading to problem solving that are not the result of rote memorization.*

I encourage you to explore the world of AI by carefully setting up an account. It could make your life easier. In addition to this article, I have used it to help me compose reference letters, craft interview questions and even design a diet to follow that will allow me to lose 20 pounds. *Now, if it can keep me on that diet and ensure that I actually lose weight, I will truly sing its praises!*

Author's Note: Hours after I completed this article, the U.S. Department of Education released a report on *Artificial Intelligence in Education*. The report offers insights and recommendations for educators. It can be found at <https://tech.ed.gov/files/2023/05/ai-future-of-teaching-and-learning-report.pdf>



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FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

August 6-8, 2023 - the Alloy King of Prussia
& Upper Merion Area High School

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Attention All PA School Leaders and Administrative Teams!



Dr. Nicholas
Indeglio

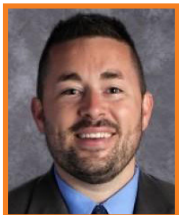
The PA Principals Association and the PA Association of School Administrators (PASA) will host a premier professional development opportunity, **SUMMIT23, for PA education leaders, from August 6-8, 2023. Summit23 will be held in fabulous King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, at the new Upper Merion Area High School facility and the Alloy Doubletree by Hilton.**

Do you want to prepare for the 2023-2024 school year and earn much-needed PIL hours at the same time this summer? Well, sit back, relax and enjoy some of the most amazing professional development available today!

On behalf of our entire conference committee, we formally invite you and your administrative team to attend our **SUMMIT23 Conference**. Information about our keynote speakers is provided below, and you and your team will also benefit from numerous breakout sessions, knowledge about the brand-new, state-of-the-art facility in Upper Merion and multiple opportunities to connect with colleagues and vendors. **We look forward to seeing you this summer in King of Prussia!**

The Summit will provide you the opportunity to:

1. Earn PIL hours (Up to 110 hours available - pre-conference and during the conference).
2. Experience a brand-new, state-of-the-art high school campus and facility.
3. Hear from renowned keynote speakers.
4. Participate in the best "trivia game show" in the education field.
5. Enjoy the award-winning King of Prussia area with some of the best shopping and dining in the country.
6. Network and socialize with your peers.



Dr. Benjamin
Feeney

Yours in Education: Dr. Nicholas Indeglio & Dr. Benjamin Feeney, Co-Chairs, SUMMIT23 Conference Committee

FEATURING KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:

Hamish Brewer

Monday, August 7th Session



Hamish Brewer is a powerful and positive disruptor who transcends the status quo and typical norms in leadership and education. He is a globally recognized advocate who built his reputation on results and performance, becoming affectionately known as **the Relentless, Tattooed Skateboarding Principal** with his galvanizing message to "**Be Relentless.**" Mr. Brewer served as an award-winning principal at both the secondary and elementary school levels. Recognized as the NAESP National Distinguished Principal and Virginia Principal of the Year, he was also honored with the VAESP School Bell Award and ASCD Virginia Impact Award. He was named a Northern Virginian of the year by **Northern Virginia Magazine** and Principal of the Year for the online national publication, **Education Dive**.

Under his leadership, Mr. Brewer's elementary school was recognized as a Nationally Distinguished Title 1 School, and he has since gone on to turn around one of the toughest middle schools in the state of Virginia. He is the best-selling author of "**Relentless - Disrupting the Educational Norm,**" published in 2019.

Under his leadership, Mr. Brewer's elementary school was recognized as a Nationally Distinguished Title 1 School, and he has since gone on to turn around one of the toughest middle schools in the state of Virginia. He is the best-selling author of "**Relentless - Disrupting the Educational Norm,**" published in 2019.

Dr. Quintin Shepherd

Tuesday, August 8th Session



Dr. Quintin Shepherd, a true visionary for the future of education, is the Superintendent at Victoria Independent School District in Victoria, Texas. When Dr. Shepherd came to Victoria, his first priority was to listen to the voice of the community, parents, staff and students, and he then invited those stakeholders to be a part of shaping the future of the district. He focuses on the practice of compassionate leadership and expressing vulnerability, and he believes that's why

radical transparency works.

Dr. Shepherd brings inspiration, hope and valuable insights about how we can transform the way we lead school districts by modifying our approach to some of the most basic leadership practices, which he shares in his new book: **The Secret to Transformational Leadership**. Within the book, he considers how some leaders are able to connect with their communities, followers and stakeholders while others struggle. This guiding question sets the stage for a discussion on the language of leadership and the need for our language to evolve.

Jennifer Rieger, Upper Merion Area High School teacher and author of *Burning Sage* (a collection of short stories), will speak on Sunday, August 6th, at the Awards Dinner.

Continued on next page

PRE-SUMMIT PIL WORKSHOPS: EARN ACT 45 HOURS!

Two Pre-Summit PIL workshops (30 PIL hours each): “*The Team: Building Leadership Success that Improves Student Learning*” and “*Research-Based Instruction, Supervision and Evaluation Strategies to Improve Student Learning*” will be held on **Saturday, August 5, 2023**. You may register for **one** of these **concurrent sessions** for an **additional fee**.

A Pre-Summit PIL workshop, “*Transforming Student and Teacher Learning through the EdCamp Model*,” will be held on **Sunday, August 6, 2023**, also at an **additional cost** to earn **40 PIL hours**.

Earn 40 Act 45 PIL Hours for attending SUMMIT23 and completing the assignments – with a Saturday Pre-Summit Session and Sunday’s EdCamp, you can earn 110 hours!

Why You Should Attend SUMMIT23

- Invest in your professional growth.
- Register as a **TEAM** and **SAVE!**
- Play a part in reshaping and reimagining what school leaders can do to lead reform efforts.
- Earn up to 110 Act 45 PIL Hours!
- Refocus on your role as a school administrator, instructional leader, change agent and advocate for students.
- Learn from nationally recognized, inspirational keynote speakers.
- Participate in face-to-face professional development, networking opportunities & fun!
- Integrate “hot topic” sessions and new practices into your daily workflow.
- Expand your opportunities by interacting with vendors.

Donate AND Receive an EXTRA Ticket for the Diamond Sponsors’ Social Prize Drawing!

A monetary donation will be accepted at the door of the Diamond Sponsors’ Social in support of the UPPER MERION COMMUNITY CUPBOARD. No food items accepted onsite. You will receive one extra prize drawing ticket with your donation or receipt of online donation.

Please visit the following link – <http://umacc.org/> – to learn more about the *Upper Merion Community Cupboard*.

Visit <https://umacc.networkforgood.com/> to make an online donation.

HOTEL RESERVATIONS

the Alloy King of Prussia - a Doubletree Hotel

Hotel Information: Please call the Alloy King of Prussia - a DoubleTree by Hilton - for assistance with reservations by dialing **1-800-445-8667** or to make a reservation online, visit this link: <https://tinyurl.com/pn5cfzsx>
The three-digit group code is **PEN**.

Hotel Cancellation Policy: 48 hours prior to arrival to avoid penalty charges of one night’s room and tax. Must have a valid cancellation number to avoid penalty.

Important: Specify you are with the *Educational Leadership Association* group when making your reservation. The **group rate of \$169, plus tax per night** is only being held until **Wednesday, July 13, 2023** (based on availability).

Outstanding Assistant Principal

Anna L. Gawel Named Pennsylvania's 2023 Outstanding Assistant Principal



Anna L. Gawel, Assistant Principal at Hershey Elementary School (4th and 5th grades) in the Derry Township School District, has been named **Pennsylvania's Outstanding Assistant Principal by the Pennsylvania Principals Association**. As a state winner in the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) National Outstanding Assistant Principal Program, Mrs. Gawel is eligible for consideration to be named the NAESP National Outstanding Assistant Principal.

Mrs. Gawel has served as assistant principal at Hershey Elementary School since 2014. She has been an educator for 20 years, beginning her career as a first-grade teacher (2003-2013) and then as an instructional coach (2013-2014) also in the Derry Township School District.

Kristin Musselman, Chairperson of the PA Principals Association's Outstanding Assistant Principal Award Selection Committee, said, "It has been an honor to work with Anna Gawel.

She is an administrator who leads with heart. She brings a positive attitude and positive mindset to the teachers and staff members that she works with on a daily basis. Among her colleagues, Anna is described as being a person of high integrity and as an assistant principal who leads with passion. Through our interactions and based on her recent accomplishments, it is clear that Mrs. Gawel is invested in her students, teachers and the school community. It is for these reasons that the PA Principals Association is proud to recommend her for this award."

During her tenure as an assistant principal at Hershey Elementary School, Mrs. Gawel organized and created an online professional development course for differentiated supervision. The course began as a pilot and is focused on district goals and is personalized for the staff members taking the course. It has grown over the past five years to encompass over 50 teachers and staff members at the elementary, middle and high school levels.

The district has provided intensive staff development at the elementary level around the Professional Learning Community (PLC) process for their staff members and administrative team. Mrs. Gawel, along with the elementary administrative team, revised their schedule to allow this collaboration during the school day, which resulted in improved expertise in examining data and utilizing best practices. "Our district has focused on becoming a PLC because we know the value of collaboration in teaching and learning," explained Mrs. Gawel. In addition, Mrs. Gawel was instrumental in the implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports/Response to Instruction and Intervention (MTSS/RtII) through a WIN (What I Need) model and developed highly functioning teams that are meeting the needs of all learners. She said, "This process has truly embodied the idea of 'team' and why it is so important in education."

Mrs. Gawel shared, "My hope for when people look back at my time in this role is that they will view my most significant contributions to my school as having been my relationships with the students, families and staff in Derry Township School District. I want the school to be a community that fosters belonging, strong community ties, values learning/growth and feels safe and welcoming. At the end of the day, if the people around me can say they felt valued, supported, heard and connected to our school community, I have done my job."

"Our selection committee has once again chosen a distinguished, talented educator to represent assistant principals in Pennsylvania at the elementary/middle level. Anna Gawel exemplifies the qualities we seek for this award while serving the 480 students and 60 staff at Hershey Elementary School: dedication, leadership, professionalism and a passion for learning for students, staff, the school and the community. I am pleased that Anna will represent the Pennsylvania Principals Association as our 2023 Outstanding Assistant Principal," said Dr. Eric C. Eshbach, Executive Director, PA Principals Association.

Mrs. Gawel resides in Palmyra with her husband and two daughters. "It is the faces of my wonderful daughters that I think about when making decisions and working with students at school. What would I want done for my children? Then that is what we do for all children."

"Mrs. Gawel is an exceptional leader. Her devotion to her students and staff is evident in her personal knowledge of their circumstances, needs and strengths. She has led a phenomenal professional learning experience for teaching staff in the last several years and in doing so has fostered growth in district priority areas that can be seen throughout the elementary staff."

**- Stacy L. Winslow, Ed.D.
Superintendent
Derry Township School District**

Principal of the Year

Dr. Timothy M. Wagner Named Pennsylvania's 2023 Principal of the Year



Dr. Timothy M. Wagner, Principal of Upper St. Clair High School in the Upper St. Clair School District, has been named **Pennsylvania's 2023 Principal of the Year by the Pennsylvania Principals Association**. He will be honored by the PA Principals Association at an Awards Dinner on August 6, 2023, during Summit23 in King of Prussia. As a state winner in the National Association of Secondary School Principals' (NASSP) Principal of the Year Program, Dr. Wagner is a candidate for the National Secondary Principal of the Year.

According to Dr. Eric Eshbach, Executive Director, PA Principals Association, "I am delighted with the selection of Dr. Timothy Wagner, an exceptional leader and principal, as Pennsylvania's 2023 Principal of the Year. He was chosen for this honor by a committee of his peers for his leadership and outstanding contributions to his school, his students and his community. This is clearly demonstrated with the time he has spent evaluating and shaping Upper St. Clair High School's culture. In addition, he recognizes the importance of the emotional and physical well-being of his students and staff members

and has worked tirelessly to ensure that all stakeholders feel valued, supported and safe. We are proud to have him represent the PA Principals Association and secondary principals across the commonwealth."

An educator for 16 years, Dr. Wagner has spent his entire professional career in the Upper St. Clair School District. He joined the Upper St. Clair High School administration in 2015 as the associate principal for program planning and innovation and served as the principal at Upper St. Clair High School since 2019. In 2007, he began his teaching career at Streams Elementary School. In addition, he taught middle-level English and social studies, served as a gifted education coordinator for students in grades 7-12 and as the middle school English language arts curriculum leader.

In 2007, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development launched its *whole child* initiative. This initiative centered schools not only on academic achievement, but also on the work of ensuring students are safe, healthy, engaged, supported and challenged. Dr. Wagner shared, "Now, more than ever, school personnel are challenged to commit to the critical standard of educating the *whole child*, both for the benefit of the children themselves as well as for the communities where they live and learn. Our school community believes that students learn best when they feel physically healthy and safe and emotionally connected and supported. Placing these goals at the forefront of what our staff learns, our students experience and our community talks about has been a priority in my career."

During his tenure, Dr. Wagner has forged successful partnerships between Upper St. Clair High School's Wellness Committee and various agencies and stakeholders, including the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center's Services for Teens at Risk (STAR) Center and the Allegheny County Department of Health and Human Services. In collaboration with Allegheny County's Department of Health and Human Services, a chapter of *Stand Together*, a school-based, peer-to-peer, behavioral health, anti-stigma club, was established at Upper St. Clair High School. In addition, Upper St. Clair High School was designated a *No Place for Hate School* based on ongoing anti-bias programming.

In 2017, Dr. Wagner was honored with the *Outstanding Young Alumnus Award* from Washington & Jefferson College and the University of Pittsburgh School of Education's *Early Career Award*. In 2014, he received the *Outstanding Young Educator Award* from the Pennsylvania Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (PASCD). In 2016, PASCD named him an *Emerging Leader*. This program recognizes and prepares young, promising educators to influence education programs, policy and practice at the state level.

Dr. Wagner received his undergraduate degree from Washington & Jefferson College. He earned his graduate and doctoral degrees from the University of Pittsburgh.

"To receive this honor makes me think about all of the amazing things that our staff and students do every day. It is a privilege to support the pursuits of members of our school community. As principal of Upper St. Clair High School, I realize that I am part of something much larger than myself. Since I was a young child, Upper St. Clair has represented so much to me – care, community and excellence. It is these traditions that allow us to succeed together," said Dr. Wagner.

In addition to his work as an educator, Dr. Wagner enjoys exploring the world, reading classic and modern fiction and translating his experience on the tennis court to the pickleball court. He is grateful for his supportive family and friends, who have encouraged him in his work in education.

"Being named Pennsylvania's Principal of the Year is an incredible and well-deserved honor for Dr. Wagner. He has taught at every level within our school district and has a depth of knowledge that is difficult to match. As principal, he has demonstrated tremendous leadership and continues to make a positive impact within and beyond Upper St. Clair High School."

- Dr. John Rozzo
Superintendent of Schools
Upper St. Clair School District

Using the Summer...



By Dr. Michael S. Snell,
PA Principals Association
Assistant Executive Director

Below is an article that appeared in the spring edition of the new **Region Update** e-newsletter about *using your summer*. I share it again because it is an important message, and sometimes we don't open an email. In addition to the article below, we are providing you with access to a **graphic organizer** to assist in the process. (See *Figure 1 below*.) To download the documents (*Year in Review for this past year and a year from now*), please scan this QR code:



Here are some action steps to prepare for your summer review:

- Determine where and when.
- Gather necessary materials (laptop, calendar, goals, etc.).
- Have a conversation with your administrative assistant, team and family prior to and after your review.
- Share with them the purpose of your review and ask for feedback. There is nothing wrong with modeling self-improvement in the office and at home.

My wish for you is a relaxing summer! Please feel free to share with me your process and feedback: msnell@paprincipals.org

Figure 1 - Driving Theme: For the Past Year

Driving Theme: This past year ...		
Reflect:	Profession	Personal
Goals:		
Relationships:		
Calendar:		
Projects /Tasks:		
Leadership Lunches with Me:		
Other:		
Other:		

Using the Summer... (Region Update, Spring 2023)

Summertime is a wonderful time of the year! As much as I looked forward to students returning each fall, I loved letting them go and settling into a good summer. A relaxed schedule, relaxed dress and having time to actually breathe are all important. For me, there was always golf and family vacations and reunions, to name a few.

I want to suggest you also find time to do two things over the summer – **Reflect & Project** on both your professional and personal status.

Reflect – Take a look at your past year and ask yourself some of the following questions:

- *Where was my life in balance and in sync with colleagues and family?*
- *Where did the merry-go-round spin out of control on all fronts?*
- *What accomplishments should I be proud of?*
- *What challenges still exist?*
- *When was I at my best ...and worst?*

Project – What will the coming year look like and how do you want to be different one year from now? Ask yourself some of the following questions:

- *How can I grow my professional career? What do I need to learn?*

Continued from previous page

- How can I become a better wife, husband, mother, father, sister, colleague, friend?
- As a leader, in both my professional and personal life, who do I need to attend to in the coming year? (My children, an aging parent, the third-grade team, or the English department?)
- Who do I want to be one year from now?

Even though I reflected on these questions most summers, I truly focused on them while vacationing at the beach. It is a peaceful and reflective location for me. Where is your spot? And this isn't really working while on vacation; rather, you are working on bettering yourself and improving your status and influence in the world.

I challenge you to do the same each summer and make it a habit at least once a year.

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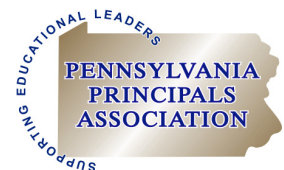
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RSS ROUNDUP

RSS ROUNDUP is written by your Regional Service Specialists (RSS): Dr. Dina Wert, East Region; Susan Martin, Central Region; and Cynthia Zajac, West Region

Student Engagement – A Creative Solution to Improve Learning

By Cynthia Zajac



About the Author:
Cynthia (Cindy) Zajac serves the Pennsylvania Principals Association as the Regional Service Specialist (RSS) for the West Region. She retired as Principal of Rolling Ridge Elementary School in the Harbor Creek School District (near Erie) after working 33 years in the district.

Cindy was a classroom teacher, instructional coach and a math specialist. She has delivered professional development in a variety of settings and is a PIL facilitator for the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

Cindy is a proud member of the PA Principals Association and enjoys collaborating with and supporting PA principals.

Student engagement is a critical component of successful learning as it promotes motivation, participation and retention of knowledge. Think back to a true learning experience in your life-time: What happened that made it so impactful? Learning to drive may come to mind as a true learning experience. What was involved in this learning process? Was it something you were interested in accomplishing? Were you an active participant? Did you have a model? Were you given opportunities to reflect on new and related situations? Were there opportunities to collaborate? All of these questions should have been answered with a resounding “yes”! If related questions are used in the planning of classroom or professional development activities, with the use of engagement strategies, educators can be more confident that deeper learning is occurring in every experience.

So, how do we know if students are really engaged in the learning experience?



When students are actively engaged, motivation and participation increase which most likely results in a more positive and empowering learning experience. Engagement promotes a sense of ownership over learning and fosters a positive attitude towards education. On the other hand, when students are disengaged, they may feel bored, uninterested, or disconnected from the learning process, which leads to poor learning outcomes. *“Student engagement can be seen as the glue that holds together all aspects of student learning and growth. Not only does student engagement make teaching itself more fun, engaging, and rewarding, but it has been shown to have critical impacts on students”* (Sutton 2021).

Disengagement is not always easy to recognize. Sometimes participation is misunderstood to be engagement. When a child is on the right page at the right time, they appear to be paying attention, yet they can still be disengaged from the experience and potentially may not be learning anything. Following along in the book and raising a hand waiting for the teacher to choose someone to answer is a minimal level of engagement and could lead to minimal or no learning. Recognizing that there is a difference between participation and active engagement will help ensure deeper levels of learning.

Active engagement, sometimes referred to as active learning, involves discussions, written responses, hands-on approaches and helpful feedback from teachers and/or peers. Instructional leaders can promote student engagement in their organization by encouraging teachers to incorporate activities that keep students actively involved in the topic through multiple levels of engagement. Building leaders and principals can and *should* model engaging activities at faculty meetings and onsite professional development. By utilizing actively engaging approaches that capture the interest of your faculty members, you not only spark feelings of connectivity but also model expectations for the same practices in their classrooms.

There are different ways of categorizing levels of engagement for learning, but one common framework is the three levels of engagement proposed by Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004):

- 1. Behavioral engagement:** This level of engagement refers to the student’s participation in the learning process, such as attending classes, completing assignments and following rules and procedures.

Continued on next page

2. **Emotional engagement:** This level of engagement refers to the student's affective connection to the learning experience, such as their interest, enjoyment and motivation to learn. Emotional engagement is influenced by factors such as the teacher's enthusiasm, the relevance of the content and the degree of challenge provided by the tasks.
3. **Cognitive engagement:** This level of engagement refers to the student's mental investment in the learning process, such as their use of higher-order thinking skills, critical analysis and problem-solving strategies. Cognitive engagement is influenced by factors such as the complexity of the tasks, the level of autonomy provided to the students and the quality of feedback given by the teacher. Asking, and allowing students to ask, engaging questions can keep the lesson more active and engaging.

It is important to note that these three levels are inter-related and if viewed as successful on an isolated level, then minimal learning can occur. For example, a student who is behaviorally engaged but not emotionally engaged may still be on the right page in their book and may complete assignments, but the learning outcomes could be limited due to a lack of motivation or interest. Effective teaching practices should aim to foster all three levels of engagement in order to promote successful learning outcomes.

There are a number of engagement frameworks available to guide a classroom or school wide initiative on deeper learning (Fisher, Frey & Hatte, 2020). As principals, it is crucial to align with a framework of engagement (or create your own) to use as a guideline to deeper learning in the classroom environment. When the framework is embedded into daily practice with common language, modeling and expectations, teachers will be able to better monitor engagement and promote empowerment that pushes learning experiences to the next level. Additionally, students should be well versed on what engagement looks like and what actions lead to deeper learning. Providing students with the ability to self-monitor their engagement level should be a regular part of every learning activity. Learners should recognize that formulating questions, sharing explanations, making hypotheses and utilizing outside re-

sources can be easily monitored and will contribute to the emotional, behavioral, and cognitive investment necessary for true learning. On the other hand, when students recognize out of seat behavior, classroom distractions or frequent visits to the hallway as noticeable disengagement activities, they can develop strategies to change or connect their behavior to learning. Not only should we expect to see active engagement in the classroom, but it is equally important for principals to model the same techniques for teachers during faculty meetings and professional development, ensuring a thorough understanding of engagement in a collaborative and challenging manner.

If we believe (and we know) that student engagement is a critical component of successful learning, then we must motivate learners to be actively involved in learning. And, if we believe that learning increases as engagement increases, then it is our responsibility to provide an atmosphere that allows for empowerment, questions, discussions and self-monitoring of personal engagement. One creative solution is to use a common framework in your school across all grade levels and classes. Desktop visuals and classroom posters can be easily created to help promote teacher and student agency for monitoring engagement and assist them to make efforts to be more engaged as a class or individual student. Simple visual reminders can easily make learning more engaging and motivating and therefore create more investment in the content. When everyone is "talking the same talk," students (and your teachers) will be more invested in the program.

The next time you visit a classroom or hold a faculty meeting, observe if the learners are *really* engaged, and use the opportunity to help promote a school that embraces and empowers deeper learning experiences.

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Susan Martin – Central Region (I, II, III) – martin@papincipals.org
Cynthia Zajac – West Region (I, II, III) – zajac@papincipals.org

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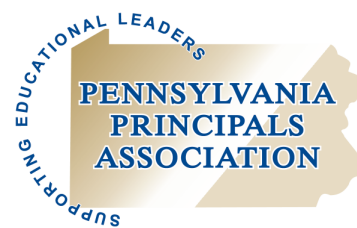
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Our Journey to a Path of Structured Literacy

By Dr. Greg Taranto, Dr. Mark A. Abbondanza, Shannon Balch and Makenzie Buhman



About the Authors:

Greg Taranto, Ph.D., serves as the Assistant to the Superintendent for K-6 Curriculum and Instruction at Canon-McMillan School District. Prior to this position, he served as Canon-McMillan's middle school principal for nearly 20 years. He is also an adjunct professor for PennWest University's K-12 Principal Leadership Program. Dr. Taranto was the 2012 Pennsylvania Principal of the Year and the 2013 Frank S. Manchester Excellence in Journalism Award recipient.

Mark A. Abbondanza, Ph.D., has been the Principal of North Strabane Intermediate School in the Canon-McMillan School District, for the past 14 years. He is also an adjunct professor for PennWest University in the Department of Secondary Education and Administrative Leadership. Dr. Abbondanza was the recipient of the 2017 Frank S. Manchester Excellence in Journalism Award. He serves on the PA Principals Association's Editorial Review Board for The Pennsylvania Administrator magazine.

Shannon Balch, M.Ed., has served as a K-4 Elementary Principal in the Canon-McMillan School District for 10 years where she is the Leadership Chairperson for English Language Arts K-5. Prior to that, she served as the assistant principal at the Burgettstown Area Elementary Center in the Burgettstown Area School District.

Makenzie Buhman, M.Ed., serves as a Literacy Coach at Canon-McMillan School District. She has been in the education field for 17 years, is a certified Wilson Language Trainer, credentialed dyslexia therapist and certified LETRS facilitator.

Background

The Canon-McMillan School District adopted a "balanced literacy" approach to reading in grades K-6 since 2007 which is designed to assess learners and identify their level of reading, utilize cueing techniques, memorize sight words and teach reading comprehension skills in isolation.

Unfortunately, balanced literacy has not been well supported by current or past research. Boxing students in a particular level often results in little reading skill growth. In addition, the reliance on independent or small group reading without the teacher has proven to be ineffective, whereas guided oral reading with the teacher has overwhelmingly proven to help children become better readers (National Reading Panel, 2000). In addition, one can argue that leveled reading is not supported by cognitive science in that it does not produce a level of desirable difficulty (Jaffe, 2011). An ideal learning experience that falls under a desirable difficulty is described as: Tasks that require considerable but desirable amount of effort, thereby improving long-term performance (Bjork, 1994). Teachers can ask varying scaled questions (i.e., Bloom's), help students make connections to prior knowledge and current content, formatively assess and spend more time with the content thus creating a deeper understanding. Students who have been taught decoding skills respond and grow as readers when exposed to higher level texts (Shanahan, 2022). Exposure to higher level texts also has a growth impact on vocabulary acquisition adding to overall increases in comprehension. Ultimately, we want to grow strong readers by expanding their reading opportunities instead of narrowing them to reading levels.

Our literacy program's "levels" were dependent on the Fountas & Pinnell Assessment System's ability to identify accurate reading levels. According to Klingbeil, McComas, Burns & Helman (2015), the only independent research done to determine the system's actual accuracy showed it had an accuracy rate of 54% to determine a student's reading level. A testing system that requires teachers to take 20-30 minutes per student with an accuracy of 54% is simply not worth its time. This is a tremendous loss of instructional time. Even more concerning, when the tool is used to identify struggling readers, the tool's accuracy drops to 31% (Klingbeil et al., 2015).

What does the research say about how students learn best?

The National Reading Panel (2000) conducted research on over 100,000 reading studies on how children learn to read. The evidence was outstanding that children learn to read best through the implementation of a systematic (structured) reading program:

- ✓ Explicit instruction in phonemic awareness
- ✓ Systematic phonics instruction.
- ✓ Methods to improve fluency.
- ✓ Ways to enhance comprehension through content knowledge and vocabulary development.

A strong focus on decoding skills at the early elementary level was also reinforced by Pennsylvania's recent Pennsylvania's new House Bill 2045 which promotes schools to place emphasis on training and implementation of such practices.

A laser focus on decoding in the early grades coupled with a strong knowledge and vocabulary development component (reading to learn and writing to learn opportunities) has been coined "Structured Literacy" also known as the "Science of Reading" (Connecticut Department of Education, 2022). The key word is structured. Unlike balanced literacy, the structured reading approach has a focus on whole group reading with the teacher leading the discussion. It also covers less topics but goes more in depth with those topics to build strong knowledge and vocabulary backgrounds. This does not mean there are no opportunities for small-group or partner-group activities. However, the main instructional component is a focus on the teacher delivering explicit instruction before any other reinforcing instructional strategies (e.g., think-pair-share, independent practice, etc.). Clarification: While explicit instruction and direct instruction are used interchangeably at times, there is a distinction. Explicit instruction is not the teacher reading from a text verbatim.

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The teacher has autonomy in lesson design with explicit instruction. It is simply a shift to a more teacher-centered approach vs. student-centered (e.g., centers, inquiry learning, etc.) approach.

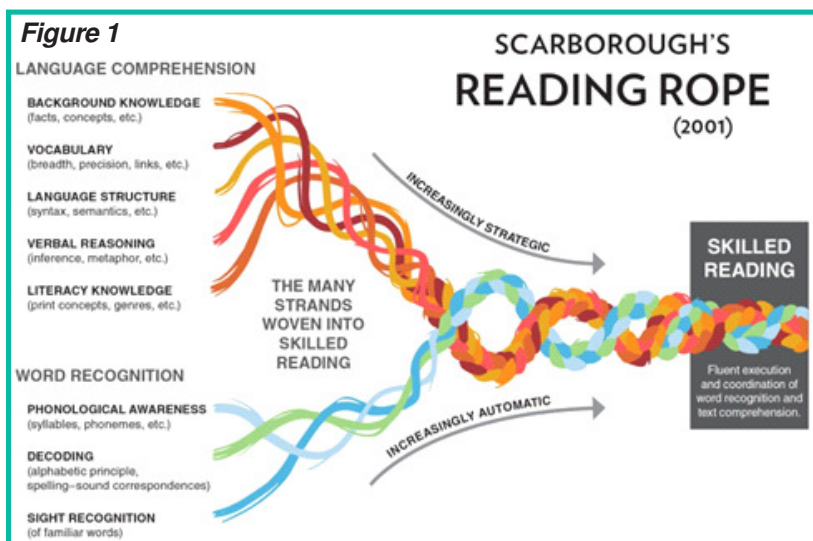
Strong readers have background knowledge in the content and vocabulary that they are reading. In particular, content that is rich in social studies and science is integral at all grade levels. A common practice is to sacrifice these subject areas to concentrate more on teaching students how to read. This practice does not afford students the opportunity to gain crucial background knowledge and enhance their vocabulary which leads to strong skilled readers. As students move into the middle and high school levels, this becomes especially important as many of their classes are content heavy.

Fortunately, the district started partly in this direction a few years back with the adoption of a formal phonics and decoding curriculum in grades K-1 and second grade this school year. In addition, we purchased Geodes (decodable, knowledge-building texts) for our K-2 teachers and provided training on the use of them this school year. Therefore, the wheels were in motion to develop students' phonological awareness, decoding skills and sight recognition, half of Scarborough's Reading Rope (2001), but the other half which entails knowledge, language and vocabulary was critically missing. We used this visual to create a structured literacy program that is based on research. (See **Figure 1**)

Roadmap

With a mission to develop skilled readers, we created a literacy roadmap. This roadmap outlines how we put ourselves on a path to structured literacy and is one that can be duplicated.

This is a monumental shift in mindset requiring strategic planning and collective input from key stakeholders: Administration, Teachers and School Board. The following checkpoints outline how we tackled this challenge to put our school district on the path of a structured literacy program aligned to best practices.



Checkpoint One

The first step was to determine where the teachers' and principals' mindset was with balanced literacy. Was there a concern among our teachers and principals about our literacy approach? A survey was distributed to K-6 educators asking them where they rated our benchmark literacy program. On a four-point Likert Scale, 78% rated it as a one or two! Follow-up discussions with principals and teacher groups identified that they have been concerned over the balanced literacy approach.



Pilot teachers debriefing about their experience with CKLA and Amplify.

Checkpoint Two

A core literacy team, aka The CM Literacy Task Force, was established consisting of a K-4 principal, 5-6 principal, our two reading specialist co-department heads, a sampling of K-4 teachers and the assistant to the superintendent for K-6 curriculum and instruction. The charge for this task force was to research knowledge-building reading programs, help provide education on structured literacy to the K-6 level as well as the board of education and recommend a structured ELA program to be piloted by a larger group of K-6 teachers.

Checkpoint Three

It is important to establish a relationship of transparency and trust with the board. Therefore, the literacy team presented a thorough presentation to our school board's curriculum committee members explaining our current status and the need to move to a research-supported structured literacy approach. The curriculum committee was in full support of the move after the presentation.

Continued on next page

Checkpoint Four

Since grades K-2 already had a head start on a complete Scarborough's Rope approach to reading, we decided to focus our efforts on grades three through six. After visiting neighboring school districts and researching materials, we decided to pilot Amplify's CKLA (K-5) and ELA (6) knowledge reading programs. The pilot group consisted of three third grade, three fourth grade, two fifth grade and four sixth grade teachers. The pilot teachers received a full day of training and ongoing, continued support in and around structured literacy.

After teaching one extensive unit of CKLA, the pilot teachers came together to share experiences. The meeting was emotional and inspiring to hear one successful story after another with a common theme of previously struggling students who are now seeing success with the new program. Common themes were (Taranto, 2023):

- ✓ Increased levels of student confidence.
- ✓ Increased levels of participation.
- ✓ Increased interest and finding connections outside of school.
- ✓ "Struggling" readers participating and doing well in class.

Shared stories included a fourth-grade teacher who was teaching a geology themed reading unit and highlighted a typically reserved student in her class bringing tiny geodes for all his classmates as Valentine's gifts in alignment with the recent ELA unit focus. Two of the sixth-grade teachers also shared joint concerns around a particular student who was struggling in English and Language Arts classes. However, with the introduction and pilot of this new programming, they have seen a direct and complete turnaround in their performance responding to the CKLA units

of study. Both students and teachers alike have found a new source of inspiration.

Checkpoint 5

With the change in mindset, a need for professional development was also addressed so that all teachers understood the research behind moving to a structured approach. It was necessary to bolster confidence and expertise with this change. Teachers having a clear vision and reason for proceeding with this approach allows them to teach with fidelity and focus. Teachers are all on the same page across the district moving forward with Structured Literacy and the necessary instruction.

Conclusion

Developing a structured literacy program at the K-6 level that is aligned to best practices will ultimately lead to students becoming strong readers who can make meaning of complex text they read. As students transition from K-6 to the secondary level they will have the necessary skills to continue to build upon and expand their core knowledge. By aligning all stakeholders from the school board, principals, teachers, and parents a successful change effort is guaranteed. By continually revisiting the goal and checking progress and reporting that progress, excitement builds and grows among the community ensuring the continued success of students. With the added support at the state level, more stakeholders are becoming invested as well. Universities and school districts are required to teach Structured Literacy and the movement will continue to move forward because the teachers they are growing are the future for our students.

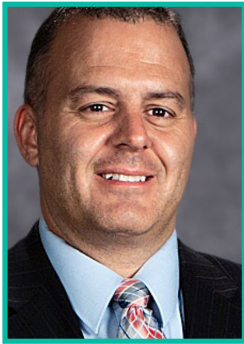
For more information, please contact Dr. Taranto at tarantog@cmsd.k12.pa.us

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How a High School on Block Scheduling Can Help Solve Staff Shortages

By Dr. Jason E. Pappas



About the Author: Jason E. Pappas, Ed.D., is the Principal of Frazier High School in the Frazier School District located in Perryopolis, Pennsylvania. He has served as the high school principal for the past nine years and 15 years in administration. In addition, he has over 23 years in education while working within a block schedule and an A/B block schedule.

The shortage of staff in high schools is a common problem across the United States. The reasons for this shortage vary, including budget constraints, teacher burnout and a decline in the number of people entering the teaching profession. The result is often overcrowded classrooms, overworked teachers and decreased student engagement. One solution to this problem that has gained popularity is block scheduling.

At Frazier High School, block scheduling is a system where students have longer class periods but attend fewer classes per day. This schedule involves students taking four classes each semester, with each class meeting for 79 minutes per day. This type of scheduling has been shown to have several benefits, including increased student engagement, better student-teacher relationships and improved academic performance (Canady & Rettig, 2008).

One of the most significant benefits of block scheduling is how it can help solve staff shortages. With fewer classes per day, teachers can instruct more students, reducing the number of teachers needed to cover all classes. This allows schools to operate with fewer teachers, which can save money and help avoid teacher burnout. Furthermore, with fewer classes, teachers can have more time for planning, grading and professional development.

Another advantage of block scheduling is that it allows for more collaboration between teachers. With longer class periods, there is more time for teachers to collaborate and plan interdisciplinary projects. This can lead to increased teacher satisfaction and better student outcomes (Casper, 2004).

While block scheduling has many benefits, it is not without its challenges. One of the most significant challenges is that it requires a significant shift in teaching strategies. Teachers need to be prepared to teach longer lessons and find ways to keep students engaged for extended periods. Additionally, students may struggle with the longer class periods and need support to adjust to the new schedule.

Despite these issues, many schools have found success with block scheduling. For example, a study of a high school in Texas found that block scheduling improved attendance rates, reduced discipline issues and increased student engagement (Holmes, 2015). Finally, Reams and Bradshaw (2009) found that block scheduling led to increased collaboration among teachers and improved student performance on standardized tests.

In conclusion, the shortage of staff in high schools is a difficult issue that has several negative consequences for students and teachers. Block scheduling is one potential solution that has gained popularity in recent years. With longer class periods and fewer classes per day, block scheduling can help schools operate with fewer teachers, reduce teacher burnout and improve student outcomes. While it is not without its challenges, Frazier High School has found success with block scheduling, making it a potential solution for schools facing staff shortages.

For additional information, please contact Dr. Pappas at jpappas@fraziersd.org

“While it is not without its challenges, Frazier High School has found success with block scheduling, making it a potential solution for schools facing staff shortages.”

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One Member's Voice

One Member's Voice is YOUR column – a place to voice your opinion regarding timely education- or school-related topics and issues.

Mentors of Mount Rushmore

By Dr. Jerald A. Barris and Mark Iannini



About the Authors: Dr.

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Charlie Monk was a legendary country music figure prominently known as “the mayor of music row” (Anderson, 2022). He recently passed away at 84 having spent over six decades in broadcasting, songwriting and publishing. His life’s work is more than memorialized across his chosen career field. To many, he is one of their *Mentors of Mount Rushmore* as stated on Sirius XM’s *The Highway*. As educational leaders, we all have our own *Mentors of Mount Rushmore*. While our mountains may look quite different in comparison, it is certain that similarities would exist. The commonalities we find in those who are assembled on our mountain share similar attributes of loyalty, trust, integrity and collegiality.

As educators, we must take the time to thank, memorialize and recognize the many people who have had a positive impact upon our lives, career progression, profession, family and life. Why is it so easy to find faults in those with whom we have associated, yet difficult to recognize their positive attributes? And why is it so challenging to take a miniscule amount of time to show appreciation to those who have helped shape us into the school leaders we are today? Sometimes we underestimate the power of positive praise and simple recognition. It is usually free of charge, costing us only a bit of time. Through the use of social media, we can easily share how those who helped us along the way have positively impacted our lives as professionals. This is *work* that is not listed in our job description, on our Google calendar or on our daily to-do list. However, recognizing past mentors can be considered some of the most crucial work in our field.

As we have all seen in recent years under the leadership of our past presidents, one of the initiatives of the Pennsylvania Principals Association is the recognition of members who are doing great things (Ross, 2020). Our goal this year continues to be to try to make positive connections with our many staff members.

If you come across a stakeholder whom you believe may be difficult to connect with or to establish a relationship with, that is all the more reason to spend the time and ‘sweat equity’ to ensure you are making a connection. Connections and relationships propel us through years of work, not days. The long and difficult days are enduring due to the importance of those relationships and the people we meet along the way. Remembering your “why” is perhaps the single most important thing you can do as an educational leader. Losing sight of your “why” is a dangerous proposition.

Dr. Joe Sanfelippo, superintendent of Fall Creek School District in Fall Creek, Wisconsin, and renowned keynote speaker, presented at the Pennsylvania Educational Leadership Summit in August 2019. He often states in his many keynote presentations that “*We are in this thing together*” (Sanfelippo, 2019). With the many challenges that we have faced in 2020 and beyond, this is ever so true. We, as educational leaders, set the tone for our buildings and our departments. Beyond trying contractual negotiations, beyond trying legal situations, and beyond the day-to-day dealings of the inner workings of a school, we are all commonly bonded by our own school’s vision and mission and also the general desire to see children succeed, learn, grow and ultimately earn a high school diploma.



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Why Leadership Matters in Establishing a Culture of Social, Emotional and Academic Learning

By Dr. Dennis H. Best and Michelle Gill



About the Authors: Dennis H. Best, Ed.D., is the Assistant to the Superintendent for Schools and Student Services in the Centennial School District, Bucks County, Pennsylvania. He has also served as a fifth-grade teacher, a middle school assistant principal, a middle school principal and as a high school principal.

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Michelle Gill serves as the Social, Emotional and Academic Learning (SEAL) Coordinator for the Centennial School District. She holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Delaware and a master's degree in education from Saint Joseph's University. She has worked in education for over 20 years in the School District of Philadelphia and Fairfax County Public Schools.

Social, Emotional and Academic Learning (SEAL)

Despite our best efforts, there are some things we all know but fail to act on proactively. Educational leaders have long been aware of the need to consistently address students' social, emotional and academic learning (SEAL) needs. However, due to educational leaders' many hats, this recognized need was more frequently addressed in pockets than across school organizations. The impact of the pandemic only accelerated our collective desire to strengthen SEAL support. A recent report published by the United States Government Accountability Office (2022) highlights this impact as seen during the 2020-21 school year:

Nearly two-thirds of teachers (61 percent) had more students who showed signs of emotional distress than in a typical year. In addition, among those teachers who had students who made less academic progress compared to a typical year, the vast majority said social or emotional issues were a contributing factor to the lack of progress. These issues were especially common in high school.

Anticipating those increased needs, the Centennial School District's (CSD) leadership team sought to evaluate and potentially refine the systems and practices used to support students' social and emotional wellness throughout the district. Therefore, in the spring of 2021, the CSD Board of School Directors approved a new position to lead this work – a Social, Emotional and Academic Learning (SEAL) Coordinator. In contrast to the more widely used acronym SEL (social emotional learning), SEAL reflects CSD's organizational stance that social and emotional learning is as important as, and supports, academic learning (Durlak et al., 2011).



SEAL Coordination – Who Owns the Work?

Dedicating SEAL coordination to a new position, instead of adding it to a previously existing position, reflects the district's commitment to sustaining this work. Adding school- or district-level coordination to a current position would have served as irony, considering the impact it could have on the social and emotional well-being of the designated employee, as well as potentially setting the initiative up for failure. Further, housing the position within CSD's schools and student services department created the potential for systemic impact through district-level coordination of evidence-based K-12 SEAL practices.

This action represented an intentional organizational shift for CSD. Previously, well-intended approaches to social-emotional learning existed in some classrooms and pockets of schools. While that addressed the needs of some students, this approach no longer aligned with our understanding of SEAL as a universal, Tier-1 approach, nor did it reflect CSD's commitment to equity in educational opportunities for all students.

Adding and staffing the SEAL coordinator position was CSD's initial step toward better addressing its students' social, emotional and academic needs. The next, and equally critical, step was soliciting the buy-in of the district's building level administrators to support the SEAL coordinator in conducting this work – building shared ownership of SEAL implementation. Again, without the support of the building-level administrators, the intended student outcomes would not be attainable.

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Principal “buy-in” and collaboration with the SEAL coordinator are critical to this process as they set an organizational culture in their school that impacts the school’s climate.

Organizational Culture

Principals are responsible for constructing the organizational norms by which school constituents are expected to interact. This includes preferred modes of communication, shared priorities and behavioral etiquette. To become pervasive, principals must model these norms and encourage school community members to abide by these expectations consistently. Established organizational cultures ultimately become the fabric of a school (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson, 2010).

Simply put, when principals “own” SEAL, eliciting staff “buy-in” and subsequently permeating the practice throughout the school’s culture is a likely outcome.

School Climate

Principals who establish an organizational culture of respectful behavior by modeling respectful interactions with the constituents of their schools enhance the school climate. In such instances, the principal values teachers and students, and the resulting climate of respect encapsulates the interactions between teachers and students (Koth, Bradshaw & Leaf, 2008).

School cultures and climates characterized by trust, respect, engagement, high expectations and supportive practices create the necessary conditions for students to continuously develop and practice practical social and emotional skills (Louis et al., 2010).

What Does SEAL Implementation Look Like in Schools for Leaders?

Establishing a SEAL coordinator position has provided relief and support for CSD’s principals in better-addressing students’ social, emotional and academic needs.

The SEAL coordinator can:

- Dedicate the time necessary to gather stakeholder input and lead the development of a district-wide comprehensive SEAL plan.
- Collaborate with principals to transparently share the plan’s why, how and what.
- Articulate a systematic process for implementation, data collection and progress monitoring.
- Maintain alignment between SEAL goals and implementation steps, *The Pennsylvania Career Ready Skills* (PDE, 2018) and existing district priorities.
- Design and facilitate professional learning to provide clarity and develop SEAL practices for leadership, staff and community members.

In this arrangement, the requirements of principals are limited to sharing their leadership in demonstrating the importance of the initiative, subsequently eliciting the “buy-in” of staff and recursive collaboration with the SEAL coordinator.

Systemic SEAL implementation is easily doable at the building level for principals when structured in this meaningful and collaborative way. Especially when juxtaposed with the unfortunate recipe for unsuccessful implementation of initiatives demonstrated too often in school districts – adding to the already overflowing plates of principals by asking them to lead work that may not be in their wheelhouse independently.

Simple, High-Impact Practices

In districts with or without a SEAL coordinator, leaders can leverage high-impact, low-maintenance practices to intentionally shape organizational culture and school climate – creating the conditions for social, emotional and academic learning to flourish.

● Cultivate One’s Social-Emotional Competency:

- Use a personal SEL reflection, like the one provided by CASEL (<https://schoolguide.casel.org/resource/personal-sel-reflection/>), to build familiarity with your SEL competencies. Self-awareness, self-management strategies and effective relationship skills provide protective factors that can increase leaders’ resilience and allow leaders to model effective SEL skills in interactions with staff, students and family members throughout the school day (Mahfouz et al., 2019).
- Self-management strategies like taking a deep breath or pausing to allow a moment to process during interactions, model effective self-regulation and enhance your ability to respond rather than react. Modeling this in everyday interactions also communicates that others can do the same, potentially impacting many in the school community.
- Giving others the gift of your full presence through active listening models a key social and emotional skill and sends the message that you value the person or people in front of you. In addition, the positive ripple effect of this practice on an organization’s culture is far-reaching as staff mirror the practice with one another and among students.

● Prioritize Belonging and Relational Trust:

- Begin conversations and staff meetings with a brief inclusive opening such as, “What is a success you have experienced recently?” If you are with a small group, invite all members to share. For a large group, create groups of 4-6 people to share among themselves.
- Create a calendar reminder system that prompts you to have a brief check-in with each staff member throughout the year, with specific students undergoing challenges or with new students. Use this quick conversation, email or phone call for good news, avoiding task-related school topics.
- Notice and acknowledge what is going well. This does not need to be tied to a big incentive program

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or public ceremony. It can be as simple as including it as part of a conversation or email, or on a sticky note left on a desk to let the person know what they did is valued: "You put a lot of effort into that project!" or "Your team's collaboration is fun to see in action and shows in your work with students."

We anticipate that the increased prioritization of students' social, emotional and academic learning needs over the

last two years will become a sustained component of K-12 education. However, there can be a wide space between mere prioritization and students' improved social, emotional and academic outcomes. School leaders have the potential to create a clear path through that space with their support for implementation steps and the robust and positive climate and culture they set.

For further information, please contact Dr. Best at bestde@centennialisd.org

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One Member's Voice

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Recently, we had the opportunity to present to our alma mater and the outgoing fall 2022 class of student teachers at Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania. Having both graduated in the spring of 2009, this opportunity generated many memories of those who inspired us in our careers. While the campus has certainly changed, many of the same amazing people remain. We are thankful for these impactful professionals who have helped shape and form who we are as educational leaders. They have had a profound impact on the work we do, the way we do it and the relationships that we cultivate...these are some of the faces on our Mount Rushmore.

Wherever they are, whoever they are, whatever they do, it only takes a few minutes to call, send a text, an email, or a message to thank those who have helped you along the way. As the years go by, you will find that those correspon-

dences will be circulating back to you from those whom you have helped and shaped over the years. The work we do is critical and ever so important for the continued success of the students and future of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Regardless of your school type, location or design, we thank you for having an impact on the future.

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