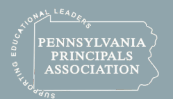


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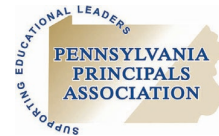
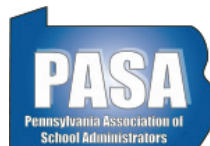


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EDITOR'S NOTE

The school year is more than half over, and spring is just around the corner. It is a time for renewal and growth. This is also a challenging time for school administrators, with exams, spring sports, extracurriculars and end-of-year celebrations approaching. This is also the perfect time to start planning for your own personal and professional growth. Does it involve networking with colleagues or acquiring new knowledge through professional development? If so, the PA Principals Association is here for you! The PA Principals Association continues to advocate on your behalf, provide support and guidance and develop and facilitate valuable professional development opportunities for members.

Currently, we are busy preparing for our premier professional development event, SUMMIT24 for PA Educational Leaders, August 4-6, 2024, at the Pittsburgh Marriott North and Ehrman Crest Elementary and Middle School in Cranberry Township. Once again, it will include pre-conference PIL programs, well-known keynote speakers, small-group sessions presented by Pennsylvania education leaders on timely topics and many opportunities for networking with your colleagues and peers. Administrative teams are highly encouraged to attend! See page 12 for more information.

Be sure to check out the many practical articles in this issue. If you are interested in submitting an article for the spring theme edition, please see page 20. The theme is "Reviving the Teaching Profession: Our Future in Education."

Enjoy this issue!

Sheri Thompson, Editor



Dates to Remember

JULY 2024

15-17 UNITED - The National Conference on School Leadership
(NAESP & NASSP)
Nashville, Tennessee

AUGUST 2024

4-6 SUMMIT24 - For PA Educational Leaders
(PA Principals Association)
Pittsburgh Marriott North & Ehrman Crest Elementary
and Middle School
Cranberry Township, 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 haynesworth@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.

Letter to the Editor

To submit a *Letter to the Editor*, one of our newest features, for an upcoming edition of *The Pennsylvania Administrator*, please send it to: Sheri Thompson, Editor, at sherit@paprincipals.org.

**The deadline for the
Spring 2024 issue is
March 22, 2024.**

THE PENNSYLVANIA
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This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. It is printed with the understanding that the association is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting or other professional services through the publication. If legal or other professional services are required, Pennsylvania Principals Association members should contact the state office or the services of other competent professionals. Printed in the U.S.A. *Postmaster*: Send address changes to Pennsylvania Administrator, 122 Valley Road, Enola, PA 17025.

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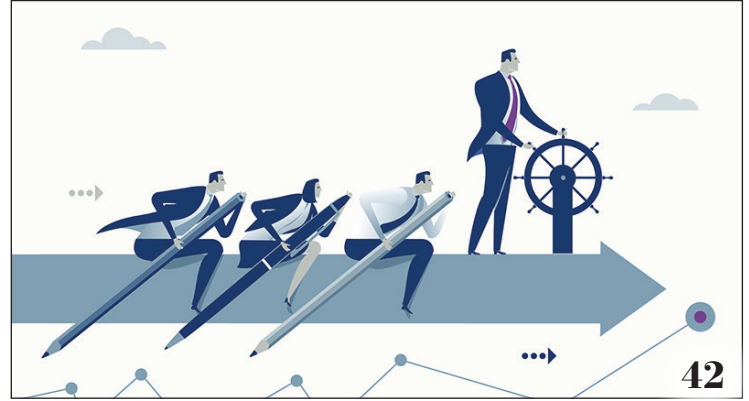
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DON'T STOP THERE

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



The Pennsylvania School Boards Association (PSBA) recently released its 8th annual *State of Education Report* (2024), highlighting the successes and challenges of public education in our state. Please take time to download and read the entire report, as it contains many insights into the current issues facing public education today. One area, however, resonated with me due to some recent work being done by the PA Principals Association to advocate for our members and the students whom they serve. According to PSBA's report, of the 276 school district respondents (of the potential 500 school districts), 79% indicated that student mental health issues led the list of instructional challenges faced by public schools. The prevalence of mental health issues among students shocked me. On average, half of the students who enter our buildings are dealing with some type of mental health issue and many respondents reported that over 60% of their students were dealing with this issue. While our school leaders try to assist students with these emotional struggles, they are challenged with a scarcity of mental health care providers, the reluctance some students and families have to seek support and the lack of funding necessary to fully address this problem. We work collaboratively with PSBA and the other education organizations to shine a light on this

issue, but we cannot stop there.

SO, WE ADVOCATE IN OUR STATE...

There are shining examples of how principals in Pennsylvania are handling the student mental health crisis. I was fortunate to accompany Dr. Harrison Bailey III, principal at Liberty High School in the Bethlehem Area School District, as he testified on this subject at a Pennsylvania House of Representatives Education Committee hearing. I was moved by his example of what one school can do to address this crisis. They have infused mindfulness training, a tiered assessment and service assignment process, the inclusion of mental health curriculum into health classes and professional development for all staff on understanding trauma, toxic stress and social-emotional learning. Most importantly, Liberty High School has developed one of the commonwealth's few school-based multi-tiered wellness centers for students. For a more in-depth look at the great things happening at Liberty High School, view the video at this link: <https://vimeo.com/900244840/529a27d910?share=copy>. However, even with these amazing efforts to address this crisis, they are still limited by funding and accessible professionals to meet their students' needs. I certainly applaud Governor Shapiro's efforts to include \$100 million for mental health resources in this year's budget proposal. I encourage the legislature to recognize this dire need, but not to stop there. In a similar vein, the PA Principals Association advocacy cannot end at the state level.

SO, WE ADVOCATE NATIONALLY...

Our Association was given a unique opportunity in January when I received an invitation to bring a group of secondary principals to a School Principals Town Hall at the White House on the topic of gun violence. I had a brief time to round up a group of administrators from Pennsylvania, so I put out a communication asking for those who had been impacted by violence to let me know. I was deeply disturbed by the great number of responses I received from principals and assistant principals who have been the target of violence or who have experienced an incident of gun violence in their school.

Limited by the number who could attend this briefing, a small group traveled to the White House where we were greeted by First Lady, Dr. Jill Biden, Secretary of Education, Dr. Miguel Cardona, and Director of the White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention, Stefanie Feldman. The goal of the town hall was to introduce a new initiative to promote the distribution and education on the use of gun safety locks. This effort marks a step toward preventing gun violence in



Liberty High School Principal, Dr. Harrison Bailey III, provided testimony on the topic of the student mental health crisis at the House Education Committee meeting in January.



Attending the gun violence town hall at the White House from the PA Principals Association were (from l to r): Dr. Timothy Wagner, secondary principal; Dr. Benjamin Feeney, secondary principal; Dr. Eric Eshbach, Executive Director; Dr. Scott Zraggen, secondary assistant principal; Dr. Harrison Bailey III, secondary principal; and Jonathan Bauer, secondary principal.

schools, but our national leaders cannot stop there. For more information on this initiative, please read the article, *White House to Principals: Talk to Parents About Gun Safety* (Banerji 2024).

It is overtly evident that a majority, if not all, incidents of gun violence are a direct result of a mental health issue. The recent trial of Jennifer Crumbley, the mother of a student

in Michigan who shot and killed four classmates, and her conviction of involuntary manslaughter highlighted the fact that when a student suffers from mental health issues and has parents who ignore those issues and who don't take gun ownership and gun safety seriously, deadly results will ensue. The epidemic of violence in schools (not just gun violence) is directly correlated to our mental health crisis. So, while gun locks may be a good first step, we cannot stop there.

SO, WE ENGAGE OUR MEMBERS...

I am committed to working to address the mental health crisis in Pennsylvania schools as well as the violence that often manifests itself in the school setting. The principals of Pennsylvania's schools need to be heard in our local communities, in our state and in our nation. We need to institute efforts like those being done at Liberty High School to meet the needs of our suffering students. We need to engage with each other to push for more funding for mental health resources. We need to work with partner organizations to elevate the work of those who serve in the mental health field. We need to emphasize that preventative measures of addressing mental health issues in students are more likely to deter a school shooter than an armed guard in each school. Don't stop here. Watch the video from Liberty High School. Commit to becoming engaged. Commit to being a part of finding solutions to the mental health crisis. Don't stop here. ■

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Submit a Review for Magazine Feature...



We are seeking educational book reviews for our magazine column, "**READERS FOR LEADERS**"; but only for books that you have found valuable and would "recommend" to your colleagues. Educators are constantly looking for new ideas to use and share, but do not always have time to read new books. It is our hope that this column will provide you with the latest in contemporary readings.

Book reviews should be 350-400 words and must be submitted as a Word document (with a brief biographical sketch and a photo of the author). Authors may not be the book's author since the purpose of the review is **to provide information and NOT to sell books!** In addition, authors **MUST include a written statement of any connection to the publication being reviewed.**

The deadline to submit a book review for the Spring 2024 edition is March 22, 2024.

Dr. Scott Zraggen Named Pennsylvania's 2024 Assistant Principal of the Year



Scott M. Zraggen, Ed.D., Assistant Principal of Springfield Township High School in the School District of Springfield Township, has been named Pennsylvania's 2024 Robert E. Lively Assistant Principal of the Year by the Pennsylvania Principals Association. As a state winner in the National Association of Secondary School

Principals' (NASPP) Assistant Principal of the Year Program, Dr. Zraggen is under consideration to be named the National Secondary Assistant Principal of the Year.

According to PA Principals Association Executive Director, Dr. Eric C. Eshbach, "Our selection committee has once again identified a talented, passionate and dedicated educator to represent Pennsylvania as the 2024 Assistant Principal of the Year at the secondary level. The admirable qualities Dr. Zraggen demonstrates in his devoted service to the students, staff and the entire Springfield Township High School community are what we seek in a candidate."

Dr. Zraggen, or Dr. Z, as he is affectionately known within his school community, has worked in the Springfield Township School District for 27 years, serving in his current role as the assistant principal for 6.5 years, overseeing ninth- and 10th-grade students, scheduling and curricular programming at Springfield Township High School. In addition, he served as Science Department Coordinator (1998-2004; 2010-2017) and as a member of the National Honor Society Selection Committee (2001-2017) and the Montgomery County Science Council (2001-2004; 2010-2017). Previously, he taught environmental science (advanced placement and academic), chemistry (honors and academic), physical science and biology (honors, academic and level one). He taught for nine years in California, beginning his career in education as a science teacher at West High School (1987-1990) and continuing at Vacaville High School (1990-1996). His experience as an animal handler/show performer at a theme park made him appreciate the role of educators in society.

Dr. Zraggen's outstanding leadership and dedication have been demonstrated countless times through his commitment to his students, his school and his school community. During his leadership of the Science Department, new courses were successfully created, and the course sequence was changed. One of the courses, environmental science, was chosen by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as a model class for all students in the state. He also collaborated with teachers from other departments to design and implement an innovative, interdisciplinary, team

approach to teaching students who felt disenfranchised from school. During his tenure as assistant principal at Springfield Township High School, he has played a pivotal role in shaping the school's culture to prioritize the well-being and safety of every student and staff member, facilitating a conducive environment for productive learning and interaction. According to Dr. Zraggen, "One of the key aspects of this transformation has been my rapport with the students. I've worked tirelessly to establish a positive relationship with all students. This has led to the creation of a culture of trust and openness where students feel comfortable seeking help and guidance."

In addition, Dr. Zraggen spearheaded the co-development and implementation of the "Lunch and Learn" Program which has promoted a culture of knowledge, sharing, skill development and relationship-building between students and staff. During this 60-minute period, students are able to meet with teachers for coursework assistance. By bringing various stakeholders together during lunch time, the school promotes an atmosphere of community and collaboration that goes beyond traditional classroom settings. "My daily cafeteria presence during "Lunch and Learn" allows me to actively engage with students while ensuring a secure, respectful space for social interaction," he explained.

Dr. Zraggen has also championed and modeled co-teaching and differentiated instructional practices, project-based learning and encouraged students to enroll in internships, work study programs and dual enrollment courses to help satisfy their Senior Experience Program credit. He has also played an essential role in developing a sensible school dress code which focuses on promoting self-expression while maintaining a respectful, inclusive atmosphere. Dr. Zraggen believes that every person should be treated with dignity, respect and fairness, and with that in mind, he has implemented anti-bias training, restorative justice practices and clear disciplinary policies to foster an environment where equitable treatment is non-negotiable. In addition, he, and his school, empower student voice through project-based learning, student panel discussions and peer mentoring.

During his education career, Dr. Zraggen has received numerous accolades including the Spirit of Springfield Award (2017); the Dr. Norman Miller Scholarship for Educational Leadership (Awarded by Arcadia University's School of Education, 2015); the Claes Nobel Educator of Distinction (2013); the University of Chicago's Outstanding Educator Award (2011); Excellence in High School Chemistry Teaching (Awarded by the American Chemical Society, Philadelphia

and recognition as an Influential Teacher (Awarded by the University Director of the Pennsylvania Governor’s School for the Sciences, 2002). Before coming to Pennsylvania, he was selected as the Outstanding Teacher of the Year by both the faculties of Vacaville High School (1996) and West High School (1990).

Pierre LaRocco, who nominated Dr. Zraggen for this award, and who also serves as an Assistant Principal at Springfield Township High School, shared, “Through diligent efforts, Scott demonstrates an unwavering commitment to fostering an exceptional school culture and a high-level educational environment. His role as a commendable team player serves as an inspiration to all those with whom he collaborates.”

Dr. Zraggen received a Bachelor of Science in Animal Science from the University of California (Davis) and a Master of Science in Environmental Science Education and a Doctorate in Educational Leadership, both from Arcadia University.

He resides in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, with his wife of 28 years, Marty. They share twin sons, Nick and Derek (26), and

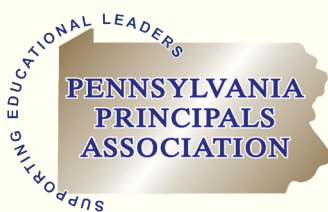
two dogs. Dr. Zraggen has lived in California, Alabama, Iowa, Michigan, New Jersey, Georgia and Pennsylvania, and has managed to visit all but three states (Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota) during his lifetime. In his down time, he enjoys traveling, trail/road biking, reading and collecting stamps. ■

“Dr. Scott Zraggen is a thoughtful, dedicated school leader. As a long-standing member of the Springfield Township High School community, he is skilled at balancing the demands and complexity of the role of assistant principal. He is supportive of all students, responsive to staff and committed to engaging with families.”

Dr. MaryJo Yannacone
Superintendent
School District of Springfield
Township

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Leading Up: Do Your Job Exceptionally Well

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



Is your position such that you report to someone else? Then you lead up. Even if your title is school principal, who do you report to? Then you lead up. Even some day, if you become a superintendent, you will lead up to a school board.

Leading up, leading across and leading down are the foundations of John

Maxwell's book *The 360° Leader: Developing your Influence from Anywhere in the Organization*. In your school leadership role, you may be the principal and need to lead down to others in your building. You also have colleagues in the district (other principals) and need to lead across and support others. There are also members of the team that reside in the district office that you lead up to, which is the focus of this article.

In our newest professional development offering, "The Team: Building Leadership Success that Improves Student Learning," we use *The 360° Leader* workbook and discuss roles as being a #1 and a #2. The irony here is that while your job description may list you as the principal, or #1, you also find yourself in a #2 position as well. So, this article is for everyone in school leadership!

One tip in the book reviews the notion that one way you can make the load for your boss (#1) lighter is to do your job exceptionally well. Before you dream of advancement or long to be the boss, master your role first.

Here are three things to consider as you do your job:

1. **Review your job description and make sure you are hitting the mark.** Is the job description accurate, or has the position evolved since the last update?

If you are confused or concerned about the primary responsibilities, have a conversation with your boss and secure a clear understanding of what is expected via the job description.

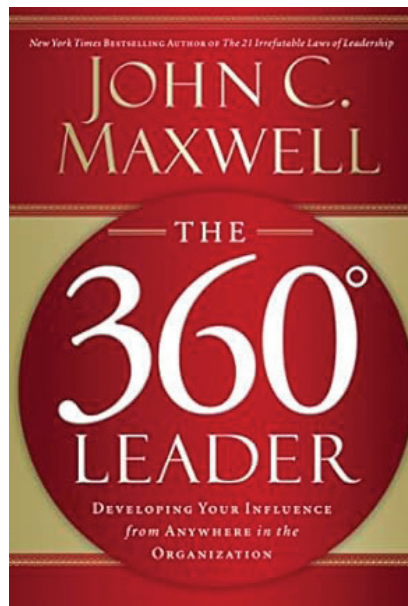
2. **During the same conversation in #1, discuss areas that are expectations of your role that are not listed in your job description.** The last time I checked, the actual job of a school leader, regardless of your title, defies an easy job description and some bullet points. How many times in the past month did you tell yourself on your drive home, "Well, this wasn't a part of my job description!" Leave nothing to chance and have an open conversation with your boss about such gray areas.

3. **Avoid destination disease.**

Someday, you may be honored with a position as a #1. Until then, work hard in your lane and let your good work speak for itself. It isn't hard to quickly discern when someone is looking for the next position and not focusing intently on their current job. These folks usually have opinions on current leadership decisions and strategy and somehow seem to know "better." Be a good #2 and do your job exceptionally well, and I believe the future will take care of itself.

Hall of Fame baseball player Willie Mays said, "It isn't hard to be good from time to time in sports. What's tough is being good every day."

In summary, be a great #2, be great at leading up, do your job exceptionally well and the future will take care of itself.



REFERENCE:

Maxwell, J. C. (2005). *The 360° leader: developing your influence from anywhere in the organization*. Nashville, Nelson Business.



School Bus Drivers are “Staff”

By Susan Martin, Central Regional Service Specialist (RSS)



Every morning and every afternoon, the school buses arrive at our schools. In the morning, they leave us with our students, and at the end of the day, they gather those students to take them home. School Bus Drivers are responsible for ensuring the safety of our children as they drive them to and from school.

Many drivers assume additional responsibility by driving for field trips and sporting events. School Bus Drivers keep our schools open each day. School Bus Drivers take the pulse of their students every day. School Bus Drivers know what is going on in the community. School Bus Drivers are the quiet heroes of our school districts.

In late September, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* estimated there to be a shortage of approximately 3,500 bus drivers across Pennsylvania (Tomasic, 2023). School districts have had to address these shortages in creative ways. Some have cancelled routes and closed schools. Some reverted to online classes. Others have notified parents and asked for their help to get kids to school. The problem exists across the country.

How can the school principal help with this situation? We are not the ones hiring and training the drivers. No, we are not. But there are many things we can do to help our drivers feel valued and part of the school team. As school principals, we need to recognize and encourage every adult who interacts with our students. A safe, supportive environment goes a long way to retaining employees.

The most important thing you can do is to get to know your drivers. Can you tell me who drives bus #3? Who has the longest route? Which driver do you get the most (or the least) behavior referrals from? Why is that? Which driver(s) make you cringe when you hear their name? We need to get to know these drivers as people, not just someone who

drives bus #3. As you are out on the bus ramp, take the time to greet the drivers and have a short conversation with them. The first thing you may be thinking is that they are going to complain about the kids or the weather. Then, you must lead the conversation. Ask them about personal things, steering them away from those topics they complain about. Which driver has a son in basic training? Which driver has a wife who published a cookbook? Get to know the drivers in the same manner you get to know your teachers.

Now, take those conversations and turn them into communication with the drivers. Once they begin to trust you as a person, you can begin conversations about their job as a School Bus Driver. Begin to encourage them to voice their concerns, ideas and to give you feedback on issues that affect them. Include them in your weekly staff newsletter or the monthly family newsletter, so they know what is happening at the school. A section of your newsletter could be all about them and their job. You could remind parents to be supportive of the bus drivers.

Your school may have *Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports* (PBIS). Do you include the bus drivers? You may have something as simple as an acknowledgement they can hand to the students each day. Students love receiving little tokens for doing a good job. Why shouldn't the bus drivers have these tokens to recognize their kids? It may improve the overall behavior on the bus! Do you recognize your bus drivers with a token for doing a good job? Our school used “Grayson Greats” to give a shout out to the school staff. These tokens were provided to bus drivers as well. And then, there are the awards assemblies and fun days we have at school. Do you invite your bus drivers? I had a bus driver who showed up at every monthly awards assembly. I made a point of recognizing her and making a big deal that she spent part of her day with us. We also made a point of including the

School Bus Drivers during Teacher Appreciation Week. Our school celebrated the entire school staff during this week, including School Bus Drivers. I'm certain the bus drivers would love to be included in your school activities!

We need to be available to offer guidance and support to our School Bus Drivers. They have good days and bad days. But every day, they are there for our students. When a student on their bus is suffering, the bus drivers take it to heart and suffer with them. When a student comes bouncing out of school with the best news ever, they are right there celebrating with them. The same drivers drive the baseball team regardless of their record. They continue to offer encouraging words and show up to drive them to and from each game. School Bus Drivers give our students so much emotional support. We should be offering the same support to them.

Principals play a crucial role in creating a positive and supportive environment for bus drivers. I know we are all busy and dealing with transportation issues is the last thing we want to do on some days. However, if we support

our School Bus Drivers, they can be a tremendous help in resolving many of the issues that occur on the bus. Without School Bus Drivers, many of us cannot operate our schools. The day won't begin until those big yellow buses show up. If they do not show up, then what?

P.S. You will notice that I capitalized School Bus Drivers throughout this article. I did that on purpose. School Bus Drivers are important, and they need our attention! ■

REFERENCE:

Tomasic, M. (2023, September 23). School bus driver shortage forcing families to scramble for transportation as districts cancel route. Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. <https://www.post-gazette.com/news/education/2023/09/23/pennsylvania-school-bus-driver-shortage-baldwin-whitehall-hempfield-central-valley/stories/202309220080>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: *Susan Martin is a Regional Service Specialist (RSS) for the Central Region. Susan retired as principal of Nancy Grayson Elementary School in the Shippensburg Area School District.*

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If you have any issues, please contact the PA Principals Association office: (717) 732-4999.



IT HAPPENED TO ME...

THE BENEFIT OF LEGAL PROTECTION

This is a column for members by members who have had to depend on the PA Principals Association for legal advice, support and protection. The legal protection afforded to members is invaluable and makes a difference.

A series of questions was directed to a member of the PA Principals Association regarding a recent legal situation.

I received a call from the district Human Resources (HR) Department and was informed that a teacher in my building had made allegations of harassment and discrimination against me. The teacher claimed that the way I had handled a particular situation was harassment.

I then met with the district HR director and district solicitor. Prior to this meeting, I believed it had to do with this specific situation, but incidents from years ago were discussed. Afterward, I felt that I needed legal advice, and it was time to contact the PA Principals Association for assistance. I knew that legal advice and counsel is part of my membership in the Association.

Following this initial meeting, I reached out to Dr. Eshbach (executive director), and he called me back right away. He provided me with legal advice and walked me through what steps to take in this situation. I was also assigned an attorney who is in the Association's network. Soon after, I received a phone call from the attorney, and I shared the details of the allegations made against me.

This was so important because the attorney shared my side of the story and acted as my representative with the school district's solicitor. The matter was closed due to unfounded charges. Nonetheless, the teacher continues to work in my building.

*My advice to any member who is facing a similar situation would be: **Know your rights and know your benefits.***

- **Know your benefits:** It is important to know that you can reach out to the executive director for advice/counsel and to find out if the situation warrants an attorney.
- **Know your rights: 1)** Be prepared: take notes and ask a lot of questions. Make sure it is not one-sided; **2)** Reflect on any different incidents that may come up so you can remember everything that happened and write it down; and **3)** Follow the executive director's advice and do what the assigned attorney tells you to do.

-Anonymous Elementary Member

Here's your legal protection:

As a member of the PA Principals Association, you are automatically enrolled as a member of NAESP or NASSP. The national membership provides legal protection for job action taken against you as well as legal liability insurance for eligible civil suit claims. This protection provides legal fee reimbursement in the amount of \$1,000 for each consecutive year of membership up to a total of \$10,000 (for example, a person who has been a member for five consecutive years can claim up to \$5,000 in legal costs). **In the event that you are involved in any situation that may result in possible legal action, you must contact the PA Principals Association office immediately.** Members of the PA Principals Association staff will assist you in the claim submission process required by NAESP and NASSP.

However, if you let your membership in the association lapse, when you rejoin, your legal benefit will start over at \$1,000. Therefore, it is extremely important to maintain your membership.

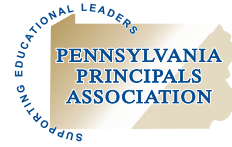
Principals' legal assistance:

If you are confronted with a legal situation in which job action is being taken against you, if you are named in a lawsuit or if you are dealing with an Act 93 issue, contact the PA Principals Association office immediately at **(717) 732-4999**. ■



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FEATURING KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:

Lead Like Fred: Mister Rogers' Lessons for Principals

Monday, August 5, 2024

Gregg Behr & Ryan Rydzewski



Gregg Behr

Gregg Behr, executive director of The Grable Foundation since 2006, is a father and children's advocate. For more than 15 years, he has helped lead Remake Learning—a network of educators, technologists, designers and makers he founded in 2007—to international renown. Among the foremost examples of learning ecosystems, Remake Learning has turned heads everywhere from The White House to the World Economic Forum for its efforts to ignite children's curiosity; encourage creativity; and foster justice, joy and belonging in schools, libraries, museums and other sites of learning. A graduate of the University of Notre Dame and Duke University, Gregg holds honorary degrees from Carlow University and Saint Vincent College. He's an advisor to The Brookings Institution and The Fred Rogers Institute, and has been honored by President Obama, the Disruptor Foundation, ISTE and AASA as an innovator and thought leader.

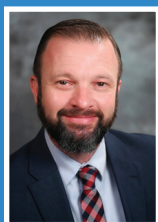
X: @greggbehr



Ryan Rydzewski

Ryan Rydzewski is an award-winning author and speaker. A graduate of the University of Pittsburgh, he taught elementary school in south Louisiana before earning a MFA in nonfiction writing from Chatham University. As a science and education reporter, his magazine stories focus on everything from schools to space travel to *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, and he regularly leads workshops for educators and parents. Born in Erie, Pennsylvania, Ryan lives in Pittsburgh with his wife, Jacqueline, and their son, Russell.

X: @RyanRydzewski

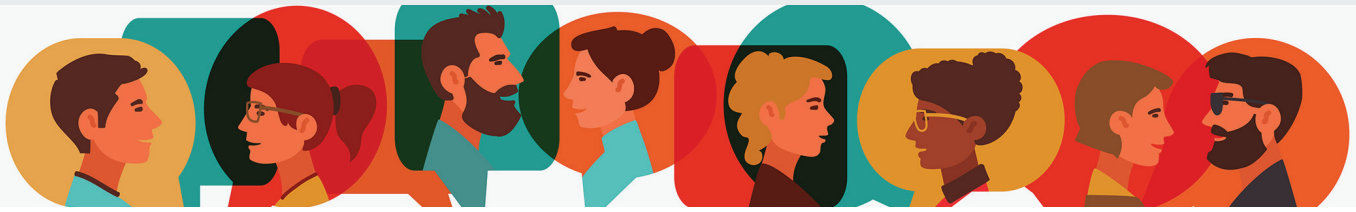


Brian Stamford

Brian Stamford, Program Director at the Allegheny Intermediate Unit 3, will present a keynote session, **Five Ways AI Will Shape the Future of K-12 Education**, on **Sunday, August 4, 2024**. Dr. Stamford also serves as state co-lead for the Classroom Diagnostic Tools, leading professional development efforts statewide, as well as co-lead for the statewide PA Association of Intermediate Units (PAIU) Curriculum Directors group. He is a Code.org regional manager, and a certified Apple Education Trainer, offering high-quality professional development on innovative teaching practices, including integrating AI tools into planning and instruction. Prior to this, Dr. Stamford worked in public education as a science and computer teacher, instructional coach and administrator.

Check out “The Exchange” - our online community!

The PA Principals Association rolled out a new online community last year called *The PA Principals Exchange* or “*The Exchange*.” The purpose is for members to connect, engage, interact and share with one another. It is a new member benefit and may be easily accessed at <https://exchange.paprincipals.org/> using the same log in credentials for your member account and our website. If you haven’t logged in to either, please use this link, <https://www.paprincipals.org>, click on **MEMBER LOGIN** at the top right of the homepage, click on forgot password and follow the prompts. Once you have logged into *The Exchange*, please Introduce Yourself! We are looking forward to meeting and interacting with YOU!



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ONE MEMBER'S VOICE

The Musings of a Middle School Assistant Principal

By Josephine Fields



As a middle school assistant principal, I chose to write this article because I feel that collaboration among administrators, teachers, parents/guardians and students is how students become successful. I do not understand how, at the most pivotal time in their lives, when hormones and “growing pains” are at their peak, families seem to loosen their support for their

students. I see the challenges teachers and administrators face to connect with some families. We hold parent-teacher conferences in a building of about 800 students, and less than 10 percent of the parents show up or even reach out to meet with their student’s teachers. We have various school activities, and again, it is a challenge to get a large number of parents to sign up and actively participate. My foremost thoughts center on the academic and social behaviors of middle school-aged pupils, as well as my inability to connect with their parents.

Most students are supported, nurtured, guided and cared for with great intent during the primary years. This evidence is noted in the students’ dress, actions, attitudes and behaviors. When students reach middle school, they exercise their emerging independence in positive and often not-so-positive ways. The middle school years are, in many cases, pivotal in a student’s academic career, often setting them on the trajectory of their future success.

- What does this administrator wonder about in relation to middle-school-age students? I wonder about many things, but my paramount thoughts are as follows:
- Why do some parents feel this age is the time to give their children “carte blanche” authority over their academic, social and even personal selves?
- Why do some parents think that at this crucial, transitional age or stage in their child’s life, they should be expected to “figure it out” and navigate these tumultuous teenage years without supervision?
- How can some parents give their child “keys to the castle” without creating clear parameters, measures, supports, expectations and consequences?

- Finally, how are teachers expected to teach and increase children’s academic knowledge without the support of parents/guardians?

I have strong reservations about how children will fare in high school and beyond without the needed guidance they require at this vulnerable age. How are teachers expected to do their job, when often times, the child is not supported, encouraged or held accountable at home?

As educators, we must stand firm and “control what we can control.” We must make school an exciting, encouraging and engaging environment where children want to go and where all children who enter know and understand acceptable behaviors. We should allow and even encourage parents to ‘parent,’ all the while creating a mutual understanding so children will be more successful in school.

My informal research of life experiences, professional conversations and personal conversations has led me to conclude that educational leaders should start with the “man



in the mirror” (Jackson, 1988). As building administrators, we set the standard for all school personnel. We should walk the hallways joyfully, greeting everyone as though they are our nearest, dearest friends. We should talk to staff, kindly inquire about their lives and offer them compliments. Modeling relationship building is paramount in developing the expectation we hold for our teachers. Because relationship building is so important, we live what we believe, providing our teachers a frame of reference they can use with their students. We may provide the students an example, which they can use in their own life. We can open up our schools and be willing to sit down and talk with families about learning. By forming relationships with families, they will know that the school is interested in working with them.

As I ponder why our students come to school and behave in specific ways, I am cognizant that implementing change in their homes is not in our purview or control. What we can

control is leading a building where teachers are valued, held accountable and encouraged to take creative, innovative risks. We can control the warm, encouraging environment we create for our students. We can control how we treat each other and the students in our building. We can control the environment by providing consistency, fairness and grace to all.

This is only one AP’s viewpoint on how to encourage our middle-school students to ‘show up’ and be their true selves. As they exercise their emerging freedom, we can help them set boundaries and develop positive habits and self-care that will benefit their academic, social and personal selves.

REFERENCE:

Jackson, M. (1998). Man in the Mirror [Song] Bad [Album].

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: *Josephine Fields, an Assistant Principal at Pleasant Valley Middle School in the Pleasant Valley School District (Northeastern Pennsylvania). Pleasant Valley Middle School serves students in grades 6-8.*

Ms. Fields holds a Bachelor of Science in elementary education, a Master of Science in reading and a Master of Science in educational leadership. “Control what you can control” is one of her guiding principles. According to Ms. Fields, “I wonder about many things, but I do not stay there. I collaborate with colleagues, read as much as I can and talk with my students and parents to learn how to move forward through my own musings.” She can be reached at fields.josephine@pvbears.org



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Empowering Students Through Innovative Educational Practices

By Tonya O'Brien and Steve Mammome



TONYA O'BRIEN



STEVE MAMMOME

In the ever-evolving landscape of education, a new paradigm is emerging – one that places students at the forefront of innovation and at the center of their learning journey. At Dutch Ridge Elementary School, a grades 3-5 building in the Beaver Area School District, fifth-grade teacher (and co-author), Steve Mammome, developed the *5th Grade Marketplace* – a groundbreaking initiative that celebrates the collaborative spirit of educators and the insatiable curiosity of students. This article explores the essence of this transformative idea, and how it is reshaping traditional educational models.

At the heart of this innovative idea is the belief that the creative mindsets of educators, as the architects of learning, possess unique insights into what engages and motivates students and prepares them for life outside of the classroom. The Marketplace foundation lies in the idea that educators, as professionals and adults in the outside world, are best equipped to identify and address the evolving needs of students.

To truly understand the inception and foundation of Marketplace, you must hear the story through the words of its creator, Mr. Mammome:

When you look around communities like Beaver, you see many different people who all have unique passions, talents, and aspirations. These influences help to shape and determine where they fit in the economic system that surrounds them. The habits they have formed over time are key factors in how well they thrive in the economy and what pathway they choose.

Our ultimate role as an educational institution is to teach skills and habits that will allow students to one day thrive in that same economy, and also, to provide opportunities to help them discover the passions, talents and aspirations that exist within them.

Marketplace was born out of this thought process. So, what is Marketplace? Before I answer that question, let me tell you what it's not. It's not a one-time event where students make a singular product. Marketplace is an authentic economy established just for students and staff at Dutch Ridge. It is a platform that was designed to allow students to participate in a real economy where they are free to pursue their passions, take big risks and allow challenges to drive their next steps. You could think of it as a "pre-season" to the real thing.

Students have been given the opportunity to embark on a year-long immersion in this economy, where they buy and sell products, services and entertainment experiences. There is no due date. As they finish their product, service or entertainment experience, they advertise and sell it. The digital Marketplace money they earn from selling is added to their Marketplace bank account to be used to purchase

products, services and entertainment experiences created and sold by other students and teachers.

So, what does the Marketplace look like in action?

Each Marketplace Day, students work through the process of planning, creating, advertising and selling their products. Week after week, they work through these processes, allowing them to naturally grow and evolve in the quality and complexity of what they bring to the market. Any job or process that is a part of the real economy mirrors what we have created here. For example, if they want to advertise their products on a hallway billboard, they must create it and pay an advertisement fee. To make a sale final, both the buyer and the seller fill out a joint order form to be turned into the accountants that have been hired that day to calculate and enter sale totals into the student accounts.

Students have been able to experience and utilize many different tools, technology, and materials available to them. If they don't have the necessary tools or materials to complete their product, they can complete a "grant form" for approval to purchase those items that are crucial to their success.

An online component allows students to advertise their businesses and products, and to post wanted ads where they share ideas of products, services, and entertainment experiences they would like to purchase. This has been a critical tool to allow students to communicate what they need or want and what they have to sell.

The idea is that we are creating our own private economy that operates like a real economy, but is driven by students, allowing them to gain experiences on their journey of discovering where they fit in the economy.

We also want students to see value in habits like hard work, attention to detail, and determination in order to successfully earn money to be spent on the things they want and need... just like real life.

Another reason we are doing this is to provide a low-risk arena where students can feel free to take big risks now, while they don't have the pressure or responsibility of really providing for their wants and needs, like they will as they grow and become members of the real economy.



Gears designed in Tinkercad software and 3D printed by students

We don't see Marketplace as separate from what we do in the classroom...it all connects. It starts with the laws that govern our Marketplace and parallel our classroom expectations:

1. Pay attention.
2. Participate.
3. Work hard.
4. And don't quit (determination).



Holiday cards created by a student using a laser cutter

Our intention is to develop strong habits as students practice those four laws in all they do. Consistent demonstration of the skills results in account bonuses, while lack of consistency results in fines. The goal is to cause them to feel and experience the connection of how these real-life habits affect their success and outcomes in class, and ultimately, in real life outside of school. Marketplace is meant to be a platform where students apply the skills they've learned in math, science, social studies, English language arts, the arts and technology, in authentic ways that have real-life rewards and benefits.

Throughout this inaugural year, I have witnessed a consistent progression from very simple products and ideas to more complex systems. This experiential learning shows students how to solve problems, how to research and find new and creative ideas, and how to put their plans into action using tools and technology. Students feel the satisfaction and pride of working hard to produce and sell a product.

You can see and feel the excitement as new ideas arise in the students. They can't wait to bring their ideas to the government (the teachers) for approval. Visiting classrooms, you see students engrossed in whatever they are attempting to accomplish that day. When they reach the point of completion and they actually sell what they have made – whether it's a product, a service they are providing or an entertainment experience they've choreographed – there is nothing like seeing the excitement and sense of accomplishment on their faces. I truly believe it gives them a sense of purpose and direction.

In my opinion, Marketplace is "as real as it gets" when it comes to having students apply what they are learning in the most authentic way possible.



Billboard advertisement menu created by students for Marketplace

The Marketplace stands as a testament to the transformative power of collaboration and innovation in education. By recognizing and harnessing the expertise and creativity of students and tailoring educational experiences to their unique learning styles and interests, Marketplace is paving the way for a student-driven approach to learning. As we continue to navigate the future of education, initiatives like these serve as beacons of change, inspiring a new era where teachers and students actively shape the landscape of learning. Please visit this link for the Marketplace Conceptual Process: <https://www.papprincipals.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Conceptual-Development-of-Marketplace.pdf> You may contact Mrs. O'Brien at obrient@basd.k12.pa.us for further information.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS: Tonya M. O'Brien, M.Ed., Co-Principal at Dutch Ridge Elementary School and Beaver County native, brings innovation and passion to her role in shaping the educational landscape. Known for her collaborative and communicative leadership style, Mrs. O'Brien is committed to building strong relationships with students, staff and parents to create a supportive educational community.

Steve Mammone, a dedicated family man hailing from Beaver County, has spent the last two decades as a fifth-grade math teacher at Dutch Ridge Elementary School. Mr. Mammone understands the importance of education, not only in the classroom, but in preparing students for real-world challenges. His vision extends beyond traditional teaching methods, as he aspires to create a trailblazing program at Dutch Ridge, empowering students to apply their learned skills in a school-wide economy, where they become the architects of their own economic system.

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BOOK REVIEW:

What's your Leadership Story?: A School Leader's Guide to Aligning How you Lead with Who You Are

By Susan M. Sibert, D.Ed.



It happens to all school leaders. The workload and busy days and nights of school leadership take over, and self-reflection of effectiveness dwindles. Every school leader has a leadership style and goals to lead a school, but the reality is that leaders sometimes have not clearly defined or updated the core

values, mindset and personal leadership style relative to the leadership situation. Furthermore, the realities and time demands of the job do not allow for weekly reflection, let alone reflection throughout the day. Principals are in the midst of leading, but also need to reflect on leading and desire direction on how to frame where they are within their own leadership stories. Once defined, leadership styles can be weighed against what is happening in the world, including post-pandemic changes in our students, families and schools, as well as the pressure and criticism school leaders face due to restrictive budgets, social media and litigation.

What's Your Leadership Story? A School Leader's Guide to Aligning How You Lead with Who You Are, an Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development publication, is available in digital or paper formats. The book is a type of workbook to guide school leaders to consider the effects and effectiveness of their school leadership. It also helps them define personal philosophy of leading, which is a good idea whether you are new to leading, new to a school or have been leading for many years and need to revisit your philosophy and goals. As times and situations change, school leaders should re-evaluate where they are in their leadership stories. This book provides scenarios school leaders face, questions on which to reflect and space to write about each scenario. The authors pose questions for reflection, including how you see yourself and how those you lead may see you. Reflections include consideration of both personal and professional identities. The exercises of reading and writing are designed for school leaders to form what the authors call a personal leadership philosophy (PLP), a one-page document that explains and defines your leadership, which should be revisited on a regular basis.

The authors identify eight steps to write the PLP (p.13):



WHAT'S YOUR LEADERSHIP STORY?

A School Leader's Guide to Aligning How You Lead with Who You Are

GRETCHEN OLTMAN
VICKI BAUTISTA

1. Identifying your leadership style.
2. Defining your core values.
3. Engaging with your mindset.
4. Exploring your real-life experiences.
5. Creating a draft of your leadership philosophy.
6. Reflecting on your leadership philosophy.
7. Revising your leadership philosophy.
8. Sharing your leadership philosophy.

The authors suggest reading each of the 10 chapters independently, then discussing them with trusted colleagues. I could see this book as the center of a professional development activity for a group of school leaders at a single school, district or across districts. It would even work well with two or three school leaders who felt comfortable coming together to share thoughts and ideas. The book could

be utilized during the school year, part of the year or during the summer.

For each chapter, there are three active engagement methods. The first are sections titled “Consider This,” with questions encountered in school leadership for consideration. The second feature of each chapter includes questions that the reader can answer independently or in a partnership or small group with other school leaders. The third feature outlines descriptions of actual situations that school leaders face and how each situation was managed, which assists the reader in determining their leadership style. The first step of creating or revising a PLP, the authors report, is looking in the mirror and identifying personal and core values and what matters most in your personal and professional backgrounds. New school leaders should be able to speak about their PLP to prepare for leadership employment. This book will also assist experienced leaders to reflect on why they became principals and where they are in their unique leadership stories and career paths, examining both past and future goals. Another area of reflection is the leader’s mindset and whether the leader believes that things can change and improve, which includes “accepting failure as a necessary part of learning” (p. 63). Chapter two covers the three main leadership styles, which the authors call directing, guiding and enabling, as well as several other well-known leadership styles. The authors present case studies as lists of questions relative to each leadership style. Readers can reflect on when each style has been used (or might be used) in leadership situations. Principals can work through their decision-making process, the leadership style used, whether the actions were effective and why the results were realized.

Chapter 8 of this 180-page book includes examples of PLPs with specific recommendations on how to improve a written PLP. Key questions suggested to evaluate a PLP include identifying the leader’s leadership style, core values, mindset and unique leadership experiences. The book focuses on

developing individual leadership style and a process to continuously reflect on the PLP and adjust it as situations and times change. First drafts of PLPs are offered, followed by critiques of those drafts, to demonstrate the specific clarifying process school leaders can use to write and define their own PLP. A key to a successful PLP is to continuously reflect on leadership experiences and how they fit into the leader’s PLP.

This book is written in a user-friendly style, with simple questions that generate significant reflection. The writing tasks could potentially be completed as a thinking reflection while doing mundane daily tasks, like getting ready for the day or waiting for an appointment to begin. This book could be used repeatedly over time, and it could be an effective way for busy leaders to learn the self-reflection process on a daily or weekly basis, so leadership skills and goals are continuously improved. Additionally, it could be used alone, as an independent study, or with any number of other school leaders. The use of this book could potentially start out as shared reading for a school leadership team and then become an independent weekly check-in for each of the team members.

All school leaders face challenges, but the authors of *What is Your Leadership Story? A School Leader’s Guide to Aligning How You Lead with Who You Are*, provide school leaders with the power to improve leadership on an ongoing basis. In a time when many aspects of school leadership are beyond the leader’s control, this book gives school leaders the power to write their own leadership stories and to continue to improve. ■

REFERENCE:

Oltman, G., & Bautista, V. (2021). *What’s your Leadership Story? A School Leader’s Guide to Aligning How you Lead with Who You Are*. Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development (ASCD).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: *Susan M. Sibert, D.Ed.*, is the Professor and Coordinator of the Principal Certification Program at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. She may be contacted at smsibert@iup.edu

Submit an Article for The Pennsylvania Administrator Spring 2024 Theme Edition

The Pennsylvania Principals Association is seeking articles for the **Spring 2024 THEME issue** of *The Pennsylvania Administrator* magazine. The theme is: **“Reviving the Teaching Profession: Our Future in Education.”**

What are the challenges in today’s schools that are keeping high school graduates and adults from entering the education profession? How can these challenges be overcome to revive the profession? How can we be a part of shaping a culture that promotes teaching and learning?

What impacts could the following have related to our theme?

- Teacher Mentors
- Guidance Counselor influence
- Advisor/Advisee programs
- Pre-Apprenticeships
- CTC programs (Childcare and Support Services Management or Education, General)
- Articulation Agreements

To submit an article for this issue, please send it to sherit@papprincipals.org by **March 22, 2024**. For article specifications, please visit: <https://www.papprincipals.org/publications/the-pennsylvania-administrator/how-to-submit-an-article/>

Structured Literacy: Principals Must Lead the Way

By Gregory Taranto, Ph.D.



I served almost 20 years as a middle school principal of 850 students prior to moving to my current position as an Assistant to the Superintendent for K-6 Curriculum & Instruction. In my time as a middle school principal, I found it baffling that around 15% of our student population struggled with basic reading comprehension.

It was not until I moved to this new position that I started diving deep into research and literature to discover that the manner in which our school district, like many others, approached literacy was not grounded in the research. We approached literacy by using a balanced literacy approach which is still the most popular manner to teach in our country despite increasing evidence pointing out its flaws.

A staggering 70% of the prison population in the United States cannot read beyond a fourth-grade level (National Assessment of Adult Literacy, 2003). This alarming statistic highlights the urgent need for effective literacy interventions that can help break the cycle of illiteracy and pave the way for a brighter future. One such approach that has shown promising results is structured literacy.

Structured literacy is an evidence-based instructional method that focuses on teaching the foundational skills of reading and writing in a systematic and explicit manner (Lorimor-Easley & Reed, 2019). It provides a structured framework that enables learners to develop strong phonological awareness, phonics skills, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension abilities. By addressing the core components of literacy, structured literacy equips individuals with the tools they need to become proficient readers and writers.

Principal Perspective

Principals and administrators need to be learning leaders first and foremost. As the administrator goes, so does the school district or building. As a result, these administrators must make an effort to learn evidence-based practices to how children learn best to read. This means, as the learning leader, you are reading journals and articles, listening to podcasts, watching videos, attending conferences, etc., on the topic of literacy.

Building Strong Foundations

Learning to Read

Structured literacy starts by laying a solid foundation in phonemic awareness and phonological skills. These foundational skills are crucial for individuals who have missed out on early literacy instruction or have struggled

with reading and writing throughout their lives (National Reading Panel, 2000). By explicitly teaching these skills, structured literacy helps individuals develop a strong base upon which they can build their reading and writing abilities.

In addition, students need to also have the opportunity to see that reading is a vehicle to learning. A knowledge-building component as part of the literacy block is essential.

Principal Perspective

Principals can facilitate this by making sure they have high-quality curriculum and training as it relates to structured literacy in these early years.

Principals can place a special emphasis on this area from the start with the master schedule in the building by establishing a common literacy block. The common literacy block should outline specific skills and timeframes. **Our Grades 1-2 Literacy Block is shown as an example:**

1st -2nd Grade Literacy Block
Approximately 120-135 Minutes

- **Foundational Skills**
 - 60-75 minutes
 - Whole Group Foundational Skills (Word Recognition Skills) - 45-60 minutes
 - Heggerty - 10 minutes
 - Foundations - 50 - 60 minutes
 - 15 minutes
 - Small Group
 - Target word recognition deficits with smaller group
 - Re-teaching
 - Other students are working on an extension activity (re-reading decodable, writing, practicing skills, etc.)
 - **Knowledge Building**
 - Geodes as a whole group - 30 minutes
 - Structured small group - 30 minutes
 - Target knowledge deficits with a smaller group
 - Other students working on extension activities based on Geodes content (writing, hands-on activity, dyad reading, etc.)

Growing Knowledge

Reading to Learn

Starting in third grade, a shift from learning to read to reading to learn should take place. In our previous balanced literacy reading program, the text was not viewed as the primary source of knowledge because the focus was placed solely on skills such as main idea, inference, etc.

Texts were disconnected; vocabulary development and writing were approached as separate aspects. In structured literacy, the text is the vehicle to learn knowledge about interconnected ideas and concepts tied directly to vocabulary and writing development.

Everything is tied together to create strong mental schemata about core concepts. Knowledge building in many approaches to reading has been a missing component to growing stronger readers (Catts, 2021).

Principal Perspective

The adoption of a high-quality curriculum with specialization in knowledge building is important combined with high-quality training. We adopted Amplify's Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) and English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum. However, there are a number of free knowledge building curriculum available including EL Education. One common theme among our teachers is how much of a difference it makes having a professionally written curriculum versus one created by the school district.

Another step we took was moving from self-contained third- and fourth-grade classrooms to a platooning concept. This allowed us to target professional development to a smaller number of teachers to receive this specialized structured literacy training.

Interventions

Dyslexia in our population is common, with nearly one in every five people having some form of it, according to the International Dyslexia Association (2023). If not accurately diagnosed and without the necessary interventions in place, this can lead to a misdiagnosis of a general learning disability and a lifetime of struggles.

Principal Perspective

As a school district, we implemented a strict screening process to catch reading problems as early as possible. All K-4 students are screened three times a year, in addition to all new K-6 students. We also screen 5-6 students displaying any form of struggle in reading. This has allowed us to reach students and put appropriate reading support interventions in place.

Summary

- 1. Support Teachers:** Principals can provide guidance and support to teachers in implementing structured literacy instruction in the classroom. They can ensure that teachers have the necessary training and resources to effectively teach reading and writing using this approach.
- 2. Make Informed Decisions:** Principals who understand structured literacy can make informed decisions about curriculum and instructional practices. They can select materials and programs that align with the principles of structured literacy and promote reading success for all students.
- 3. Advocate for Students:** Principals can advocate for students with reading difficulties by early and often screening. They can ensure that students who need additional support receive appropriate interventions and accommodations to help them succeed.
- 4. Monitor Progress:** By understanding structured literacy, principals can monitor the progress of students in reading and writing. Principals need to provide continuing support when implementing structured literacy. It is not something that is presented to a group and then the teachers are asked to do it on their own. There must be ongoing support and monitoring.
- 5. Collaborate with Parents:** Finally, principals can educate parents about the benefits of structured literacy and involve them in supporting their child's reading development. They can provide resources and information to parents to help them understand how they can support their child's learning at home.

Principals and administrators can and should be leading the way to ensure evidence-based reading instruction is taking place in our schools. It is time to embrace it and help our teachers implement it in their classrooms. Please contact the author at tarantog@cmsd.k12.pa.us for further information. ■

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Economics of Good Behavior

By Veronica Will, Sandra Smith and Caitlin Kinnane



VERONICA WILL



SANDRA SMITH



CAITLIN KINNANE

A third-grade student sits in his reading class. He struggles to read a passage out loud. His teacher prompts him to read the paragraph correctly, but he fails to meet her expectations. The corrections follow in a punitive fashion, “You should know this by now,” she says. “If you don’t read this paragraph like I told you, there will be consequences.” If this response did not seem to fit the appropriate action of a teacher attempting to guide a student to a new understanding, that’s because it didn’t. However, the same techniques are often applied to students who struggle with behavior. A third-grade student struggles to stay focused and fidgets in class; a correction follows in a punitive fashion: “You should know this by now; if you don’t focus like I told you, there will be consequences.”

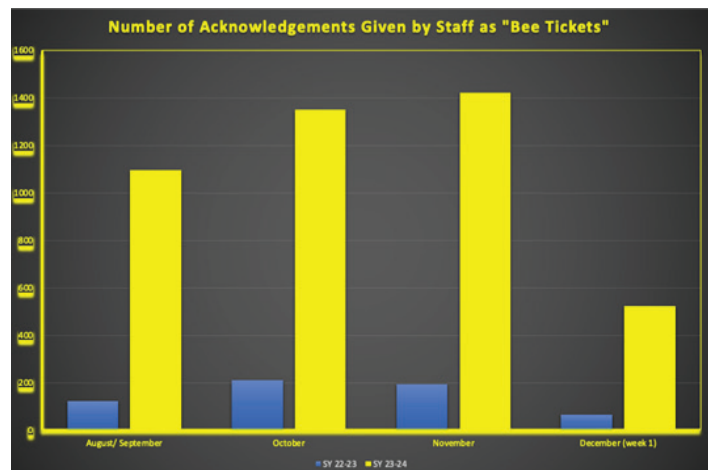
Standard behavior theory tells us that the behavior which receives the most attention is also most likely to be repeated.

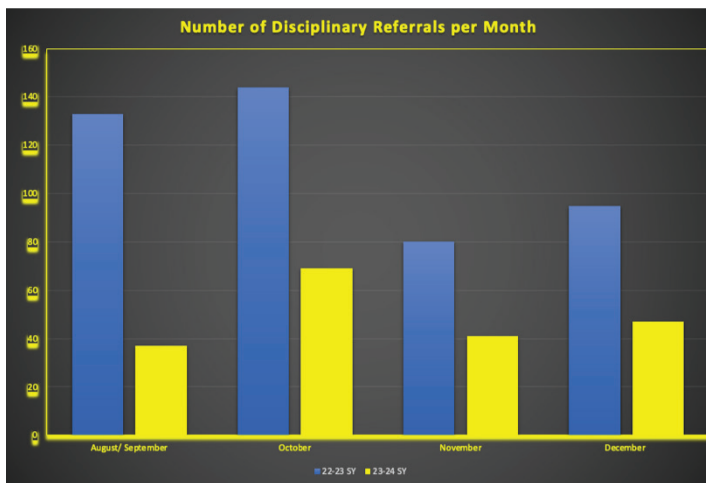
The Schoolwide Positive Behavior Intervention System (SWPBIS) is a program that utilizes these principles. When implemented with fidelity, SWPBIS has been shown to result in decreases in office discipline referrals and suspensions and improve academic outcomes, school climate and student engagement (George, Cox, Devon & Therese, 2018). Its aim is to develop positive student behaviors through direct instruction and reinforcement, much like the process of developing reading skills. The absence of appropriate behavior acknowledgment is often a lack of learned habit rather than malicious intent on behalf of adults interacting with students. Therefore, impacting the habits of staff will result in a direct change of student behavior. This can be achieved by establishing collective efficacy among staff. Deltour, Datchet, Monseur and Baye (2021) defined collective efficacy as teachers’ beliefs about the educational team’s ability to educate students constituting a norm that influences the actions and outcomes of schools. At Iroquois Elementary School, the use of a token economy as part of SWPBIS has supported not only a decrease in disciplinary referrals, but also an increase in staff’s attention to the occurrence of positive behavior by establishing a collective efficacy which can be predictive of students’ success.

One of the ways in which the SWPBIS model at Iroquois Elementary School produces expected behaviors is through the utilization of a token economy which distributes acknowledgements to students demonstrating those behaviors. The tokens are a tangible vehicle by which

staff can monitor their level of attention to expected behaviors. Monthly feedback is provided to staff by way of acknowledging the member who distributed the most acknowledgements to their students; he or she is bestowed with the “Golden Bee” title, a play on the token system that is used with the students. The ongoing expectations of “Bee Safe, Bee Kind, Bee Responsible” are promoted via “Bee Tickets” that staff hand out when they observe students engaging in desired behaviors. The token system allows students to trade in these acknowledgements for preferred tangible rewards. Simply put, teachers recognize good behavior, actively acknowledge it and students reap the benefits by trading their tickets for goods at the school store. Students also benefit in non-tangible ways by practicing and developing behaviors that will lead them toward school success.

The success of students in school is reflected in the evaluation of disciplinary referrals. Compared to the 2022-2023 school year, from August through the first week of December, Iroquois Elementary has observed a significant increase in the number of acknowledgements given by staff as “Bee Tickets.” Moreover, a 56% reduction in overall disciplinary referrals has resulted from the increase in acknowledgements. This reduction has rippled through other domains in the school setting. Peer relations have noticeably improved. Fewer incidents of reported bullying and peer conflict have risen to office level involvement. Administration has noted an increase in student determination, self-confidence, and grit fostered by the desire to meet the designated behavior expectations. Students are seeking ways to engage positively with others, understanding that this will lead to positive social recognition and praise. This leads us to believe that the consistent positive feedback, created through the collective efficacy of the staff, fosters a healthy self-image, that of a student who is willing to arrive at school ready to learn.





This has resulted in qualitative gains in classroom engagement, improved peer and staff relations and overall school climate. Mrs. Flagg, a recipient of the “Golden Bee,” summarizes it with this reflection:

“The bee program has been an amazing way to highlight my students for their individual achievements and praise them for their positive behavioral, academic, and social choices. Each day, I choose certain behaviors to promote (without telling the students in advance). These behaviors include being prepared for class, sharing their writing pieces, working actively as a team, or participating in class. Students are more likely to take risks and engage with the curriculum during class by encouraging them with the bees. In addition, students can earn other bees for other positive behaviors I notice throughout the day. I find that by using this program, students are striving to earn as many bees as they can while contributing to the overall classroom environment in a positive way.”

The “Bee Tickets” are not limited to the positive engagement of students at Iroquois Elementary School. Staff and administration have extended the system to their peers and actively acknowledge each other for their

contributions to the betterment of the school environment. Staff “Bee Tickets” are displayed on a “Staff Bee Board” in the main office. There is an opportunity to win gift cards and prizes. This comradery has promoted a culture centered around community, collaboration and acknowledgement. In parallel to the reasonable conclusions made about benefits to students, the positive feedback established by peer acknowledgement and distribution of “Bee Tickets,” has led to a subjective feel of improved staff morale and positive engagement in working toward supporting the student body and a healthier work culture.

The SWPBIS team at Iroquois Elementary School does not claim to have figured out the “economics of good behavior” in a vacuum. Through the use of data driven decision making, collaboration, and research, the Iroquois team has found a way to contribute positively to the overall climate of the building for both students and staff. This has been achieved through collective efficacy among staff to support student behavioral success. Making the right investments in appropriate behavior supports through the adoption of this system has demonstrated that the “economics of good behavior” have less to do with students and more to do with the actions taken on by the adults who guide them toward success.

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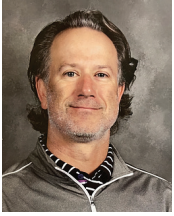
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Fostering Teacher Well-Being: A Servant Leadership Perspective

By Dr. James Croushore and Dr. Melinda Kulick



JAMES CROUSHORE, ED.D.



MELINDA KULICK, ED.D.

Public schools operate within two very messy, interconnected worlds demanding attention: mandates and local communities. On one hand, mandates placed upon schools by the state and the federal government dictate how educational organizations function instead of considering the ultimate best interests of teaching and learning. Progress from these mandates and student test scores are often the measuring stick for the evaluation of public schools. On the other hand, are the communities that public schools serve. Families, businesses and organizations look to districts and schools for direction, guidance, innovative leadership and support. These, and many

other leadership characteristics, are embedded within Bon Air Elementary School and the Burrell School District (BSD) through servant leadership. As defined by Robert Greenleaf (2002), servant leadership is a leader being a servant first and a leader second, ensuring the needs of those being served are met before leading happens. At BSD, intentional effort is made to grow servant leadership from administrators, to teachers and to students in hopes of creating more servant leaders.

Before delving into the transformative power of servant leadership, it is essential to acknowledge the challenges educators face today. Teachers often grapple with heavy workloads, challenging student dynamics and societal expectations that can lead to stress, burnout and a gradual erosion of the joy that initially drew them to the profession (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Bringing happiness and joy back into the profession is a challenging task. COVID-19 is often thought of as the tipping point for educators wanting to leave the profession. Low salaries, stress, burnout, teaching workplace conditions and feelings of a lack of respect and value are a few of the many reasons the teacher attrition rate for Pennsylvania in 2023 increased from 6.2% to 7.7% (Fuller, 2023).

State and federal mandates and local government control create a push-pull between stakeholders, teachers and administrators. The struggle lies between focusing efforts on test scores or other factors influencing their school's Future Ready Index instead of where the focus should be, on teaching and learning. With the current public education landscape, school leaders may find themselves witnessing their school culture suffer. Servant leadership is crucial at this time. Acknowledging the difficulties teachers face daily will not mend a suffering school culture or climate.

Administrators must listen to the needs of teachers and provide them with the leadership and support they require while offering opportunities to grow, both personally and professionally.

To determine if servant leadership is genuine, one can examine if those being served grow as people by becoming healthier, wiser and likely to become servants themselves (Lowney, 2003). This approach aligns well with the needs of teachers who often find themselves overwhelmed with responsibilities while trying their best to serve students daily. School leaders adopting servant leadership actively listen to teachers' concerns, empathize with their challenges and provide the necessary support to create a positive work environment. As communities look to public schools for support, how can school leaders seek innovative and revolutionary solutions to combat the attrition of teachers from the profession? One suggestion is to encourage open and honest dialogue within the school community. Open and honest communication should be the expectation when administrators perform check-ins, through informal and formal observations, as well as establishing an open platform for teachers to provide feedback expressing concerns and ideas. An approach to these types of open conversations is strength-based discussions with teachers. Strength-based discussions can shift the emphasis away from diagnosing problems and fixing weaknesses to examining strengths that will bring about a more lasting, positive change (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2020).

Another opportunity for servant leadership is providing meaningful professional development for teachers. A one-



size-fits-all approach to professional development is a thing of the past. Providing personalized professional development options for teachers instills ownership in the process. To understand the personal needs of teachers, data collection and analysis through surveys begins in advance of the next school year. This technique combines practicing open communication, personalizing to meet teacher needs and carrying those needs and wants throughout the school year. Accountability for assisting with individual goal achievement and providing feelings of efficacy for teachers is a critical element that needs to be a part of the professional development process. BSD's professional development schedule is designed for faculty and staff to prioritize required and optional learning opportunities. The district has found success in the last few years by instituting flexible options for teachers (the learners) to complete their annual professional development. Flexibility includes the opportunity to choose individual, relevant online courses and training and complete contractual clerical time from their home on designated in-service days.

When the learner's point of view is considered, the collaborative process leading to decision-making evolves into teachers becoming empowered learners. Believe it or not, learning then becomes a byproduct of collaborative decision-making. Remake Learning and Knowledge Works best describes the voice of empowered learners as "ensuring learners can articulate what they care about and how they learn best while playing an active role in designing their learning goals" (Remake Learning, 2023). Not all collaborative decision-making teachers might be invited to revolve around learning goals, but how nice would it be if it did? Establishing a collaborative process gives teachers a voice in the decision-making process empowering ownership and personal investment through their thoughts, feelings and beliefs. While this type of collaboration can evoke strong feelings and often become personal, teacher-voice opens conversations from both instructional and student advocacy vantage points. Within the Burrell School District, opportunities exist for teacher voices to be involved in the recommendations and decision-making for curriculum writing, adoption of curriculum materials, professional development topics and schedules, yearly school calendars and technology needs. We believe that serving teachers and offering a voice and choice in these areas enhances workplace contentment. Again, the collaborative process precipitates teacher buy-in and ownership of the process.

Creating a culture of appreciation within schools is another practical way of bringing joy to the teaching profession. Professional learning communities (PLC) are one starting point to develop a culture of appreciation. Building community within a teaching team can lead to the sweet spot of workplace positivity. The sweet spot includes connection to the organization, meaningful pursuits and a feeling of efficacy. The meaningful connections and positive reinforcement from team members can boost morale and bring joy and happiness back to teaching. BSD adopted PLCs and established teams in 2016. The PLC process is truly job-embedded professional development, enhancing teacher learning through the collection and analysis of their student data while learning pedagogical strategies from one



another that work best for their students. We believe the PLC process can be the sweet spot in making workplace positivity a reality for teachers.

Considering the seven pillars of servant leadership: a person of character, putting people first, skillful communicator, compassionate collaborator, foresight, systems, thinking and moral authority outline many opportunities for districts to put people first (Sipe & Frick, 2015). Servant leadership offers a compelling framework for revitalizing the teaching profession. By embracing empathy, collaboration and a commitment to growth, leaders can create environments where joy and happiness are not just ideals but tangible aspects of the teaching experience. Servant leadership opportunities within schools assist with reinstating joy.

Think about how frequently planning is done both inside and outside of classrooms using a collaborative approach. The Sunshine Committee at Bon Air Elementary aims to provide a culture of community for faculty and staff by planning a fun, collegial celebration once a month. Each monthly event is teacher – and administrator – driven with the final activity taking place at the end of the school year – attending a Pittsburgh Pirates' baseball game. Monthly activities have proven to be a wonderful way of bringing teachers together and providing them with opportunities to cultivate camaraderie outside of the classroom. Working hard to shift thinking over the past several years, BSD students have begun to share in the servant leadership role. There have been many ways students volunteer their time and raise money. One way has been through a fourth- and fifth-grade program called "Kids for Kids." Money is raised through a student-led market with profits in the thousands of dollars being donated to UPMC Children's Hospital. These small-scale projects cultivate service in individuals we assist and broaden the concepts of service to others.

In the pursuit of educational excellence, let us not forget the well-being of those at the forefront—the teachers—who, with joy in their hearts, shape the future of generations to follow. As leaders and educators alike reflect on the principles of servant leadership, there is a unique opportunity to usher in a new era of fulfillment and happiness in the teaching profession. It is our responsibility as school leaders to exercise creativity in the redesign and development of the systems and frameworks that enable teachers to teach, rather than state mandates and outside influences forcing them away from our children's best interests.

For further information, please reach out to Dr. Croushore at jcroushore@burrell.k12.pa.us ■

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It's Time to Invest in Principals

By Edward Roth, Jr.



I vividly remember how amazed I was when I received the phone call from our assistant superintendent telling me that I would be the next principal of the only school I had ever professionally called home. After all, I ended a previous interview

by telling the committee that I was too young and inexperienced to get the job (*if you are reading this and preparing for a job interview, I do not recommend including that line in your planned remarks*). However, after just three years as an assistant principal, I was about to take over as the building principal of one of the largest schools in America. Was I excited? Of course! Was I nervous? Way more than I cared to admit. However, it was already August and there was no time to dwell on it, let alone move my belongings into my new office.

My amazement about how much I was trusted by my two assistant superintendents (we were hiring a new superintendent), the school board and the others on the committee quickly turned to anxiety. I needed to hire two new assistant principals, including one to finish the building schedule! When we hired a new superintendent, he was from outside the district and had a stellar reputation as a high school principal (no pressure!). Before the news broke, I was observed by one of our curriculum supervisors, who commented that it was unfortunate that I wasn't older as I would have been an excellent fit for the position (I couldn't be angry since it's exactly what I said in my interview). Subsequently, I received a call from my supervisor informing me that the district intended to utilize a portion of its School Improvement Grant funding to hire a recently retired principal as my mentor. Even though I was quietly doubting myself, I was now insulted that anyone believed I required a mentor. Maybe I was too inexperienced after all.

Wayne McAllister, a former member of the PA Principals Association board of directors and of the magazine's editorial review board, becoming my mentor shouldn't have been a surprise. He retired after 30 years as an elementary school principal in that same school district. I did not know him well, but knew he had an incredible reputation and seemed to be a great guy. During the summer I was interviewing, he was the high school's interim administrator, so I got to see first-hand how he handled the position and the pressure our team faced in getting ready for the new school year. To be honest, I think that having him there that summer made it easier for

me to get the job in the first place since I knew that people valued and sought his opinions. It felt as though someone was assigned to keep an eye on me, but if that was what was needed, I was glad Wayne was the guy tasked with the job.

At the time, I did not realize that principal turnover was so common. The principal who came before me held the position for four years, and the principal before him was there for over a decade. Because of my limited expertise, I was unaware that around 20% of building leaders leave their positions *every year* (Winters, Kisida & Cho, 2023). My district was not assigning me a babysitter; they were investing in me so I could be the effective, long-term principal I wanted to be and that every school needs. I was not given the name of a colleague whom I could call and ask questions (while

they were putting out fires of their own). Instead, I received embedded, in-house assistance as I began a journey that many people were unaware would be difficult until they had actually completed it. Every first-time principal should have this same experience.

Wayne worked there a few days a week in addition to his other responsibilities outside of my building. I will always remember a few of our earlier conversations. He warned me that some people would treat me differently than I had ever been

treated. He gave me advice, saying that some people will always tell me what I want to hear, that some will sabotage my efforts and that some will try to tarnish my reputation in order to protect their own. He advised me to never stop leading with kindness and empathy, but also to make sure my kindness was never taken as a weakness. Speaking *my truth* to those above and below me is crucial, he continued; he had seen too many talented leaders lose the trust of others when they did not. He told me to sell my successes no one else would. I even remember him telling me that when the district spends \$100,000 on mechanical repairs to tell everyone, so they can take pride in knowing that investments were being made. These conversations taught me some valuable lessons as I got started in my administrative career. They have rung true for me ever since and helped me continue to be an effective principal 11 years later.

My first day as a principal was a complete disaster. The schedule was a mess, rooms were double booked, as were some teachers. The PA system, replaced during the summer, didn't work. We had several unfilled teaching positions. It was awful but my mentor still didn't tell me what to do. He

“**However, after just three years as an assistant principal, I was about to take over as the building principal of one of the largest schools in America.**”



answered questions if I had them, and he jumped in to help cover rooms and look up schedules. I told him I thought we needed an emergency faculty meeting at the end of the day. He just said it was a good idea and reminded me to be authentic. The day was a disaster, I told my faculty, and it would never happen again. I let them see I was upset, and they appreciated my candor. My mentor shook my hand as I walked off the stage and informed me that the day went much better than I even realized and to never forget how I handled that moment. He went home, and my team and I worked until 5 a.m. to fix the schedules. The next day was much better (minus our exhaustion). I learned a lot that day. Most importantly, I learned that even though I had an awful day, I was able to handle the job. How did I know? Wayne told me I could. Thankfully, he was there to tell me.

This job really is unlike any other. Every new principal should be fortunate enough to have an in-house mentor. Wayne helped me harness my talents and fit them into a system that I was only learning how to navigate. Whether it was how to understand in-district politics or by being a confidant when I had to make difficult personnel decisions, Wayne quietly steered me clear of some heartache in those

early days. Better yet, his words still ring true for me 11 years (and two schools) later. There have been many times when I didn't know what to do, and I referred back to his sage advice *to stay true to myself*. I can still hear him say, "Hey pal, do what you think is best. That's why they hired you."

True mentorship programs for emerging school leaders are not common. A literature review by Watts (2023) found only 45 scholarly articles on the topic. If we want to help new leaders evolve into experienced change agents, we need to find them better support structures. Wayne cannot mentor every new principal in Pennsylvania. However, forward-thinking districts and professional organizations like the PA Principals Association, are diligently working to assist those who are willing to take the keys to a school and the pressure that comes with them. Experienced principals should continue to seek out new colleagues and offer them mentorship and guidance. If you are reading this during your first year as a principal, or as you prepare for an interview (where you will not say you are too inexperienced), advocate for the help you need and don't be ashamed when it is offered. A mentor is an investment, and if we want to stabilize the world of education, we need to invest in leaders who can do so.

For more information, contact Mr. Roth at eroth@rtmsd.org ■

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Melinda Kulick, Ed.D., serves as the Technology Integration Coach at Burrell School District. She has over 20 years of experience as a personal coach, higher education faculty trainer and K-12 technology coach and teacher. In addition, she is a Google Trainer and Remake Learning Personalized Learning Ambassador.

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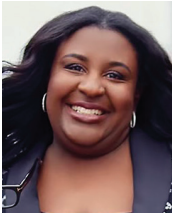


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Lower Merion School District Emphasizes “Building Belonging” with a Social Media Campaign

By Shawanna James-Coles and Amy Buckman



SHAWANNA JAMES-COLES



AMY BUCKMAN

For decades, both the fields of education and psychology have recognized the significance of belonging (Booker, 2016). A sense of belonging at school is associated with many positive school adjustment outcomes (Gray, Hope, & Byrd, 2020). Building a sense of belonging in schools is crucial for fostering a positive learning environment. Research has consistently shown that when students feel connected to their school community, they are more likely to engage in learning, have higher academic achievement and experience better mental health.

A sense of belonging contributes to a supportive social environment, reducing feelings of isolation and promoting positive relationships among students and between students and teachers. Building belonging can impact students’ overall wellbeing and academic and personal success.

Understanding the necessity of fostering belonging, the Lower Merion School District (LMSD) aims to reduce the “belonging gap.” The belonging gap occurs when some groups experience a lack of belonging, belonging uncertainty or violations of dignity (Cobb & Krownapple, 2019). LMSD prides itself on providing students and staff with a safe and welcoming environment.

LMSD was the first district in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to enact Policy 259 protecting Transgender and Gender Diverse students and staff, a policy that has since become a model for many other districts. It was one of the first suburban districts to enact Equity Policy 101 and was a founding member of the University of Pennsylvania’s Delaware Valley Consortium for Excellence and Equity (DVCEE). In addition to policies that support student wellbeing, the Committee to Address Race in Education (CARE) – comprised of students, staff, administrators and community members – has met monthly since 1997. The parent/guardian Committee for Special Education has worked collaboratively with the district since its founding in 1972.

As political polarization began to predominate the national landscape, some of the district’s longstanding efforts to build a sense of belonging for all students were called into question. These included the district’s “Cultural Proficiency for Kids” lessons, efforts to engage more girls and Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) students in advanced STEM courses, and its support for LGBTQ+ students and staff. To help cut through the fiery rhetoric and to better explain

the intent and execution of these efforts to students, families and the community, Director of School and Community Relations Amy Buckman and Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Shawanna James-Coles developed the #LMSDBuildingBelonging campaign.

On the district website, www.lmsd.org, social media pages and in other communications, staff and students are encouraged to share the hashtag #LMSDBuildingBelonging, along with its accompanying logo, which shows a school house, where the building blocks of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion form the foundation for Belonging.

When the district shares stories and messages about students’ and staff’s accomplishments and activities, it calls out how Diversity, Inclusion, Equity and Belonging (DIEB) concepts are embedded in everything done in the district,

knowing that children flourish when they feel a sense of safety and belonging. Student organizations and the home and school associations are encouraged to use the hashtag and logo in their communications to help further the message that everyone is valued in LMSD.



LMSD’s “Building Belonging” schoolhouse illustrates that Diversity, Equity and Inclusion build the foundation for belonging in the district.

Holiday meals sponsored by the Best Buddies organization; programs by the various high schools’ affinity groups; activities fairs where students can see the myriad of clubs, sports and activities they’re welcome to join; Unified Sports competitions; and the “Jazz and Friends” family reading night hosted by the All Gender Sexuality Alliance (AGSA) are all examples of district events that are shared on the website and social media with the hashtag.

In addition, a hallway display featuring the #LMSDBuildingBelonging logo and the faces of dozens of students and staff was created to welcome visitors to school board meetings in the district administration offices. Beyond the logo and hashtag, the district is working to increase a sense of belonging and engagement for families who may not have felt welcomed in the past. This includes Mrs. James-Coles, Dr. Steven Yanni, the

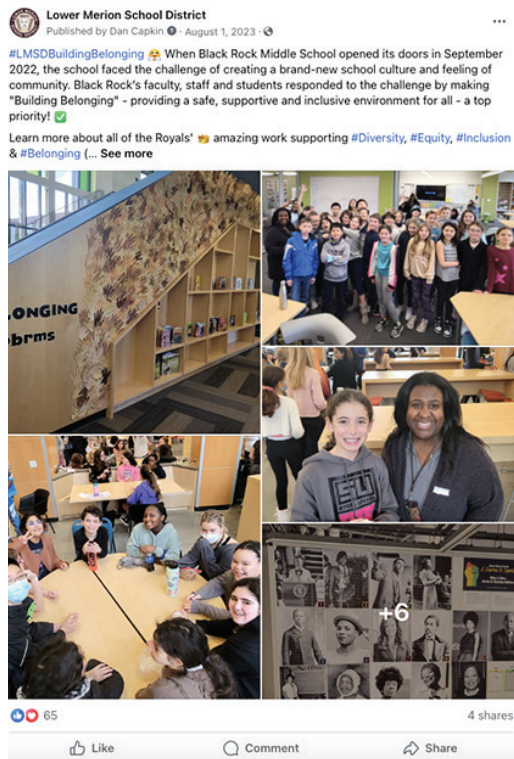
Superintendent of Schools, and other administrators attending grassroots “Community Conversations” held at churches and community centers and the traditional “Ask the Superintendent” meetings on school properties. Ms. Buckman, Mrs. James-Coles and other district administrators have hosted a table at the community “National Night Out,” handing out crayons and back-to-school coloring books to children while assisting parents and guardians with signing up for online accounts and sharing information about free and reduced lunch and district-sponsored, free at-home internet access.

“Focusing on belonging is crucial because it creates environments where everyone feels valued, respected, and included. When people feel a sense of belonging, they’re more likely to engage, contribute their best and collaborate effectively. It enhances overall wellbeing, fosters diversity of thought and cultivates a supportive community where individuals can thrive. Ultimately, prioritizing belonging leads to stronger relationships, increased productivity, and a more positive and inclusive culture for all,” said Dr. Steven M. Gianni, LMSD Superintendent of Schools.

Mrs. James-Coles has brought the #LMSDBuildingBelonging campaign to our youngest learners. According to Roffey, Boyle and Allen (2019), it is essential that all students feel a sense of belonging to their school. Our elementary students enjoy listening to stories about belonging, making connections and engaging in activities where they find things they have in common with peers.

Mrs. James-Coles is also working with student-led groups to encourage them to incorporate the #LMSDBuildingBelonging into their peer-to-peer messaging, while Ms. Buckman is working closely with the English Language Development (ELD) teachers, school psychologists and social workers to implement additional language translation services for families who may have difficulty understanding or accessing communications sent by the district and their children’s schools. At the annual spring ELD ice cream social and resource fair, the #LMSDBuildingBelonging logo was used on buttons worn by staff and volunteer translators and interpreters to identify them as community-builders for ELD families most comfortable in languages other than English.

The #LMSDBuildingBelonging campaign is ongoing work. Schools play an essential role in building groups and social networks and offer opportunities for students to develop a sense of belonging (Allen & Bowles, 2013). The district hopes to continue to build the sense of belonging that students and staff need to achieve their highest levels of success.



An example of LMSD's social media campaign. #LMSD-BuildingBelonging

For further information, please contact Mrs. James-Coles at jamescs@lmsd.org ■

The success of the campaign is identified through positive feedback from the belonging survey, active participation of the campaign in schools and across the district, the inclusion of the campaign at school events, sharing positive comments on social media, personal narratives/stories and the feeling of a sense of

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Amy Buckman joined the Lower Merion School District as Director of School and Community Relations in March 2018, after spending 28 years as a television news reporter and producer, including 25 years at Philadelphia’s powerhouse 6abc/Action News. Determined to use her communication skills in support of vitally important, mission-driven work, she transitioned into public relations, first in support of journalism, as manager of public relations and special events for the Philadelphia Inquirer and then by returning to the school district from which she graduated to promote high-quality public education for all students.

Welcome NEW Elementary Members

6/30/2023 - 12/18/2023

<u>NAME</u>	<u>DISTRICT</u>	<u>NAME</u>	<u>DISTRICT</u>
Jonathan Blake	Avon Grove SD	Jeremy Kulago	Troy Area SD
Vanessa Boyd	Butler Area SD	Sarah Kumar	Highlands SD
Paul Bozella	Selinsgrove Area SD	Chera Mason	Philipsburg-Osceola Area SD
Justin Bruce	Northern Lebanon SD	Alison Matusko	Central Dauphin SD
Todd Burns	Souderton Area SD	Jennifer Menaker	Upper Darby SD
Rachel Butler-Pardi	Duquesne City SD	Richard Menear	Southeastern Greene SD
Rebecca Champion	East Penn SD	Jason Menghini	Crestwood SD
Tammy Cook	Dubois Area SD	Michelle Mercado	Central Dauphin SD
Christie Corcoran	Central Bucks SD	Kelly Mignogna	Portage Area SD
Heriberto Cordero	Warwick SD	Dr. Lori Murtha	Beaver Valley IU 27
John Cupples	Easton Area SD	Ryan Nye	Reading SD
Dr. Lauren Czyszczon	Ridley SD	Javon Oates	William Penn SD
Frank D'Agostino	Tamaqua Area SD	Dr. Tara Orefice	Tamaqua Area SD
Kendra Darr	Warren County SD	Christopher Ortman	Beaver Area SD
Seth Decker	Milton Area SD	Jessica Parker	Seneca Valley SD
Nicole Delsandro	Erie City SD	Ernest Patrick	Upper Darby SD
Dr. Edward Dombroski	Dubois Area SD	Whitney Petrosky	Armstrong SD
Heather Dzikiy	Dubois Area SD	Brent Pistner	Chambersburg Area SD
Robert Eastwood	Avonworth SD	Andrew Pry	Eastern York SD
David Eggleton	Clarion-Limestone Area SD	Amy Ransom	Warren County SD
Radharari Ericson	Bangor Area SD	Chad Riddle	Central York SD
Jennifer Felix	Lampeter-Strasburg SD	Dr. Christopher Rudisill	Mechanicsburg Area SD
Megan Flaherty	Wilkinsburg Borough SD	Matt Sadowsky	East Stroudsburg Area SD
Roshanna Floyd	Reading SD	Amy Santanasto	Bethlehem Area SD
Michael Freeborn	Warrior Run SD	Erik Sawchuk	Pottsgrove SD
Emily Gainor	Central Dauphin SD	Ethan Sentz	Bermudian Springs SD
James Galligan	Upper Darby SD	Catherine Smith	William Penn SD
Rachel Gardocky	SD of the Boro. of Wilkinsburg	Trina Snoke	Chambersburg Area SD
Joshua Gibson	Susquehanna Twp SD	Laura Steele	Towanda Area SD
Ralph Gioia	McKeesport Area SD	Meghan Stefanucci	Crawford Central SD
Alyse Gonzalez	Upper Darby SD	Dana Stepanic	Connellsville Area SD
Taylor Good	Donegal SD	Brian Strazdus	Wyoming Area SD
Andrea Gunns	Erie City SD	Dr. Kathleen Swantner	Hempfield SD
Melissa Haft	Erie City SD	Ron Swantner	Hempfield SD
Mark Hamilton	Susquenita SD	Steve Talley	Garnet Valley SD
Stephanie Hannan	North Penn SD	Elayne Thomas	Steelton-Highspire SD
Stacey Herncane	Chestnut Ridge SD	Christina Tuell	Columbia Borough SD
Kaitlin Hoch	North Hills SD	Kelly Vaughn	Avon Grove SD
Stephanie Hoesly	Canon-McMillan SD	Brian Wallace	Avon Grove SD
Brett Hoffmaster	Lewisburg Area SD	Rebecca Walseman	Susquenita SD
Michael Ishler	Pottstown SD	Tara Walter	Allentown City SD
Renee Jerge	Girard SD	Jeannette Williams	Glendale SD
Travis Jones	Conestoga Valley SD	Kristin Wilson	Forest Hills SD
Hannah Kim	Upper Dublin SD	William Wonders	Big Spring SD
Stacey Kimble	Big Spring SD	Travis Zook	Mifflin County SD
Christopher Kimmel	Weatherly Area SD	Stephen Croft	Wilson SD
Nicholas Krajcic	Reading SD	Christopher Low	West Chester Area SD
Andrew Kreider	Eastern Lancaster Co. SD		



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Principals, It's Time to Move Beyond Empathy and Lead with Compassion

By Dr. Zac Bauermaster



One spring afternoon, I rode my bike around town with my three kids. We were having a great time, smiling and laughing as we cruised the streets. It was a beautiful day, and even though the kids were still relatively young, they could ride their own bikes. As we were riding, we came to a long,

gradual hill. I decided the best thing I could do was set an example for them and go out in front as the leader.

I went ahead of my three kids, showing them the way to the top of the hill. I began to peddle faster to help propel me toward the top. My legs were burning, but I kept going without looking back. I reached the top of the hill and rested under a stop sign while waiting for my kids to arrive any second. Unfortunately, as I looked back, I saw and heard a few things I was not expecting. Two of my children were halfway up the hill, standing beside their bikes. I heard my oldest daughter yell, "Dad, we can't do it!" My youngest was about a quarter of the way up the hill, crying and yelling for me to come back down. "Daddy, come back!" I listened, but instead of going down the hill to meet them, I stayed at the top and waited for them to arrive as they walked their bikes.

Fast forward to a few weeks later, and we were out for a bike ride again, enjoying our time together until we got near the hill. My oldest two started to say, "Let's find another way to go; we don't want to go to the hill. We can't do it." As we continued riding, I prepped them verbally. I said, "You can make it up the hill; I know you can!" I also added a little advice: "While we are approaching the hill, start to pedal faster so you can gain momentum to help you the whole way up the hill."

Off we went up the hill. Once again, I sped off toward the top of the hill to set the example. As I reached the top of the hill and stood under the stop sign, I turned around with no kids nearby. There they stood again off their bikes, a couple of kids crying, one even saying, "This isn't fun anymore. Let's just go home." We finished our bike ride that day with not everyone in the greatest of moods.

I began reflecting. I wanted the kids to get to the top of the hill. It wasn't about me getting to the top of the hill, but about my kids getting to the top. I recognized that their moods had changed drastically over the past two bike rides. They were either crying or sharing their displeasure with the hill and how I was leading or failing to lead them, to be more exact, up the hill.

The following weekend, the kids and I headed out on our bikes. I was excited to face the hill when my middle daughter suggested, "Let's go a different way; I don't want to go to the hill." I listened, but no matter what, we were going to the hill

that day. As we approached the hill, I spoke individually to all three. I rode my bike behind my oldest daughter and said, "You go ahead. You can do this; I will be right behind you." I pedaled my bike beside my two younger children and said, "You can do this. I'm going to be pedaling right here beside you."

As our legs burned, we moved closer and closer to the top of the hill. My oldest daughter smiled at the top of the hill as she exclaimed, "I made it!" I arrived at the top of the hill with the other two a few seconds later. That day, we stood at the top of the hill for a few extra seconds, fist-bumping and high-fiving one another to celebrate everyone reaching the top. A few days later, we headed out for another bike ride. Guess what they said this time? "Daddy, let's go to the hill!" I asked my daughter, "What helped you get to the top of the hill last time we rode?" Her response was, "Because we knew you were right there with us." Wow, those nine words from my daughter hit me hard. "Because we knew you were right there with us."

Lesson Learned

The most effective leaders understand their followers' needs. I had been attempting to lead by example, expecting my children to follow and ride up the hill. However, all my children needed was for me to notice their needs and act compassionately by meeting them where they were. How often do we, as leaders, get out in front of those we lead and incorrectly assume they are right there with us, and we are with them? It wasn't about me reaching the top of the hill but moving my three kids to the top. Leadership is not about the leader being out in front, reaching the "top" before anyone else. Leadership is about coming alongside the people we lead, observing their needs, meeting them where they are, and helping them reach their full potential—often at heights they didn't think they could reach.

Benefits of Compassionate Leadership

Principals, it's time to move beyond empathy and lead with compassion. The word compassion is derived from the Latin roots "com," meaning "with, together," and "pati," meaning "to suffer." So, at its core, compassion can be understood as "to suffer with." Compassion is a critical component of effective leadership. According to the Harvard Business Review, neuroimaging research has shown that leaders who display compassion receive more positive responses from people's brains. Establishing a compassionate culture has been associated with reduced emotional exhaustion among employees (a key factor in burnout) and decreased employee absenteeism from work (Trzeciak, Marrarelli, & Seppala, 2023).

Research findings also indicate that when leaders prioritize the welfare of their employees, it significantly influences various aspects of the work environment. This focus serves as a reliable predictor of factors such as employee job satisfaction, perceived organizational support, loyalty and trust in the organization, ultimately leading to higher retention rates (Van Dierendonck, 2010). Additionally, this approach is associated with enhanced employee job performance by increasing motivation and has demonstrated positive effects on overall team performance (Schaubroeck, Lam, & Peng, 2011). Author and speaker Simon Sinek (2014) said, “Leadership is not about being in charge. Leadership is about taking care of those in your charge.”

Take Action: The Three L’s to Leading with Compassion

1. **Look Up, Slow Down and Look Around** - We cannot effectively lead others with compassion if we are operating at a hurried pace and not taking the time to slow down and use our eyes to look for the needs of others. A Johns Hopkins study found that giving someone just 40 seconds of compassion can lower their anxiety in a measurable way (Trzeciak & Mazzarelli, 2019). When we make the effort to show individuals that we are happy to give them the time they need and deserve, we can enhance compassion. Leaders can be so “busy” that they often forget to pause and slow down. In a world, society and profession that are moving faster and faster, we must consider the needs of others by slowing down, *looking* up and *looking* around. Next time you are walking quickly through the hallway from one place to another, purposefully slow down and look around. Someone needs you. Be an unhurried leader.
2. **Listen More: Speak Less and Ask Questions** - Leading with compassion means *listening* more, asking questions and speaking less. We can learn so much about people when we close our mouths and open our ears. Questions are one of the most effective ways to connect with others. Listening allows leaders to not only hear the words that are spoken but also understand why the words are being spoken. Listening begins with asking the right questions. When a staff member is struggling, ask *how* you can support them instead of asking yes-or-no questions. Instead of asking *if* there is anything you can do to help, ask *how* you can help. I worked with a principal who often asked staff members the following questions: What do you need? How can I help? Most importantly, he listened, cared and took action. We want to invite staff members to share *how* we can help and support them, and when the right questions are asked in the right way, it will often give us something actionable. Leaders often

think we need to have the right answers when we should focus on asking the right questions, *listening* and learning.

3. **Learn to Discern the Needs of Others** - Looking and listening allow leaders to build social awareness to diagnose and *learn* the needs of others and action steps to follow. Taylor (2022) states that we will *learn* to appreciate the emotions of others as a form of data helping us diagnose where people are, what they need and what they don’t. Too often, leaders move into action before taking the time to diagnose the needs around them. Leading with compassion requires adaptive leadership adapting to the moment by looking and listening to *learn* to discern the needs of others.

Summary

To put it simply, compassion is empathy in action. The actions we take have a far more significant impact than the words we speak. *People need to know we are right there with them.* That’s compassion; that’s leadership. Leading with compassion means individuals know we see them; we see their needs and we care. It is making a difference one staff member at a time. Leadership isn’t for show; it’s compassionately walking humbly and quietly alongside others through life’s “little” moments.

People want to know their leader is by their side, caring about them as a *person*. As leaders, we shouldn’t stop at empathy, sharing the feelings of others, but allow empathy to move us toward compassion. Empathizing should drive us to observe the needs of others and respond accordingly. Compassion is not simply empathizing with what someone is feeling or going through; compassion is recognizing suffering and moving beyond empathy with a willingness to help.

Make the time to be a student of all the people around you, prioritize them, genuinely get to know them, empathize, observe their needs and move into action with compassion.

For more information, you may contact the author at zac_bauermaster@solancosd.org or www.zacbauermaster.com. ■

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PA Principals Association PIL Program

The Team: Building Leadership Success that Improves Student Learning

30 Act 45 PIL Hours - Cost is \$250/person



The Pennsylvania Principals Association will bring this PIL workshop to your school or district.

Goals of the Program:

This course is designed for building and district level teams or individuals looking to improve their leadership skills regardless of position. The text for this course is *The 360° Leader* by John Maxwell. Beyond the author's excellent leadership advice, chapters focus on leading down if you are the boss, leading up if you are the assistant and leading across to members on your team.

Participants could include any of the following:

- A principal and assistant principal. **(1&2)**
- A superintendent and assistant superintendent (and other cabinet members). **(1&2)**
- A principal, or group of principals in a district, without an assistant principal(s) who wants to improve their leadership ability. **(1-1-1)**
- An assistant principal who wants to improve their "leading up" leadership ability. **(2-2-2)**
- A school or district team. **(1-2-3)**

Learning Objectives:

- Review, discuss and improve upon the **team relationship** at the building level / district level to improve overall effectiveness and improve student learning.
- Establish routine opportunities for **communication** between the team and others.
- Assess **trust** at the building level / district level and identify pitfalls and opportunities to improve the importance of trust.
- Assess and reflect upon their personal **leadership style** to maximize impact on the team.
- Develop strategies for **leading up, leading down** and **leading across**.
- Create **daily, weekly, monthly and yearly** opportunities to talk about building leadership, building culture and student learning.

Program Requirements:

- Read text and complete **Book Read Summary**.
- Complete an **Action Plan Summary**.
- Complete a **Performance Goal Template**.

If you have additional questions or would like to schedule this PIL program, please contact Dr. Michael Snell at msnell@paprincipals.org

Why You Need a Support Team in Your Life

By Tyler P. Cook, Ed.D.



Leadership is not for the faint of heart, and sometimes we find ourselves feeling stuck. As a result, we tend to feel the need to work through those things alone, whether out of embarrassment, the fear of appearing inadequate, or even believing the lie that the people closest to us will

look at us differently. In these moments, we will oftentimes do whatever it takes to make others believe we've got it all under control. However, this can lead to burnout, not managing our emotions well, or further isolating ourselves from those who really care about us.

But the truth is that leadership is not meant to be done alone. We need the people in our lives whom we trust to share the truth with us, support us in our journey, and speak into our lives about our “blind spots” that are stealing from us. However, this all starts with a humble invitation to welcome feedback into our lives, even when it's not always what we want to hear. Because usually, that's when we need to hear it the most.

Your Support Team

There is such value in a personal community in a leader's life. Not solely for encouragement but for support and accountability. Reflect for a moment on those people in your circle whom you deeply trust to speak into your life. Maybe it's your spouse, a best friend, a fellow leader, or a mentor. Generally, this is not a large group of people, but an inner circle who knows you well and who are the ones that are there for you, thick or thin.

Do you give those people permission to share with you when they see you fading off course? More importantly, when they do, are you open to their feedback? One of the greatest catalysts for personal growth is our willingness to pull the veil back and welcome the feedback of others. Your support team is made up of people who believe in and care about you. This also means they care about you too much to let things rob you of your potential. They are not solely concerned about your personal successes but, first and foremost, care about you as a person. Those people in your life are a gift.

In the 1950s, psychologists Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingram developed a tool called the “Jahari Window” to serve as a map for the purpose of identifying and improving important components of our lives, such as self-awareness, personal development, communication, and interpersonal relationships. The premise of their work was to contribute to forming a complete understanding of ourselves, specifically

the blind spots in our lives that oftentimes hold us back from our full potential (Luft & Ingram, 1955). In their research, they emphasize that we in fact need others in our lives who see the things that we don't and communicate those things to us for the sake of our growth.

The reality is that we all have blind spots. These blind spots can affect virtually every area of our lives—our relationships, performance and growth. They can become the source of habits and patterns that often leave us stuck, whether we realize it or not. And as a result, we can't move forward or grow in an area that we don't even know exists.

The Value of Insight from Others

Perhaps you are overcommitting in one area and leaving another facet of your life to suffer as a result. Maybe when addressing certain topics or people, you are not hitting the mark with your approach or intentions. Or perhaps you are simply wearing yourself out to the point that you are not bringing your best self to the most important things in your life. Your support team knows you and has your best interests in mind. They are the ones who are willing to say, “I see this area in your life that is holding you back from being who you intend to be. Would you be willing to take some time to reflect on this area?” The best part is that they do this from a place of love. That's what makes their feedback so incredibly powerful (Cook & Nesloney, 2023).



Bill George, author of *Discover Your True North*, shared that in challenging times, leaders need a solid network of trusted relationships with people available to counsel and care for them. This can give leaders confidence to listen to their inner voice, even when outsiders attack or criticize their decisions. A support team can provide resilience to get through challenging times and to recognize what is truly important in life (George, 2015).

Sometimes, you simply need people to be a sounding board and listen. Perhaps it's a gentle reminder to prioritize what matters most, which serves as a guide to staying true to your course and not letting the pressures, responsibilities or even critics in your life shift you away from where you are going.

360-Degree Feedback

If you want to lead with authenticity and impact, leaning into feedback is essential. However, it can be uncomfortable at times. It doesn't always feel great to sense that someone is putting your shortcomings on display, so remember that it is a matter of perspective. Think of the relief you feel when a friend quietly saves you from the pepper or lettuce in your teeth. They are looking out for you because they have your back. They want what's best for you.

When it comes to welcoming feedback in your life, it starts with the humility to ask. Don't just assume people will tell you. Be willing to ask them questions. One powerful question to ask others is, "How do you experience me when..." Being specific in the areas you desire feedback in is helpful to those individuals who are supporting you. Maybe it is regarding your demeanor in a meeting or how you engage in difficult conversations. Or perhaps it is even regarding a relational dynamic. What if, during a conversation, a seemingly insignificant detail like your body language consistently conveyed a different meaning than you intended? You would want to know!

Research shows that when you are intentional about growing in the area of self-awareness, you are more equipped to foster healthy relationships, generate trust with those you lead, and develop deeper, more authentic connections with others (Gardner et al., 2005).

Take the Step

Your support team in life is truly a gift. They are not simply there to slap your hand when you are off course, but they are there to encourage you, believe in you, and remind you of who you are when things inevitably get hard. They serve as your guardrails in your life. They are there to listen as well as



provide feedback. Don't discount the value of these people. Your growth and those you lead depend on it. So, who is on your support team, and have you invited them to speak into your life?

For additional information, please contact Dr. Cook at tcCook@harborcreeksd.com. ■

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Tyler P. Cook, Ed.D., serves as the Principal of Klein Elementary School in the Harbor Creek School District and is co-author of *Building Authenticity: A Blueprint for the Leader Inside You*. His passion is to equip and mobilize others to live and lead with authenticity, no matter their role. Through Dr. Cook's leadership, writing and speaking, he is committed to seeing every person grow to their fullest potential so they can impact the world around them. You can find him @drtylercook (Twitter, Instagram).

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By Michael I. Levin, Esq., PA Principals Association General Counsel

Cautionary Tales for Principals



Principals are school leaders. They are supervisors. And they are employees. Job security for principals demands that principals act in accordance with all applicable rules of conduct and enforce all applicable rules of conduct. Because principals are school leaders, they must model proper behavior that is beyond reproach. Not only must they act in an

exemplary manner, but they must also stop inappropriate behavior of those they supervise.

There are three School Code provisions that address discipline of principals—section 1122, 24 P.S. §11-1122; section 514, 24 P.S. §5-514, and section 1151, 24 P.S. §11-1151.

Section 1122 governs dismissals of professional employees. Most principals are “professional employees” and, therefore, protected by section 1122. However, sometimes a principal may not have achieved tenure (as where he or she was hired from another state and never obtained tenure in Pennsylvania), in which case the principal is protected, not by section 1122, but by section 514 of the School Code. Section 514 of the School Code governs the termination of non-tenured employees of the school district. Finally, section 1151 of the School Code governs the demotion of tenured employees, including principals. There are no provisions in the School Code that address disciplinary suspensions.¹

Section 1122 of the School Code has been interpreted as providing a strong degree of job protection when it comes to dismissals. Principals can be discharged for, among other things, “persistent negligence in the performance of duties,” “willful neglect of duties” and “persistent and willful violation of or failure to comply with school laws of this commonwealth (including official directives and established policy of the board of directors).” 24 P.S. §11-1122. The phrases essentially allow a principal to be dismissed if he or she fails to do what he or she should be doing—failing to comply with their duties. The “neglect of duties” can be “willful,” or it can be “negligent” if it has some degree of persistence. For

a principal not to violate his or her duties, the principal must know what those duties are. The duties are contained in law, in school board policy, in administrative regulations, any code of employee conduct, and the job description. Therefore, principals need to have a working knowledge of applicable law, policies, administrative regulations, codes of conduct and job description.

For non-tenured principals, the standard for dismissal is much less. Under section 514 of the School Code, a non-tenured principal can be discharged for, among other things, “neglect of duty” or “other improper conduct.” 24 P.S. §5-514. Under these standards, there is no requirement that the principal’s conduct be willful or persistent. Any “improper conduct” can support a dismissal of a non-tenured principal.

The standard for a demotion is even less. Under section 1151 of the School Code, school districts may demote a principal for any reason if the reason is not arbitrary or discriminatory. In *Peiffer v. Lake-Lehman School District*,² the Secretary of Education said:



It is apparent from a reading of the cases addressing demotions that school districts possess broad discretion in personnel and administrative actions which result in demotions. Courts have been loath to interfere with a school district's exercise of discretion in a demotion case unless the court is satisfied that the petitioner has met his or her heavy burden of proving that the demotion was arbitrary or based upon discriminatory considerations.

In *Harris v. Philadelphia School Dist.*, TTA 2-91, 29 SLIE 77 (1992), *aff'd* 155 Pa. Cmwlth. 169, 624 A.2d 784 (1993), the Secretary of Education ruled that the school district does not have to establish "just cause" for a demotion. Examples of the types of conduct supporting a demotion are unsatisfactory performance by employee³ and inability to communicate appropriately with supervisors and subordinates.⁴

Regarding disciplinary suspensions of principals, there are no provisions in the School Code that address the issue or that establish the standards that must be met by a school district to impose the suspension. Because of the lack of a School Code provision, it was argued that school districts had no power or authority to impose a disciplinary suspension of tenured employees. However, almost 40 years ago, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruled that the power was implied. The court said:

Rike's argument that the board was without power to suspend after conducting a hearing pursuant to Sections 1122 and 1127 is likewise without merit. That a board of school directors possesses the authority to impose lesser forms of discipline than complete termination of a tenured teacher's contract is by now beyond question. The general assembly, in whom our constitution reposes the responsibility of establishing the parameters of administering the education of our youth, PA CONST. Art. III, Section 14, has created school districts and imbued them with "all necessary powers to enable them to carry out the provisions of this act," 24 P.S. § 2-211, including the power to employ teachers, 24 P.S. § 11-1106. Inherent in the school district's power to employ is the power to control certain activities of teachers, Kaplan v. Philadelphia School District, 38 Pa. 213, 130 A.2d 672 (1957). As stated by Justice (now Chief Justice) Nix in Neshaminy Fed. of Teachers v. Neshaminy School District, 501 Pa. 534, 545, 462 A.2d 629, 635 (1983): "The power to regulate conduct, of course, would be illusory absent a concomitant power to enforce rules through the imposition of some form of discipline."

Rike v. Commonwealth, 508 Pa. 190, 195, 494 A.2d 1388 (1985).

It is this writer's opinion that school districts can impose a disciplinary suspension without pay for any reason, as long as the reason is not arbitrary or discriminatory. I base this opinion on the fact that the School Code's failure to set forth the standards for imposing a demotion meant that any reason other than an arbitrary or discriminatory reason was

permissible. The same reasoning should apply to disciplinary suspensions.

Although the great majority of principals adhere to the laws, policies, administrative regulations and codes of conduct governing their employment, there are always exceptions here and there of school principals who are either unwilling or unable to follow such guidance. To the rest of the school principals, these outliers serve as cautionary tales. In a somewhat recent instance, an elementary school assistant principal with 20 plus years of experience, allegedly made statements about the appearance of a student's mother, flirted with a female staff member in front of others, showed a picture of a female teacher's torso whose shirt was too tight, made comments or jokes with sexual innuendo to or in front of staff. Notably, in one instance, when subordinates were improperly discussing whether a co-worker's breasts were real or fake, rather than shut down such inappropriate discussion, the assistant principal weighed in that they were real. The school district demoted the assistant principal to a teaching position under section 1151 of the School Code.

At a school board hearing, the administration was asked why the assistant principal was demoted under these facts. The witness testified, in part, that the assistant principal was demoted "based on the fact of his lack of professionalism and his inability to understand professional relationships and boundaries with subordinates." The lesson to learn is that the behavior of principals must always be professional. In addition, principals must insist upon professionalism by teachers and support staff.

“**Regarding disciplinary suspensions of principals, there are no provisions in the School Code that address the issue or that establish standards that must be met by a school district to impose the suspension.**”

In another recent instance, a junior high school assistant principal was demoted to a teaching position under Section 1151 in the first year of her appointment as assistant principal. Due to deficient performance, the school district gave her a performance improvement plan ("PIP"). After receiving the PIP, her performance did not improve. Among her

shortcomings were allegations of late arrival to meetings, failing to complete formal and informal observations, and failing to attend a staff development meeting, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting and an informational meeting at the intermediate unit. The assistant principal also allegedly mishandled a student threat situation and several student incidents, whereby staff and parents raised complaints about failure to follow through and student discipline and accountability. The lessons to be learned from this case are several. First—perform all duties on a timely basis. Show up for all meetings on time. Respond to emails. Second—do all aspects of your job. Perform required observations and chair required IEP team meetings. Third—don't let others down. When a teacher refers a student to the office for discipline, make sure the teacher knows how it was handled.

Several years ago, an untenured high school principal accepted a donation of carpet and authorized installation without consulting the school board or superintendent. In another instance, the principal searched the locker of a student without reasonable suspicion or notifying the student as required by policy and state regulations. In fact, the principal later admitted to regularly and repeatedly searching lockers without suspicion and without notifying students, and that he failed to keep written records of such searches. On one occasion, the principal took a student's book bag from the locker and took it to the cafeteria where he placed it on a table, walked away to another table 40-60 feet away for a period of time and then left the cafeteria, leaving the backpack unattended. Notably, the principal failed to look into the bag or search the bag. Later the principal returned to the cafeteria where he was alerted by a cafeteria employee that the bag had been searched to discern its owner, and a knife had been found. The principal took the bag to his office, and in the presence of the student, searched the bag and found the knife. The principal then failed to provide the proper notice required under the administrative regulations prior to the informal hearing with the student and his parent. During the student's expulsion hearing, the principal lied under oath as to the discovery of the knife.

The school district fired the principal, and the courts upheld the dismissal. *Jackson v. Shikellamy Sch. Dist.*, 2016 Pa. Commw. Unpub. LEXIS 732 (2016). Reviewing the principal's reasons for doing what he did, the court said:

At the time of the searches at issue, Jackson had been an educator for 12 years and the temporary principal at Shikellamy High School for a little under two years. He testified that, as temporary principal at Shikellamy High School, he searched unlocked lockers "all the time . . . if I see a locker undone, I look inside of it." He stated that between 5 to 15 times he had found threats to the health, safety or welfare of the school in such lockers. He explained that unsecured lockers have the "potential to be a drop box . . . [A] student can put drugs in somebody's locker that's not

secured, make a drug deal and if something goes wrong, he can say it's not my locker The other thing is that somebody could put a knife or gun in there, and it could be stored there, and nobody would know about it, except for the person that put it in, and could cause a serious safety issue" Jackson stated that, prior to the knife found on October 16, 2014, he had never found a weapon, but had found "illegal drugs" and "spice." He admitted to not keeping records of the searches as required by school policy. Jackson's reasons for searching the unlocked lockers are based on his own subjective beliefs, a hunch, and not on any individualized reasonable suspicion.

Jackson v. Shikellamy Sch. Dist., 2016 Pa. Commw. Unpub. LEXIS 732, *11-14.

The lessons to be learned from this case are that principals must know the rules—whether constitutional rules such as those for searching lockers or school board rules contained in policy. The *Jackson* case also teaches that "excuses" or "rationales" for not following the rules will not be accepted. In another instance, an assistant principal was charged with secretly recording a meeting attended by a parent and the superintendent. Following a Loudermill hearing, the assistant principal was suspended pending dismissal and dismissal charges were issued. Pending a hearing before the school board, the school district reduced the discipline to a 14-day suspension without pay by settlement agreement. This case illustrates that there is another source for rules which principals need to know—the criminal laws. The secret recording of conversations where people reasonably expect privacy is a crime under the Wiretapping and Electronic Surveillance Control Act, 18 Pa.C.S. § 5701 *et seq.* Not only is the recording of such private conversations unlawful, but so is the disclosure or use of such a recording. 18 Pa.C.S. § 5703. The lesson to learn is that the rules governing the conduct of principals comes from many sources, including criminal laws. In another instance, a principal was accused of a lack of visibility during the workday, a lack of parent or community engagement and a lack of attendance and visibility at after-school events. She was also accused of failing to collaborate with the district-level principals. It was alleged that the principal failed to schedule weekly administrative meetings using an agenda as recommended and then as directed. The principal failed to communicate consistently with her assistant principals during the weekly administrative meetings and after significant events occurred. It was also alleged that the principal mishandled an incident where a teacher allegedly berated a student in front of others and another incident where a guidance counsel reported a teacher touching a student. The principal resigned. However, as in other cases discussed, the lessons of this matter include the need to communicate with others in the school and the need to address deficient performance by subordinates.

Finally, in a recent incident, an acting principal received a text from a parent containing a video of a male individual who appeared to be a minor, exposing his genitals during

a virtual classroom in one of the school's classes which occurred in view of several students. Despite receiving the video, the principal failed to notify the superintendent or the police for at least four days and failed to notify the school district's coordinator of safety. Instead, the principal shared the video with several female co-workers/subordinates, including at least two secretaries. None of the female employees requested to see the video or had a need to see the video. At least one employee indicated disgust, which did not deter him from showing the video to another employee in her presence. Following a Loudermill hearing, the school district demoted the principal and reassigned him back to his original assistant principal position.

From the foregoing, it might be easy to forget that most principals throughout the commonwealth perform their duties competently and intelligently and without incident. The previous are clearly the exceptions and not the rule. However, the summaries of real matters serve as cautionary

tales not only for principals but for school districts who employ them.

Obviously, school principals have a dual role in that they not only are responsible for their own performance of their own duties, but they are also responsible for their staff's performance of their duties. Thus, principals are expected to perform their tasks competently and appropriately and in line with policy and directives from above, but they also are expected to hold their staff accountable to complete their tasks and to follow all such policies and directives as well. Thus, principals can and will be held accountable not only for their own failings but the failings of their staff, especially if their staff are not held accountable by the principal. Because principals also serve as leaders and exemplars for their staff, it is not enough for a principal to simply not act improperly, it is also necessary for the principal to affirmatively enforce those rules in terms of the staff, or else the principal risks being held responsible for allowing such behavior to occur. ■

ENDNOTES:

¹Although section 1124 of the School Code, 24 P.S. §11-1124 governs "suspensions," the suspensions addressed in section 1124 are those that are necessary because of a reduction in force—not discipline. In other words, section 1124 deals with "furloughs," not disciplinary suspensions.

²*Peiffer v. Lake-Lehman School District*, TTA 9-93, 33 SLIE 36 (1996).

³*Patchel v. Board of School Directors of Wilkinsburg School Dist.*, 42 Pa. Commw. 34, 400 A.2d 229 (1979) (where a demotion is based on an unsatisfactory rating of the demoted employee, the rating need not comply with the rating requirements applicable to the dismissal of a professional employee); *Pasekoff v. Armstrong School Dist.*, TTA 5-87, 26 SLIE 93 (1989); *Bacto v. Williamsport Area School District*, TTA 3-99, 38 SLIE 43 (2001); *Jones v. Pittsburgh Board of Education*, TTA 03-04, 41 SLIE No. 41 (2004).

⁴*Stackpole v. Pittsburgh School Dist.*, TTA 12-86, 26 SLIE 19 (1989).

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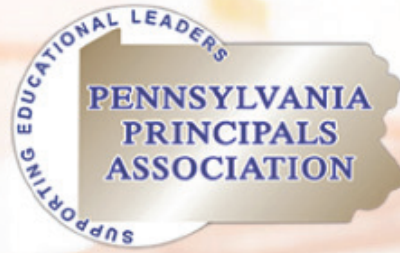
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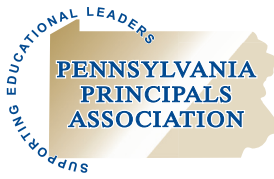
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