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Gains were largest in first grade where students of Walden teachers averaged 5.4 more words per minute than students of the non-Walden-Master’s educated teachers.*

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*According to a 2008 independent study of teachers in the Tacoma Public Schools (Washington) that analyzed data from 2006-2008.

**A recent study concludes:**

**Students of Walden-educated teachers make greater gains in reading fluency.**

Can a teacher make a difference in student learning? According to research sponsored by Walden University’s Richard W. Riley College of Education and Leadership, the answer is yes. In a unique collaboration with Tacoma Public Schools in Tacoma, Washington, researchers compared the reading fluency of students taught by Walden Master’s-educated teachers with students taught by non-Walden Master’s-educated teachers. The study revealed that students of teachers who graduated from Walden’s Elementary Reading and Literacy program had gains in reading fluency that were on average 4.8 words per minute, or 14%, greater than students of non-Walden Master’s-educated teachers.*

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**The Richard W. Riley College of Education and Leadership**

**Walden University**
Finding the Value in Difference

In 2010, the next census year, the U.S. government will calculate the number of residents in the country and, among other data, the race, ethnicity, age, and makeup of each U.S. household. The results of the 2010 census are anticipated to reveal another round of increases in the number of racially and ethnically diverse people living in the nation—numbers that are bound to be reflected in the student populations of your schools. But, as this issue of *Principal* explains, diversity is not only based on a person’s race or ethnicity.

NAESP’s standards book, *Leading Learning Communities: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able To Do*, states: “In addition to defining diversity by class, gender, ethnicity or race, effective leaders also look for diversity in how people learn and how age, beliefs, perspectives and experiences influence learning.” Diversity has become a dynamic term, encompassing characteristics both seen and unseen. Where and how a student has been raised, and by whom, are among those components that go unseen when looking into a child’s eyes.

School administrators, faculty, and staff must not only recognize these differences among their students, but also embrace them. One way to do this is by becoming culturally proficient, as author Anthony Moyer details in his article. The additional theme articles included in this issue are intended to further expand your knowledge on the topic of diversity and provide insight about bringing out the best in all your students.

NAESP’s efforts to offer resources to principals about diversity do not end with this issue of the magazine, however. Looking ahead to future Association events and initiatives, you’ll find a variety of ways that you and your staff can further engage in professional development built around the theme of diversity. First up is the second installment of NAESP’s six-part webinar series. Titled “Principals Leading Diverse Learning Communities,” the online professional development opportunity on Nov. 5 will focus on building consensus on a vision that reflects the core of the school community, valuing and using diversity to enhance learning, and developing a learning culture that is adaptive, collaborative, innovative, and supportive. For more information about this webinar, as well as the others that are part of the series, go to www.naesp.org/webinars.aspx.

In April, NAESP’s 89th Annual Convention and Exposition in Houston will feature a session strand titled “Cultural Diversity: Transforming Learning Communities.” Concurrent sessions falling under this category will address such topics as best practices for communicating and working with diverse parents and communities; how to get started thinking about inclusion for gifted, special needs, and English-language learners; defining cultural competencies for educators and applying it in schools; and coordinating services to meet the instructional needs of diverse student populations. Information about these concurrent sessions, and others, can be found at www.naesp.org/2010.

Finally, our annual Summer Institute, which will take place July 6-9, 2010, in San Diego, will have a central theme of “Diverse Learning Communities.” Stay tuned for details about the Summer Institute in the next few months.

We hope that this issue of *Principal* will lay the groundwork you need to begin instituting best practices for teaching diverse populations, and that you take advantage of the additional professional development opportunities NAESP is planning in the coming school year.
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Research Digest

NAEP Scores Improve; Black/White Achievement Gap Narrows

In 2007, math scores for both black and white public school students in grades 4 and 8 nationwide, as measured by results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), were higher than in any previous assessment, dating back to 1990. This was also true for black and white fourth graders on the NAEP 2007 Reading Assessment, according to a report from the National Center for Education Statistics. For grade 8, reading scores for both black and white students were higher in 2007 than the most recent previous assessment year, 2005.

White students, however, had higher scores than black students, on average, on all assessments. While the nationwide gaps in 2007 were narrower than in previous assessments at both grades 4 and 8 in math and at grade 4 in reading, white students had average scores at least 26 points higher than black students in each subject.

At the state level, gaps in grade 4 mathematics existed in 2007 in the 46 states for which results were available. In 15 states, the 2007 gaps were narrower than in 1992, as black students demonstrated a greater gain in average scores than white students. At grade 8, math gaps were narrower in 2007 than in 1990 in four states: Arkansas, Colorado, Oklahoma, and Texas. In all four, scores for both black and white students increased, but scores for black students increased more.

Gaps in grade 4 reading existed in 2007 in the 44 states for which results were available. Gaps narrowed from 1992 to 2007 in Delaware, Florida, and New Jersey due to larger increases in black students’ scores. Grade 8 reading gaps existed in 2007 in 41 of the 42 states for which results were available; there was no gap in Hawaii.


Feds Give Fewer Dollars Than States

Of the $556.9 billion in government funding received by U.S. public elementary and secondary schools in 2006-2007, the federal government only contributed 8.3 percent, with state and local governments supplying the remaining 91.7 percent (about $510 billion) of funding, according to U.S. Census figures. Approximately $11.3 billion of federal money went toward funding Title I and about $9.8 billion went toward special education nationwide.

As for expenditures, public elementary and secondary schools collectively spent about $288.4 billion on instruction and about $165.5 billion on support services. The average per-pupil spending in U.S. public schools in 2006-2007 was $9,666. New York and New Jersey had the highest per-pupil spending rates at $15,981 and $15,691, respectively. At $5,683 and $6,625, Utah and Idaho, respectively, had the lowest per-pupil spending rates.

For more details, read the report at www.census.gov/govs/school/index.html.
10 Actions Principals Can Take To Stop School Violence

- Reward good behavior.
- Insist that your faculty and staff treat each other and students with respect, courtesy, and thoughtfulness. Be the chief role model.
- Offer training in anger management, stress relief, mediation, and related violence prevention skills to staff and teachers, and help them identify ways to pass these skills along to students.
- Work with community groups and law enforcement to create safe corridors for travel to and from school.
- Involve every group within the school community—faculty, professional staff, custodial staff, students, and others—in setting up solutions to violence.
- Establish zero tolerance policies for weapons and violence.
- Develop a memorandum of understanding with law enforcement on access to the school building, reporting of crimes, arrests, and other key issues.
- Develop ways to make it easier for parents to be involved in the lives of their children.
- Develop and sustain a network with health care, mental health, counseling, and social work resources in your community.
- Ensure that students learn violence prevention techniques throughout their school experience.

Source: National Crime Prevention Council

Promising Practices

The experiences of our children and families began to vary widely as we became a culturally diverse school. We realized the need to connect on a much deeper level with parents. In a program called Together for Children, we meet regularly in classrooms with parents, teachers, interpreters, and children to share what it is we know about learning, culture, and the individual needs of our children and their families.

Jerry A. Bergstrom, Principal
Pershing Elementary School
Lexington, Nebraska

Our school has a high number of Spanish-speaking students, but Spanish-speaking parents never attended the meetings of our Parent Teacher Organization. We presented the idea of a parent group conducted solely in Spanish and had an overwhelmingly positive response. Meetings do not center on fundraisers, but focus on parent questions about school culture and protocol. Now, all parents have an avenue for school involvement.

Nancy Hayes Gardner, Principal
West Elementary School
West Liberty, Iowa

We have a formal partnership with a sister school in Puebla, Mexico. Our teachers communicate regularly to plan collaborative lessons and activities. Our students conference over the Web with their friends from Mexico on a variety of topics. Borders between countries dissolve with the click of a mouse and children flourish as they learn firsthand the similarities and differences among cultures.

Lori D. Howard, Principal
Clyde Erwin Elementary School
Jacksonville, North Carolina

The Principalship at a Glance

When asked the question “If you were starting out all over again, would you want to be an elementary school principal?” 58.4 percent of principals responding to NAESP’s 2008 survey replied “certainly would” and another 30 percent replied “probably would.” High levels of willingness to “re-enlist” exist among novice and veteran principals and with both male and female respondents.

The Willingness to Again Become a Principal

- 10.1% Certainly Would
- 30.0% Probably Would
- 1.5% Probably Would Not
- 58.4% Certainly Would Not

Source: The K-8 Principal in 2008: A 10-Year Study (NAESP, 2009)
As our nation’s schools strive to provide quality education for students most at risk for failure, the notion of diversity continues to lead the discussion. Revisiting our understandings about diversity as a response to creating equitable learning opportunities to foster achievement for all students has become increasingly urgent given that, while the student demographics have shifted, the achievement gap remains stagnant. We can no longer neglect or miseducate such a significant segment of our population; all our citizens benefit when we improve the education of at-risk students. If schools are to meet these challenges successfully, principals will be expected to be more critically informed about diversity.

The Changing Face of Diversity

Revisiting our understandings about diversity will reveal that it no longer refers to race alone and that it is a value-added resource to classrooms.

Noni Mendoza Reis and Sylvia Méndez
According to the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, many states are experiencing significant growth in culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) groups. For example, 24 states saw an increase of at least 100 percent in their English-learner student population, while other states have experienced a change upwards of 350 percent. This diversification of the student population, however, has not been matched by an increase in student achievement. On the contrary, schools across the nation are experiencing an ever-increasing achievement gap between white students and students from diverse backgrounds. Providing effective educational programs to all students is especially significant now as schools continue to experience high student drop-out rates, sanctions for low-performing students, and high teacher attrition in schools where quality teachers are needed most—working with poor and culturally diverse students.

**Evolution of Diversity**

There has been a variety of understandings about diversity and how to respond to it in schools, most notable are the following three distinct approaches. The first approach occurred after the civil rights movement and ensuing legislation of the 1960s and continued through the 1980s. The assumption among educators was that diverse students performed poorly in school because they “inherited” a number of deficits: poverty, inability to speak...
English, low self-esteem, and other forms of “cultural deprivation.” The approaches used by educators, therefore, assumed that the schools should make up for such deficits and provide more opportunities for students to improve their self-esteem and/or overcome the language barrier through bilingual education programs. Multicultural education had its origins during this time. While intended to address issues of inequalities, many schools implemented it in a nonthreatening and narrow manner. For example, multicultural curriculum often was limited to the celebration of various ethnic heroes. Additionally, while school principals supported multicultural education, it was the responsibility of the teacher to infuse it into the curriculum.

A second approach to addressing diversity in schools began in the late 1980s and 1990s. It addressed the cultural proficiencies and/or culturally relevant pedagogies necessary to work effectively with students from diverse backgrounds. This approach to diversity shifted the focus away from students’ perceived deficits toward teachers’ knowledge and skills in working with CLD students. Many researchers—including Gloria Ladson Billings in Crossing Over to Canaan, Christine Sleet—..." preparing teachers for cultural proficiency and the need to reflect upon one’s biases and understandings of effective strategies for working with diverse student populations. It also requires principals to effectively facilitate discussions because these conversations often move to issues of entitlement, bias, prejudice, and race.

Putting race on the table is not an easy issue, especially when the National Center for Education Statistics reported that a majority of the teachers (82 percent) in 2006-2007 come from the majority group. Often these teachers have limited experience working with CLD students. The first step is to participate in collegial discussions that authentically address the issues. The goal must be to identify successful structures and strategies that are inclusive of all stakeholders and empower each one to take the next step in responding to diversity as a resource that will enrich schools.

**Working With Today’s Students**

Now, more than ever, the ways in which school principals manage and respond to issues of diversity are essential to promote the systemic change needed to best meet the needs of our changing student population. In leading a discussion in a school, for example, a principal might ask his or her staff: What does diversity mean? It is likely that a first anticipated response is that “Diversity is good” and should be embraced and nurtured. But not all of us have a common definition for this term. Some may first think about diversity in terms of the color of one’s skin or one’s language, background, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, or race. And of course all of these criteria fit into the spectrum of diversity and how it appears in our students and in our teaching force; but what is the decisive focus of diversity? For us, it is the continuum of experience that a child brings into a school as a learner who needs to be nurtured and supported. Moreover, when there is a clash between a child’s home and school experiences, diversity is often identified as something to be obliterated or ignored, placing the responsibility of the achievement gap once again on the backs of diverse students. Past experience has shown this to impact not only a child’s opportunity.
Leading Change

Previously, diversity was identified through visible labels like the color of a person’s skin or his or her language. Now, diversity is viewed through the multiplicity of the individual. His skin color can be brown but he is a fluent English speaker or she may have blue eyes and her primary language is Cantonese. Interracial marriages are much more common and children share cultural and ethnic pride across races. The societal realities that confront families cannot be ignored. Not all of our students have two parents of the opposite sex in the home who are both employed, enjoy two weeks of vacation, are homeowners, and have cars to take children to the store or to the movies. Nor might they have a home full of books, pens, dictionaries, encyclopedias, computers, cell phones, or functioning bathrooms. Rather, some of our students survive with minimal supervision and resources each day, often with only the television to keep them company. This is the diversity of experience that our students bring with them into our schools. As principals, we must be mindful that no one in school is making false assumptions about a student based on his or her own experiences and biases.

There needs to be a way for a significant adult to develop a relationship that is built on trust and shared interests. We must explicitly teach our students how to navigate a system that is not always equitable. It is our role as principals to be advocates for our students.

Our schools are predicted to become increasingly more diverse. Add to this circumstance that leadership studies indicate that principals are key to leading change and improvement reforms. They can play a key role to ensure that diversity is handled in a culturally responsive and student-centered manner with equity and social justice at the center. The principal, as the instructional leader, must demonstrate how diversity is a value-added resource that will enhance the learning environment for students, teachers, and the community in a positive and enriching manner. As the late Harvard University professor Ron Edmonds said in a 1978 speech: “We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to in order to do this. Whether we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven’t so far.”

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WEB RESOURCES

The Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence (CREDE) is focused on improving the education of students whose ability to reach their potential is challenged by language or cultural barriers, race, geographic location, or poverty. http://crede.berkeley.edu

Teaching for Change is a nonprofit organization promoting social and economic justice by offering multicultural resources, including books, videos, and posters. www.teachingforchange.org
What Does It Mean To Be CULTURALLY PROFICIENT?

A suburban school in Pennsylvania prepares for an increase in English-language learners by incorporating culturally proficient instruction.

Anthony Moyer and Janice Clymer
Today in the U.S., more than 4 million elementary and secondary students require language assistance, and growth of the English-language learner (ELL) population is expected to continue. In “The Impact of Experience and Coursework: Perceptions of Secondary Language Learners in the Mainstream Classroom,” Miguel Mantero and Paula McVicker reveal that by 2050 minority students will account for approximately 57 percent of the student population, largely due to the increase of Latinos and Asians. As a result, “The multilingual classroom is an American reality in the 21st century,” write Jennifer Costa and her colleagues in “The Challenge of Infusing the Teacher Education Curriculum with Scholarship on English Language Learners.” Thus, school staffs must be prepared to meet challenges that will arise because of the changing population and an increase of ELLs. School districts that are prepared to manage population changes will be able to offer more effective instruction and services and avoid difficult transition periods that affect teachers, administrators, and students and their families. Cultural proficiency will be an integral component for shaping a school environment to enable ELLs to perform optimally.
An Increasingly Common Case

Wescosville Elementary School, a suburban school near Allentown, Pennsylvania, has experienced an increase in ELLs in recent years. While more than 25 languages are represented, with Spanish-speaking students constituting the largest portion of ELLs, district officials predict that the number of ELLs will continue to grow. Administrators and teachers work diligently to provide remediation for ELLs so they can perform at a level commensurate with their peers. Even though there has been progress, assessment data indicate that this group of students is still lagging in academic performance. Moreover, the majority of staff members are white, whose ancestors emigrated from Germany, and are unfamiliar with the diverse cultures represented by the ELLs they serve.

Haitian Creole, Arabic, Spanish, Korean, French, Japanese, and multiple Indian language dialects are just a few of the languages spoken by students at the school. One hundred of the 650 students are monitored for their English language proficiency and 40 students are identified as ELLs. There is no doubt ELLs feel different and isolated from other mainstream students due to their diverse cultural backgrounds and native languages. They lack a sense of belonging to the classrooms and school they attend, which mounting evidence suggests hinders academic progress.

In “Changes in Latino Students’ Perceptions of School Belonging over Time,” Emily Campos and her colleagues define school belonging as “the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment.” Students who lack a sense of belonging are unmotivated and nonparticipative. In The Culturally Proficient School: An Implementation Guide for School Leaders, Randall Lindsey, Lorraine Roberts, and Franklin Campbell Jr. write that the appropriate response to this dilemma is to “seek and develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that demonstrate openness and authentic responsiveness to the heritage, values, and expressions of each cultural group represented in the population.” However, typical U.S. public school classrooms continue to function as they traditionally have, based on mainstream, white, Anglo-Saxon culture. As a result, many teachers are unaware of the importance of helping ELLs—who frequently feel lost, depressed, alienated, lonely, fearful, and abandoned when immersed in a class of students that caters to a culture unlike their own—develop a sense of belonging.

Develop Staff Buy-in

As principal of Wescosville School, I worked closely with the English as a second language (ESL) teacher, Janice Clymer, to introduce the concept of cultural proficiency to the staff. Five years ago, Janice and I decided that it was time for the staff to begin embracing the cultural diversity of our student population. As a first step, we staged a multicultural fair that featured music, dance, food, and customs and traditions that represent the varied cultures of the student population.

This annual celebration, which staff eagerly anticipate, occurs in conjunction with the school’s spring open house on a weekday evening. Students and their parents staff the information-al, interactive booths set up throughout the gymnasium that represent their cultural heritage. The fair attracts hundreds of visitors and other schools in the district have begun to stage their own multicultural fair as a result. In the future, we plan to expand the fair so that it takes place throughout an entire school day and becomes more connected to the school curriculum. Students will attend programs and assemblies throughout the day, research the various cultures represented at the fair, create projects for display, and orally present their research to the student body.

In addition to the fair, we use staff meetings and employee development workshops to explain the concept of cultural proficiency. These occasions provide opportunities to teach the staff about techniques that can be used within the classroom to improve the learning environment for our culturally diverse students. For example, staff members have been trained to be sensitive to the cultural traditions and beliefs of students in their classrooms. As a result, red pens are rarely used when correcting student work because the color red symbolizes death in various Asian cultures, and teachers now avoid touching the top of students’ heads since Indian students consider the head a sacred part of the body. Janice and I continue to attend workshops and read research articles that enable us to learn more about becoming culturally proficient.

Here are other steps that we are taking toward cultural proficiency:

- Staff members learn appropriate pronunciations of student names and learn basic words in ELLs’ home languages, which encourages an inclusive school environment;
- Teachers routinely use multicultural books in their classrooms to show
students that cultural traditions of all students are recognized and accepted throughout the school year; and
- Written communication sent home from the school is translated into various languages so that family members can clearly understand relevant information.

Parent Involvement Is Critical

Teachers alone cannot improve ELLs’ achievement; parental involvement at home and at school is a critical component. That is why before ELLs enter our school or a new class, a meeting is scheduled between the classroom teacher, guidance counselor, school psychologist, instructional support teacher, ESL teacher, principal, and most important, parents. These meetings, which are pleasant and nonthreatening, serve as the initial point of contact with parents to encourage their involvement. Lois Yamauchi and her colleagues confirm in “Family Involvement in a Hawaiian Language Inclusion Program” that home environments that encourage learning, family involvement at school, and high academic expectations contribute significantly to student achievement for ELLs.

Parental input is also helpful in determining factors that create culturally proficient environments. Because the parents of ELLs often experience the same type of isolated, unwelcome feelings as their children, their ideas and opinions about effective educational practices and the most suitable learning environments are crucial. Parents realize their involvement in the education process is important when schools value their input.

Positive School Changes

There have been many changes since we have become more culturally proficient at Wescosville. Staff meetings routinely include agenda items that focus on culturally proficient practices. Also, our ESL teacher has become more involved with each classroom teacher by serving as a valued consultant who provides teachers with packets of cultural information for each ELL assigned to them. The amount of time she spends co-teaching has increased in an effort to help teachers include multicultural education in the daily curriculum.

Cooperative learning has become a common teaching strategy for all teachers since we know that it is beneficial for ELLs. Emily Campos and her colleagues write in “Changes in Latino Students’ Perceptions of School Belonging over Time: Impact of Language Proficiency, Self-Perceptions, and Teacher Evaluations” that “Cooperative learning activities help to facilitate a sense of belonging in ELL students. Working with peers fosters new relationships, and, if given the chance to share and explore their own histories within the school environment, they may experience a sense of competence and acceptance.”

Staff members at Wescosville now show more patience and understanding in their relationships with students and exhibit sensitivity regarding students’ cultural heritage and traditions. In addition, the overall school environment is free of prejudice—Wescosville students are frequently complimented by staff members, parents, and community members for their willingness to accept all students regardless of their cultural background. ELL families who have become involved in our school as a result of our culturally proficient efforts thank us profusely. Hugs and handshakes abound after team meetings when parents and students realize our willingness to work with them to create a successful learning environment.

An Ongoing Process

In the future, we plan to do even more to encourage family involvement at Wescosville. In addition, our ESL teacher and other staff members plan to create a community resource guide specifically designed for families of ELLs that includes listings of available school, district, and community resources. We are also encouraging our school district to employ our ESL teacher as a full-time co-teacher.

Finally, in order for teachers to ensure that students in their classrooms accept cultural and linguistic differences, they must develop a greater awareness of their own cultural heritage. The importance of developing cultural self-awareness and self-knowledge is crucial for teachers who wish to develop a multicultural classroom environment. When teachers engage in the process of cultural self-awareness, they are able to recognize personal bias and other preconceived notions that may create barriers, which prevent them from effectively teaching their culturally diverse students. Therefore, we plan to conduct various activities such as book studies and electronic discussions about cross-cultural sensitivity to help our staff become more aware of their own diversity issues.
Cultural Proficiency Is Crucial

All schools need to focus on becoming culturally proficient because the U.S. population will continue to become more racially diverse. In order for our schools to continue to be successful, we must be able to respond to the needs of the changing student population. Each student has the right to be treated equally, and it is the responsibility of public schools to implement social justice.

Cultural proficiency benefits all involved: Students are taught in an improved learning environment where their parents will be more involved in the learning process; administrators improve the academic performance of their schools; and parents become more acclimated to the school, feel more comfortable in the school environment, and develop a sense of ownership in the school since their opinions and input can help to create positive changes.

Effective and culturally proficient teaching eventually benefits our global society. According to Hannah Jaber’s dissertation, *Personal and Professional Beliefs of Preservice Teachers About Diversity*, schools that help children to develop both strong national identities and ethnic identities produce global citizens who function more effectively in the world community. Racism, stereotyping, and cultural bias are persistent concerns that continue to grow as countries become more diverse. Exploring issues pertaining to cultural awareness in a country that is becoming more diverse is more important than ever before, especially in the school setting, which is common to all students’ lives.

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WEB RESOURCES

The Teacher’s Corner Web site provides activities, lesson plans, and songs that are appropriate for a diverse group of students.

[www.edchange.org/multicultural/teachers.html](http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/teachers.html)

In addition to multicultural activities, lessons plans, and songs, this Web site also provides instructions for planning a multicultural fair.

[www.cloudnet.com/~edrbass/edmulticult.html#collections](http://www.cloudnet.com/~edrbass/edmulticult.html#collections)

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Create a successful ESL model by matching the program to the language needs of the students.
As the population of English-language learners grows exponentially across the nation, districts not traditionally considered immigration magnets suddenly find themselves with a need to come up to speed on implementing the most effective English as a Second Language (ESL) program model. As a principal in one of these districts, you may find yourself with the sobering task of developing an action plan to raise the achievement of second-language learners. Fortunately, the library of information and resources on educating English-language learners has grown along with the population, readily answering the obvious first question: What knowledge do we need to help these students be successful? Once our knowledge base of approaches and best practices for serving English-language learners has been established, the question then becomes: Where do we go from here?

Experiences at a variety of elementary schools have shown us that the key to implementing a successful ESL model is to match the program to the language needs of the students—not to the needs of a stand-alone ESL curriculum. The process of matching student needs begins with conversations about student data, conversations that are informed by a schoolwide team comprising classroom and ESL teachers, content specialists, and administrators. Each subsequent step leads to an informed decision about the best delivery model to select.

**Five-Step Process**

1. Look at data on language acquisition, not just at conventional standardized reading/language arts and math assessment...
data. Use traditional ESL assessments of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, as well as teacher observations about mainstream performance. Step outside the box of grouping students by ESL level and make decisions based on what language objectives are needed to succeed in the regular classroom.

The heart of effective ESL instruction should be on acquiring the language focus that will help students to access regular classroom instruction, not on covering an independent timeline of discrete English proficiency skills. ESL instruction is about building the whole student and making the student’s transition from ESL to mainstream classes as seamless as possible. Today’s climate of accountability simply doesn’t give us the luxury of building two separate educational pathways—ESL and mainstream—one at a time.

Look at the resources already available in the building to support second-language learners. How is ESL teacher time traditionally being used? Are ESL teachers valued as language acquisition specialists or do they lose valuable time moving students between classrooms or plugging into traditional classrooms as glorified teacher’s aides?

Consider the ESL instructional schedule. Is it an integrated part of the school’s master schedule or is ESL an afterthought, a patchwork of times and places that has more to do with fitting into an existing master schedule than with targeting students’ academic language needs?

Commit to regular ESL and classroom teacher planning time that focuses on integrating ESL language outcomes with mainstream content outcomes. For effective English-language learner instruction, the master schedule must include joint planning time between ESL and grade-level teams. ESL teachers should collaborate with classroom teachers to create a short-term ESL planner that supports mainstream curriculum with vocabulary development, content-specific language structures, and the linguistic skills that support balanced literacy. Mainstream teachers must support the ESL instructional focus as well. A classroom teacher can integrate an ESL language objective into his or her guided reading instruction, while the ESL teacher uses the same mainstream text but with a different focus.

Select the delivery model. Only now, after grouping your students according to their needs, can you select the most effective instructional delivery model. ESL students spend only a small percent-

“An effective ESL program model is never going to be one-size-fits-all.”

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age of the day with the ESL teacher, but are classroom teachers equipped to integrate language acquisition into their daily instruction? It may be that an influx of newcomers requires the expertise of a skilled ESL teacher to build basic communicative English. Or it could be that a small group of third graders, both native and second-language speakers, needs English-language learner strategies—building background information and vocabulary, extensive modeling, and oral practice—before they can master the concept of making inferences from a literary passage. Could they be grouped with a talented reading/arts instructor or team-taught by the classroom and ESL teacher? Consider everything that gets to the needs of the student beyond the question: ESL—Yes or No? Frame the discussion around a shared understanding that every adult is responsible for the success of every child.

An effective ESL program model is never going to be one-size-fits-all. It should always be a flexible, mixed model resulting in ESL students being taught by teachers with demonstrated excellence in teaching second-language learners. Further, an effective ESL program model is never static. ESL instructional groupings in September will look very different in January and again in June. Language develops at different rates in different individuals. The key is to stay the course on addressing students’ ever-evolving language focus, and not just on getting through a prescribed scope and sequence of language development skills.

Yes, it’s a challenge to periodically juggle students, teachers, and groups; even the most strategically designed master schedule has limited flexibility. This is why, before selecting a successful ESL model, principals must include as many staff as possible in conversations about the needs of English-language learners and how to address them. Our experience in working with schools has underscored the importance of schoolwide collaboration. When every person who has a stake in the academic performance of second-language students participates, then the efficient implementation of any program model improves.

The message we learned from our experiences in developing effective ESL program models was this: The more of a schoolwide effort it becomes, the more successful it will be. And, thus, the answer to the difficult question, “Where do we go from here?” becomes, simply, “We all will go wherever the students need us to.”

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NAESP Partners With NSU to Offer Diversity Certification

In collaboration with NAESP, Nova Southeastern University (NSU) has developed a Certification in Educational Leadership Diversity program, which prepares education leaders to work in culturally diverse populations and develop effective strategies and techniques for achieving organizational and team goals.

To learn more about the significance of this program, Principal spoke with Delores M. Smiley, dean of Community Education and Diversity Affairs at NSU. Smiley served as the principal researcher and developer of the certification program, which officially launched this fall.

What is the purpose of the Certificate in Educational Leadership Diversity program?

The purpose is to equip education leadership professionals with the tools to effectively work with faculty, staff, and students in identifying strategies to build a team that values individuals and empowers them to achieve at their highest capabilities. Through this cutting-edge and highly innovative program, leaders will better understand what is required for a learner-centered community that values and supports the achievement of all students. Subsequently, theoretical and practical strategies will be provided with the intent of increasing cultural competency in this world of change and in this age of information and knowledge economy.

Why do you believe this certification program is important at this point in time?

Diverse issues are becoming more openly prevalent in our workplace and in our communities. This compelling and significant demographic trend has shifted the minority/majority concept in our society today. The approach to this change requires new strategies and approaches if leaders are to maximize their effectiveness at the helm of their organizations. As change agents, they must focus on building and sustaining an inclusive learning community.

Therefore, knowledge of the dynamics of self, social groups, identity development, dominant and subordinated group membership, internalized oppression, privilege projection, and other resistance processes all need to be understood and positive practices implemented. Moreover, I see this program as a tool that will improve professional practice and positive community building.

Who does it benefit and in what ways?

Among the practitioners who will benefit from completing the Certificate in Educational Leadership Diversity are education leaders, diversity specialists, trainers, consultants, organizational development professionals, and human resource professionals. The certificate will provide participants with the necessary skills to understand and lead/manage diversity in the workplace as it relates to cultural knowledge (from awareness to globalism); sensitivity and communications; hiring, training, and promo-
tion tactics; and Equal Employment Opportunity. They will learn how to create a bias-free workplace, open lines of effective communication, and implement diversity training for organizations.

What will it mean for an individual to have this certification?
First of all, they will be able to help their organizations close specific diversity-competence gaps and will know how to navigate the politics of diversity. Second, completion of this certificate will earn them distinction among their colleagues as they are able to expand their career opportunities. Third, credit earned for the Certificate in Educational Leadership Diversity may be transferred into the Master of Science in Instructional Design and Diversity Education or another master’s degree program at the NSU Fischler School of Education and Human Services.

For more information about NSU’s diversity certification program, visit www.schoolofed.nova.edu/oceda. As a benefit to membership, NAESP members earn a 20 percent tuition reduction on coursework applied toward an advanced degree from NSU.

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Nontraditional family structures, especially those with one or more gay parents, are an overlooked segment of school populations. It is estimated that between 8 million and 10 million school-age children live with a gay parent. Regardless of individual political or social beliefs, it is important that these students and their parents feel welcomed, included, and safe in our schools.

Not all principals are experienced or knowledgeable about working with gay parents. Here are five tips from an experienced elementary school principal who has conducted research; spoken at local, state, and national conferences; and written about school climate for gay students, families, and staff members.

**Review your school and district forms for inclusivity.** Do school forms indicate “mother” and “father” or are they more inclusive? Review documents such as school handbooks and enrollment and emergency contact forms to make sure they are inclusive of gay parents and other nontraditional family structures. My school district revised its enrollment forms to indicate Parent 1 and Parent 2, which sends a positive message that we care about and respect all parents.

**Be knowledgeable and aware of your state, district, and school policies for harassment and name-calling.** It is often in unsupervised areas where children with gay parents are teased, taunted, and harassed. These kinds of behaviors should be dealt with in the same way you respond to other types of harassment and name-calling. I know a principal who meets with every class in his school at the beginning of the school year to review school polices and expectations; he talks about anti-gay words and harassment in the same context as other unacceptable behaviors.

**Provide language to describe the variety of families in your school and community.** When we use age-appropriate words such as two fathers, two mothers, and gay parents, we demystify the language and model appropriate behavior for others. It is important for children with gay parents to know that their principal and teachers know about their family and aren’t afraid to talk about them. One principal colleague acknowledged the variety of family structures, including same-sex parents, in her school during an open house. Consequently, a new family with two fathers approached her after the meeting to introduce themselves and to thank her for the acknowledgement.

**Welcome and include gay parents in the same way you welcome all parents into your school.** Include them in classroom and school volunteering opportunities and in any way parents are invited to be a part of your school. I encouraged a family with two mothers to be visible at our school, volunteer in the classroom, and attend events as a family. Though they were hesitant at first, the more active they became, the more welcomed they felt—and we all benefitted from their involvement.

**Consider including gay parents in units on families and addressing the accomplishments of gay individuals.** This strategy provides other examples of gay families without putting pressure on one gay family to always have to educate others; we can all take part in that.

An online search of gay parents or families can provide video and print resources that can be incorporated into classroom lessons and district curricula. One organization that has curricular and video resources is GroundSpark (www.groundspark.org). Also, the Human Rights Campaign’s Welcoming Schools program provides resources for schools and families (www.hrc.org/issues/parenting/7201.htm).

A parent’s positive school experience can have a lasting effect on his or her child. If a gay parent feels welcomed and included, there will be more connection to the school, support for school at home, and advocacy for your school in the community, which will lead to a more positive experience for the parent and child.

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Program Evaluation

Know-How

Nancy Protheroe

Take a critical look at specific school programs and approaches by using these research-based strategies.

In the assessment-driven environment of today’s schools, questions about effectiveness and impact on student learning often focus on the school as a whole. For example, is our school successful in helping all our students meet high standards? Or the focus may be somewhat narrower—how are we doing with math instruction? An often-missed piece is taking a critical look at specific programs and approaches. Program evaluation is a tool that can help do this.

The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (2006) explains that “in schools, program evaluation means examining initiatives the school has undertaken—whether the initiative is an approach to literacy instruction or a program to support struggling students—to answer the question, ‘Is what we are doing working?’ The important point is that principals should be constantly reviewing the ways in which resources—staff, time, and money—are used and should be asking: Is what we are doing having a positive impact on students? Is the effect a program is having worth the money or should we spend our resources another way?

Program evaluation can help to answer a range of common-sense—but critically important—questions. For example, Are we seeing the results we anticipated? or What changes should we make, if any, to increase the program’s impact? (McREL, 2000).

Howard (2004) steps back from the idea of evaluating a specific program and puts the approach in a broader context: “School improvement and data-driven decision making are two terms that all school leaders hear almost every day. Program evaluation brings together these two concepts by focusing data collection and analysis in an organized way in order to improve programs and, through improvement of these component programs, to improve schools.”

While you might agree in theory with the idea that data should be collected to assess how well programs are working, you might also be thinking that you don’t have the time or skills needed for an evaluation. You are definitely not alone in that opinion. However, Herman and Winters (1992) suggest that educators’ experience as “progress trackers” who almost continuously gather data to help assess what is going on in classrooms prepares them well for program evaluation. They continue: “Much of this progress tracking, whether at the classroom or program level, addresses two simple questions: How are we doing? How can we improve?”

McNamara (1998) agrees that educators have the skills and ability to conduct evaluations since they “do not have to be experts in these topics to carry out a useful program evaluation.” McNamara
goes on to say that “The ‘20-80’ rule applies here, that 20% of effort generates 80% of the needed results. It’s better to do what might turn out to be an average effort at evaluation than to do no evaluation at all.”

In addition, “many evaluation techniques are easy to execute; can make use of data that are already being gathered; and can be performed on a scale that is practical for teachers, principals, and other school leaders” (Center for Comprehensive School Reform, 2006).

The challenge, then, is to conduct an evaluation that yields useful data—while not diverting undue amounts of staff time from teaching and other important responsibilities. Distilling the evaluation process to three critical questions can help to organize the process:

- What are we looking for?
- How will we look for it?
- How will we use the data?

**What to Look for**

Words that are familiar to educators—formative and summative—from the perspective of assessing student learning are also relevant to program evaluation (Frechtling, 2002). A formative evaluation of a program might ask whether the program or approach is being done as it is intended to be. Howard (2004) calls this “taking stock,” with some questions that might be asked such as: Are there variations across classrooms? Do particular components seem to strengthen the overall program?

In contrast, a summative evaluation uses your school’s reasons for deciding to use the program—the objectives—as a measure against which its success is measured. For example, have students who participated in our after-school tutoring program made the desired progress?

Although many formal program evaluations might be summative in nature, formative evaluations are likely to be most helpful to your school’s improvement efforts. There is a common sense reason for this. Periodic reviews of how things are going can help you ensure that programs, use of specific teaching strategies, etc., are headed in the right direction.

**How to Look for It**

The “how” should begin with developing a thorough plan of action. As part of the planning process, you will need to:

- **Establish due dates and timelines.** Planning too tightly almost guarantees that there will be slippage, and the project overall may suffer.
- **Identify resources that will be needed.** Staff time and expertise are two specific resources that should be discussed in detail.
- **Identify the components of the evaluation and assign responsibilities.** The important concern at this stage is to think concretely—and in as detailed a manner as possible—about what will need to be done.

One important piece of advice: Keep the plan as simple as possible, especially for your first program evaluation. Remember that everyone working on the evaluation has other, more pressing responsibilities, and that the evaluation will need to mesh with the normal flow of school work.

**How to Use the Data**

Using the data is a must-do step of any evaluation. Otherwise, the resources used to support it would have been better spent elsewhere (Sanders & Sullins, 2006). Data use has two components: analyzing it in order to glean lessons from it—that Killion (2002) calls “meaning-making”—and then using these lessons to support decision-making. McNamara (1998) suggests that this meaning-making is often easier if you go back to the goals of your evaluation: “This will help you organize your data and focus your analysis. For example, if you wanted to improve your program by identifying its strengths and weaknesses, you can organize data into program strengths, weaknesses and suggestions to improve the program.”

Here are additional tips that can help you and the other staff members analyze the data that have been collected:

- Ask: Do these results make sense? How can they help in decision-making about the program?
- Don’t assume the program is the only source of outcomes (positive or negative).
- Don’t rush this step of the evaluation process; the first fact discovered may not be the most important one (Cicchinelli & Barley, 1999; W. K. Kellogg Foundation, 1998).

Once the three key questions have been identified, staff members working on the evaluation can focus on deciding which data will be needed to answer them. In Champion’s (2002) view, “No single data source can measure everything ... A good evaluation includes several kinds of data that measure the same thing from different angles.”

However, trying to draw from too many data sources may prove confusing. The goal is to develop an evaluation plan that balances the need for information with ease and cost of data collection. To do this, you should decide what information is critical to answering the question. You can also find that some of the relevant data might be difficult or costly (in terms of time and money) to collect. If so, circle back to your questions and ask whether different ones—those that could be addressed more economically—would still provide you with a productive evaluation.

Data such as test scores or attendance records will typically form part
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of the evaluation’s data base. However, descriptions of how the program functions or the feelings and attitudes of those involved with the program also can be useful data to collect. Data of this sort can provide context and might help to explain, for example, why the program isn’t working as well as expected. Such qualitative information can be collected through surveys, interviews, or observations.

A primary use of program evaluation data should be to inform decision-making about school programs. Depending on the purpose of the evaluation, school staff need to consider the following. Does the program do what it is supposed to do? What program improvements do the findings suggest? For example, does it look as though the approach is not being implemented as designed? If you decide to keep the current program, perhaps with modifications, the findings might suggest some ways to improve the program’s effectiveness. Finally, if the evaluation provides solid data that a program isn’t working—and likely will not work—what does the evaluation tell us about what to look for in a replacement program or approach?

The Principal’s Pivotal Role

In Howard’s (2004) view, principals can be pivotal in creating “evaluation-friendly” environments in their schools by helping staff understand that the intent is to evaluate programs, not people; integrating data collection into existing procedures as much as possible; and making it clear that some important questions can be addressed quite easily.

Finally, Champion (2004) stresses that it is important that your initial efforts to conduct more systematic reviews of your school’s programs be of high quality—even if that means they are fairly limited in scope: “Think big, but take some small, carefully considered steps. Start with a conversation with your colleagues about what would be most useful to know with some certainty ... You don’t need to do everything at once.”

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References


“Keep the plan as simple as possible, especially for your first program evaluation.”

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WEB RESOURCES

Evaluating for Success was originally developed by McREL to help support schools’ implementation of Comprehensive School Reform programs. However, its clear description of the evaluation process can be applied to any evaluation project. www.mcrel.org/topics/products/76

The 2002 User-Friendly Handbook for Program Evaluation is posted on the Web site of the National Science Foundation. In one chapter, the authors briefly discuss the advantages and disadvantages of approaches to data collection such as surveys and focus groups. www.nsf.gov/pubs/2002/nsf02057/start.htm

The New York State Teacher Resource Centers host a Web site to assist educators to “plan, implement, and communicate evaluation activities.” Included are tools such as an evaluation planner spreadsheet, designed to help support the development of an evaluation. www.programevaluation.org

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A Sensible Way to Distribute School Leadership Roles

Jane Kise and Beth Russell

Use personality type to discover and enhance your leadership style.

Which sounds like more fun to you: spending an afternoon reviewing student assessment data to inform instruction or meeting with student groups to hear their ideas about improving school climate? What about finalizing procedures for teacher observations versus completing a multiyear plan for professional development? Although you are able to do all of these tasks, some probably come more naturally to you—and fit better with your natural strengths.

As the demands on school leaders expand, it’s becoming more and more important to lead from your strengths. Our review of literature on essential school leadership responsibilities led us to write Differentiated School Leadership: Effective Collaboration, Communication and Change Through Personality Type, which revealed 26 separate roles for school principals that have an impact on student achievement. If you try to fill all 26 roles by yourself, you: are headed straight for burnout, will probably struggle with some roles that simply do not suit you, and will rob others of the chance to add their strengths and ideas to school leadership.

In The Learning Leader: How to Focus School Improvement for Better Results, Douglas B. Reeves summarizes: “Great leaders are not mythological composites of every dimension of leadership. Instead they have self-confidence, and without hubris they acknowledge their deficiencies and fill their subordinate ranks not with lackeys but with exceptional leaders who bring complementary strengths to the organization.”

But how do you distribute leadership responsibly when you are ultimately responsible for what happens in your building? For decades, people have used personality type theory to make the most of their natural style and build effective teams. This theory can help you move from the old Lone Ranger mentality to sharing leadership in an effective, efficient way. The theory also helps to explain why literature on school leadership emphasizes some critical roles over others. As we’ll describe below, people with certain personality preferences are more likely to seek leadership positions and this colors what is seen as the way to lead. Those whose personalities are different may feel like outsiders at best, inadequate at worst.

Personality Type 101

Type theory comes from the work of Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung and American Katherine Briggs, who independently charted the same framework of human development and interactions. Briggs and her daughter, Isabel Myers, created the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) to help people make constructive use of natural, normal differences. The theory describes how people:
Gain energy, through action and interaction (extraversion) or through reflection and time alone (introversion);

Take in information, through reality and experiences (sensing) or through hunches and connections (intuition);

Make decisions, through logic and objectivity (thinking) or through values and considering the impact on people (feeling); and

Approach life, through planning and coming to closure (judging) or through flexibility and staying open (perceiving).

All of these indicators influence how we lead, how we teach, and how we learn.

Most people find that they perform at their best when tasks fit their personalities. School leaders can learn to perform all 26 of the essential principal roles, but some are energizing while others are of limited interest. In the opening example, reviewing assessment data fits the strengths of the thinking function—making decisions based on logic and objective criteria. In contrast, building relationships with students fits the strengths of the feeling function—making decisions by stepping into the shoes of those who will be affected and considering community values. Given that the Center for Applications of Psychological Type’s Atlas of Type Tables reveals that 80 percent of school principals—and an even higher percentage of superintendents—prefer thinking, is it any wonder that one reads more about using assessment data than qualitative data to guide decisions in books and research on school leadership?

Beth, a principal, prefers feeling and considering impact on people—and knows that working with assessment data isn’t her strength. She shared responsibility for this role in several ways. She scheduled data retreats for grade-level teams. She asked district personnel to lead the retreats, knowing that they could help teachers look at data in ways that would motivate, inform, and
assist them in their work. She also asked the assistant principal and Jane, an education consultant, to join her at the meetings to help the teachers set goals based on the data. Because the staff now understand personality type, they don’t expect Beth to be a master at every role. They know they’ll need to dig into the data themselves.

Further, the personality type framework can help principals understand what isn’t being addressed at their schools. In working with leadership teams at other schools, we often make a poster of all 26 leadership roles. Each team member is given five green stickers to place by the five roles that they would prefer to spend the majority of their time pursuing and five red stickers for the five roles that appeal the least to them. In every building, the roles covered in red stickers simply aren’t being done. In one school, the exercise explained why on any given day, 50 percent to 60 percent of students weren’t following the school uniform policy—no one was taking on the essential roles of establishing procedures and managing administrative processes, and the students knew it!

As you read the more detailed descriptions of the type preferences and the principal roles that fit each preference, think about what you prefer to do. How, by asking others to take on other roles, could you be a more effective leader? If you don’t yet have a leadership team, consider who might bring complementary strengths to such a group.

Interactive and Reflective Leadership Roles

Think about the paradoxical nature of what you’re called to do as a principal—be visible, advocate for the school, and gather input from multiple sources. If you prefer extraversion, you probably thrive on what we termed the interactive leader roles. You enjoy being out and about in your building, thinking best when you can interact with others. Too much time on paperwork can be draining for extraverted principals.

However, there are also reflective leader roles—pulling back before making decisions and reflecting to learn from past positive and negative results. If you prefer introversion, the reflective leader roles put you at your best. Ideally, you have the time to step back and ponder information and ideas before sharing your thoughts. Too many interruptions and meetings can be draining for introverted principals.

Which role describes how you are
energized? That self-knowledge can help you plan your days in ways that keep your demanding job from completely draining you. Then, consider how a leadership team might help you balance the interactive and reflective principal roles. Introverted team members might help an extraverted principal set aside staff time for reflection on progress toward school goals. Extraverted team members might help an introverted principal stay aware of the pulse of the school—what students are saying, what is happening in the hallways, how the community reacts to news about the school, and so on.

What Information Captures Your Attention?

The second pair of preferences, sensing and intuition, describe the information that first draws our attention. Think about all of the day-to-day managerial tasks demanded of you, what we call the administrative leader roles. Those with a preference for sensing first pay attention to information the five senses can gather. They’re good at details, learning from experience, and putting structures into place. Therefore, roles such as maintaining school focus and monitoring strategy implementation play to their strengths.

The visionary leader roles, such as acting as a change agent and optimizer, call on very different strengths. They naturally appeal to intuitive types who prefer to focus on the big picture, the future, and working to change rather than maintain the status quo.

Beth prefers intuition. Her staff jokes that she returns from each conference she attends with a dozen new ideas for teachers to implement. She asks other members of her leadership team to take on the sensing role to evaluate whether a new idea fits with the school focus and, if so, help Beth plan the who, what, where, and how of training, implementation, and follow-through.

How Do You Make Decisions?

An individual’s preference for thinking or feeling influences his or her decision-making style. While all principals need to be instructional leaders, thinking principals often naturally gravitate toward gaining extensive knowledge of curriculum and instruction, aligning curriculum and standards, and using data, assessment and testing effectively—the systemic instructional leader roles. Feeling principals are better described as community instructional leaders, emphasizing building teams and community, focusing on qualitative information such as student motivation or engagement, and recognizing accomplishments of both students and staff. Again, with more than 80 percent of principals preferring thinking, the thinking roles seem to be overemphasized in the literature on effective principalship roles.

There is nothing wishy-washy about the feeling approach to instructional practice, just a different approach, and sometimes a better approach. It all depends on what the job demands.

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Proced With Caution Toward Change

I began my first principalship with anticipation and excitement, armed with the wisdom of my educational leadership courses and the insights born of classroom experience. Despite all my preparation, it was still a year replete with surprising lessons that I won’t forget. My most daunting challenges came in the area of change-making.

I replaced a 20-year veteran principal who had a long tradition of, well, traditions. Thus, my first challenge was to update the school. The facilities, curriculum, and teaching methodologies, while sound, were starting to show their wear, and enrollment at the school had been in a steady decline for almost a decade.

However, I remembered the caveat that I had heard many times over: Make no changes in your first year; just observe. But despite this sound advice, I found myself facing circumstances that seemed to warrant immediate attention. I weighed my options: Should I leave things alone and risk further decline in enrollment, or should I defy the accepted wisdom and change something. And if so, what should I change first?

To Change or Not To Change

To answer these questions, I took a look at the whole picture from the outside in and the inside out. We were perceived from the outside as a school that faced possible closure if the current downward spiral of enrollment continued. We had lost one-third of our student body in the four years prior to my arrival, and there were no signs that this trend would shift. To stem this tide, we had to show that the school was willing to make substantive changes to attract new students.

From the inside, confidence about the future was slipping. Although the faculty felt justifiably proud of the school’s long-held reputation for academic excellence, both the enrollment drop and the closures of other under-subscribed schools in our geographic area made them feel insecure. Parents of current students were also concerned since they were anxious about having to find alternatives for their children in case the school closed.

Weighing these factors, it seemed clear to me that there was an imminent threat to the school’s future and that was a condition serious enough to warrant change. Given our situation, I decided to take the plunge and change one thing.

Pick Something SAFE

First-year principals can successfully introduce the concept of change by keeping in mind the guidelines for a SAFE project:

- **Stand alone**—it isn’t personally connected with any of the school’s constituency.
- **All are aboard**—there is consensus that this project should be targeted.
- **Fines**—the budget will support the project.
- **Efficient**—parameters are well-defined, turnaround is quick, and results are observable.

Choosing a target area was difficult for me. It was important to avoid anything that touched upon teacher performance in the classroom. Sensitivities were so high that even small suggestions about updating resource materials or altering teaching strategies would have been perceived as criticism. Teachers might easily make the leap and assume that I was blaming the enrollment drop on them.

Changes to the facility would have been helpful since much of the plant needed significant updating, but with budget constraints, this did not seem to be a practical goal for the first year. I also knew that I couldn’t choose an extensive project because I had limited time to complete it. I wanted to take on something that could be done quickly, even during my first few months, and that would have an immediate impact. Ideally, the change would be a sign of more good things to come.

Luckily, there was a project that presented real possibilities in all these areas—our Web site. Simply put, it was an anachronism. This was not a result of anything but inattention since the site had been designed many years prior to my arrival and was rarely used. It looked like a prime candidate for my first change.

As a tool for growth, the Web site held enormous potential. It could present a renewed image of the school to prospective families while updating our entire approach to communications. It could serve the dual purpose of being a marketing tool and change agent. And those benefits would present themselves almost immediately.

However, despite it being a manageable project in terms of budget and time, it was most important to consider: Would altering it insult the efforts of those who had created it in the past? Was anyone’s identity tied to what was currently posted? Would changing it...
result in extra work for any of our current employees? If so, would that cause resentment?

Fortunately, there was unanimous agreement in the school community that the site needed to be updated, and my supervisor was on board with anything reasonable—and inexpensive—that would add to the school’s visibility and marketability. With buy-in from all stakeholders, I was off to a good start. Next, I met with parents who offered to assist with the site’s design. Fortunately, I brought some expertise to the process because of my educational media background. This proved to be a real asset since I was a credible leader for the project. I listened carefully to all the ideas that were presented and tossed some of my own into the mix.

The Web site overhaul was a huge success. Parents welcomed the new, easily navigable format and the wealth of information about the school’s programs and activities. Students enjoyed seeing pictures of their projects and the events in which they participated. Teachers were initially hesitant about the extra workload of posting class material, but enjoyed the easy access to essential information. Faculty and families alike appreciated e-mail as a simple and practical mode of communication.

Prospective families almost universally made the Web site their first stop in school shopping. From a marketing and public relations perspective, the school’s enhanced Web profile brought numerous new inquiries about enrollment possibilities. The site provided all the essentials with the added benefit of pictures, video, and links to current news.

First-Year Success

A wizened professor once opined that you make changes in schools like you make changes in a cemetery—one body at a time. While we might attribute this perspective to the cynicism of an older veteran, one must admit that many educational institutions seem to move at the rate of tectonic plates.

Yet a first-year principal can ill afford to expend the necessary energy to fight this reality. It may, in fact, be the best choice to make no changes in the first year of your tenure. If, however, your institution is faced with the prospect of imminent failure, continuing precipitous decline or negative public sentiment, you may want to pick one SAFE area to target for change.

Choosing such a project can yield positive results for both you and your school. For you as a principal, it can position you as a forward-thinking leader; for your school, it can send the message that you recognize the need for growth, and you’ve taken a step in that direction.

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**Why Don’t Students Like School?**

“E”ducation makes better minds, and knowledge of the mind can make better education,” writes author Daniel Willingham in *Why Don’t Students Like School?* In this book, Willingham uses a question format for each chapter as he provides nine cognitive principles and classroom applications that teachers can use in their everyday planning and teaching.

Resonating throughout the book is the idea that mental work appeals to students and adults because it offers opportunities for that “pleasant feeling” when it succeeds. However, when work is overwhelming, we often check out, avoid, and give up.

What seems most applicable to teaching and learning is a discussion about the four factors necessary for successful thinking—information from the environment, facts in long-term memory, procedures in long-term memory, and the amount of space in working memory. Also, data studies about teacher traits most important to students show that students connect personally with teachers they perceive as “nice” and “organized.”

A chapter that focuses on lesson planning stresses the power of stories. Practical ideas for social studies, science, and math lessons are offered to help readers understand story structure for each specific subject. Another chapter on intelligence shares the view that intelligence can be improved and it is important to convince students of this idea. Ideas are provided for classroom implementation.

Although the book is mainly about students and their learning, there is a specific chapter about teacher learning. Teachers who consciously want to improve are offered steps to follow to pursue this endeavor. At the conclusion of the book, a reminder is given to know our students in order to keep them interested and anticipate their reactions in classroom learning.

The title of the book is what invited me to read it. Although a little dry and difficult to read, this would be a perfect book for a Teachers as Readers book group to analyze each chapter, use the practical ideas in the classroom, and then reflect and discuss.

**Reviewed by Lisa Hannah, Principal, Three Oaks Elementary School, Virginia Beach, Virginia, lisa.hannah@vbschools.com.**

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The principal that is committed to effective communication will be able to offer personnel recognition, praise, and professional regard, while establishing organizational expectations and developing a campus culture that benefits the entire learning community.

The Principal’s Guide to Managing School Personnel is a book that I would have benefited from having in my collection years ago. Many of the concepts presented in each chapter, as well as the scenarios, could be related back to experiences that I have had in my principalship. As the title suggests, this book is a guide, a reference source. Each chapter could stand independently, so as situations arise, one could use this source to refresh protocols and offer suggestions on how best to proceed. The authors recommend that school leaders, “Consider every principal-personnel situation to be a learning opportunity that opens the door to increased professional growth and leadership skill development.”

The book is divided into eight chapters in which each one is devoted to a single topic critical to effective personnel relationships. The authors use existing research from a variety of sources to define concepts and illustrate potential techniques to facilitate positive interactions with personnel and to navigate through trying situations. Each chapter contains scenarios to consider and reflective questions.

Chapter 5, “Personnel and Conflict Resolution,” stands out for me. The authors take a positive approach to handling personnel in conflict with one another or with the administration. As the authors state: “Problems are opportunities for teaching. If you really want to have a lasting impact on your students, your faculty, and your community, handle conflict in a way that builds understanding and teaches others to do the same.” As I read this book, I found myself frequently relating the scenarios and concepts to situations that I had experienced. I am already quoting and describing points illustrated in this book to others with whom I work.

I recommend this book, for it reaffirmed techniques that I already knew and has encouraged me to examine alternative methods of interaction with personnel. It is a useful resource for school administrators and I will be keeping it readily available as a resource in my daily interactions with others.

**Reviewed by Jon Stern, Principal, Wabasha-Kellogg Elementary and High School, Wabasha, Minnesota, jstern@wabasha-kellogg.k12.mn.us.**
Remaining Focused During a Budget Crisis

Last year, I had to face a new challenge: the economic dilemma facing our schools. The impact of our national, state, and local economic outlook on our students was foremost on my mind because our school system was openly discussing repercussions such as school closings, teacher layoffs, and program cuts. My concern was maintaining an academic focus and continuing to do what was best for students during an economically stressful period. I wanted to maintain a positive attitude within the schools, with teachers, and with parents and the community.

At the beginning of my administrative career, I faced a similar issue when I initially sought to garner support from the school community. I had to learn how to share my vision for the school, bring everyone together as a team, and establish strong relationships, all while increasing students’ academic performance. Both challenges helped me develop the perspective that establishing open lines of communication between the principal, teachers, staff, and community members helps everyone focus on doing what is best for our students.

Because establishing rapport with the school community is important, I developed budget-savvy committees and groups to help others understand how to tighten our in-house budget such as by cutting down on photocopying and energy use. My school created a letter-writing campaign to legislators and local newspapers in an effort to spread the word about saving our schools and the impact on students. Everyone was working as a team to increase awareness of the economic impact on our schools.

I recently thought about this issue while guiding my protégé through a successful first year as a principal. My protégé had to face these challenges while establishing herself as an instructional leader to her school and community. By using knowledge and training gained from my participation as a mentor in NAESP’s Mentor Program, I was able to encourage her to reflect on the following areas:

- How can I create an atmosphere that is positive and focused on students?
- How can I create an environment of listening and information sharing?
- Which budget line items can be cut that would have the least impact on student achievement?
- How can I empower the community to stand behind the school?

—K. Jane Cline

I began my first year as an elementary school principal with much excitement, enthusiasm, and anticipation. I quickly learned the true definition of the word TEAM—together everyone achieves more—as I began to count on teacher leaders to assist with many schoolwide initiatives. One of our challenges was to find the most effective way to do more with less.

In collaboration with my mentor, I developed interest groups to assist with reviewing the budget to determine methods for cutting back without taking away from students. For example, classroom teachers made a commitment to help decrease the amount of money spent on substitute teachers. Teachers pledged to be conservative and limit absences; when needed, coverage would be provided by administrators or nonclassroom teachers such as the guidance counselor or inclusion teacher. We also began to look at different ways to save paper costs by communicating with parents electronically and including additional parent-teacher information on the school’s Web site.

Though we continued to face challenging economic times, and the district was considering closing the school because of low enrollment, I followed my mentor’s lead by remaining positive in all interactions and correspondence with students, parents, faculty, and community members. I didn’t want to lose sight of our students or instructional momentum. We all made a conscious effort to put our best foot forward and focused on our students’ needs. As a team, we continued to set high expectations, focus on student achievement, and grow as professionals through trainings, learning communities, and book studies.

I made a concerted effort to provide my staff members and stakeholders with timely district information and news articles about the budget. My door was always open and I maintained visibility in the mornings and afternoons for parents if they had questions or concerns. I empowered the school advisory council, parent teacher organization, teacher leaders, and community business leaders to assist
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In Our Students’ Shoes

All educators should be learning something that is difficult. For many of us who grew up thinking the arts were only for those who had talent, learning to draw, dance, or play an instrument can provide a challenge. Most students only pursue arts training if they are thought to have talent, which is a natural interest in something coupled with an unlearned facility in it. Everyone can develop some level of expertise in the arts; for those of us without innate talent, art or music lessons can be a challenge similar to those faced by children learning reading or math. Imagine if we only taught reading or math to students who demonstrated talent in those areas! Violin lessons have provided me with valuable insights into the struggles students face and how educators can help children learn.

Principal vs. Violin

After my appointment as principal of an arts-focused school, I was challenged by our strings teacher to join the third graders in beginning strings instruction. She provided a violin and I tried to attend class weekly. The children loved it; and my designated buddy made sure I kept up with practice even if my principal duties made me miss a class. After the children helped me through fourth- and fifth-grade violin class, I was hooked and decided to begin private violin lessons.

I will never forget sitting in the studio’s waiting room for my first lesson. The teacher came out, looked around the room, and asked a little girl if her name was Bridget. I said, “I’m Bridget,” and we began our journey together. At first, I rarely played a measure without being asked to stop so that some techniques could be corrected. During that first summer, I never made it through one whole song without interruption. It seemed to me that nothing I was doing was working the way it should. My teacher tried to explain how to hold the violin and bow correctly, to understand the relationship between the angle of the violin and the angle of the bow and, most of all, to be relaxed while paying attention to all these details.

I was feeling pretty discouraged until she uncovered my learning style. I needed hand-over-hand, kinesthetic practice to understand what I needed to do. This was the key and we have used the technique weekly with success. Whenever I just can’t do what my teacher tells me to do, she makes me relax—no small feat—and she takes control. By working through the motor patterns under her control, I am able to successfully take over on my own.

So what have I learned by taking up this seductively difficult instrument as a 50-something-year-old principal?

“Educators should be learners—not only for acquiring new knowledge, but for the experience gained from learning something difficult.”

You are never too old to try and children appreciate witnessing your effort. Sometimes, trying is hard and risky and might be embarrassing. We need to be tuned in to our students to support them when they are taking risks.

It is helpful for children to see an adult learning something hard and not being instantly good at it. Usually, adults can easily do what we are trying to teach children to do; it helps kids to see that hard work can result in improvement.

Having a good teacher who can analyze and suggest solutions is a precious gift to a learner. A good teacher spends much time figuring out how each student learns best and uses that knowledge at every opportunity to keep the student going. Good teachers are problem-solvers who never give up on anyone.

All students need opportunities to see how much they have learned and improved. Playing pieces that were hard a few months ago is a good way to see improvement.

Never give up on the basics. Scales may be boring, but they allow your mind to focus on small parts of technique that you can’t focus on when you are playing something more complicated. Students should review easy material to build confidence and fluency.

All students can improve if they are challenged. I always thought I had a good ear for relative pitch and harmony. I have learned that it isn’t as good as I thought, but that it is improving slowly with practice.

Old habits are hard to break—and new ones take concentration to establish. Children need time to relax their brains from all this hard work. Activity and recess are crucial.

Having a goal can be motivating. Knowing I have to play in a concert can inspire me to endure tedious practice. Knowing that learning will be shared with others is motivating for students, too.

Praise is only valuable when it is genuine and it needs to be specific so the learner knows exactly what was done correctly. Criticism definitely needs to be balanced with specific praise—otherwise the learner can become disheartened and frustrated.

Sometimes even principals have to give someone else control to learn something. As a leader, we must be open to learning from others, including children.

Educators should be learners—not only for acquiring new knowledge, but for the experience gained from learning something difficult. The arts can provide a challenging learning experience as well as valuable insights—and maybe something to help us relax!

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A Restorative Approach to Resolving Conflict

Today, our schools reflect the state of the 21st century. Facing crises such as world terrorism and a collapsing international economy, many schools have adopted disciplinary policies such as zero tolerance. Research has shown that reactive approaches such as zero tolerance, including out-of-school suspension and expulsion, have limited effect and tend to hurt the student by labeling him or her; create idol time, which can create an atmosphere conducive to at-risk or illegal behaviors; and contribute to the student falling further behind academically.

Zero tolerance policies are problematic and, according to the American Bar Association’s “Final Report: Bi-Partisan Working Group on Youth Violence,” they have overshot their original purpose “as a congressional response to students with guns.” Instead, zero tolerance has “become a one-size-fits-all solution to all the problems that schools confront. It has redefined students as criminals, with unfortunate consequences.” School suspensions and expulsions result in a number of negative outcomes for both schools and students. Students see out-of-school suspension as a vacation. If they realize that nothing will be done at home, they will continue to try to get suspended.

Restorative dispute resolution (RDR) offers an alternative to suspension and expulsion by addressing the victims of misbehavior and repairing the harm caused to them and to the school community. RDR fosters a sense of community within the school and neighborhood through the development of listening, mutual respect, and fairness.

Restorative Accountability

A more useful way of dealing with conflict is the use of restorative practices, which have been used effectively for years in the juvenile justice arena. Instead of zero tolerance and authoritarian punishment, restorative practices provide high levels of control and support, which encourage appropriate behavior, and places the responsibility for resolution on students themselves.

RDR is designed to repair the harm to the victim and school community, and build peer and intergenerational relationships through mutual respect and fairness. This is accomplished by using cognitive-behavioral processes (role-playing, discussion, feedback, demonstration, activities) among the stakeholders. They include the offending student, his or her parents or support group, the victim, his or her parents or support group, and a trained facilitator.

The group members negotiate a settlement that addresses the harm to the victim and school community, resulting in a written contract that spells out the responsibilities of each participant. The contract must also satisfy the school administration and address legal concerns. Through this process, participants learn about each other and develop empathy by exercising respect, cooperation, and understanding.

Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the offending student to repair the harm for the incident. It requires that every effort be made to restore losses to the victim and school. Offending students can participate in community restoration projects, mentor or tutor other students, organize community activities such as clean-up projects on school grounds, or participate on advisory boards.

Parents and support groups are an important part of this process; their participation is a key to its success. They can give back to the school communities and neighborhoods by participating, providing feedback on the process, advocating for the school community, mentoring and tutoring students, and becoming facilitators and serving on advisory boards.

Successful Restorative Programs

The numbers tell a powerful story: Schools implementing restorative methods have seen a drop in disciplinary problems, decreased reliance on detention and suspension, and an improvement in student attitudes.

A pilot project was implemented at Patterson Middle School in Lansing, Michigan, in January 2005 to manage disciplinary issues through restorative practices. As a result:

- There was a 15 percent drop in suspensions, while suspension rates at the district’s other middle schools increased;
- Two expulsions were averted;
- Conflicts were resolved effectively, with 93 percent of participating students reporting that they used restorative methods to resolve their conflicts; and
- Nearly 90 percent of participating students reported learning new skills in their restorative experiences, and 86 percent reported using those skills to peacefully resolve or avert conflicts after their restorative interventions.

The program’s success led the district to expand its restorative program...
to one elementary school, two more middle schools and a high school for 2006-2007. Abby J. Porter reports in “Restoration Practices in Schools: Research Reveals Power of Restorative Approach, Part II” that the district’s restorative justice coordinator estimated that during that year, restorative interventions saved students nearly 1,500 days of suspension.

Public schools in Minnesota are also implementing a range of restorative practices. From 1998 to 2001, the Minnesota Department of Education conducted an evaluation of restorative practices in primary and secondary schools in four districts. The study showed a 30 percent to 50 percent reduction in suspensions. According to Restorative Practices in Minnesota Schools, a video interview produced by the International Institute for Restorative Practices, Nancy Riestenberg of the Minnesota Department of Education indicates that one elementary school reduced its behavior referrals for inappropriate physical contact from seven per day to a little more than one per day.

**Restore the Student and the Community**

A unique feature of the restorative model is making clear to the offending student that he or she has not only violated the victim, but has also victimized the school community. Thus, RDR allows students to not only make the victim “whole,” but to make amends to the school as well. RDR establishes meaningful peer and intergenerational relationships by establishing a culture of listening and mutual respect. Giving back—in restorative terms—involves the stakeholders: offending students, victims, parents, and school. All stakeholders participate in the process, addressing the harm that has been caused in ways meaningful to the victim and the school community.

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Don’t Overlook Grade Skipping

You and your teachers are under ever more stress. Mandates from your district, the state, and the federal government seem to be ever mounting, even contradictory. And then there are the parents who say, “My child is bored in school!” or “I’m not happy with my child’s teacher!” Such complaints are particularly likely to come from parents of high-ability kids.

Principals and teachers can be tempted to give such complaints short shrift. After all, many educators are too consumed by the problems of low-achieving students and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) mandates to serve them. Alas, those parent complaints are more likely to increase for a number of reasons.

First, NCLB imposes carrots and sticks for helping low-achievers reach basic competency but none for high-ability kids to live up to their potential. Also, our increasingly heterogeneous classes make it more difficult to meet the needs of high-ability students. Finally, as the full range of career options open to women, today’s cohort of teachers contains fewer teachers who are as capable of and motivated to help high-ability students live up to their potential. I’ve heard many teachers (and even a few principals) say things like, “He’s smart; he’ll do fine anyway.” Or even, “Bright kids can learn by teaching struggling students.”

Of course, such a mind-set is a perfect recipe for reducing America to its lowest common denominator. Certainly some learning accrues when a bright child explains something to a low-ability child, but when bright children are denied an opportunity to learn new things at a fast pace, they wither or just stay alive instead of flowering.

High-ability students have the greatest potential to cure our diseases, discover the next Google, and become wise leaders of our government, nonprofits, and businesses. Yet, too often, we make greater efforts to appropriately educate low achievers than high-potential students. Given all this research, why is grade skipping infrequently used? Some educators believe that bright kids should serve as role models for slow learners even if that’s not optimal for the high-ability students. And educators and parents worry that children who skip a grade will suffer socially. This logic fails to consider the above research and the pain of being constantly bored and undereducated.

Steps to Successful Grade Skipping

Academic Readiness. Examine the student’s standardized test scores and assess the disparity between the student’s reading and math ability and the work level in his or her current class. It is not enough to look at the child’s typical classwork because many high-ability students blow off too-easy work. Instead, examine the child’s best work—for example, a project that he or she found very motivating.

Is there outside-of-school evidence of high intellectual capability? For example, learning to read before entering kindergarten or undertaking a project more cognitively complex than same-age peers can handle?

Chat with the student to determine if his or her reasoning ability appears significantly above average. Also, talk to the child’s teacher about whether he or she thinks the student is capable of doing well if skipped to a higher grade.

Emotional Readiness. The child needn’t be sure he or she wants to skip a grade, just not be unalterably opposed. Many kids who would be wise to skip a grade resist because of fear of the unknown, loss of friends, or desire to be like everyone else. Principals can open a reluctant child’s mind to grade skipping by:

- Encouraging the parent and child to visit candidate classrooms, assessing if the child would likely be happier

HERE’S YOUR CHANCE TO SPEAK OUT

The author believes that high-ability students are better off skipping a grade than remaining in the same grade in which the teacher would need to offer differentiated instruction. Are you more likely to encourage grade skipping or differentiated/gifted instruction in your school? What do you believe are the pros and cons of grade skipping?

Let your colleagues know what you think by going to the Principals’ Office blog at http://naesp.typepad.com and clicking on “Speaking Out.”

A Practical Solution

Grade skipping instantly gives high-potential students a much more appropriate education without imposing more work on teachers than they’re likely to do. It is not surprising, then, that the research literature strongly supports the value of grade skipping:

A meta-analysis of 32 separate studies by Karen Rogers found that grade skipping results in a half-year’s additional growth in all academic subjects compared with a matched group of gifted students who were not accelerated. Rogers summarizes, “The results of all 32 studies were remarkably consistent and positive.”

A meta-evaluation of 26 other studies by the University of Michigan’s James Kulik and Chen-Lin Kulik found that accelerated gifted students outperformed nonaccelerated gifted students without incurring any significant negative social or emotional problems.

Also, research by Miraca Gross found that highly gifted students who skipped a grade were more socially well adjusted than those who remained in coursework dictated by age. A wealth of additional support for acceleration can be found at the University of Iowa’s Institute for Research and Policy on Acceleration (www.accelerationinstitute.org).

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- Encouraging the parent and child to visit candidate classrooms, assessing if the child would likely be happier
and/or more successful in one of those classrooms;
- Coordinating efforts to have another high-ability classmate join the child in skipping a grade; and
- Asking the receiving teacher if the child could sit next to a socially savvy and kind classmate who can serve as a peer mentor.

Grade skipping helps ensure that your high-ability students live up to their potential while relieving the sending teacher of the heavy burden of trying to provide appropriate instruction for above-average students. And it can reduce the seemingly endless complaints you get from parents of bright kids.

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Enter the New Generation of Parents

In a recent column, I mentioned that one of the most important things principals can do to effectively engage parents is to treat them like partners instead of as clients. It’s also important to clearly understand that today’s potential parent-partners are much different than the parents you may have worked with when you first started your career.

Here’s a crash course on common characteristics of parents today—the Generation Xers—based on Why School Communication Matters: Strategies from PR Professionals by Kitty Porterfield and Meg Carnes. Following each characteristic I suggest some partnership-appropriate ways to respond.

**Generation X has grown up hearing about “failing schools.”** They grew up with unflattering media stories about schools sparked by the 1983 *Nation at Risk* report stating that “the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people.”

**Response:** Show parents the detailed curriculum teachers are following. You have it; most parents have never seen it.

**They are skeptical problem solvers who thrive on collaboration.** They will work with school leaders given the opportunity—or, just as easily, against them if they feel it’s necessary to help their children.

**Response:** Take the initiative to invite parents, individually and in groups, to work with the school on topics of mutual interest such as attendance, discipline, and bullying.

**They think outside the box.** The fact that the school has never done it that way before does not concern them.

**Response:** In newsletter articles and at meetings, invite innovative suggestions and ideas for improving student achievement. Expect some good ones.

**They imagine doing things others before them wouldn’t dare to do—including challenging authority.**

**Response:** Welcome parents’ initiative. Recognize that the same thing that motivates you motivates them: helping their children succeed in school.

**They are family-oriented and receptive to efforts to get families involved.**

**Response:** Capitalize on this.

**They don’t trust institutions to automatically do what’s right.**

**Response:** Communicate quickly and forthrightly. Discuss, publicize, and strictly enforce staff confidentiality and ethics policies.

**They don’t trust that their children are always safe at school.** In fact, they fear for their safety.

**Response:** Anticipate parents’ concerns and provide information before they request it, especially on health and safety issues.

**They are interested in relationships and want to be sure they can trust you.**

**Response:** Provide informal opportunities for parents to get to know you and staff members on a social basis such as movie nights, community events, and celebrations.

**They expect to communicate with you and your teachers instantly by e-mail, cell phone, and online.**

**Response:** Make responding quickly a habit—and publicize your reasonable turnaround time policies.

**They expect that your school will have a first-class Web site that is up-to-date and dynamic, with easily accessible information, including ways they can help their children.**

**Response:** Google “key communicator” and set up your own program. It’s simple and effective.

**They expect personalized, not generic, communications conveniently available to them day or night.**

**Response:** Personalize when you can. Use semi-personalization when you can’t: “Dear Third-Grade Parent,” “Dear Band Booster.”

**Since they are almost all working, they value their time and don’t want it to be wasted with school activities that don’t directly help them or their child.**

**Response:** Be ruthless about not wasting anyone’s time on things that don’t directly build school success.

Parent partnerships are dynamic and are always a work in progress. However, the payoffs begin immediately—as soon as today’s parents see that you genuinely want to work side by side with them to help children learn. It all starts by seeing parents as partners instead of just clients.

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Mesa Public Schools, Arizona’s largest school district, is nationally recognized and an award winning K-12 school district with high academic standards serving over 69,000 students.

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As our society becomes more diverse, expectations increase for public schools to include curricula and other activities that promote respect for not only racial and ethnic pluralism, but also gender preferences. At the same time, traditional values and fundamentalist beliefs pose a counterbalancing force that insists on public schools playing their historic role of homogenization and not invading parental issues, such as religious and sex education. The following case and accompanying question-and-answer discussion illustrate recent court decisions that demarcate the boundary between these competing interests.

Background

In the early 1990s, Massachusetts enacted legislation requiring curricula standards for all public elementary and secondary schools “to inculcate respect for the cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity of the Commonwealth ... and to avoid perpetuating gender, cultural, ethnic or racial stereotypes.” To comply, the state education department issued regulations and curricular frameworks, which at the K-5 level encourage instruction covering “different types of families” and “the concepts of prejudice and discrimination.” Not long thereafter, Massachusetts’ highest court held that the state’s ban on same-sex marriages violated the state constitution.

The Case

In 2005, Jacob Parker was in kindergarten in Lexington, Massachusetts. As part of the school system’s Diversity Book Bag program, he brought home the book *Who’s Who in a Family*, which contains illustrations of different types of families, including those with parents of the same gender. In grade 1, his readings included *Molly’s Family*, a picture book about a girl who is at first made to feel embarrassed by a classmate because she has both a mommy and a mama, but then learns that families can come in many different varieties.

In 2006, when Joey Wirthlin was in the first grade in Lexington, his teacher read the book *King and King* aloud to the class. In this fairy tale, the prince meets and marries another prince, and they live happily ever after. The book ends with a cartoon kiss between the young couple.

Jacob’s and Joey’s parents hold sincere religious beliefs that homosexuality is immoral and that marriage necessarily means a union between a man and a woman. They registered their objections with school administrators to the use of these three books to “indoctrinate” their young children with beliefs opposite from their own. They requested that the school system not expose their children to such instruction without first providing the parents with notice and an opportunity to opt out. Although state law requires such notice and opt-out for any curriculum that “primarily involves human sexual education or human sexuality issues,” the school officials did not consider the disputed lessons as fitting this criterion and denied the request.

The Parkers and Wirthlins then joined to file suit in federal court, claiming violations of federal and state law. On the federal side, they based their claims on the 14th Amendment’s “liberty” of child rearing and the First Amendment’s free exercise of religion. Their state claims were based on the opt-out statute and the state civil rights act. In addition, they sought an injunction against schools presenting any “materials graphically depicting homosexual physical contact” to students before grade 7.

Questions and Answers

What was the ultimate judicial outcome in this case?

In *Parker v. Hurley* (2006), the federal trial court granted the defendants’ motion to dismiss the case on the federal constitutional grounds and declined to decide the state law claim. The following year, the 1st Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed that decision in *Parker v. Hurley* (2007). For the First Amendment free exercise claim, the appellate court viewed the precedents as unsettled as to the level of justification required of the government, but found it unnecessary to reach this step, concluding: “While we accept as true plaintiffs’ assertion that their sincerely held religious beliefs were
If the parents had additionally or alternatively argued that the diversity program violated the First Amendment’s religious establishment clause, what would have been the likely outcome?

The odds would strongly favor the district defendants. In prior cases, the courts have consistently rejected curricular challenges premised on the notion that public school curricula were promoting a religion such as secular humanism or Wicca.

Returning to the constitutional challenges raised in the Massachusetts case, what would be the judicial odds if a suit targeted one of the following school activities:

An Opposite Sex Day, in which students engaged in cross-dressing. The only published court decision specific to this situation was inconclusive. In Stanley v. Carrier Mills-Stonefort School District No. 2 (2006), a federal district court in Illinois denied the district’s motion to dismiss the parents’ suit, thus preserving for trial their First Amendment free exercise clause and 14th Amendment parental liberty claims. However, the 1st Circuit’s caveat about state law and local policy applies here, too.

Diversity education in the nation’s schools. A federal district court in California readily jettisoned such a broad-based claim in Preskar v. United States (2008), illustrating that such concerns are more appropriate for other branches and levels of government.

If the boys in the Massachusetts case had worn T-shirts to school inscribed with a message opposing homosexuality as a religious sin, and the principal censured them for violating school policy, what would probably be the judicial outcome?

This situation poses a much closer case, with the outcome dependent on various factors, including the clarity of the school policy, the treatment of other similarly expressed controversial student viewpoints, and the specific nature and context of the expression. The recent case law is split, with some courts deciding at least partially in the student’s favor, while in other cases the district lost on the merits or on technical grounds. Such situations warrant careful consideration, in consultation with legal counsel.

In a state or school district without a diversity program, if the parent of a child whom other children perceive as gay sues the principal and other district representatives, based on repeated verbal and physical harassment, which side would likely win in court?

Plaintiff-students who have been the victims of harassment based on perceived homosexuality have had marked success in at least defeating defendants’ motions for dismissal or summary judgment. These initial successes have been variously based on Title IX prohibition of sex discrimination, the 14th Amendment equal protection clause, and state anti-discrimination laws. However, the remaining hurdles for prevailing in such cases are relatively daunting.

Conclusion

Public schools’ efforts to promote diversity are understandable in the modern era. Nevertheless, the very diversity of our society, including religious fundamentalists, illustrates the difficulty of avoiding costly judicial battles. The odds favor defendant districts in many, but not all, such situations, depending on the circumstances and legal grounds. In general, these issues are best resolved in the state and local policymaking arenas, but where the resolution is in favor of diversity education, school officials should not be paralyzed by challenges based on the federal Constitution, except when freedom of speech is clearly involved.

Perry A. Zirkel is a professor of education and law at Lehigh University.
Interesting Times

There’s an ancient Chinese proverb that is equal parts blessing and curse: *May you live in interesting times.* I don’t know about you, but I’m finding these times to be extremely “interesting.”

First, the blessing. NAESP is ideally positioned to serve as your champion on Capitol Hill, in the Department of Education, and with our sister associations. We are asserting our increasingly robust advocacy agenda with renewed purpose, urgency, and clarity, but also with an outstretched hand and a commitment to collaboration. Consequently, in recent months, we’ve been invited to participate in dozens of conversations with Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and his top aides, members of Congress on both sides of the political aisle, and influential consortia of education associations.

Our message is powerful: Elementary and middle-level principals are primary catalysts for creating a lasting foundation for learning, driving school and student performance, and shaping the long-term impact of school improvement efforts. We’ve had significant legislative successes on your behalf. A few follow:

- NAESP drafted legislative language supporting professional development for principals in a provision for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).
  
  **How it helps you:** This bill, which has taken a back-burner to other legislative priorities, is the source of federal funding for elementary and middle-level education. Specifically, the provision would fund “a comprehensive system of professional development” with the goal of embedding professional development in a principal’s work.

- NAESP took a central role in providing specific language on pre-K through grade 3 for the first-ever national comprehensive literacy bill. The bill is awaiting congressional action.
  
  **How it helps you:** The bill will fund literacy coaches at schools, new research, and the wider dissemination of research-based best practices.

- Key NAESP staff participated in the first round of high-level meetings with members of Congress and their staff; the second-round began this fall.
  
  **How it helps you:** These meetings have reintroduced NAESP to power brokers on Capitol Hill; consequently, congressional members and staffers increasingly recognize our key staff as informed, balanced content-specific experts on issues pertinent to you. Their contributions of accurate and timely data have greatly elevated and informed many issues dealing with the principalship.

Now, the curse. We’re at the table for important discussions, but like many of our education association counterparts, our greatest challenge is making our voice heard clearly and sufficiently, particularly on issues related to the department’s initiative to improve low-performing schools: how we measure school improvement and how we lift up such schools. Our comments on this initiative follow:

We wholeheartedly share the department’s goal to improve these schools. We part company, however, on its approach to use standardized test scores as the primary yardstick for measuring success, and we strenuously disagree with the proposal to replace principals (and other educators) when low-performing schools don’t show sufficient progress.

NAESP believes that if the department relies on standardized test scores as the primary metric for school improvement, reform efforts will fall far short of our mutual goal to strengthen schools and educate children. You and your colleagues know best: Success is more than a test score. Schools and students succeed in multiple ways; they should be measured in multiple ways.

Further, we believe that automatically replacing principals of low-performing schools is likely to be hasty and unwarranted. The better solution is providing all principals with the time, talent, and tools they need to succeed. They need a minimum of three school years to turn around an underperforming school, they need the ability to restructure and reorganize teaching and support staffs, and they need support, professional development, and resources to strengthen their skills. A new principal alone cannot change a struggling school that operates in the same culture and with the same resources. Current principals at under-performing schools should be afforded the same presumption of expertise and the same opportunity to succeed as replacement principals.

As these issues and others dominate education—and as our work and yours grows ever more “interesting”—we’ll continue to lend our voice to this national discussion.

“As these issues and others dominate education ... we'll continue to lend our voice to this national discussion.”

What are your views? NAESP wants to know. Please contact governmentrelations@naesp.org or visit www.naesp.org and click on Advocacy.
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Grading and Reporting Student Learning: Effective Policies and Practices
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