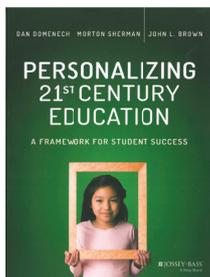


Personalizing 21st Century Education: A Framework for Student Success.

Dan Domenech, Morton Sherman, and John L. Brown. Josey-Bass, 2016, 122 pp.

With chapters titled “Personalizing the System, Not Just the Classroom” and “Making Assessment Meaningful in 21st Century School Systems,” this book is genuinely positive and helpful. The closing chapter, “Transforming the System, Not Just the School,” brings the collection of ideas proposed by the authors into focus using final suggestions from essential questions posed throughout the book. With their careers as superintendents and curriculum director of large districts, their firsthand knowledge about what’s involved in this



process is offered at a granular level and from the satellite view.

“There has never been a Golden Age of Education,” the authors write. “Let’s dispense with any misleading nostalgia for a time that never was.” They continue, “We need a moral awakening and we need it now, in order to offer personalized education to each student.” I appreciate the permission to abandon nostalgia! That’s the first step to embracing true curriculum compacting, tiered lessons, learning centers, and learning contracts for personalization.

Performance-based assessment is easy to talk about and easy to implement ... poorly! The approaches to assessment are presented clearly and give the reader can-do courage. Real-world examples, presented in parallel to strictly school-based examples, provide a sense of the immediacy educators need to begin personalizing 21st century education. The examples about retail responding to the need

for excellent customer service made the idea easy to translate to an educator’s vernacular.

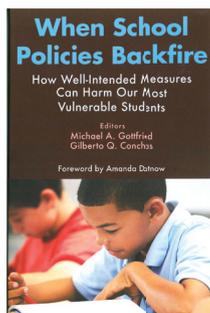
Spoiler alert: The authors distinguish between *individualizing* and *personalizing* education a third of the way into the book, providing plenty of time to think about the differences while there’s still two-thirds of the book left to settle into and try the ideas on for size in relation to your own school and beliefs. If you are not yet convinced this is a book for you, then perhaps knowing the authors value “creativity and self-expression as biological necessities” will help. If you believe that, and appreciate Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Daniel Pink, then this book will become a go-to manual to help you transform your school organization and classrooms to places of true personalization.

Reviewed by Cris Blackstone, principal of Alton Central School in Alton, New Hampshire.

When School Policies Backfire: How Well-Intended Measures Can Harm Our Most Vulnerable Students.

Michael A. Gottfried and Gilberto Q. Conchas. Harvard Education Press, 2016, 222 pp.

“What happens when well-intended educational policies go wrong, really wrong, exacerbating the very problems they are aiming to solve?” asks Amanda Danow, professor of education studies at the University of California, San Diego, in the foreword of this book. Good question, although the answer that is spelled out through case studies might not be an easy pill for policymakers and education leaders to swallow.



The various case studies described in this book address a wide range of areas of education reform. Topics such as accountability, school closure, and technology programs are discussed in detail. Throughout each of the five chapters that focus on the case studies, we learn how and why specific policies have backfired. While each case study is unique, they share a common problem: Policies that were intended to help our most vulnerable students not only failed, but actually made the situation worse.

Why study policy backfire? This book certainly supports the adage that hindsight is 20/20. We must learn from these significant mistakes. When you analyze the case studies in this book, there are common themes that emerge, including lack of communication, the disconnect between theory and practice, and insufficient agency-support systems. It is clear that everyone involved in education policies needs to remember to communicate intent to all

stakeholders involved and to continually evaluate the effectiveness of the policy while it is being implemented.

The simple yet powerful message that is at the heart of this book, “first, we must do no harm,” needs to be shared with education leaders and lawmakers. When an education policy fails, as some do, that is one thing. But when an education policy backfires and hurts students, that is something entirely different. This book is a reminder that we need to learn from our mistakes and fix them so that we are not harming our most vulnerable students. Hopefully, policymakers, education leaders, and community members will read this book and learn a valuable lesson. Our students are counting on all of us, and we cannot let them down.

Reviewed by Liz Garden, principal of Florence Roche Elementary School in Groton, Massachusetts.