Publishing Professionally: Guidance for Education Leaders

AASA conference presentation, Los Angeles, Calif. February 21, 2013

Jay Goldman, School Administrator magazine
Chris Tienken, Journal of Scholarship & Practice
Kitty Porterfield, AASA Books Program
It was a dark and stormy board meeting...

Do You Itch To Write?

The School Administrator is always on the lookout for feature articles, guest columns, Focus and humor items—anything pertaining to the work of school district administrators.

For complete details, check out our author guidelines at: www.aasa.org/publications/sa/author-guidelines.htm

Or request a copy by calling: 703-875-0772
Today’s Objectives

• Encourage school system leaders to write about relevant experiences and skills for publication

• Share the existing opportunities in publications for writing

• Describe what editors look for and how to improve one’s chances of having your work accepted
Why Write?

• Education is a field of many interesting ideas

• A professional obligation to enhance the field of educational administration

• An opportunity for reflection

• Pride of authorship
Write for Whom?

PROFESSIONAL PERIODICALS

- The School Administrator (AASA)  www.aasa.org
- Principal (NAESP)  www.naesp.org
- Principal Leadership (NASSP)  www.nassp.org
- Middle School Journal (NMSA)  www.nmsa.org
- Education Leadership (ASCD)  www.ascd.org
- Journal of Staff Development (NSDC)  www.nsdc.org
- School Business Affairs (ASBO)  www.asbointl.org
- American School (NSBA)  www.asbj.org
- Techniques (ACTE)  www.acteonline.org
- Phi Delta Kappan (PDK)  www.pkintl.org
- Education Week  www.edweek.org
- Scholastic Administrator  www.scholastic.com
- District Administration  www.districtadministration.com
- School Planning and Management  www.webspm.com
- American School and University  www.asumag.com
How To Be Successful

• “Burning desire” – pick a subject you are passionate about
How To Be Successful

• Who’s my audience? – become familiar with the various periodicals
How To Be Successful

• Catch my attention
How To Be Successful

- Write in English
How To Be Successful

• What are my key points? – don’t tell us everything you know about a subject
How To Be Successful

• Show, don’t tell
How To Be Successful

• Watch the bottom line
How To Be Successful

• Write and revise – and be prepared to do more after you hear back from the editor
What Do We Look For?
What Do We Look For?
# 2013 Editorial Calendar
for *School Administrator* magazine

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*Notes: 1. Schedule is subject to change; 2. Major article assignments related to the theme generally are finalized at least five months prior to publication date; 3. Only a portion of each issue relates directly to the editorial theme.*
School Administrator Author Guidelines

School Administrator, a monthly professional magazine, receives many more manuscripts than it can publish. So how can you enhance the chances your manuscript will be among the 30 percent receiving preliminary acceptance for publication? A good starting strategy is to read the author guidelines that follow.

About the magazine

School Administrator is the official magazine of the American Association of School Administrators. It provides big-picture perspectives, informative features on national trends and new developments, how-to articles, provocative commentaries and collegial discussions on a broad range of topics in education that relate to the role of those working in leadership of public school systems in the United States. The magazine is delivered to every public school superintendent nationwide. They serve as our primary audience. Our readers are school system leaders around the United States. These leaders typically are school superintendents and their cabinet members who oversee such areas as curriculum and instruction, assessment, technology and school facilities. They are the highest-ranking officials involved in education on the community level.

Each issue is generally organized around a theme (see Editorial Calendar) with about half of that issue’s contents connected to the theme.

What we look for in manuscripts

Content Guidelines

School Administrator provides timely and informative coverage of school system practices, policies and programs that have widespread appeal. Articles typically emphasize actual experiences – some successful, some not – rather than theory. Articles may be written in the first person and should include insightful reflections that might help other school district administrators.

School Administrator regularly invites AASA members and non-members who are experts in various fields to contribute articles. We also occasionally hire professional education reporters as free-lancers to write the major feature articles. Here is a list of the different categories of articles that appear in most issues of the magazine along with links to examples in each category:

Features, the main articles in each issue, typically are written on assignment by experts in their field, including school system leaders, professors and consultants. Unsolicited manuscripts are considered for feature slots. Often the lead article is an in-depth examination of a topic relating to that month’s editorial theme with several articles that follow clustered under the same thematic umbrella. Most issues of School Administrator are based on themes, such as superintendent-board relations, improving student learning or testing and assessment. Current and upcoming themes can be found on our editorial calendar.
You can improve the likelihood that The School Administrator will accept your article by using these guidelines to edit it yourself. The tips may seem picky and insignificant, but you may be surprised at how they tighten and strengthen your writing.

Organize your article. Make it flow logically and effortlessly. Make your points in sequence as if you were telling them to a friend or trying to convince a colleague. Remember your audience and strive to anticipate the reader’s questions.

Use plain English. Make your meaning clear to every reader. Be specific when you can. Avoid generalities or unsubstantiated assertions.

Write concisely. Keep sentences lean and short. A simple declarative sentence is a thing of beauty. When in doubt, leave it out.

Cut clutter. Omit unnecessary phrases such as:

- in order to say to
- in the area of instruction say in instruction
- make decisions about say decide about
- on an annual basis say yearly
- at that point in time say then
- subsequent to say after
- a large majority say most -- unless a vote was taken
- please do not hesitate to call say please call
- in the process of updating say updating

Do not look for answers and solutions to problems and difficulties. One of each synonym will convey your thought.

Do not show the skeleton of your article. Do not say "I am going to outline ..." Just outline it. Do not say, "Finally, ..." The reader will know when the article has ended. Instead of writing "It is interesting to note that ..." -- make it interesting. Never say, "I want to take this opportunity to thank ..." Grab that opportunity and simply thank!

If everybody in business and government learned to write and edit well, thus produced strong copy that was direct and forceful, we could wipe out the national debt because paperwork would be cut by one-third.

Jefferson Bates

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Brevity is a by-product of vigor.

Strunk and White

Words, like eyeglasses, blur everything they do not make clear.

Joseph Joubert
Five Common Categories

• Personal experiences and skills
• Distinctive district practices
• Op-ed commentaries on important issue of the moment
• Converted version of blog post or presentation
• Off-beat circumstances
Personal Experience

The Changing Rules of the Superintendency
Hunt
(October 2010)

The Changing Rules of the Superintendency Hunt
A veteran leader’s personal recounting of sundry changes in the conduct of the search process over three decades

BY ART STELLAR

Earlier in my career, a job search seemed like a game with few rules and lots of competition. The best candidate didn’t seem to be selected any more often than an average candidate.

My personal strategy for playing this game, where luck seemed as important as skill and knowledge, was to create a formula—something I called the “rule of five.” Every five job applications for an education administration position would result in at least one interview. After 25 applications and five interviews, at least one job offer would materialize. Over the ensuing years, the rule of 5 became the rule of 6, and then my trusted formula morphed into the rule of 10.

Has the superintendent search game changed? Most definitely. Of course, I too have changed. Early on, I often was asked in interviews, “How will you supervise people much older than you?” In the last decade, a common question has emerged, “How much longer do you intend to work?” At the age of 63, my knowledge, skills and energy levels are higher than ever, and I have a notable track record of accomplishments, but that’s not always the focus.

Serving as superintendent, going into my 24th year, I have completed hundreds of applications and interviewed for nearly a hundred superintendencies. I have accepted seven superintendencies and, in more than 20 instances, have declined offers or withdrawn from consideration after being interviewed. This cumulative experience has produced a personal perspective of how markedly the process has changed over time — not necessarily for the better.

A Negative Swing
The most significant change in the way school boards search for a new superintendent over the years has been the shift from focusing on the positive to dwelling on the negative. In the past, the strengths and talents of individual candidates were at the center of the search process, and the search process emphasized what a candidate did well. School boards wanted to know what you have done in previous leadership posts and what you could do to support their schools’ students.
The Pursuit of an Online Doctorate: Three Experiences

EDITORS NOTE: With the growing availability of online courses and degree programs in educational leadership, The School Administrator sought out superintendents to share their firsthand experiences pursuing a doctoral degree in educational leadership in fully online or hybrid programs.

In the accounts that follow, three superintendents discuss what motivated them to pursue their terminal degree through one of these programs. The contributors are Kevin Miller, superintendent in Croswell, Mich. (Capella University); Louise Bennicoff-Nan, superintendent in Ripon, Calif. (Willard Howard Taft University); and Gary Maestas, superintendent in Plymouth, Mass. (Regent University).

To identify these individuals, we asked each of the major university programs offering online doctoral degrees (see page 12 for full directory) for the names of current superintendents holding doctorates earned at least partly through virtual courses. This generated a few leads to superintendents; national data on school leaders with online degrees do not exist.
CONFRONTING A Neo-Nazi Hate GROUP

A superintendent finds teachable moments for a community in crisis through creation of a public pedagogy

BY TERRANCE L. FURIN

The peaceful quiet that often accompanies the warning of a mid-April morning in our rural/suburban school district outside Philadelphia was broken by a group of students arriving at school with Neo-Nazi flyers. The group was called the Pottstown SS, and their goal was to recruit new members into a hate group.

The organizers of the group attempted to replicate the SS insignia used by Nazi-era German police, and they also included a hand-sketched statement that proclaimed: "As with the phoenix who is reborn in fire, the Pottstown SS rises from the ashes of the past to create a new and better elite force to serve the Aryan cause." The organization's goal was to "...give Aryan men who truly believe in their race the opportunity to fight for their rights and build a new society that respects the Aryan race." The organizers also claimed that "our presence will serve as a stark reminder of the dangers that lie ahead for us if we do not act now." The group's members were also instructed to "never lose hope, never give up, and never give in.

The group's actions were met with a swift and strong response from the school district and the community. The school district immediately contacted local law enforcement and the FBI to report the incident. The community also came together to support each other and to create a safe and welcoming environment for all students.

Questions Arise:

The switchboard lit up as news of the flyers spread throughout the 4,000-student school district. The first calls came from building principals and teachers who were looking for direction on what to tell their students. I asked them to remain calm and quickly assured them that the district security plans outlined in our policies would ensure the safety of students and staff members.

These calls were followed rapidly by others from parents and citizens who wanted to know answers to a myriad of questions — answers for many that were not found in our policies. What did we know about the Neo-Nazi group that was distributing the flyers? How do hate groups recruit members? Was this threat real and what could be expected in the way of violence? Would classes be canceled? If schools remained open, how could we guarantee the safety of all our students? What could the community do to keep schools safe?

We had in place policies that addressed immediate safety and security concerns. We did not have a strategy to keep a hate group from establishing a lasting presence in our school community.

Luckily, we had approximately two weeks before the proposed boycott to find answers to the most pressing question: What did we know about this
The Snow Day: One Tough Call
(February 2003)

Cold weather superintendents have a special alliance, solidified by at least one frenzied winter night of staying up late to watch The Weather Channel, climbing out of bed at 4 a.m. to decide whether the roads are hazardous enough to cancel school and then spending the day defending their decision.

Even with 20 winters of snow-day decisions under my belt, I still wrestled with indecision on some wintry mornings. Superintendents never can stop worrying about the elements. My advice: Realize that no matter what decision you make, somebody is going to be upset.

Having said that, there are a few mistakes cold weather rookies can easily avoid when snowflakes and ice threaten the school day.

**Forecasting Follies**

**Rookie Mistake No. 1:** Calling off school on the basis of a weather forecast.

If the inclement weather forecasted doesn’t materialize, the weathercaster can laugh it off with, “The bad weather missed us this time. The upper-level gusmo failed to affect the drop in atmospheric gases and therefore it will be a nice day.” The superintendent who called off school based on that forecast can’t laugh it off.

**Rookie Mistake No. 2:** Delaying an obvious call until the morning.

Eight common mistakes rookie leaders commit when the flurries start to fly

If the weather is already so adverse the night before that there is no way the roads could improve before the morning bus run, call school off then and stay under your electric blanket. Parents will thank you for giving them time to arrange child care for the next day.

If you do wait until the next day, get up early to greet the weather. The earlier you make the call, the happier your community will be.

**Rookie Mistake No. 3:** Failing to recognize the dangers of extreme cold.

Snow and ice are not your only enemies in the winter. Sometimes it is just too cold for school. While children in Wisconsin may simply throw on their parkas, boots, mittens and scarves and go out to wait for the bus, that is not the case in Oklahoma, where extreme cold weather is rare and children may not even have heavy winter coats or mittens.

Be sure the buses will start before making the decision to hold school. Cold temperatures can cause the diesel fuel that powers most school buses to turn to gel. If the buses start, they may be slow and run behind schedule while children stand and wait. The wind chill adds to the danger of frostbite, especially if the children are not dressed for the weather.
District Practices

Why We Test Students for Drugs
(January 2008)

The superintendent in a New Jersey suburb sees a compelling message being sent to her community, along with positive results.

By Lisa A. Brady

It was a cold, damp night as I swung into the parking lot after an hour-long drive north on the New Jersey Turnpike to Middletown. The lot of the large 2,000-plus student high school was jammed, and several local and regional news trucks were stationed in front of the building where people were entering quickly from the mid-February chill.

The scenario was familiar, and I knew exactly what to expect when I was invited to be the keynote speaker for the community forum on random student drug testing. Having worked with more than 30 individual school districts across the country over the past 10 years, I knew what questions I’d face and what concerns would be aired.

In this case, I had been contacted recently by the assistant superintendent of the suburban school district, who explained that the school board had started conversations about a growing concern about student drug and alcohol use in its two high schools. In an effort to quantify the problem, the schools had administered the Rocky Mountain Behavioral Science Institute’s American Drug and Alcohol Survey to students in grades 9-12 and were awaiting the results.

Anxious feelings

Upon entering the multipurpose room, I was greeted by more than 200 parents and a small group of former students wea-
District Practices

Strategic Staffing (August 2012)

Strategic Staffing

Business and industry leaders do not flinch at the idea of placing top talent in struggling departments and divisions. This is not always the case in public education.

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools made a bold statement to its community in its strategic plan by identifying two key reform levers—an effective principal leading each school and an effective teacher in every classroom. This statement was followed by a commitment to place a top principal and the most talented teachers in the district’s struggling schools.

While this strategy placed the school district in the national spotlight and earned the district commendations for its courage in placing its most skilled educators where they were needed most, it begs the question: Why is assigning top talent to the lowest-performing schools viewed as a courageous move and not a regular course of doing business in our public schools?

Imperative Action

We viewed low-performing schools as a problem of some urgency. A consolidated city-county district, Charlotte-Mecklenburg is North Carolina’s second-largest school district, with 160,000 students in prekindergarten through grade 12. More than half of its failing students are concentrated in a third of the schools. The district’s overall success depends in large part on how well and how quickly it can improve its bottom performers.

The solution was a strategic staffing initiative the district developed and launched in 2008. In four years it has exceeded expectations, turning around almost all of the 24-participating schools. Student achievement on state tests has soared as much as 20 points in a single year at some schools. The initiative also has drawn praise from

Five tenets of Charlotte-Mecklenburg’s initiative that lands top-skilled educators in the district’s bottom-performing schools

BY ANN B. CLARK

AUGUST 2012 SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR 17
Dealing With Outrageous Online Comments

Dealing With Outrageous Online Comments (May 2012)
Raising Accountability for Parents Too

BY STANLEY HIPBUS

What is most interesting in the big debate over how to improve public education is the lack of discussion over parent accountability. The truth is that, except for extreme cases, school officials do not come close to having the impact on a child’s success as does a parent. Between birth and age 13, children spend only 10 percent of their waking hours at school with the bulk of their time spent at home. Yet the home environment, with no standards of accountability, parents may choose to be uninvolved in the education process.

Why are there not more efforts to hold parents accountable for meeting child-rearing responsibilities when public schools face intensifying pressure? Public school officials welcome accountability on a level playing field. We fully recognize the comparative statistics showing the United States ranking below other industrialized nations in science, mathematics and reading attainment. The low ranking of our students naturally is unacceptable to the general public, the news media and especially the politicians who believe high test scores are the most important indicator of school excellence and the only way to hold schools accountable for performance. The answer to a low ranking one year seems to be even higher academic standards that are verified by even more high-stakes testing the following year. But there’s rarely a mention of parent accountability.

The answer for some is to spend more money on charter schools, vouchers, open enrollment and privatization. The underlying logic of this competitive approach is that when public schools are forced to compete for students, teachers will become motivated to change their practices and course content. For those who believe competition drives quality, the role of parents in improving academic performance is left out of this formula completely.

Parenting Ills

Even when educational reformers do consider what may be done to help children being raised by irresponsible parents, they generally focus instead on whether children are kept home because of sickness or because they are needed to baby-sit younger siblings or watch an ailing grandparent. Little to no effort is made to hold parents who violate the law accountable because it is time-consuming and costly.

It is not politically correct to refer to some parents as irresponsible when there are no standards for parenting as there are for 4th-grade math or 7th-grade English. After all, there is not a parent anywhere who has not made mistakes in raising a child, so lawmakers who themselves may be parents are reluctant to consider legislating specific parent responsibilities—even though research, as well as common sense, tells us children benefit from parents who read to them, “Little to no effort is made to hold parents who violate the law accountable.”

School Administrator

Coming Next Month in THE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR

• Preparing highly qualified teachers for children of poverty
• Jerry Bacev on “The Ready School”
• Protecting vital school records
• Review of books on leadership for literacy, shared visions and grant writing for educators
• Sidekick shines on a polka-playing superintendent

School Administrator November 2005 49
Politicians Have a Role in Bullying, Too

About the Time my school district was updating its policies governing harassment and bullying, the election campaign season kicked into high gear. That meant our airwaves were inundated with political advertisements. The mean-spirited and hurtful rhetoric directed from one candidate to another has been impossible to ignore.

And it is just not the adult electorate who are noticing. Our children are watching, listening, and learning.

I cannot help but wonder whether the incessant personal attacks have some bearing on the bullying that all of us in education are trying hard to address.

The behavior of those in the public eye — sports stars, musicians, and, yes, candidates for public office — does influence our impressionable youth.

Personal Attacks
I admire all who seek to serve today in elected roles in our local, state, and national governments. These individuals are to be commended for entering courageously into the democratic process — the likes of which can be vicious. The brutal nature of running for office has intensified to the point where well-qualified citizens will not even consider becoming a candidate because they so fear the risk of personal attacks on their reputation, character and family.

Our students, with their eyes wide open, are observing how we adults are treating one another. This behavior is contributing to the rise in the number of bullying incidents that occur inside and outside of our schools.

I recognize that bullies have been a part of society throughout human existence. However, the intensity of bullying behavior has increased to unprecedented levels — sometimes to the tragic extent that a child feels the only way to escape is to commit suicide.

I am not proposing that politicians and political candidates are solely to blame. Certainly, the rapid
Coping With Malcontents
(February 2003)

You can deal with negative staff and prevent yourself from becoming negative. Thoughtful planning, understanding, and retooling can help you deal better with negative people and keep an atmosphere of positive energy. You can deal with negative staff and prevent yourself from becoming negative.

They are everywhere. We have to deal with them everyday, and they can tear apart an organization or a family. I am referring to negative people. They are tremendous energy drainers for adults, children and themselves. Negative people consume large financial and human resources and usually stand in the way of new ideas and programs. Parents, students and other staff members do not want to be around them. We become emotionally upset with negative people, who are frequent targets of complaint by others.

As school leaders, we become frustrated with negative people and the draining effect they have on everything and everybody they touch. Sometimes it becomes so difficult to deal with the negativity that we start becoming negative ourselves. We try to improve morale by accommodating some of their concerns, transferring them to other assignments, and sometimes providing honest feedback through formal and informal evaluations.

Unfortunately, none of these approaches usually results in long-term positive change. Only when the negative person leaves do we see any change taking place. With luck, no one else will step in to take his or her place.

Climate Control
Four years ago I set out on a quest to better understand negativism and develop strategies to reduce its impact on staff members, students, and the overall school environment. I hoped to share what I learned about how to deal effectively with negative people, improve the overall atmosphere of a school district and increase the positive energy in classrooms. I also wanted to keep my own negativity in check and protect myself from getting dragged into the negativism. I realized personal change was necessary if I had any hope of changing others.

After two years of research, interviews, observations and field testing, and after six months of writing, I led my first training program titled “How To Deal With Negative People and Keep From Becoming Negative Yourself” for a school district administrative team. Since then, I’ve shared my training at state and national conventions. Clearly, many of us face this challenge in our school communities. What follows are practical suggestions that I hope will help you become a more positive leader and enable you to deal more effectively with negative people and situations.

Visualize success.
Start by developing a picture in your mind of what you want to happen. Visualize staff members being positive and supportive of one another along with being respectful and nurturing toward students. See your principals working together as a positive, cohesive team with you and the board of education.

Keep this vision firmly implanted in your mind because this is what you will act on and move toward. If your vision becomes clouded with negative pictures,
The Superintendency: Is It Worth It?

BY KIMBERLY MORITZ

As superintendent in Western New York's Randolph Central Schools for 18 months, I can honestly reflect on my first year with gratitude that I survived the transition. Life is much better 1½ years into the work than it was four months in.

With significant turnover predicted in the superintendency over the next couple of years, it seems wise to write about what the transition can be like for any administrator considering the position. I've worked in large and small districts as an assistant middle school principal, a high school principal, and an assistant superintendent, but none of those positions is quite like the superintendency.

When I started in December 2008, I was absolutely immersed in the job. I didn't feel overwhelmed or regret the decision. I was simply mentally consumed by the work to the point where I was oblivious to world events. The presidential inauguration? I missed it. A national health problem with peanut paste? I had no idea. I read the local newspaper every day during lunch in my office but only to comb through it for mentions of our students or school districts.

Having a BlackBerry, which kept me connected to the district 24/7, didn't help either. I didn't miss a beat about school, but I would have benefited from unplugging for a couple of hours in the evenings. I didn't attend meetings out of the district unless I absolutely had to, and I didn't get into the classrooms as I'd intended in my ambitious entry plan.

For the first seven months and most of the first year, I couldn't turn off my head, find any balance or take care of myself. It was the most difficult work transition I've ever experienced. I fully felt the weight of the responsibility and the impact of every decision I was making every day. It was exhausting.

Hope Emerges

Eighteen months in, I've located that balance. Actually, I started to find it at the beginning of this school year. I think it just took that long for me to make the transition, from hitting the ground running to building relationships to developing teams and learning the work.

In particular, working to build trust with the board of education members, our union leadership and the district's administration team definitely helped me. Establishing routines and knowing what to expect helped. Now I know whom I need to call to help me solve these problems. I know the strengths of my administration and the interests of each school board member. I can better anticipate what's coming next and be more proactive.

And I've learned to request assistance. Just asking my secretary to schedule time for classroom visits on Tuesdays through Thursdays, such a simple concept, has helped me immeasurably. I must learn to leave behind whatever paperwork or phone call needs to be addressed and concentrate on learning during that time. It's the best part of every day.

In addition, I've figured out the four other full-time administrators in the district know how to do their jobs well and I don't need to be involved in every problem handed to me by our community, teachers or students. I've worked hard to ask people to follow the chain of command, knowing that's not always easy and if they don't feel they're getting the answers they need, while trusting others to do their own work.

No Guilt Pangs

Something else that's aided me, perhaps most of all, is that we simply must make time to exercise and eat right or the stress of the position and lack of healthy activity will compound our problems.

For me, that means forcing myself to get on the treadmill every morning at 5 o'clock, planning what I will eat so I'm not running to the corner pizza shop for whatever I might grab before an evening meeting, and scheduling time for family and friends. I don't feel guilty about attending my son's athletic events or going away for the weekend with my husband. I'm a much better superintendent for this district if I take care of myself and my family, so why waste energy feeling guilty about it?

It's by far the greatest job I've ever had. Honestly! I get the opportunity to lead a group of incredible professionals, to work on some amazing teams, to make collaborative decisions about the direction of an entire school system, to change our little piece of the world in meaningful ways. We're focusing on our vision of learning with passion, innovation and leadership, starting with our faculty.

My hope is that our efforts will change learning for our students Pre-K-12 so they graduate with strong skills in problem solving, collaborating, leading, communicating, assessing and analyzing information, and thinking. Changing learning in a public school system in meaningful ways means students will graduate ready to solve the problems of the world. It's definitely worth it.

Kimberly Moritz is superintendent of Randolph Central Schools in Randolph, NY. Email: kmoritz@rand.wnyric.org. She blogs at http://kimberlymoritz.com.

"Something else that's aided me, perhaps most of all, is that we simply must make time to exercise and eat right or the stress of the position and lack of healthy activity will compound our problems."
My Romance With Another Superintendent

BY BRUCE BLANCHARD

When people learn that both my wife and I are superintendents, they seem overcome with curiosity. The most frequent questions are: "Why would you do that?" "What's wrong with you anyway?" and "How does that work?"

The first answer involves philosophical discussions too lengthy for this forum, and the second gets into abnormal psychology, but I can try to explain the logistics of how it works.

As with many professional couples, our careers have not always been controlled by our personal considerations. Job choices have been tempered by the other spouse's professional needs and considerations of our children. When the move to administration seemed right to both of us, we were fortunate enough to find principalships in the same school system.

However, as the time came to consider moving on, we recognized the unusual opportunity we had and took stock of our situation. Our youngest was in college, and my wife was abroad. I decided to pursue the next logical job, a superintendentcy. We realized this might necessitate living apart, but after six years as principals in close proximity we weren't sure there was enough time left over after work to notice on a weekday. We hoped there would be common time available on weekends.

A Law Point
This is how three years after we both accepted district superintendencies we continue to make our career choices work. We maintain two homes. Even when France moved to a position much closer to my district, 36 miles instead of 106 miles apart, both school boards have an expectation of residency.

Maintaining two homes, while necessary, has been the low point of our dual superintendencies. It is not desirable from an emotional or financial point of view. We are getting better at it, and we will continue with this arrangement for at least a few more years if it allows us both to pursue professional goals.

We spend almost all weekends together at one house or the other (usually determined by who has a Saturday football or basketball game and which house is closer). Weeknights are up for grabs. In nice weather, if there aren't too many night meetings, one of us will commute. During basketball season with weather concerns, we are grateful for an in-town house and a good long-distance phone plan. At a minimum we have a midnight "date."

After meeting perhaps 25 times at a restaurant that was about halfway between our school districts, we were amazed to learn that the staff had just figured out that despite separate cars arriving from separate directions, we were actually married and not involved in some torrid affair. Personally, at my age and condition, the thought that I could be mistaken for a Don Juan is the best compliment I've had in awhile.

Game Planning
A typical week looks like this:

Monday: We begin the day from my house where we spend Sunday. France arises an hour before me because her school is in the Central Time zone and mine is in Mountain Time zone. She has to be on the road by 5:45 a.m. At the end of the day I have a 7 p.m. meeting so we'll settle for a phone call.

Tuesday: We begin from our respective homes. We have the same educational service unit meeting so I stop at her school and we travel together, a bonus. Her school has a game that night and mine doesn't, so I stay to watch that with her. Supper is at the concession stand, of course. I stay at her house for the night.

Wednesday: We can both leave for school at 7:20 a.m. even though I am starting from her house because I log an hour going back to Mountain Time. What a coup—we have no evening activities that night so France comes to my house for supper. There is snow in the forecast so she goes back to her place that evening in case she needs to make a cancellation call.

Thursday: No snow, of course. There never is when you've planned ahead. I have to host family-school conferences until 9 p.m. and she has a board meeting, so we stay in our own homes tonight.

Friday: We both have away games. Her house, while not exactly next door to either sports venue, is the closest spot so after the games the next day's hotel is spent there.

Saturday: Her school plays at my school tonight. We carefully each wear the wrong colors, listen to the same comment about "Who are you cheering for?" at least 463 times and then spend the night at my house.

Sunday: We check the weather forecast and the next day's schedule and decide who stays where and start all over.

Personal Protection
Despite the hectic schedule, which isn't that unfamiliar to most superintendents, our professional lives have many positive aspects. While becoming a superintendent can be a lonely and isolating experi-
Snow Days and the Weather Channel

BY RANDALL A. ZITTERKOPF

In my 26 years as a school administrator, the one question I probably answer most often is “Are we having school today?” — that is, when the ominous snow clouds roll in from Canada, which can happen quite often when you live in South Dakota.

My school district has a policy, not uncommon, that gives me as superintendent the authority to call off school because of the weather. At this time of year, we’re talking snow — and lots of it — plus wind chill that will freeze your rear end. You know the picture. I’ve tried to pay others to take this authority from me, but I haven’t had any takers yet.

This brings me to the Weather Channel, one of the mediums I consult when I am faced with a school-closing decision. I personally don’t like the Weather Channel all that much. The light jazz music that plays as the weather maps appear and information scrolls across the bottom of your TV screen can be mind-numbing after several minutes. I feel as if I’m on some serious Valium.

When it comes time to make a decision, I don’t need mind-numbing influences. My mind is numb enough at 4 a.m. without Kenny G. Of course, I don’t think the Rolling Stones doing “Start Me Up” would be palatable at that time of the day, either. So how do I make the call? Simple. The mute button. There, that’s better. Now I can think.

The Wait Factor
As I analyze the details of my decision-making process, let me clear up some misconceptions.

First, the primary concern in forming a decision about calling off school is the safety of the students. All other factors (such as how parents will deal with childcare and whether sports activities will be affected) are irrelevant.

Second, I don’t own a big honkin’ Hummer that will get me through the snow where other vehicles fear to tread. I do own an all-wheel-drive sedan. Actually, it belongs to Linda, my wife. When the weather is really, really bad, she lets me use the four-wheeler. Linda is still sleeping at 4 a.m., which is too bad because she likes Kenny G and the Weather Channel.

Third, the snow does not have to be up to my waist before I decide to call off school. Once upon a time, a 1st-grader asked me how deep the snow had to be before I called off school. I joked, “It has to be up to my waist.”

“Snow callers usually come in two types”

should have known. Be careful when trying to joke with 1st-graders. They tend to take things literally — as do some adults when they overhear some conversations.

My up-to-my-waist comment somehow became an unwritten law in the district. Because I stand 6-foot-6, my waist is up about four feet from the ground.

Fourth, I don’t make the call to leave school open because I think it’s the macho thing to do. I simply weigh all of the circumstances, discuss the decision to be made with others (e.g., transportation supervisor, police department, state patrol, etc.), and make the call.

Fifth, I admit to having made mistakes in my decisions. These are usually obvious even to the most casual observer. The most succinct way to make the weather turn nice is to call off school, a fact that all superintendents north of Oklahoma know.

Cautious Callers
Of course, I sometimes get phone calls at home or in my office from folks who question my intelligence and acumen. My secretary, Ellen, and other secretaries in the district, should get medals for fielding phone calls from irate callers who think school should be called off only when the falling flakes are as big as half-dollars. The angriest parents generally live directly across the street from the school their children attend.

Ellen has taken calls from individuals who want to talk to blankety-blank. In this case, my secretary knows exactly whom the caller is asking for.

Snow callers usually come in two types. The first type is polite and respectful, but I’m never certain how to answer their big question, which I’ll paraphrase: “Where is your head?” I assume this caller thinks my head is in some dark place.

The second type of snow caller is much more direct: “When are you going to pull your head out?” These callers press my head is already deeply embedded in some dark place. I want to answer this way: “I’ll pull my head out when the sun starts shining and people stop calling.”

Second-Guessers
Before I return to the Weather Channel, I have to dig myself out of the dregs I have dug myself into. First, I don’t mind light jazz. I even own at least one Kenny G cassette tape. Second, folks here are justifiably in calling to question my decisions. They have a right to express themselves, even if the tone of their expression or their complaint is not appealing to me.

That is, indeed, the beauty of democracy and public education, especially in the Northern Plains in winter. And that’s why I get paid the big bucks.

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