Publishing Professionally
Guidance for School District Leaders

AASA National Conference on Education
Phoenix, Ariz.
February 13, 2016

Jay P. Goldman, School Administrator magazine
Jimmy Minichello, AASA Communications & Marketing
Ken Mitchell, AASA Journal of Scholarship & Practice
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: http://aasa.org/AuthorGuidelineMagazine.aspx

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

- School Administrator (AASA)  www.aasa.org
- Principal (NAESP)  www.naesp.org
- Principal Leadership (NASSP)  www.nassp.org
- Middle School Journal (AMLE)  www.amle.org
- Education Leadership (ASCD)  www.ascd.org
- JSD: The Learning Forward Journal  www.learningforward.org
- School Business Affairs (ASBO)  www.asbj.org
- ASBJ (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?
2016 Editorial Calendar
for School Administrator magazine

January . . . Big Data
February . . . Engagement
March . . . The Productivity of Rural Education
April . . . Social and Emotional Learning
May . . . Combating Poverty in Schooling
June . . . Leadership Succession
August . . . Student Transitions (ES to MS, 9th grade, Post-secondary
September . . . Mental Health and Well Being
October . . . The Politically Savvy Superintendent
November . . . Professional Development Across the System
December . . . Instructional Structures (multi-age classrooms, looping, etc.)

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. 

Full version of author guidelines is available at aasa.org/AuthorGuidelineMagazine.aspx
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*  
- *in the area of instruction*  
- *make decisions about*  
- *on an annual basis*  
- *at that point in time*  
- *subsequent to*  
- *a large majority*  

- *please do not hesitate to call*  
- *in the process of updating*

say to  
say in instruction  
say decide about  
say yearly  
say then  
say after  
say most -- unless a vote was taken  
say please call  
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

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 of Article Submissions

- Personal experiences and skills
- Distinctive district practices
- Op-ed commentaries on important issue of the moment
- Rewritten version of blog post or conference 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 30 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, 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

(September 2010)

EDITOR'S 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.
Personal Experience

Confronting a Neo-Nazi Hate Group (November 2007)

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 warming of a mid-April morning in our rural/suburban school district outside Philadelphia was broken harshly when several alarmed high school students arrived at school with Neo-Nazi flyers. The flyers were designed to recruit new members into a hate group calling itself the Pottstown SS.

In addition, the group attempted a show of strength by calling for a boycott by students of all the district’s schools to commemorate the anniversary of Heinrich Himmler’s death. The flyer contained a rough drawing of Himmler, chief of the German police, flanked by swastikas and twin thunder/lightning bolts meant to replicate the dreaded SS insignia. Beneath the drawing was a hand-scribbled statement that proclaimed: “As with the phoenix who is reborn in fire, so the Pottstown SS rises from the ashes left behind by their forebears 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 to keep their race safe and strong, even if it means their deaths in the process.”

In this dramatic way, one of a superintendent’s most-dreaded nightmares — a community upheaval fed by rampant rumors and fears of violence caused by a clash between students and members of an organized hate group — became a reality for me.

Questions Abound

The switchboard lit up as news of the flyers and the impending boycott quickly 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 through e-mails and personal school visits 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 cancelled? If schools remained open, how could we guarantee the safety of all our students? What could the community do to keep groups such as this from disrupting its schools?

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 questions: 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 gismo 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.

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

Find a reliable source for an up-to-date weather report. A good personal relationship with your local radio or television weathercaster can help. Consider subscribing to a weather alert system with a broadcast monitor that sounds an alarm when a weather alert is at hand. Perhaps you can access a weather band channel with a special radio monitor or a cable TV station that includes the Weather Channel. Determine what source works best for you.

Don’t overlook the unconventional. Accept warnings from any and every source, including the football coach’s icy knee and your secretary’s arthritis, although sometimes behaviors of earthworms and woolly caterpillars may be more accurate than any of the above.

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

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.
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 Parkway 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 raised.

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 who...
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 with 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 140,000 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
District Practices

Dealing With Outrageous Online Comments (May 2012)

Dealing With Outrageous Online Comments

SOME SCHOOL DISTRICTS are taking a pro-active approach to community relations by developing a network of community members who volunteer to "listen" to the public. These volunteers then use their voice in the community to ensure accurate information is being heard by the public.

This has proven to be an effective strategy in one school district in the Pacific Northwest for dealing with the new很正常 online comment sections on daily newspapers' websites. In many cases, these forums meet the naivety in public speech — namely, bashing of public officials and public schools in the crudest terms allowed by the host publication, almost always couched in anonymity. What is left unaddressed, wild assertions with little basis in fact can result in the propagation of inaccurate or biased information about the public schools.

Rapid Responses
A daily newspaper in Montana carried a news story recently about a rural school district's technology levy, quoting the superintendent about the need to upgrade technology for students and to supplement grants that were no longer as plentiful. The story was published in nature.

Among the online comments posted at the end of the article were these:

▶ "There are already too much waste going on in the school system and you want us to pay for more???? Give us a break!"

▶ "Why didn't she... Public School leaders get a percentage of your tax money aside for this kind of event?... spend every dime we get so when we submit a new budget, we can say we spent it all and we need more money from the bottomless tax-payer piggy bank."

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Shadow Days Open Eyes and Minds of District Leaders

June 2013

School Administrator

District Practices

Shadow Days Open Eyes and Minds of District Leaders

Central Office Leaders Often Move in and Out of Districts to Attend Meetings, Visit Classrooms, and Supervise School Administrators. But Do They See Enough Quality Time to See What Life Is Like for the Students They Are Charged with Educating?

Not enough, in Montgomery County, Md., Public Schools, Superintendent Joshua D. Starr determined. So he asked his senior staff to join him on a three-week stint to experience the school day in the district's 27 high schools and four technical schools to experience the school day from the perspective of a student. Starr believed the experience would be eye-opening for him and the district's senior leaders, including the principals of the central, academic, and administrative units.

The shadow experiences were part of a comprehensive listening and learning initiative by the superintendent, who arrived in Montgomery County in July 2011. He had heard numerous stories from school staff, parents, community members, and students, where he heard about what was working well and what needed improving in the district with its 300-plus schools. Understanding the complexity of student life would take listening to a whole new level and influence decisions about the future of the district, particularly with regard to student engagement.

A Non-Relativistic Exercise

There was resistance at first — both among senior staff and many principals. The central-office administrators thought, "How can I do this? What will it look like? Will schools just put on a show so we won't see anything real?" And principals wondered, "Will this count as part of my evaluation? What might my teachers or students say to those senior leaders about me or our school?"

Once more adjusted to the idea, they embraced it as a tremendous learning opportunity. Central-office staff became excited about getting to really know students. Principals were eager to show off their schools and to help their bosses realize, or in some cases remember, how challenging it is to be a high school principal today.

The logistics of planning and executing the Shadow Days were complicated. With 149,000 students, Montgomery County Public Schools is the seventh-largest school district in the nation. The student body is diverse — 22 percent African American, 27 percent Hispanic, 15 percent Asian and Pacific Islander, with 15 percent receiving free or reduced-price meals, a third receive meal assistance, and 25 percent receive special education services.

We wanted to remove any doubt that Shadow Days were in any way evaluative, so we were careful to pair principals with the school they supervise. Principals were asked to recommend students who were representatives of our diverse student body and all of the school’s groups. The principals also were asked to include students who were working below, on, and above grade level.

In reviewing the nominations, we looked at each student’s background to ensure that representative group. Grade point averages ranged from 2.26 to 3.5, and extracurricular activities spanned from no participation to varsity sports, student government, and music groups.

Revealing Insights

Following the five Shadow Days, the superintendent met with the 26 senior staff participants, which yielded interesting feedback. Some leaders commented on how little the high school day changes when there were more than two decades of students. Others marvelled at the students’ abilities to change gears as quickly as they did between the 45-minute classes and the different demands of the teachers. They were widely varying quality of instruction, ranging from inspiring and engaging to less ideal.

Students showed themselves to be strong advocates for their own education, appropriately questioning the decisions of adults, and they impressed the administrators by demonstrating ownership of their education. (A video of the shadowing experiences and a roundtable discussion with the students and their administrators is available at http://bit.ly/3uxrF6)

The shadowing experience provided many senior staff with their renewed commitments to working with principals to ensure every student has engaging and meaningful shadowing experiences. Central-office administrators are working with principals to improve their skills as instructional coaches. We knew if we were to gain better outcomes for students, we must focus on the best practices and end with the interaction among the student, the teacher, and the content.

Several Shadow Day participants have maintained contact with their students long after, sometimes holding on the experience with their actual students. "I think they enjoyed being our students must be more exciting to students, I told them to stay tuned. Middle schools are up next."
Raising Accountability for Parents Too

By Stanley Hippus

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 in 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 18, children spend only 12 percent of their waking hours at school with the bulk of their time spent in the home environment where, with no standards of accountability, parents may choose to be uninvolved and 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 to the low test scores 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 consider what may be done to help children being raised by irresponsible parents, they generally focus instead on strategies to hold schools more accountable. Instead of addressing parent accountability, the reformers ignore the worst of parenting:

- Parents who never read to their children, review a spelling list or monitor homework assignments;
- Parents who assume no role in monitoring what their children watch on television, how much sleep they get or what they eat;
- Parents who lie to school officials about attendance and fail to teach manners to their children by attaching no consequences to misbehavior;
- Parents who refuse to attend a parent-teacher conference or even respond to requests to discuss the progress of their children;
- Parents who do not teach their children basic vocabulary, how to count to 10 or the difference between left and right; and
- Parents who allow a 6-year-old to smoke.

“Little to no effort is made to hold parents who violate the law accountable.”

New troubling behaviors are being documented. These schools report that 30 percent of the students are now wearing gold chains, some even sported gold rings. What is wrong with this picture?

School administrators are often the ones to administer these drugs in school. School officials find then they are powerless to prevent the next generation of children from becoming involved in drug use. When the school becomes a drug lab, it is the parents who are responsible. The children are raised on a regular basis to establish good work habits at home are irresponsible but not accountable.

Reluctant Enforcers

Parents are expected to send their children to school on a regular basis due to compulsory attendance laws. However, it is nearly impossible to determine 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, who ensure they eat and sleep properly and who supervise homework.

Nancy Kem, president of the National Children’s Reading Foundation, said, in an interview with Education Week: “From birth to kindergarten, a child who is raised to at least 20 minutes a day absorbs 620 hours of structured language. With this wonderful daily experience, most children will acquire the pre-literacy skills essential for learning to read. They also learn to love books and are eager to become good readers.” Parents who do not read to their child on a regular basis or establish good work habits at home are irresponsible but not accountable.

Schools must open dialogue to determine what schools and parents should expect from each other. A process determined collaboratively with parents should outline what will happen if a teacher, parent or administrator does not live up to agreed-upon expectations. While government bodies will probably never hold parents accountable, it is essential that our schools continue to try.

Stan Hippus is superintendent of the Salem Community Schools, 500 N. Harrison St., Salem, IN 47167. E-mail: shippus@salemcschools.com

The School Administrator November 2005 49
Op-Ed Commentary

Politicians Have a Role in Bullying, Too
(October 2012)

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 larded 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 not just 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
Op-Ed
Commentary

Common Core Advocate? That’s Me
(November 2015)

Common Core Advocate? That’s Me

As a school district leader who writes and speaks about our school improvement efforts, I’ve been labeled a Common Core advocate. I’m not sure what that means to the people who use the phrase.

Common Core may be the most misunderstood term of our generation. If an advocate is one who publicly supports or defends a cause, then my mission is school improvement, and I am an advocate of the standards and systems that will make that happen.

First, it’s our responsibility to lead so that we have schools with systems in place to ensure that all students are taught to the same high standards. That system can’t be one in which each teacher reads and interprets standards alone, plans a curriculum and lessons independently of every other teacher and then modifies and adapts the curriculum based solely on her or his own hunches or feelings.

A school district that’s healthy, coherent and cohesive puts systems in place to ensure that all teachers and administrators work together to read and analyze standards, design curriculum across and between grade levels, and modify and adapt curriculum based on data that are both anecdotal and performance- and test-assessed.

Also, the systems must include a cycle of analysis for continuous improvement. Our school district has seen dramatic gains in student learning and achievement for all students by working together in these ways.

Support for All
Second, it is our responsibility to ensure that we have a school system in which every child receives the support she or he needs to learn. That support, individualized and differentiated, is meant for students at all levels, from our most disadvantaged students to our most advanced.

We must create schools with systems in place in which all students are supported through adaptive teaching and diagnostic instruction. After 26 years in public education, the past 15 as an administrator, I’m tired

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Coping With Malcontents
(February 2003)

BY MICHAEL R. WEBER

T hey 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 negativism 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 negativism 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 worth writing about what the transition can be like for any administrators 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 district.

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 import 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 letting 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 which problems. I know the strengths of my administrators 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 key to 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 I’m here afterward 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 pizzeria 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 am a much better superintendent for this district if I take care of myself and my family, so why waste energy feeling guilty about it?

And what about the position, the work — is it worth it?

It’s by far the greatest job I’ve ever had. Honestly! I got this 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, analyzing data, 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, N.Y. Email: kmoritz@rand.waynec.org. She blogs at http://kimberlymoritz.com.
How to Talk Publicly About the Common Core

(May 2014)

How to Talk Publicly About the Common Core

Messages to share with your community when the innuendo-based opposition begins to mount

BY JIM DUNN

Why aren’t people listening?” asks Brian Hanes, superintendent of the Ashwaubenon School District, a 3,150-student system just outside Green Bay, Wis.

The same question is being asked by superintendents in all 44 of the states that adopted the Common Core State Standards Initiative about three years ago. Hailed as a solid, initial upgrade to achieve a more competitive and rigorous American education, Common Core standards now face withering attacks from both sides of the political spectrum.

What people are not hearing, according to Hanes, is the truth about the Common Core — and how it is invigorating learning and educational achievement.
My Romance With Another Superintendent

BY BRUCE BLANCHARD

W

hen 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 only work 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. My youngest was in college, and my wife and 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 ever 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 superintendent positions we continue to make our career choices work. We maintain two homes. Even where 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 superintendentships. 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 now have a midweek “date.”

After meeting perhaps 25 times at a restaurant that was about halfway between our school districts, we were amused 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 our house where we spent 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 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 night is spent there.

Saturday: Her school plays at my school tonight. We carefully each wear the correct 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-
Off-Beat

Snow Days and the Weather Channel (February 2006)

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. First some coffee. Now I can think.

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

First, the primary concern in making a decision about calling off school is the safety of the students. All other factors (such as how parents will deal with child care 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.” I 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 surefire way to make the weather turn nice is to call off school, a fact that all superintendents north of Oklahoma know.

Cantankerous Callers
Of course, I sometimes get phone calls at home and in my office from folks who question my intelligence and ancestry. 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 flake are as big as half-dollars. The angriest parents generally live directly across the street from the school their child attends.

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 presume my head is already deeply imbedded 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 drafts 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 justified 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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School Administrator

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GUEST COLUMN
Off-Beat

Leadership Lite (various issues)

One Fine Day in Prison

Overheard at after-school pickup time outside Earby Elementary School in Grosse Pointe Farms, Mich.

Mother: "How was your day?"
Son: "Great!"

Mother (taken by surprise): "Really? Why?"
Son: "I had lunch with the prisoner."

(Insert mom's stunned and quizzical look over her frozen smile.)

Son: "You know, the lady that runs the office."

Source: RECA ARAHON, COMMUNITY RELATIONS SPECIALIST, GROSE POINTE, MICH.

Stuck on the Wrong Product

A student in Lisa Barnstead's kindergarten class at Big Flats Elementary School in Big Flats, N.Y., was working hard to get his gluing assignment done. He was having a little trouble — the pieces kept falling off, even though he was applying the glue over and over.

Barnstead finally intervened. Upon closer inspection, she discovered what the student assumed was a glue stick was actually ChapStick.

Source: SUSAN Pirozzolo, Horseheads, NY, Central Schools

Scaling Up Expectations

Joshua Starr, an enthusiastic Twitter user, receives plenty of tweets delivering unsolicited but usually good-spirited advice whenever there's a forecast that calls for snowflakes.

His staff's favorite tweet this winter, according to Starr's communication chief Brian Edwards, came from "a young kid who put a ruler flat on the sidewalk next to some snow and said he got 12 inches of snow at his house. How creative!"
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