



Back to School 2019

Insights for Education Leaders



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Welcome Back, Friends & Colleagues

As you embrace the excitement and anticipation of this back-to-school phase, with intentions renewed and everything possible, you may also be feeling the familiar anxiety that comes with the enormity of being an educational leader. Optimism mingles with uncertainty as you consider your role in creating a culture, engaging the community, developing your staff, and preparing your students for the world ahead.

As you confront any trepidation, be reminded and assured that you are the transformation agent who sets the course, capable of improving instruction and learning for those in your charge. In the 2019-2020 school year, we at HMH® and the International Center for Leadership in Education® (ICLE) stand by you in support as you continue to shape your district or school into a model of equitable access and achievement.

To assist your ongoing efforts, I recommend you use the articles in this eBook like you would a series of peer-coaching intensives. They're designed to engage your professional wisdom and advance your goals. You'll consider the keys to turning intentions into actions and focus on simple—though rarely easy—practices like sticking to a schedule, continuing to learn, and getting to know your teachers and students. You'll think outside the four walls and 10 months of school to build community partnerships and address next summer's achievement now. You'll break through obstacles of overload and fatigue to make data your and your teachers' friend.

A leader's impact on each student is second only to that of the teachers', whose impact depends on effective leadership. So, as the 2019-2020 school year begins, we encourage you to stand tall and smile warmly; to lead from vision and through relationships; and to set, work consistently toward, and measure specific goals for the benefit and achievement of all your students.

The new school year is here. Everything is possible.

Sue Gendron

President, International Center for Leadership in Education
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Intentional Leadership: Moving from Intended to Implemented

By Dina Rocheleau

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, Ferndale Public Schools, Michigan

In every school across the U.S., we need leaders who inspire others to do their best and lead with a coherent heart—leaders who build a culture of achievement and mutual respect by holding true to their beliefs around equitable educational opportunities. We need leaders who learn, understand, and utilize neuroscience research—who live to serve as the heartbeat and pulse of their school family. And we need leaders who can create and sustain urgency, hope, and ownership. It's these leaders we all aspire to be and whom our children deserve. Many of us believe in intentional, positive leadership. But how do we accomplish upholding these values and building an empowered staff with the same mindset?

Throughout my leadership journey, I have observed administrators (and others) who enter their careers and practice through the lens of compliance rather than commitment. The difference is dramatic. Compliance is an approach that can produce intended results, but it is based on complying with pre-established rules, structures, and control. A commitment-based leader focuses on promoting collaboration, empowerment, and excitement that leads to expectations, routines, and sense of collective purpose. A leader who leads through this lens values collective efficacy and builds his/her style knowing that together we are better. When a leader shifts into a commitment-based approach, they shift from the what to the how. And when we focus on the how we become more productive with the what. Beginning the year by sharing your compelling *why* with your staff is a priority and should serve as a best practice. Being able to articulate your "operational mindset" is essential to build and support the relationships that matter most. The

more staff members can visualize your *why*, the greater the physiological or internal mindset shift among them. Once staff understand your reason for being their leader, they feel more connected to you. Once they work together to build the staff/schools collective *why*, they feel more connected to one another.

Dr. Becky Bailey taught us, "Connections on the outside build neural connections on the inside." I will never forget hearing this from her, and it truly became my own *why* and shifted my mindset to become a better leader and learner. When we understand and live into knowing that the more connections we make from adult to adult, adult to student, student to student the more our brain makes essential neural connections that optimizes our learning and motivates us to be our best.



Beginning the year by sharing your compelling *why* with your staff is a priority and should serve as a best practice.



Being intentional in how you build and sustain relationships promotes trust and mutual respect. These are directly linked to our outlooks and attitudes. With trust and mutual respect as the core of our leadership, we can be an intentional leader who creates a safe, coherent environment. We can ensure staff and students are in a positive and receptive state and ready to embrace change. We can empower staff to collaborate and take ownership of the school's vision, mission, and

direction to facilitate change and promote a continual learning process. We can work with staff, students, and families to become an inclusive school family. And we can maintain a steady press for excellence and mastery.

Let's never forget that results come from relationships.

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FINDING YOUR WHY

Just as love is more powerful than fear, commitment must precede compliance. When we make this small tweak in our daily practices, we are able to move from intended to implemented. This takes:

- Knowing and living your own *why*
- Sharing your individual *why*
- Building a collective *why* with staff

Your individual *why* may come in the form of one sentence, a list of your professional core values, or an action statement. One sentence examples of your *why*:

- To lead with a coherent heart
- To provide all students equitable educational opportunities
- To wake up each day inspired to put a smile on every child's face

Here are a few examples of core values supporting your *why*:

- Family, Empathy, and Structure
- Faith, Learning and Integrity
- Compassion, Connections, and Children

This is an example of a *why* action statement:

As an educator, I lead with three words at the core of my daily work: Connections, Coherence, and Children. These words lead me to make the best decisions for the best reasons.



With trust and mutual respect as the core of our leadership, we can be an intentional leader who creates a safe, coherent environment.



THE 3 C'S

So as we embark on another school year in which we are honored to lead students, staff, and families, let's stay focused on what matters most, allowing us to be intentional leaders with a lens of commitment. As an educator I have stayed true to this course by being mindful of three words: *connections*, *coherence*, and the *child*.

Connections: When we are connected to all members of our school community, we feel better and more able to stay the course even during difficult, stressful times that take place throughout the year. Our emotions modulate our thinking. So, how will we take care and lift up our staff this year? What will we do to support our students this year? And how will we build connections with families this year? Building strong connections needs to be part of your implementation plan and should be monitored just as you do with school improvement goals. Routines are the skeleton of your school, but the rituals are the heart. Plan accordingly.

Coherence: It's important to have structures, systems, and alignment—but *only* if there is a shared depth of understanding about the purpose in the minds and actions of each of us, individually and collectively. The impact on learning and culture when you create a purposeful community can't be denied. So again, ensure you are intentionally planning what coherence looks and sounds like after your staff has created their collective *why*. How will you keep this *why* at the forefront? How will you start your staff meetings off? Is your collective *why* written on each memo

or communication? What is your systemic approach to build the internal capacity of your staff and ensure coherence? In times of stress, take a moment to go back to your collective *why*. Reflect on its importance. It's mindfulness for the collective minds.

The Child: In all my years of working in education, I am most proud of the fact I have and will never lose sight on why we are all here—the child (or the student). No matter if we are talking about our youngest students

or our graduates, they are all children in this sense. If you are working one on one with a student or making a broader policy change, keep your mind on what's best for the students. On the days you feel that it's hard to have a positive attitude or outlook, put your computer down, take off your walkie talkie, and step into a classroom. It will bring you back to your *why* and help you step back into being an intentional leader who leads with a coherent heart.



Building Strong Relationships with Your Teachers This Year

By Anthony Colannino

ICLE Senior Fellow; Former Principal, Fiske Elementary School and Douglas MacArthur Elementary School, Massachusetts

"I wish she'd just do it."

This was my passing thought watching my 9-year-old daughter during a recent swim lesson, where she refused to jump into the pool for the fourth straight lesson. As she dried off after her weekly 30-minutes of swimming and noticed my disappointment, I realized my thoughts were selfish ones—more about me than my daughter.

They were also unfair.

I know school leaders and teachers have the same thoughts about staff and students. "I've done everything, yet he still doesn't get it/understand it/performance, etc." Our desire for all to grow is well intentioned. Yet when those under our care do not rise to meet our standards, a common reaction is to place the blame squarely on the learners. And we're all learners – from district leaders to our youngest students.

The blame game is dangerous and unproductive for educators and leaders at all levels. Teachers know if they disappoint their principal, curriculum coordinator, or department head, just as my daughter could sense it in me. My reflection wasn't spurred by deep-seeded self-awareness. No, it was spurred by my daughter asking, "Daddy, is something wrong?"

"Yes, something is wrong with me," I thought. I also knew I had to turn my disappointment into opportunity—an opportunity to discuss learning, what was stopping my daughter from taking her jump into the pool, what skills she needed to work on in the pool (and away from it), as well as strategies to cope with her anxious feelings about doing something hard.

As you look over your staff roster, I know there are teachers who frustrate you because of a perceived lack of effort. Here's the thing. Just like students, teachers will not achieve in a culture that dismisses them, ignores them, or is hostile toward them. If a teacher is underperforming as the new school year begins, it's the leader's job to find out why and how to help.



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DEVELOPING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH TEACHERS

One goal for the 2019-2020 school year should be **to create stronger connections with your staff**. There's leadership and follow-ship, which are symbiotic. Leaders cannot lead without followers, and followers won't follow leaders who don't create the culture and conditions for following. It's the leaders responsibility to get the ball rolling to build and model positive and productive learning relationships.

If you truly want to know your staff better, and you should, **provide a survey** for all to fill out. Knowing your staff means wondering about them and asking them important questions. These questions can range from the simple—"When's your birthday?"—to the more complex: "What could I do better to meet your professional development needs?"

You must understand that if you're going to ask for feedback, staff will provide it and it's not all going to be easy to hear.

But you have to show you're open to both critical comments and positive praise from those you serve. It's likely you'll learn more about yourself and your leadership if you show enough courage to ask your staff a series of questions that helps you understand them better. After surveying, you'll have to set aside office hours to meet with any and all staff members who want to speak with you. I'd encourage you to meet with each and every one.

LISTENING TO STAFF FEEDBACK

When you do meet, please understand that *listen* and *silent* hold the same letters. Ask your questions, but do not interrupt your staff. Let them talk, share, and dare to provide avenues for you to improve as a leader. When you ask a series of common questions, common themes are likely to emerge, which will help you develop district and school plans for support and improvement.

Just as importantly, doing so will spark stronger relationships with your staff. You'll get to know them, and they'll get to know you. Some staff will shock you with their honesty; others with a hurt they have been carrying around long before your arrival. Some will reveal passions that you didn't know existed; others may admit helplessness. While they do, keep on listening and learning. Make no judgments.

Allow staff to surprise and inspire you, and they will! Once you're finished reading, talking,

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and reflecting, share with all what you've learned. Pull on those common threads to let staff know they are not alone. Be humble and thankful that you asked and all answered. Recognize courage; share misconceptions you've held. Apologize if necessary. Only share individual conversations after requesting permission, and only choose the most important learning moments to do so.



When you do meet [with faculty], please understand that *listen* and *silent* hold the same letters.



Your reward will be tenfold. Here is what you can expect:

- Greater trust
- Respect for your leadership
- Plans for improvement developed together
- Commitment to improvement from all
- School leaders building more empathic relationships with staff and students
- Resilience in facing challenges
- More risk-taking, thus greater innovation

I know my daughter, and I still made the mistake of placing my disappointment upon her. But since I love her, work on our relationship, and have taken important steps to understand her better, I used her fair question of me—"Daddy, is something wrong?"—to discuss and support her instead of blaming and shaming her. If you're able to do the same, you're likely to replace your initial thought ("I just wished she'd just do it") with, "I know I can find a way to help her." Leadership starts with the second comment and is diminished by the first.

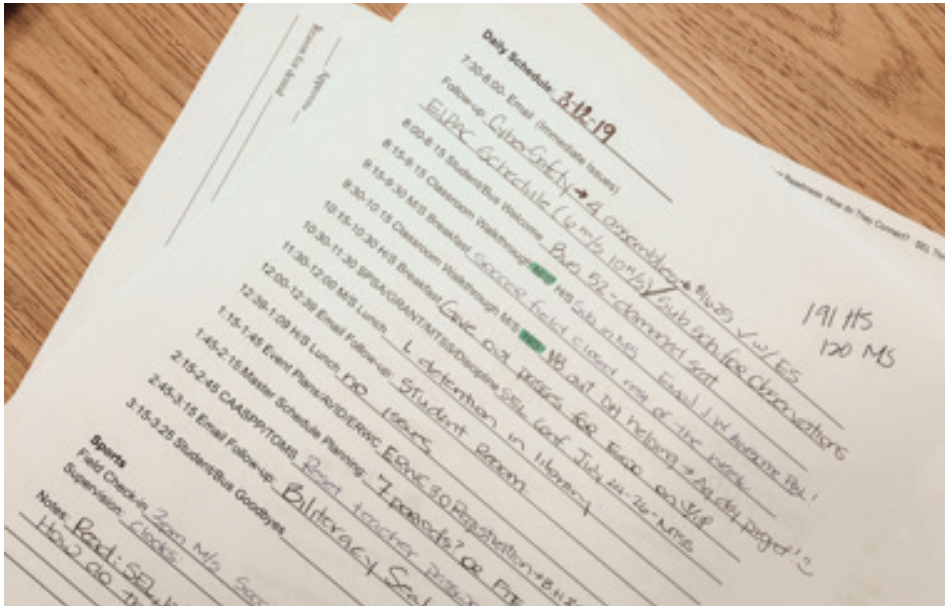
You know what to do; now do it!



What I Wish I Knew as a New School Administrator

By Kelly Boeing

Assistant Principal, Lucerne Valley Middle High School, California



Kelly Boeing's daily schedule as an assistant principal. (Credit: Courtesy of Kelly Boeing)

Time is going to pass anyway.

So, this is a no brainer. I have seen this as a poster on Facebook, a mantra of the successful, and I have even seen it stitched on a pillow. It is not a secret, but sometimes it can be a challenge to keep it in context. Say it with me: *Time is going to pass anyway.*

What matters most is making a cognizant choice of how you delegate that time as a school or district leader—a choice where you are going to invest time wisely for the greatest return. This brings me to the first thing that I wish I had known in my first year as an administrator.

1. MAKE A SCHEDULE, AND FOLLOW IT

My first few months as a teacher turned assistant principal, I had a running to-do list. I noticed that at the end of the day, no matter how many things I was able to mark off my list, it was always longer than it had

been earlier. At the end of a long day, I found sitting at my desk, watching the colors of the sky fade as the sun set, and feverishly adding things to my list that I would need to accomplish the following day.

You see, when I was teaching, some to-do items carried over into the next day—like grading—but by and large, I was able to end my day and start the next without a three-page running to-do list. The never-ending administrator list was a new concept for me. My goal was to finish my list daily. As soon as I realized that this is not even remotely possible, I had to re-evaluate the way I looked at my day and more importantly, the time in that day.

The time will pass, the list will grow, and so I had to start prioritizing what was on my list rather than focusing on what can I get done *right now*. I decided to make a daily schedule for myself. Obviously, there are times when something arises that will prevent me from

following it directly, but I try to stick mostly to that schedule.

Every few weeks, I update the various categories on my schedule. For example, I just recently added a state testing section. When that's done, I will replace it with a summer-school category. I also check my digital master calendar and make sure that I account for scheduling conflicts. Since I created my daily schedule, I have really been able accomplish more of the things I need to be doing, rather than just sitting at my desk completing every task that comes across it in real time.

The time is going to pass, but how? With accomplishment? Or just lost time?

Grow and be in
charge of your
own growth.

2. BUILD THOSE RELATIONSHIPS (WITH STUDENTS AND STAFF)!

One of the reasons many teachers don't leave the classroom is the same reason that brought them to the classroom: the students! After completing my admin program, I was so scared to leave my kids and was convinced that the children I would be working with as an administrator were of a different type of clientele. I was scared I would lose those moments when I watch a struggling kid finally grasp a concept, the check-in conversations, the handmade cards at Christmas—all of it.

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Right after the switch, I was terrified my worst fears were being realized. I struggled to find time to get into classrooms, interact with students at lunch, and be there to welcome and say goodbye to them. The only kids who knew my name were the ones in my office for less-than-wonderful reasons. My heart hurt with the change. This is when I started building student time into my schedule. I now have eight scheduled times per day, plus sports, to spend with kids, and I have seen a huge difference. I walk around to different groups, say hello, and have meaningful conversations. Now, I have students who yell “hello” to me across the campus, and I know I am still able to make those relationships.

This schedule has also helped me to build relationships with adults! There was recently a viral meme of Forrest Gump on his shrimp boat, and he looks out and sees Lieutenant Dan on the dock and starts eagerly waving. Then he jumps in, leaving the boat, swimming toward his friend, and the caption reads, “Every teacher when they see an adult for the first time after being in the classroom all day.” I had never related to anything so much in my professional career! It is much easier to win over a classroom of middle school students with a well-timed fart joke than it is to win over a room full of adults. Adult relationships don’t just happen by working side by side

with someone; they take work! I realize that this is no great revelation to most, but as a first-year administrator who is learning new systems and protocols, it is hard enough to get out of your own head, let alone have a chat about anything non-school related.

I spend time meeting with teachers and aides; at lunch and breakfast I meet with the cafeteria ladies, custodians, proctors. During walkthroughs I make sure to talk with our administrative assistants. It seems disingenuous to plan these chats, but it really is much more organic than it sounds in writing. In having these conversations, I am better equipped to help my students.

3. READ (OR LISTEN TO EDUCATION PODCASTS)!

There are many jobs and careers that exist where a person gets better at their job because of repetition. They simply repeat the same thing over and over and get better at it. This is NOT an educational or administrative model! Ask anyone in education—it is fluid. It is constantly changing. Showing up every day and doing the same things, promoting the same antiquated ideals and strategies, does nothing for our students and does nothing for our teachers.

It is important to stay at the forefront of the national movement toward focusing on

elements such as social-emotional learning and the growth of technology. I am not saying we should *implement* every movement we read about, but know them, evaluate what you think it might look like at your site, take ideas—all of it! Grow and be in charge of your own growth. Reading (and writing) blogs is like listening to someone talk about what they are doing and how it is working. But sometimes, scholarly articles get a bit tedious! Another option, which I also enjoy, is listening to podcasts. I subscribe to quite a few different educational ones. And when I listen to them, I know there are things that I could not do due to resources, demographics, and so on, but they keep me motivated to keep growing, to refuse stagnation.

I refuse to ever be done learning. The first day I don’t learn something new is the first day I stop growing. I felt this way as a teacher, and I feel it even more now that I am in an administration. I know that I am looked to for setting a standard, and I hope to instill in our teachers what they instill in our students: inquiry. A desire to continue to learn and never be satisfied in this particular arena. And honestly, why not? Devote your time to productivity—because remember, the time will pass anyway.



**CHECK
OUT OUR
NEW *HMH*
LEARNING
MOMENTS
PODCAST >**

Opinion: The Unintended Consequences of Summer Break

By Ron L. Woodard

Assistant Superintendent of Instruction, Maury County Public Schools, Tennessee

As we prepare to embark on a new school year, let's rewind the clock back a few months to dissect what happened at the start of the summer. Nothing signals the start of the summer like the end of school. As the final bell rings for the last time, kids all across the United States stand in anxious anticipation.

The end of school is so epic that songs have been created about it. Everyone knows the head banging anthem by Alice Cooper "School's Out for Summer." Even Will Smith caught the bug as he released his smash hit "Summer Time" (1991), a smooth urban groove that even non hip-hop lovers can't resist.

What is it about summer? Why is the idea of kids leaving school for an extended period of time so appealing? Don't get me wrong, as an educator myself, I totally understand the need for students and teachers to have a break. However, the extended time out of school has unintended consequences.

According to the National Summer Learning Association, most students will lose two months' worth of mathematical skills over the summer, and low-income students usually lose about a few months of reading skills.

About two-thirds of the ninth-grade achievement gap between lower and middle income youth can be explained by unequal access to summer learning opportunities during the elementary school years. Plain and simple, students need to be reading all summer. When coupled with the challenges of increasing academic proficiency for students who are one or more years below grade level, it would be clear to see why summer break is perceived as a "loss." Districts across the country have instituted or proposed various calendars and schedules

that could provide additional time on task for students. However, it is important to note that extending the school year is a costly strategy. A large portion of revenue would need to be allocated for transportation, meals, teacher salaries, curriculum materials, and miscellaneous expenses.

In a dream world where funding is not a barrier, here is what would happen. The process would be called "STRETCHING." All students would begin school at the same time and finish at different times. Students who meet their academic goals would finish in May somewhere around Memorial Day. Students who do not meet their targeted goals as identified by formative assessments and RTII must remain for an additional one to two months. The terms and conditions of each child's school year should be negotiated and contractually agreed upon by the student and the parents before Labor Day. We could begin to close the achievement gap by staggering the end dates for students who would otherwise waste time during summer break playing video games and watching T.V.

WHY LEARNING LOSS HAPPENS

For students living in urban high-poverty areas, school may provide two hot meals, caring adults, learning and enrichment opportunities, and safety. According to a study conducted at Brigham Young University and the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, when juveniles are not engaged in supervised activities, they are more likely to engage in certain anti-social behaviors and possibly criminal activity. Unfortunately, many teens who live in poverty don't get exposed to reading or high-quality enrichment

opportunities during the summer. Hours of talking, texting, video games, and watching countless T.V. programs marks the highlight of their summer.



Unfortunately, many teens who live in poverty don't get exposed to reading or high-quality enrichment opportunities during the summer.



During the evenings, many students often become further exposed as eyewitnesses to the ills of their home environments where drugs, criminal activity, and violence are rampant. Sadly, some will even fall victim to these elements and become statistics. As social theorist James Davison Hunter noted, the "moral cultures into which children are socialized plainly predispose them toward different patterns of moral choice and commitment – patterns so strong that they cut across the boundaries of economic circumstance, race and ethnicity."

Ironically, after about three weeks off, many students can't wait to be back in school, as they miss having a structured routine and positive interactions. When asked why they are eager to come back to school, they often cite boredom at home as the leading cause. Oddly enough, students say the same thing when school is in session.

STARTING THE CONVERSATION

There are real implications that need to

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be further examined regarding academic retention and its correlation to summer break. State and local policymakers should consider publishing a list of summer learning opportunities that are within families' budgets that provide targeted outcomes across all grade levels for at-risk youth, ELL students, SPED, and rural students.

As an education leader, you can take action. Perhaps you may partner with a local library or other community organizations to provide fun opportunities to engage kids during the summer and keep them from just sitting at home. You may consider sending home a recommended summer reading list with every student at the end of the year, and post that summer reading list on your district website so parents can access it.

As you embark on a new school year, keep the unintended consequences of summer break for your students in mind, and be sure to plan accordingly. There's no clear-cut answer to how to prevent summer learning loss, but it's definitely something to start thinking about as your students return from another summer out of the classroom.

NSLA. "Moving Summer Learning Forward: A Strategic Roadmap for Funding in Tough Times." National Summer Learning Association (2014).

NSLA. "At a Glance." National Summer Learning Association. <https://www.summerlearning.org/at-a-glance/>

Jacob, Brian & Legfren, L. "Are Idle Hands the Devil's Workshop? Incapacitation, Concentration, and Juvenile Crime." *American Economic Review* 93 (2003), 1560-1577. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w9653.pdf>

ACCORDING TO THE NATIONAL SUMMER LEARNING ASSOCIATION:



9 out of 10 teachers spend at least three weeks re-teaching lessons after the new school year begins.



Elementary school students who regularly attend voluntary summer learning programs for at least five weeks see benefits in math and reading.



51% of families who don't participate in a summer program say they would if the option was available to them.



Consider Pursuing Community Partnerships This Year

By Anthony Colannino

ICLE Senior Fellow; Former Principal, Fiske Elementary School and Douglas MacArthur Elementary School, Massachusetts

We know we are better together, when we work together as a class, a department, a school, a district. But how can you tap into resources offered beyond your school community? Businesses, non-profits, social services, the arts, and even families in our school communities also need to be represented in our schools through mutual programming. This can take many forms based on needs of the school and outside partners.

WHY COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS?

Of course, this makes sense to anyone who's had the pleasure of making a positive connection that benefits all. The biggest challenge in schools is finding the time and people power to intentionally plan community partnerships. With so many needs and demands, it may be hard for school leaders to reason why outside partnerships should be formed when so much has to be done during school hours.

Sadly, the failure to reach out to local businesses cuts our students and schools off at the front doors by pretending the outside community doesn't exist or isn't important. Just getting the sense that there are community members who care about school, as well as the adults and kids who populate them, is worth the effort.



Just getting the sense that there are community members out there who care about school...is worth the effort.



In return, community organizations and businesses can gain a sense of how schools have developed over time (since they were in school), innovations that are happening, and an appreciation of the workload of both educators and students. This should not be understated. If we cut the community off, how will they ever know about the great things happening in schools and then share those stories with friends and peers while becoming a champion of the schools? The answer is, they won't, and schools lose out.

SEE HOW COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS BENEFITED ONE HIGH SCHOOL IN TENNESSEE.

[READ THE BLOG ON SHAPED>](#)

FORMING A PARTNERSHIP

Fifteen years ago, when I first became a principal at a K-5 elementary with high rates of poor families, I knew I had to provide opportunities for students to understand society outside of their current circumstances—that there was a world out there that did indeed care about them. One of my solutions was to forge a partnership with the defense contractor, Raytheon, who had just created a new office in town.

The idea was simple. Using teacher curriculum knowledge, we would create interactive, hands-on math lessons to support students struggling with learning concepts and the confidence to even try to solve difficult math problems. So the teachers would use their expertise to research effective pedagogical practice, purchase supplies that connected with students in another way, and wrote the plans our engineer volunteers would ultimately

deliver. The basis of the programming was in our low standardized math test scores.

My elevator pitch to Raytheon was that we would use our educational experiences to reinforce or build math skills in a new and different ways with our struggling students. We would train engineers to deliver the lessons since we had such a large cohort to help. I brought Raytheon leadership into the school, providing a tour and opportunities to meet with teachers and students. We talked about our student diversity and the need for the outside community to help us. They were sold!

I followed up by visiting Raytheon a couple of times to introduce myself and explain why we were partnering and how engineers turned tutors would be supported by me and the school. I brought in teacher-prepared lessons with materials and showed them how to work through each lesson with the students. I provided practical advice on tutoring students and also had teachers and myself on hand to help and encourage volunteers when necessary when they made their weekly visits to school.

THE IMPACT OF THE PARTNERSHIP

Both the formal and informal results of this partnership were positive. Students were learning in their sessions, enjoying math and forming relationships with engineers who used math every day and worked just a few miles away. Not surprisingly, standardized test scores went up for the students who participated in the program—some dramatically. Participating teachers also found great benefits in formulating lessons that taught math in a different way from our school district's assigned curriculum. These teachers

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started using more hands-on techniques in their classrooms and then taught these techniques to colleagues who weren't working in the after-school program.

The most gratifying result for me was the one I had considered least—the engineers. In providing feedback after the program ended, just about all of the 24 volunteers wrote how gratifying and meaningful their work with our students became—how the relationships formed with our students were inspiring and meaningful. Some volunteers wrote how their Tuesday after-school visits was the best part of their work week!

HOW TO LAUNCH A SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIP:

- **Consider Your Impact:** From the outset, the work has to be meaningful for the school and the community partner.
- **Clarify Roles:** Partners need to understand the reason for the programming and how they can or will be impactful.
- **Discuss Possible Challenges:** School leaders should provide potential partners with an overview of the school's challenges and state how the partnership will benefit both parties.
- **Be Transparent:** If schools are asking for monetary support, how funds will be used must be clear.
- **Train Volunteers:** Training needs to be offered to give volunteers a level of support and confidence necessary for helping.
- **Share the Results:** Whatever the results of the partnership are, they must be shared to keep partners and schools engaged in the work.



How to Use Big Data as an Education Leader

By Dustin Bindreiff
Growth Mindset Author and Consultant

One of Bobbi's first actions when she took over as a new principal at a middle school was to create a data-driven school. Like many new principals, being data-driven is a rallying cry she had heard and spoken about often. Shortly after sharing her commitment to data with staff and the community, she formed a team to help her analyze the school's data. That's where the problems began. Her team was quickly drowning in test scores, software program usage data, demographic data, climate survey results, and stakeholders wanting to help, regularly bringing in research and ideas of new best practices to explore.

The team realized they were being given more data to consider between meetings than they could use. At the end of Bobbi's first year, the school found itself having to answer questions about a lack of results and progress on various district-level initiatives. In her second year, the district selected a number of popular initiatives that seemed to have worked in other places. Like most districts, her administration was eager for her to implement a multitiered system of supports (MTSS) and explore implicit bias trainings to improve equity. Despite the team's excitement, little changed over the course of the year, and Bobbi was quickly losing the trust of her staff and supervisors. Over the past 20 years, K-12 education has made great strides on the path to become data driven. However, many educators run into challenges similar to Bobbi—too much data and too little time. **As a result, schools that are consistently and effectively using data seem to remain more the exception than the rule.**

The disciplined and purposeful use of data can help schools define their vision, develop

a plan to achieve it, and measure if they are executing the plan. **However, there are four primary hurdles that limit the effectiveness of data-driven schools.**

4 COMMON OBSTACLES TO USING BIG DATA AS AN EDUCATION LEADER

1. Data overload (or too much data)
2. Initiatives fatigue (or too many initiatives going on)
3. A lack of time
4. A lack of confidence in analyzing data

1. DATA OVERLOAD

Education is great at collecting data. However, much of it is never put to use. Demographic data is collected and stored; assessment results can take a year to receive; student, staff, and parent surveys are taken and rarely used; and data is stored but never compared, analyzed, or summarized in a usable form. Many educators will agree it often seems like the federal government as well as state and local agencies each have their own data requirements, and yet few educators understand what the data is for. This data overload does as much to muddy the picture of what needs to be done as it does to solve problems.

2. INITIATIVES FATIGUE (OR TOO MANY INITIATIVES GOING ON)

Research has shown the average lifespan of an education initiative is roughly 1.5 years. In conversations with principals, it's not uncommon for them to attempt a dozen or

more district-level initiatives at one time. This short lifecycle can lead to inconsistent data measures over time and constantly change the plan for achievement. If the plan is different every other year, it would be difficult to pinpoint what interventions are supporting change and which are detracting from student learning. This problem tends to be compounded when working in high-poverty or struggling schools. For some reason, if a school is struggling, they become prime targets for more initiatives.

3. A LACK OF TIME

This third obstacle brings the challenges of data overload and initiative fatigue into focus. Time is likely the most precious resource in education. For some educators, a limited amount of time leads to them using just one or two pieces of data to make a lot of decisions, instead of the *right* data to make individual decisions.

4. LACK OF CONFIDENCE IN ANALYZING DATA

Finally, I am an accountant by nature, and few things excite me more than pulling up a spreadsheet of discipline or special education data sets. This is not common in education. There is *understanding* data, and then there is *interpreting* data to inform decision-making—the "so what do I do differently" based on these results. That can be hard because sometimes data from one source contradicts another source. We intentionally use tests that measure slightly different things, so when we look at results for a student or a class in combination, knowing *what* to do first and *how* is the hard part! In order to begin addressing these challenges, we must first begin by organizing what types of data is available. **In general,**

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there are three types of data: **outcome data, predictive data, and implementation data.**

Now that we've identified the three types of data to use as a school leader, let's take a closer look at how exactly to implement them successfully.

TAKING ACTION: OUTCOME DATA

Think of outcome data as summative data.

To become data driven, we have to begin at the end. How will your school define success? This question takes us back to the first obstacle: too much information. Schools that struggle with data often make the mistake of looking at every piece of data and creating an initiative to address it. The result is often that these schools implement programs a mile wide and an inch deep.

Even worse, this lack of direction often confirms the maxim that a person who goes down every road often goes nowhere. As leaders, the first challenge is to work with your team to create a clear vision of success for your school, and then define how you will measure this success. Education has many competing stakeholders and a tremendous responsibility. Without a clear vision, it can become easy to make the mistake of trying to be all things to all people. Limiting your number of outcome data measures is an important first step.

This is the time when you, your staff, and other stakeholders should have the important

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conversations and answer questions such as, "What is valued here?", "What does success look like?", and so on. If done effectively, these conversations can become the foundation for creating a learning community. Your team may want to focus strictly on academic achievement and benchmark scores, or they may bring more of a whole-child focus, adding in surveys about school climate, mental health, and achievement.

PREDICTIVE DATA

Once we have decided how we will measure success, we want to utilize **predictive data.**

This is the data that will predict our outcome measures. For example, many schools use benchmark testing as an outcome measure, so the next question a data team would ask is, "What drives improved test scores?" This data measure is akin to formative assessments in teaching that allow us to monitor progress.

In general, I have come to realize that if we can create a climate where staff and

THE FOLLOWING ENGAGEMENT MEASURES CAN BE GREAT PREDICTIVE DATA SOURCES:

- **Attendance and work completion:** These can reliably predict that those students who show up and turn in their work are going to have more success than most.
- **Active student participation:** The amount of engagement can predict which students experience success, and a lack of engagement can predict problem behavior.
- **Staff attendance and turnover:** These can speak volumes about the school climate and certainly carry over to student achievement. If staff seem unmotivated, be sure to examine your school environment and morale at your site.

students are showing up, doing their best, and turning in work, learning is occurring. Ideally, a data-driven school will identify a small number of outcome data measures and use these to identify a small number of predictive data measures that will drive outcome data. Once this is done, the team should develop a plan to increase those predictive data scores and, ultimately, the outcome data.

IMPLEMENTATION DATA

Once an intervention has been decided upon, the team will want to identify **implementation data** measures. Implementation data helps a school answer the question, "Did we do what we said we would do?" There is no way to evaluate the effectiveness of education programs if we cannot reliably say whether the program was actually implemented as intended. These measures should be observable and measurable. Can you and your team

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see or touch this measure? The National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) is a national research collaborative focused on this kind of data. You may want to explore their resources as you work to develop your data-driven processes.

BEING A DATA-DRIVEN LEADER

The exciting part of becoming a data-driven school is guiding your staff and stakeholders through the process of creating a clear vision for your school, and then creating a plan to achieve that vision and put it in place. In even the most ideal circumstances, this process is difficult, and bringing that vision into reality is certain to be challenging. However, when a team has had the opportunity to understand their data and take ownership of future directions, chances of success improve. Data can either provide your school with a compass to help achieve its vision or it can overwhelm staff and leave your school adrift. A data-driven school needs to understand

the amount of data out there and which measures matter to them. This requires a disciplined focus, not allowing all the information and good ideas available to create chaos.

The effectiveness of efforts to develop a data-driven school will depend on the leadership quality of the school. In education, it is easy to be overwhelmed with good ideas. As John Hattie explains in *Visible Learning*, almost any initiative will show some kind of

improvement. Additionally, often the goals of schools will shift with the latest news story, vacillating from achievement to equity to bullying to social-emotional learning to school spirit to career readiness and so forth. Unfortunately, each good idea and well-intentioned focus spreads staff thinner until there is little focus on anything other than summer vacation. However, with a disciplined approach to data-driven decision making, we can create a focus and measures that bring out the best in your team.

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A data-driven school needs to understand the amount of data out there and which measures matter to them.

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Let the School Year Begin!

As you kick off 2019-2020, remember that your approach to leading and the strategies you integrate across schools in your district play an integral role in shaping students' lives. We hope that the tips and strategies from these school and district leaders will help you achieve your goals, build strong relationships with teachers, prioritize social-emotional learning, and utilize big data to drive your decisions.

Each new school year represents a fresh start. It's a great time to be the change agent who will empower teachers and inspire students—and set them on the right course for a successful year ahead.



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Dina is the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction for Ferndale Public Schools in Ferndale, Michigan. She previously worked as a school principal, assistant principal, and early childhood special education consultant in other districts. She has been an adjunct professor at Eastern Michigan University for both undergraduate and graduate programs. During her professional tenure, she is proud of the accolades and awards she and her district have received—but nothing tops the pure emotion of a student who loves school and the mutual respect she has built with staff members. Her educational background includes a bachelor's degree from University of South Florida and a master's from Nova Southeastern University. She has completed all coursework toward her Ph.D. at Capella University.

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For more than 20 years, Anthony has dedicated himself to creating atmospheres where adults and children feel happy, healthy, and successful. Anthony has worked in just about every school setting from the rural poverty of eastern Washington to the affluence of the Metro Boston area. Anthony brings a contagious joy and passion to the important task of educating children. Prior to joining ICLE, Anthony developed his own education consultancy, Leading and Teaching for Growth, and worked at the e-learning company Dr. Carol Dweck co-founded, Mindset Works Inc., helping school districts across the country understand and operationalize Dr. Dweck's growth mindset research. He also served as an elementary school principal in the Boston area and taught fifth grade.

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Kelly Boeing taught for 13 years in southern California. She has taught high school and middle school math, English, and ASB. She loves what she does, including having the opportunity to grow and develop. Kelly received her bachelor's degree from Cal State Fullerton in Liberal Studies, her Master's in Teaching from Chapman University, Master's in Special Education from Chapman University, Master's in Educational Leadership from Azusa Pacific, and is currently working on her Master's in Educational Technology from Azusa Pacific.

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Dr. Ron L. Woodard served as principal at Apollo Middle School for three years and at Maplewood High School for five years, earning distinction as a turnaround principal after significantly improving student achievement outcomes. Woodard has served as a community advocate for youth and teen violence prevention across the city of Nashville, as well as a district trainer and presenter on numerous occasions on topics including teacher efficacy, school climate and culture building, memory and retention studies, brain-based research, and teacher quality. Woodard earned a Bachelor of Science from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, a master's degree from Tennessee State University, and a doctoral degree from Lipscomb University in 2012. Woodard was also honored by Nashville Public Television as an "American Graduate Champion" for his work with at-risk youth and dropout prevention.

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Dr. Dustin Bindreiff has spent nearly 20 years serving youth in need as a mentor, educator, and administrator committed to creating educational opportunities for all students. In addition to being a teacher, he has served as a special education coordinator, PBIS coordinator, and a growth mindset consultant. Dr. Bindreiff has participated in a number of equity and special education improvement teams for more than a dozen school districts. His research has been published and presented nationally in the area of establishing multi-tiered systems of support, including schoolwide positive behavior support. Dr. Bindreiff has also provided professional development to district leaders, principals, teachers, paraprofessionals, and parents in meeting the instructional needs of students grounded in rigor, addressing exclusionary disciplinary practices, and implementing PBIS.

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