



# Curriculum in Context

JOURNAL OF THE WASHINGTON STATE ASSOCIATION FOR SUPERVISION AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT



## Strength in Numbers

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EXPLORING SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS  
IN WASHINGTON STATE

# The Two Washingtons

## THE FEDERAL *No Child Left*

*Behind* legislation and

Washington state's new graduation requirements are placing more and more demands on Washington's public schools. Working to ensure that every child meets standard on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning and that all students earn a high school diploma is an enormous challenge for educators. In addition, we are also facing changes in the requirements individual student learning plans for special education students.

Every day I hear my colleagues talk about obstacles to obtaining these goals. Lack of sufficient funding is often cited. "There's not enough time," some say. "If only parents would work with their children. How can we expect kids to learn when their basic needs have not been met?" I hear all of these and more.

There is no doubt that both the federal government and our own State legislature have asked us to accomplish a monumental task—that of providing an education for every child, one that promises the skills and knowledge needed to be successful in the 21st Century. Indeed, it may very well be the ultimate challenge.

I also recognize that there are barriers to achieving this commendable goal. But where others may think the major obstacles we face are lack of time or money, I believe that the greatest obstacle we face is ourselves. Yes, it is we—the teachers and administrators—who stand in the way of students achieving at high levels. We are the greatest problem.

How could that be, you say? We work long hours. We prepare lessons in alignment with the essential learnings. We do everything we can. What more could we possibly do?

BY TITA MALLORY



We are the problem not because of what we do, but because of what we believe. In our hearts, most of us question whether every child can meet standard on the WASL (especially the math test). In our hearts, most of us doubt every student can meet new graduation requirements and receive a diploma in four years. We aren't certain the achievement gap can be closed for minority students.

Most of us, I am sad to say, don't believe all students can reach the goal.

We don't usually come right out and say it. But, it slips out in our conversations just the same. It slips out whenever we make an excuse for a child by saying "his mother was never good at math either," or "this skill is too difficult for my struggling kids". It slips out when we blame a child's circumstances for his or her performance. "If only her parents would help with homework. They only speak Spanish at home." It slips out when we don't believe in our hearts that every child can succeed.



Our beliefs not only keep students from succeeding, they keep educators from succeeding, as well. Rather than seeing the new legal requirements as a goal—worthy of our dedication and energy—we believe they are unrealistic. To most of us, the goals of *No Child Left Behind* are just

dreams—and not very reasonable ones at that. We, in fact, don't believe in our own ability to accomplish these dreams. Uncertainty about our own abilities holds us hostage. Without a belief that we can make the dream come true, we settle for what we've always known and continue to do what we have always done.

When I look back through my life, I remember people who believed in me. These individuals gave me the greatest gift

imaginable. They removed obstacles inside me that kept me from achieving. They did this by believing in my abilities. Because others believed in me, I believed in myself. Because others believed in me, I took risks, I tried again, and I accomplished things I never thought I could.

I learned to have faith in myself. I learned how much teachers care. I learned that educators make dreams come true. There is no doubt in my mind that schools have the ability to accomplish this dream for all children. I have seen it happen. I have seen teachers come together to accomplish what seemed impossible.

I am not the only one to witness this “miracle.” There are records of it happening again and again. There are stories of schools in inner cities, with students living in desperate conditions, who succeed at high levels. There are many examples of high-performing schools, where students are succeeding despite the color of their skin or the income of their families. Key to success in these schools are leaders and teachers who collaborate to overcome the difficulties and challenges they face. There is no doubt that we can accomplish anything if we unite and work together.

The consequences of not meeting the challenge before us are immense. If we choose to continue as we are, our future and the future of our students are dim. A high quality education is now a necessity for almost all jobs. If we continue as we are, we will deny most of our students access to the education and jobs they deserve. If we continue as we are, our society will become even more divided between poor and rich. If we continue as we are, the promise of a better future will be lost.

Yes, incredible dreams can be accomplished if we believe in ourselves. Astonishing goals can be met if we believe in others. The challenge before us now is not the one we think it is. It is not *No Child Left Behind*. The real challenge before us is to believe. We must believe in our students. We must believe in ourselves. And, we must provide every student with the

knowledge and skills they need for the 21st Century. There is no other option.

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*Tita Mallory is the Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment for the Aberdeen School District.*



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*The editorial committee seeks articles that provide perspectives, research and useful information about the problems of  
and ways to improve the teaching and learning process in Washington state.*

#### Acronym key

In this issue, we're providing a key to often-used acronyms to avoid duplication.

**AYP:** Adequate Yearly Progress

**ELL:** English Language Learner

**ESEA:** Elementary and Secondary Education Act

**NCLB:** No Child Left Behind

**OSPI:** Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction

**WASL:** Washington Assessment of Student Learning

# A Message From the Editors

**THE TERM “COMMUNITY”** conjures up a variety of definitions in our minds. It has become an amorphous word, so general in its use that it means something different to each of us. Many schools are developing Professional Learning Communities, several high schools in Washington State are working on federal planning grants to create Small Learning Communities and our local politicians are hosting Community Forums. But what is community, and what is the role of community in the public schools?

Schools have often been perceived as the sole party responsible for educating *all* children. This perception has placed a tremendous burden on the school leaders and educators who day in and day out are doing everything they can to live up to this responsibility. This issue of *Curriculum in Context* is designed with these realities in mind, and we hope it will help alleviate some of that pressure by defining the responsibility for children’s education more broadly, and by providing examples of ways in which a greater sharing of such responsibility is helping more children and families find success in the public schools.

Trish Millines-Dziko, Co-founder and Executive Director of Technology Access Foundation, helps illustrate our conception of community articulated above: “Think about your school and the other schools you’ve worked in. Now think about all of the homes, businesses, nonprofits, churches, and other schools that surround your school(s). That is the community.” Millines-Dziko goes on to share practical strategies she has seen for ways schools can reach out to develop a community-focused learning environment. Gene Schmidt, superintendent of the Bridgeport School District, describes his community’s pioneering spirit, and the themes he has used to create a district-wide community determined to ensure success for all learners. Tim Herron, from the Northwest Leadership Foundation, shares examples of how faith-based organizations are partnering with the Tacoma Public Schools to enhance the educational opportunities and success-rates of children in the area. Kim Noel and Jennifer MacKillop share the benefits of coordinated community serv-

BY GREG FRITZBERG AND DEBORAH GONZALEZ



ices in two middle schools, where staff and community service providers are working collaboratively to reduce students’ risk factors and increase their protective factors. The results of these efforts as measured by the Healthy Youth Survey in 2000 and 2002 show impressive and sustainable impact on students’ attitudes and behaviors.

In each of these thoughtful contributions, the importance of relationships in building community is apparent. Relationships are the foundation of any good community, but that foundation must come from a culture of mutual trust and respect. As schools work to meet the challenges of the day, they have to cultivate an inclusive culture of trust and respect by reaching out to their communities. Creating communities of mutual trust and respect, working toward a shared purpose, requires a comprehensive approach. Creating these types of communities may be the best insurance a school or district can have that all children will attain academic and social success, and carry the democratic vision forward for the next generation.

This issue also contains Spokane teacher Juliette Howard’s essay on social promotion versus retention, which follows up on a similar essay in an earlier issue, an innovative article on violence and school leadership by Al Fein, and an out-of-state piece from Raymond Broach in New Jersey that speaks to the achievement gap issue.

We hope all of these articles give you some ideas to ponder and strategies to consider. Enjoy!

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*Greg Fritzberg and Deborah Gonzalez are co-editors of Curriculum in Context.*

# A Teacher's Voice

BY CAROLYN CARY



**NOW ENTERING** my fourth year of teaching, I am amazed at how quickly the last three years have passed. I have completed my Professional Certification and Master's degree in Secondary Education this summer after two extremely intense and stressful years. Reflecting on my journey in education thus far, I have developed a deep appreciation and profound respect for my grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, and cousins who have also answered the calling to teach.

Austin Henry, my paternal grandfather, spent nearly four decades in education, including thirty-five years as a grade school principal. Grandpa Henry was witty and wise. His puns always elicited a smile and chuckle while his wise words eased fears, reassured uneasy nerves, calmed tempers, or nurtured pride in someone he praised. His wife, Marie Henry, taught for over thirty years. Grandma Henry's laughter and playfulness, and open and abundant love were contagious, undoubtedly making her an adored 1st grade teacher.

My maternal grandmother, Bettina Taft, also taught for more than thirty years, primarily 6th grade. Grandma Taft is extremely passionate about education. While she has high expectations, she abundantly bestows praise when it is earned through hard work and determination. And indeed, Stan Taft, Bettina's husband, taught music for over twenty years. Grandpa Taft's artistic eye and creative touch made ordinary events something special. His students met and exceeded his high standards, knowing he had deep faith in their talent.

My father, David Henry, taught for over thirty years himself, primarily high school math and driver's education. The most intelligent person I know, Dad hooked his students with his vast knowledge of cars, music, and movies, and then sold them on what they were learning by making it real and applicable to their lives. Connie Henry, my mother, is currently teaching English language learners who are spending their first semester in a U.S. high school. Mom is incredibly patient and caring. While her curriculum is extremely rigorous, her students adore her, knowing she is preparing them to take full advantage of their new lives in this country.

But despite this amazing educational heritage, I had wanted to do something different. Growing up, I swore I would not become a teacher. I would do something more adventurous and exciting. I would be a veterinarian...or a marine biologist... or a wildlife biologist. Well, healing sick dogs and cats sounded intriguing until I realized how awesome it would be to swim in the ocean with whales and dol-

phins. Which in turn did not sound as exhilarating as tracking down a grizzly bear or gray wolf to collar and study. But as I began to mellow with age, sharing my love of science with kids ultimately seemed more down to earth, yet noble somehow. Teaching was my calling, after all.

I could not have imagined a better position than my present teaching assignment. I enjoy what I teach and work with colleagues who are remarkable mentors. I am actually teaching in the district my great-grandfather was Superintendent of back in the early 1900s. In many ways my journey has come full circle. I aspire to follow in the footsteps of my family as well as the teachers, professors and mentors who have been such inspirational role models. They have taught me that while curriculum, assessment and classroom management are essential for teachers to master, the truly great teachers instill a love of learning in students' hearts. They offer words of encouragement and praise; they smile, laugh, and play; they passionately teach their subject and make each student feel special; they share common interests with students outside of school, and they are patient and caring.

This past spring, with my graduate work coming to an end, I finally began to grasp how delightfully exciting and astoundingly scary it is to have this enormous responsibility of shaping the minds and hearts of students. I consider myself extremely fortunate to be the daughter and granddaughter of teachers. I strive to be the kind of teacher they were and continue to be. I am tremendously proud to carry on this legacy.

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*Carolyn Cary is an 8th grade Earth Science teacher at Deer Park Middle School.*

# Arm in Arm

## Cohesive Prevention Practices that Support the Learning Environment

BY KIMBERLY NOEL AND JENNIFER MACKILLOP

In an era of heightened accountability for academic standards and scarce resources, it is imperative that district leaders, school administrators and teachers take effective measures to ensure a supportive learning environment for all students. It is not enough that teachers are

highly competent and ready to teach; they must also be equipped with a comprehensive support system to address student barriers to learning. This requires organized access to effective resources for addressing individualized learning challenges, as well as coordinated approaches to delivering a cohesive prevention message through school-community partnerships, programs and events.

However, within a school setting, it is more common that these resources, skills and practices are given less consideration than instructional practices and result in fragmented and inconsistent approaches. It is the contention of

this article that a critical factor in the development and maintenance of a supportive learning environment is a coordinated approach to comprehensive prevention and intervention practices, with a focus on collaboration and networking among key stakeholders in the school community. It is through this on-going collaborative effort that healthy student attitudes and behaviors are promoted, students' investment in learning increases, and academic achievement is enhanced.

The effectiveness of a collaborative, comprehensive prevention strategy as a foundation for supportive learning environments has been, and

continues to be, consistently demonstrated through the success of federally-funded grant initiatives which address this prevention-based strategy. Evaluative data supporting such effectiveness is evidenced through two middle schools in a small suburban school district in the Puget Sound Region where a full time Prevention Resource Coordinator (PRC) joined school leaders and school-community stakeholders to overcome identified drug, violence, discipline and school safety issues. The Coordinator's focus was to thoroughly assess the related needs and assets of the school and surrounding community; to work with an advisory group of stakeholders to determine ways to strengthen and enhance the prevention efforts at each site; and to increase the cohesive and coordinated prevention capacity at each school.

Strong administrative support at each school site was critical in establishing the value of a coordinated and cohesive approach to prevention practice. It is with that message that other members of the school community embraced the

work of creating a supportive learning environment. And, it is in this context that the Coordinator's efforts to provide the leadership and expertise in establishing the infrastructure for a supportive learning environment were maximized.

### **Addressing Barriers to Prevention**

Following the federal funder's guidance, the PRC worked in collaboration with each site's advisory group and school leaders to identify barriers to school-based prevention efforts to facilitate and support a comprehensive prevention strategy. This was in line with the contention that if all key stakeholders worked to overcome these barriers, their prevention efforts would have a greater impact. The barriers identified by the stakeholder group included:

- deficits in the areas of communication among stakeholders;
- lack of cohesive planning and implementation of prevention strategies;
- communication with and coordination of prevention strategies;
- need for greater participation and support for community/business buy-in;
- lack of prevention program evaluations and school-wide assessments;
- poorly constructed implementation plans and strategies for existing prevention programs, including the lack of training and knowledge about best practices and effective programs;
- and need for greater support, training and coordination among the Student Assistance Program and other school-based services.

With the leadership of the PRC, the barriers to comprehensive prevention practices at the two middle schools were significantly impacted over a three-year period, resulting

in the following valued, supported and sustainable prevention efforts:

- a positive shift in student attitudes and perceptions regarding violence/substance abuse;
- representative advisory groups were formed at each school site with the role of developing cohesive prevention strategies/plans. The principals at each site supported the recommendations of the advisory groups;
- communication practices were improved by developing new network connections and by establishing a working relationship with existing networks. Coordination and collaboration between school, community and business organizations improved. A mentoring partnership was formed at both sites with Pacific Lutheran University. The enhanced working relationship with the Safe Streets Coalition resulted in improved services to youth living in area apartments. Middle School (X) worked with the district on issues related to homeless students; teachers received training in identifying students-in-transition, issues of homelessness and the school's responsibilities under the McKinney-Vento Act;
- when conducting a comprehensive assessment that included looking at archival data, administering surveys and conducting focus groups, the advisory teams and school faculty recognized the value and need for data-based decision making and became committed to this process. Evaluation data from current prevention practices was collected and shared. School administrators demonstrated commitment to evaluating key programs;

- existing prevention practices were enhanced through review of current science-based research on guiding principles, best practices and effective programs. The PRC supported district efforts in encouraging the use of best practices. Staff training increased awareness and faculty "buy-in" for implementation of effective prevention practices. Staff at both middle schools were committed to best practice programs and to developing new strategies based on guiding principles. Staff at Middle School (X) made plans to implement the Get Real About Violence (GRAV) curriculum with fidelity. Building administrators were highly supportive of sustaining the mentoring program and was committed to continuing the bully prevention awareness efforts. Teachers at Middle School (Y) were trained in Get Real About Violence and Here's Looking at You;
- coordination and collaboration improved between the Student Assistance Program, the Prevention/Interventionist, Safe and Drug Free Schools and other program professionals and service providers. The PRC met regularly with the district administrator, assisting with the informal development of action plans for continued improved service to students in need and teachers in need of support, consultation, training and materials/curriculum.

### **Coordinated Effort Impacts Student Attitudes and Behavior**

The coordinated efforts of the Prevention Resource Coordinator, Prevention-Interventionists, Safe and Drug Free School leaders, counselors, principals and other school-

community stakeholders; targeted and delivered prevention efforts to overcome identified drug, violence, discipline and school safety issues within (Y) and (X) Middle Schools. They found that a coordinated prevention-intervention effort impacted student attitudes and behavior regarding the use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, as well as acts of delinquency and violence at school.

In the 2000 Healthy Youth Survey (HYS), 75% of both (X) and (Y) students reported it was wrong for someone their age to smoke tobacco, compared to 87% (X) and 84% (Y) reporting it was wrong in the 2002 HYS. Attitudes about alcohol and marijuana use saw similar changes. In the 2000 HYS, 74% of (X) students and 69% of (Y) students reported it was wrong for someone their age to drink alcohol regularly compared to 84% and 77% in 2002. In 2000, 75% of (X) students and 76% of (Y) students reported it was wrong for someone their age to smoke marijuana compared to 86% and 80% in 2002.

### **Attitudes and Behaviors are Closely Related**

As stated in the May 2002 report by Washington Kids Count at the Human Services Policy Center (University of Washington) concludes “that for groups of middle school students, behavior and attitudes about harmful behavior are tightly linked (correlation = 0.96). That is, the same groups that think it is okay to use alcohol or drugs, know where to obtain them and think they are unlikely to get caught are also using them. Similarly, groups of middle school students with antisocial and rebellious attitudes are also involved in violent/delinquent behavior (correlation = 0.91).”

This correlation between attitude

and behavior is also reflected in the reported alcohol or drug violations at (X) Middle School, with a decrease from 16 reported incidents in 2001-02 to only one incident in 2002-03. At (Y) Middle School violence related infractions such as fighting decreased from 138 to 86 reported incidents, a decrease of almost 50%. Physical assaults or threats decreased from 75 to 54 reported incidents; a decrease of almost 30%.

On the 2000 HYS, 47% of students at (X) Middle school and 44% at (Y) Middle School reported that *none* of their four closest friends had tried alcohol in the previous year, while on the 2002 HYS this increased to 59% and 62% respectively. Similar behavior changes were seen with marijuana as 58% of (X) students and 62% of (Y) students reported on the 2000 HYS that none of their four closest friends had tried marijuana in the past year. On the HYS 2002 this increased to 73% and 61% respectively.

### **Substance Use and Delinquent Behavior Linked to Academic Achievement**

Further research conducted by Washington Kids Count has also demonstrated that “groups of middle school students with low involvement in substance use and violence/delinquency scored an average of 53 points higher in math, 24 points higher in reading and 53 points higher in writing on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) than groups with moderate involvement. “Moderate” refers to engaging in 1-2 violent or delinquent acts in the past year; having ever tried alcohol or drugs; and endorsing attitudes favorable to both substance use and violence-delinquency.” These findings have taken into account factors of gender, race-ethnicity and poverty.

Washington Kids Count also reported in September of 2000 that even if middle school students are *not engaging* in substance use but *have peers who use*, school performance is impacted. On average, students whose peers avoided substance use had WASL scores that were 18 points higher for reading and 45 points higher for math.

### **Conclusion**

All schools have services and practices that contribute to establishing the learning environment that will support academic success. The impact of these services and practices can fall short without a coordinated effort that involves all key stakeholders invested in developing cohesive and comprehensive strategies based on best practices. The key to success in this regard is to strategically and energetically embrace comprehensive plans that involve youth professionals both inside and outside of the school system.



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**Jennifer MacKillop**, MSW, is Program Manager in the Prevention Center at the Puget Sound Educational Service District.

# Hooking Up

Exploring Partnership Possibilities that Help All Children Learn

BY TRISH MILLINES-DZIKO

## Education Isn't the Same

Back in 1962, I started my K-12 educational journey. As I passed through school, we read the classics, tackled the “new math”, took a foreign language, and learned about our country’s history. We had home economics (presumably

for us girls who were going to be married and become homemakers ‘cause heaven forbid we aspire to have a career!), health and physical education, and we played sports. We took one or two field trips per year, and we had some parents come in and talk about what they did for a living.

All of this was good enough to prepare the majority of us for work and a few of us for college. For me personally, education was the ticket to breaking the cycle of manual labor and domestic work—the only work available to the adults in my family.

Today, our country and economy have changed so much that the old

way of education is not sufficient. We have a different idea of what a career is and who can have one. Companies expect us to know more when we join them—they want instant contributors who are visionary and tactical at the same time. However, our public education system has not caught up and we are sending under-prepared students to college where they are struggling.

A successful model of education today involves the school district, school administrators, teachers, students, family and the community. There have been many articles and opinions on the role of the school and the family—most of them

pointing the finger at who should be doing more than they currently are for the students. Very little is written about the role of the community in the existing system. This article will attempt to shed some light on how important the community is to a child’s education and how to get the community involved in your school.

This is not primarily an intellectual article. This is a practical article with examples and ideas so you can take that next step in enhancing your school’s potential by involving the community.

## The Community

The first thing we should do is define “community.” Think about your school and the other schools you’ve worked in. Now think about all of the homes, businesses, nonprofits, churches and other schools that surround your school(s). That is the community.

We all know that schools cannot teach students everything they need to know to be successful in life, so the community can be a valuable

resource for schools. Schools also can't help every child who struggles. So why is it that schools don't exploit these resources?

I cannot answer that, but I can say that there are ample opportunities for students (starting in kindergarten) to learn about and contribute to the community that surrounds them. There are many ways that the community can help students jump over the difficult academic hurdles they encounter. There are many ways the community can make a student feel like they belong to something when their family fails them. And I believe that the connection to many of these community resources should be the schools because the schools are the center of a child's education.

Most kids still see academics in the abstract, where you learn things in books and it stops there. If they never see the concepts they are learning set into action, it is really hard to grasp the different permutations of a concept. Being connected to the community enables students to have hands-on experiences learning about health, the environment, government, technology, business, volunteering, community, art, collaboration, activism, transportation, safety and caring for living things. It gives students a reason for learning. Having hands-on experiences and face to face time with community members really gives students a chance to feel empowered. They see why you need math and science, they can see how different academic disciplines are used, and they begin to develop critical thinking and problem solving skills. They can learn from experts, participate in their own experiments, make their own creations, build things as a

team and get an appreciation for the purpose of learning.

### **Making the School/Community Connection**

Obviously, if you really want to exploit the school/community connection, you would have to totally evaluate your curriculum, how your teachers organize their classrooms, what your expected outcomes are, and then figure out how to integrate communities into the system. However, there are some quicker and easier ways to get the community connected to your school.

#### *Start with after school programs*

Connecting with after school programs takes the least amount of effort and does not always require any changes in the day-to-day instruction. It should be seen as a way to get your feet wet in the school/community collaboration space.

There are numerous afterschool programs that are available in every city and town. First, contact your local YMCA, YWCA, Boys and Girls Club, and State Welfare office. They generally have a list of programs they either offer themselves or are offered by other groups. You can also go to your school district office.

Then, narrow your list of programs by figuring out what you want to achieve. Trying to get help for kids who are struggling in certain academic areas? Want to offer enrichment programs that your school does not have for kids that show talent? Once you focus in on what you are trying to achieve, you can get to the programs you really want.

Beware, not all programs are created equal, so you will want to cre-

ate a vetting process to ensure you are bringing in quality programs. What are your expectations? Do you want the programs to measure and report their results? What kinds of results do they get? Do you want the programs to be academically focused or more enrichment-oriented? Once you get your expectations listed, you can interview program officers and participants' parents to see if the programs will work for your students. You should also interview other organizations that have partnerships with the organizations you are vetting. Knowing how the organization you are interested in works with others is critical because you do not want to have a messy relationship where details are being overlooked or you are doing all the work.

#### *Get teachers to offer afterschool activities*

Teachers can host afterschool activities to teach kids things that they are interested in. For instance, if the teacher is interested in playing chess, then he or she can start a chess club for the kids. This is a really easy way for teachers to jump into, and they can eventually bring in community resources because they will want to have other experts work with the kids. There may be an issue with the availability of school resources after normal school hours, so it is possible that these activities may need to be held at another venue.

#### *Get teachers to bring in community resources*

Sometimes teachers have perfect projects where a community resource can be extremely helpful. For instance, if the teacher is covering different writing styles, he or she



might bring in a poet one week, a screenwriter the next week, a technical writer another week, and so on. The next thing might be to have a contest where these professionals are the judges. Then the winning entries could be entered in a larger competition in the community.

However the teacher uses a community resource, it is important to have a well-planned lesson that ties in the practical use of a concept. It is important to make sure that both the community resource person or agency and the students get something out of the experience. When you find a resource that you like, then share them with other teachers in the school. Eventually, you will build a nice database of community folks who are willing to be a part of your school's educational landscape.

*Arrange a class trip that centers on a lesson from class*

A lot of teachers plan class trips. Unfortunately, they do not always have good follow-up in the classroom. A good example would be to

have a biology lesson where kids are studying the different organisms that live in fresh water. A trip to a lake accompanied by a professional biologist might make that trip a little more real. The biologist could use his or her tools to explore the marine life and talk about the things a biologist does. The students could take back samples of the lake water and do their own experiments in class. Of course a larger group project could come of this and be on display for the whole school to see.

Class trips should not only center on a lesson, there should be a way for the students to apply what they learned in the classroom and an opportunity for return visits or to have an in-class visit. The internet and professional development groups for teachers can help them find the best projects to involve community resources.

*Change how you deliver your curriculum*

The ultimate way to engage partnerships with the community is to

completely change how you deliver your curriculum and what you expect from students. This requires a complete effort from the principal down to the janitor. A perfect example of this method is the Audrey Cohen College's Purpose-Centered System of Education. I had never heard of this until I sat on the board for the New School Foundation. Even then, I did not pay that close attention to the model; I just knew it was different. Now I am living it first-hand because my daughter is starting first grade at TT Minor Elementary and they have totally embraced the Audrey Cohen model.

**A Practical Example: TT Minor Elementary School**

TT Minor Elementary School is a unique little public school in the Seattle School District. They went from the dumping ground for poor teachers and under-performing students to a gem of the district, in my opinion. How did this happen? For starters, they were fortunate

enough have a benefactor who believed in a community-based school model and wanted to start one at TT Minor. You can read about it in the *Education Week* archives (see October 28, 1998). The article is called “A Gift of Good Fortune,” by Julie Blair.

TT Minor has numerous relationships with community agencies that are both fee-based and free. The PTA organizes fundraisers for some activities, others are paid for in part by the families, and still others are paid for by the New School Foundation.

Here are a few partnerships that allow TT Minor to call itself a community-based school:

- **YMCA** – They have a before school and afterschool program that provides enrichment activities such as art and music.
- **Seattle Academy of Arts and Sciences (SAAS)** – This is a private school in close proximity to TT Minor. Students come to TT Minor to do one-on-one reading, act as mentors and participate in special events..
- **Islandwood** – This is an environmental research nonprofit that takes school-age kids on educational campouts. TT Minor sends the 5th and 6th graders each year.
- **Synagogue** – The Synagogue across the street hosts a joint Martin Luther King Celebration with TT Minor and SAAS students.
- **School evening activities** – TT Minor hosts at least 4 evening activities during the school year where parents and community members can see what the kids are working on. There are also family nights and curriculum nights.
- **Community Celebrations** –

There are two community celebrations each year that are open to all community members. One event kicks off the school year, and the other celebrates the end of the school year.

- **Alton House** – The Alton House is a nonprofit organization that focuses on math skills and teaches kids how to play chess. The Alton House partners with TT Minor to help kids who are struggling in class, and they also train the chess team (which is open to all TT Minor students) for tournaments.
- **Seattle Pacific University (SPU)** - Students and faculty from SPU volunteer their time to teach 4th and 5th graders violin lessons.
- **Running Club** – One of the teachers started a running club for the students. She integrated a Seattle geography lesson into the process by drawing lines on a map to represent how far they ran each day. They could then see they “ran” the equivalent of the city’s perimeter. They also entered in a marathon.
- **University of Washington** – Students from the School of Architecture at the U.W. designed the yard space, including a jump rope platform and a nice trellis that sits above a garden. Students from the School of Social Work intern at TT Minor as family-support workers and counselors. The U.W. Meany Music Series (a professional music series) sends artists to TT Minor for performances, and this year some artists are going to give lessons to the students.
- **Junior Achievement** – Starting with kindergartners, Junior Achievement staff visit weekly to provide lessons in

entrepreneurship.

- **Seattle University (SU)** – Students from SU tutor TT Minor students in a variety of subjects.

As you can see, TT Minor has developed a variety of relationships that are beneficial to the students. Students have exposure to adult professionals, college students, high school students and middle school students. They get out of the city and get a chance to apply their studies to the real world.

#### It’s Time to Get Started!

One of the first comments I hear from people when I talk about TT Minor is that they have external funding to do a lot of the activities. This is true, but there are plenty of things they do that do not cost a dime. Being creative about getting community activities in your school is your best weapon.

The new school year is upon us, so it is time to hit the streets and gather those resources. Get teachers in your schools together and create a community resource plan. Time is not standing still and the kids deserve our best effort!



**Trish Millines-Dziko** is Co-Founder and Executive Director of the Technology Access Foundation.

# Community Involvement

## The Pioneer Spirit of Bridgeport

BY GENE SCHMIDT

A plaque was presented to the staff of Bridgeport Elementary School in July 2004 by Dr. Terry Bergeson in recognition of the commitment to continuous improvement on behalf of our students and community. The award by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)

identified Bridgeport as a pioneer in the school improvement assistance program.

The wording on the plaque caused me to reflect on the importance that education played in our community's history. Bridgeport's pioneer spirit in education dates back to 1892 when classes were taught in Boyd Teter's store (Homer, 1981). Increasing need for public education led to a community project to build a school in 1896. As Bridgeport grew, new schools were constructed in 1909, 1937, 1950, 1977, and 1990.

Bridgeport residents share stories of the children of early settlers

that rode horses to town and lived in tents so they could attend school in the winter. This love of learning partially explains the tradition of deep community involvement for our schools. Long time resident Verli Cavadini tells the story about her father, who served as a member of the Bridgeport School Board in the early 1950s. A larger school was needed when an influx of workers settled in Bridgeport to build Chief Joseph Dam. Verli's father promoted construction of a school to meet the demand. That school is still in use 54 years later. This story is interesting because even though Verli's father did not

complete the 8th grade, education was important to him and he wanted to make sure that others would have the opportunity to complete their own education.

Bridgeport's pioneer spirit and strong sense of community involvement is about neighbors taking care of neighbors. People get involved. Communities, like ours, help themselves. Locals do not wait for something to happen or hope that someone will make something happen for them. When you live in Bridgeport, you can count on community involvement to get it done.

Rich and Marilyn Lynn have served the school community since the 1980s. As officers in Home and School they supported their children's learning. They personify the pioneer spirit of getting involved and making things happen through their promotion of school levies and visibility at school events. Hugo Martinez exemplifies the new generation of pioneers. He and his wife, Maria, joined Home and School to build a connection with the Hispanic community. They forged a

partnership with the Migrant Parent Advisory Committee and Home and School. Hugo demonstrated his personal commitment to education by serving as a member of the elementary school's improvement team. Recognized for his outstanding leadership qualities, Mr. Martinez was selected as the 2004 Washington Migrant State Advisory Committee president-elect.

The pioneer spirit permeating individuals like these were built on four simple beliefs: every child is important, everyone working together can make a difference, the school is the heartbeat of our community, and it is up to me to make it happen. This story becomes more remarkable as Bridgeport transitioned from ranching to an orchard economy. Large numbers of Hispanics migrated to the area as apple production flourished. This rapid demographic shift led to instructional changes as English as a Second Language strategies were introduced in the classroom. In five short years from 1999-2004, the percent of 4th graders meeting the WASL standard climbed from four to 56.4 in math and 30.6 to 51.3 in reading. The dramatic improvement in student achievement resulted in the selection of Bridgeport Elementary as a 2004 National Title 1 Distinguished School for continuous improvement in reading and math.

### **Every Child is Important**

Fueling the improvement in student achievement in Bridgeport has been a strong belief that every child counts. Community members showed interest in children by participating in a popular program called *Let's Do Lunch*. Throughout the school year, grade school stu-

dents invited parents to eat lunch at school on Fridays. The invitation to lunch created an opportunity to bring community members into the school and involve them in the lives of their children. Community involvement was also demonstrated through participation in Home and School which sponsored fund raising events such as the Fall Carnival and Here Comes Santa. The Home and School fund raising spaghetti dinner became an enchilada dinner as Hispanic parents introduced their culture to the school community. The outpouring of community involvement united school staff and parents in the common cause of educating children. Making every child important generated a remarkable community response. Participation in student-led parent conferences increased to 95 percent as families took greater interest in their children's success in the classroom. In addition, cultural diversity was celebrated at music concerts when song selections in both Spanish and English were included in the program.

### **Everyone Working Together Can Make a Difference**

Bridgeport is visible proof that it takes a whole community to raise a child. Community members are actively engaged in the school scene. Working together, the energy of city government, the school and Chamber of Commerce united in a partnership for learning that benefited children and accomplished incredible feats. Two projects deserve special mention. The first was the Vietnam Moving Wall, which Bridgeport hosted in October of 2003. For those not familiar with the Moving Wall, it is a half-scale replica of the actual Vietnam

Memorial in Washington, D. C. Hundreds of school and community volunteers staffed this week of remembrance for our service men and women. For seven nights and days, students, townspeople and veterans read aloud more than 58,000 names as a tribute to the fallen soldiers listed on the wall. Six of the names on the wall were from our small section of North Central Washington. The Moving Wall brought our community closer together and helped heal the wounds left over from the Vietnam War. More importantly, it tied one generation to another. Students, too young to know Vietnam in any personal way, now understand the sacrifice that an older generation had made in defense of freedom.

A second example would be the partnership between school and community that revitalized Bridgeport DAZE. Our town's three day celebration in June tied high school graduation to the start of cherry harvest. The annual event lost luster as overworked volunteers tired of the annual project. High school students refused to let our community celebration die. The pioneer spirit of involvement that some feared was lost was found in the willingness of high school students to give back to their community when they sponsored the parade, a co-ed softball tournament and family events in the park. The civic contributions of the students demonstrated that a community, working together, makes a difference.

### **The School is the Heartbeat of our Community**

In Bridgeport, schools are the center of community activities. Academic and athletic activities draw students and parents to school

on a non-stop basis. The regular school year lasts 180 school days, but enrichment opportunities continue on throughout the year. Instruction in reading starts even before the class day begins. Over 90 students volunteered for a cross-aged tutoring program where sixth graders coached younger students in reading. The school day ends with family literacy nights where discussions are held with parents to explain good reading habits. Parents are also shown strategies to help their children with homework. Family literacy is important. To promote literacy at home, over 4,200 reading books were distributed to students, courtesy of *Page Ahead*, in the past three years.

A six-week enrichment program facilitates learning during the summer months. Key to the success of the summer program is a strong focus on cultural enrichment. Exchange teachers from Mexico provide summer instruction in Spanish for students in an effort to expand our Migrant educational program. The popularity of the program led to hiring a secondary exchange teacher from Mexico to instruct math and science in Spanish during the regular school year.

#### **“It’s Up to Me to Make it Happen”**

A wise person once said that there are three kinds of people: people who make things happen, people who watch things happen and people who wonder what happened! Bridgeport’s *make it happen* ethic is a strong characteristic of our pioneers. Every community has moments when something happens because an individual took personal initiative to get something done. Making things happen is the mantra for building principals Scott

Sattler and Steve Pointer and Special Programs director Diane Hull. These three were instrumental in creating a positive climate that generated tremendous change in the learning culture of Bridgeport.

Once regarded as a backwater of education, Bridgeport is now celebrated statewide for improvement in student achievement in reading and math. Despite an 87.7 percent free and reduced lunch count, an 80.7 percent Hispanic student population and 70.1 percent transitional bilingual population (OSPI, 2004), Bridgeport met WASL standards that other districts with similar demographics have not attained. Good instructional leadership and high quality instruction made it happen.

Sattler and Hull tag-teamed Bridgeport Elementary to a 2004 National Title 1 Distinguished School award by introducing the Consortium on Reading Excellence and Bridges in Math. The move to the Harcourt Trophies Edition insured continuity in reading. Focused staff development targeted teacher weaknesses and polished strengths. When funding for staff development ran low, they wrote grants that added new resources. Most importantly, they challenged the staff and students with high expectations. Four years before Bridgeport received national Title 1 recognition, Sattler and Hull had pledged to their staff that if they followed the school improvement plan, Bridgeport would win this award.

Steve Pointer met similar success at the high school. Selected as the 2004 WSASCD Principal of the Year, Pointer’s leadership was instrumental in improving student achieve-

ment. He created advisories so that students could establish personal goals and teachers could discuss new instructional strategies. He introduced a mariachi band to attract Hispanic students to Bridgeport’s music program. Recognizing the need for alternative education, he opened two new learning centers: Aurora High School and Main Street Learning Center. The two alternative programs combined to graduate 24 students this past June, many of whom were former dropouts.

#### **It is Time to Chart a New Course**

The Bridgeport community is a living example of how an involved community with a pioneer spirit can change the face of education. Every child is important. Working together makes a difference. The school is the heartbeat of the community. It is up to me to make it happen. These four characteristics personify our pioneer spirit.

Reality, however, tells us that while pioneer spirit is a good thing, it is no longer enough. A new belief needs to be added. It is time to reach out to others for assistance because our needs are great. We need access to research-based instructional strategies that continue to emerge, leading to greater student performance. High quality professional development and focused classroom instruction are necessary. Strategies to meet adequate yearly progress and the mandates of *No Child Left Behind* require technical assistance that Bridgeport is unable to provide for itself. In addition, expertise is needed to identify, recruit and train newly emerging leaders from the Hispanic community. As pioneers in the school improvement process, it is time to chart a new course.



Two educational themes will be explored as we solicit guidance in our new course of action. The first will meet the needs of under-challenged students and the second will expand our connection with the Hispanic community. When a school reaches outside of its community, it is always helpful to have friends. Dr. Louis Fox, Vice Provost of the University of Washington, and Lt. Colonel Consuelo Kickbush (U. S. Army retired) stepped forward to assist Bridgeport. The expertise that these two educators bring to Bridgeport will do much to help us realize our goal of serving the needs of all students and improving our links to the Hispanic community.

Dr. Fox was instrumental in Bridgeport's selection for a pilot project called, *The Digital Learning Commons*. The DLC, which is hosted by the U.W., is a clearing house of online courses. Hard-to-find courses that our rural school district was not able to provide can now be accessed through the internet. The online courses provide an alternative learning approach for students that do not perform in the traditional classroom setting, those

under-challenged and those seeking college credit while still in high school. Twenty Bridgeport students signed up to pilot DLC courses this fall. Our new partnership with the U.W. also created an opportunity this summer for 40 teachers and para-pros to receive training in the 5 core principles of reading.

Consuelo Castillo Kickbush's mission is to increase parental involvement in schools and promote family leadership within the Bridgeport community. Mrs. Kickbush, who hails from the barrios of El Paso, has proven to be a great role model for Hispanic families throughout the nation. Her training focuses "on providing immigrant/migrant Hispanic families, primarily of Mexican origin, with knowledge, tools and inspiration to help first and second generation children succeed in school and in life" (Kickbush, 2004). She will assist us in recruiting and training emerging leaders in an effort to involve them more directly in the educational lives of Bridgeport children.

In closing, our mission is to educate the pioneers of the next generation. Just as our forefathers stepped aside to let us lead, the time will

come for my generation to step aside and let the new leaders take us into the 21st Century. My hope is that the new generation will continue to cherish our pioneer values of community involvement even as they develop a new set of values. It would be my hope that one hundred years from now children will still be important, that working together will make things happen, that the school will be the heartbeat of the community and that if it is really going to happen, it is up to me. But I am not alone.



**Gene Schmidt** serves as the Superintendent of the Bridgeport School District. Gene was named 2002 Superintendent

of the Year by the Washington State Library Media Association and received the 2001 Learning Space Achievement Award for Administrators.

# For Kids' Sake

## Responsible Partnerships Between Faith-Based Organizations and Public Schools

BY TIM HERRON

While mixing public money and the work of faith-based institutions is a controversial topic in politics today, investment by various religious groups in the academic and social success of public school children is nothing new. Given this reality, it is relevant to ask what role faith-based

groups can and should play in supporting public education in Washington state today.

Public schools clearly do not exist in a vacuum. Educators are not alone in their concern for quality education nor in their ability to teach, influence and shape young minds and hearts. Public schools will be most successful in accomplishing their educational objectives when they understand those objectives as important but limited elements of a broader mission to create communities of social, economic, and spiritual wholeness. Children in such places, sensing hope and purpose for their lives

and knowing they are both supported and loved, are free to give their full attention to the adventure of learning.

Given this perspective, public schools simply cannot ignore the essential role that faith congregations play in vibrant communities and the potential that they possess as partners in increasing students' academic achievement. Likewise, people and institutions of faith must acknowledge that quality education for every young person is a fundamental ingredient of healthy communities and that public schools, as the only institutions charged with educating *every* stu-

dent, deserve our full attention and investment.

The Northwest Leadership Foundation (NLF) is a faith-based non-profit organization in Tacoma whose mission since 1989 has been to encourage, strengthen and develop leadership for the social and spiritual renewal of the city. Our commitment to creating vibrant communities by addressing both social and spiritual concerns with equal integrity has over the last seven years led us to support public education as one of our fundamental pursuits and to encourage partnerships between our city's faith community and Tacoma Public Schools, particularly in our most struggling urban neighborhoods. We believe that our experience in this endeavor provides evidence of the value of these partnerships and may serve as a model for other schools and communities.

Before describing NLF's work with Tacoma Public Schools, however, it is perhaps necessary to be very clear about some basic understandings that guide these partner-

ships. The programs described below represent neither a back-door effort on the part of faith-based organizations to “get religion into the schools” nor a subtle endorsement by the district of religious perspectives. As faith-based partners we are engaged in this work because we value the mission of public schools and have a common stake in the academic success of our community’s young people. While faith-based organizations are by definition religious, the programs described below both acknowledge and respect the fact that public schools must be places free of religious influence.

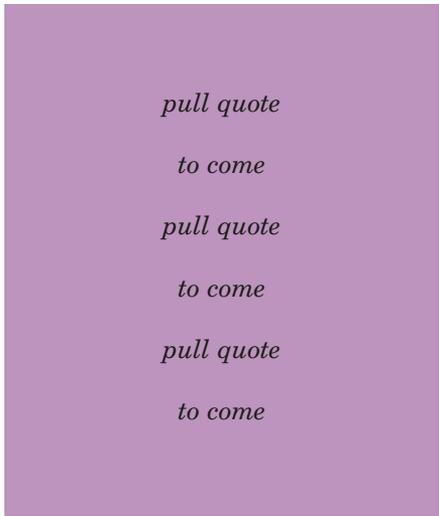
### **Equipping Neighborhood Churches to Provide Quality Academic Support**

We at NLF believe that neighborhood churches represent a tremendous untapped resource for supporting students’ academic success. Not only do congregations represent a huge pool of caring and motivated volunteers, churches and their members are very often strategically positioned in the heart of neighborhoods, forming a network of resources “just around the corner” from students and their families. Equipping neighborhood churches to deliver quality, innovative, neighborhood-based academic support is the goal of NLF’s Neighborhood Learning Center Network (NLCN).

Currently, churches in the NLCN run five after-school tutoring programs and three summer academic programs that serve over 300 students in Tacoma’s Hilltop neighborhood. Supervised by state-certified teachers, NLCN programs strive to deliver instruction aligned with district curriculum and state standards using effective pedagogical practices. In addition to running the after-

school programs, NLCN staff spend over 150 hours each week in schools leading reading groups, coordinating parents and volunteers, tutoring in classrooms and connecting with teachers and counselors.

District staff at both the building and administrative levels have welcomed and supported these efforts. Teachers, counselors, and principals refer students to the tutoring programs and with parent permission invite NLCN staff to participate in parent conferences and discipline



proceedings. Relevant district professional development opportunities are made available to NLCN staff and the district math facilitator trains NLCN staff on the district’s new math curriculum while regularly tutoring at the learning centers herself.

In a related venture, NLF is a partner in Vision Youth, a program of World Vision that funds and trains youth outreach workers in urban churches. In the six years since its inception, Vision Youth has trained nearly 25 indigenous leaders in Tacoma (most of whom grew up in

the neighborhoods they now serve) as mentors and advocates for the most at-risk and hardest to reach young people in our urban neighborhoods. These outreach workers spend a significant portion of their time volunteering in schools, where administrators and counselors often turn to them for help in addressing Becca-related attendance issues, translating for non-English speaking families, understanding and mediating gang issues, and encouraging students to follow through on behavior contracts.

Vision Youth outreach workers proved so effective in their advocacy in the schools that when the district, in collaboration with the police department, opened its pilot truancy center four years ago, it contracted with Vision Youth to deliver a mentoring component for students brought to the center for skipping school. NLF is currently working with Vision Youth churches to develop even more effective academic interventions for the at-risk students they mentor.

### **Organizing and Leading Community Collaborations**

While we believe that public schools and faith institutions are both critical elements in healthy communities, we are quick to acknowledge that there are many other resources that are equally essential. In addition to quality education, successful families need access to a wide range of other support services. Precisely because of its commitment to the holistic renewal of the city, NLF as a faith-based organization is particularly well positioned to organize and lead the kind of broad community collaborations that are required to transform our neighborhoods and schools.



In January 2003, NLF was awarded a five-year federal 21st Century Community Learning Center grant administered by Washington's Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). Directed by Kurt Miller, who also serves on the Tacoma school board, the TEACH initiative is taking a holistic approach to meeting the needs of students and families by organizing cohesive and comprehensive after-school and summer programs at the four primary schools that serve the Hilltop neighborhood: Stanley, Bryant, and McCarver Elementary Schools and Jason Lee Middle School. Rather than creating new programming, however, the TEACH initiative instead has developed a format by which more than 35 organizations that were already serving students at these schools have come together to coordinate and strengthen their offerings while expanding the number of students they serve.

In their first full year, TEACH programs provided literacy, cultural and community awareness, arts education and academic programming to over 600 low-income students. A

brief sampling of offerings includes academic tutoring, environmental art, hip hop dance, Lego robotics, science explorations, book making, small group counseling, and physical fitness activities. TEACH delivers these and many more offerings by coordinating the efforts of diverse community organizations such as Metro Parks, Tacoma Children's Museum, The Urban League, MESA, 4-H, the Health Department, Hilltop Artists in Residence, local colleges and universities, and the local Boys and Girls Club.

In addition, TEACH facilitates monthly networking meetings for partner organizations to share ideas and resources, provides staff training opportunities, collects and distributes in-kind donations from local businesses, facilitates the hiring of college work-study positions, creates a variety of urban social work internships and provides resource referrals for school counselors and families.

#### **Responding Strategically to Community-Defined Needs**

Because of our strong relationship with schools and connectedness

to the urban community, NLF is often able to respond quickly and strategically when new opportunities arise to address community-defined needs. Over the past years, as NLCN staff and Vision Youth outreach workers have spent time in schools, one of the frustrating issues that they witnessed for both school administrators and families has been what to do with long-term suspended students. It is clear that students who create discipline problems at school do not benefit from being on their own at home for extended periods during their suspensions. Both common sense and district data suggest that after missing so much school without any intervention these students are unlikely to succeed upon their return and far more likely to be suspended again.

Aware of this dilemma, NLF was able to quickly develop an effective response when OSPI released a request for proposals to create programs that linked suspended youth with community service opportunities. The ProTeen initiative was developed as a one-year, pilot program funded by a Title IV Community Service grant to address this pressing need through a partnership between NLF, Vision Youth, and two other faith-based community organizations that provide youth mentoring: Club Friday and Hilltop Health Ministries.

Specifically, ProTeen offers a school coordinator who provides immediate intervention on-site as principals are preparing to long-term suspend students, a resource coordinator who performs comprehensive assessments of suspended students and creates transitional action plans, and an individual

mentor for each program participant. The program then provides accountability to ensure each student completes 10 hours of community service; advocacy for counseling, tutoring and other mental health or educational needs; and follow up with students, parents, and school staff to make sure that the student makes a smooth transition from suspension back to school.

### **Education as an Investment in Leadership**

In light of our organizational mission, NLF views education as a means by which the next generation of community leaders are equipped to serve the city. College education is a powerful component in the development of community leadership and yet too few students from ethnically diverse, low-income urban neighborhoods are earning college degrees. In addition to financial barriers, these students often face unique challenges of isolation when attending campuses that are profoundly different than their home communities. The Act Six Leadership and Scholarship Initiative was developed to address these challenges.

Act Six is a Christian leadership development and scholarship program that each year: (1) recruits and selects a diverse, multicultural cadre of approximately 10 of Tacoma's most talented urban student leaders; (2) intensively trains this group of students for nine months, equipping them to support each other, succeed academically and become servant leaders and active agents of change on the college campus; and (3) sends the team to Whitworth College in Spokane for four years of fully funded education at one of our

country's most respected Christian liberal arts colleges.

A key component of the initiative has been our strong relationships with public school teachers, counselors, and administrators around the city who help to identify strong applicants and assist them in the application process. With two cadres of students on the Whitworth campus and the selection of a third underway, Act Six has proven tremendously successful in selecting, training, and retaining some of our city's brightest leaders who are already making a significant impact on the Whitworth campus and in their Tacoma neighborhoods.

### **Advisory Board**

One of the keys to our success in navigating the often uncharted waters of partnership between public schools and the faith community has been the faithful support of a committed and talented education initiatives advisory board that represents a broad range of constituencies important to our work. Currently, our advisory board represents teachers, top-level school district administrators, pastors, university education faculty and administration, ethnic community leaders and directors from key partner organizations. This table of diverse voices has proven to be a critical place where trust can be established between partners as we together identify needs, develop ideas, recognize potential pitfalls, refine vision and forge partnerships.

### **Common Grace**

The term *common grace* is often used by theologians to describe the good things that bless and sustain all of humanity, regardless of one's faith or creed—things like sunshine

and rain, food to eat and meaningful work. Amidst the flurry of all NLF's educational partnerships and programs we have witnessed not only schools and students becoming more successful, but also an outpouring of common grace expressed in a broad and renewed sense of community vitality. So many people and organizations in our communities both care about and depend on the education of our young people. Our hope at NLF is that our success in engaging both the public schools and the faith community can serve as a demonstration both to other faith organizations and to schools and districts around the state that this kind of partnership is an important and powerful tool in increasing academic achievement while building a more vibrant and life-filled community for everyone.

*You can learn more about the work of the Northwest Leadership Foundation at [www.northwestleadership.org](http://www.northwestleadership.org).*



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# Social Promotion Versus Retention

## A Second View

BY JULIETTE HOWARD

Many educators across the country must face the difficult question as each year ends: Should we retain students who are under-performing, or should we promote them to the next level? In its extreme version, the fear is that certain students can sit all year long doing next to nothing,

while their teachers flail around seeking the key to their potential, and still manage to make it to the next grade level. Meanwhile, frustrated high school teachers assess incoming freshmen and wonder how they ever made it to high school when they cannot read or write. Many teachers agree that “social promotion” is a disgrace to our educational system and the hard work they put in year after year. There are many educators, however, who believe that the simple “solution” to this dilemma — more aggressive retention policies — creates more problems than it solves. Is there a middle ground? If

social promotion is unacceptable, then what are appropriate alternatives for those students who do not meet the standards?

The term “social promotion” is a negative term created by advocates of stricter retention practices, and has served many a politician in his or her drive to “clean up our schools”. Students are said to be socially promoted when keeping them with their age group trumps a rigorous assessment of whether they have met the academic standards for their grade level. This issue has been and continues to be a major area of concern for educators, parents and students, as well as the

broader community. Indeed, many school districts across the nation are attempting to remedy the problem, demanding minimal competency testing in order for students to pass to the next level. The press and the public have paid a great deal of attention to these districts’ efforts to “get tough,” but simply calling an end to this practice is not enough. Research indicates that there needs to be alternatives to social promotion beyond testing students and putting them through another year similar to the one they just failed. As Rogalski & Jacoby (2000) report, “Neither social promotion nor retention at grade level address [students’] emotional, social, or academic needs, so we have to come up with solutions that make this difficult decision unnecessary.” (p. 22). Effective alternatives are essential in order to prepare students for the academic skills they should be expected to master.

### Alternatives to Social Promotion

If social promotion is not as successful as parents and teachers

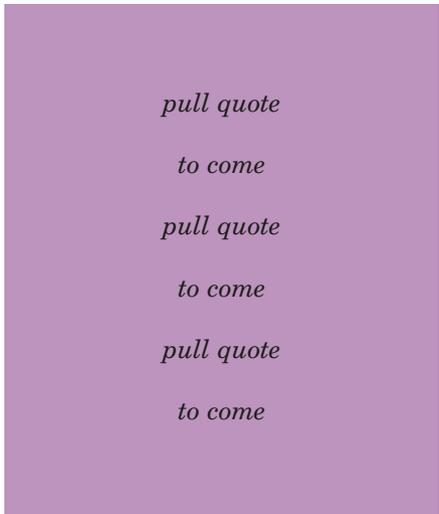
hoped it would be, and the common-sense knowledge that merely repeating a grade and expecting different results is not realistic, then what is next? What do *teachers*, as opposed to politicians, see as appropriate alternatives to social promotion? This question has been on my mind for a few years, and I recently decided to survey the group of middle-school teachers with whom I work. I wanted to assess not only their attitudes about social promotion, but also what they believed to be the most desirable solutions. None of the teachers I surveyed found any appeal at all in the notion that students are always better off with their age group. Among the handful of alternatives I proposed to the staff in my survey, retention, “looping,” multi-year assignments, after-school study programs, and summer school stood out as the most appealing of the alternatives.

**Retention With Individualized Assistance the Next Year**

Retention is most common “solution” for the child who has fallen behind. The problem is seen as residing within the child, rather than in school practices or in the competency of the teacher. When a child is retained, little seems to be done to make sure the experience is not merely a review of the year before (Darling-Hammond, 1998). It is this inactivity in the face of student failure that bothers teachers, not retention itself. Sixty-seven percent of the teachers I surveyed thought that grade retention should be the norm if a student failed core subject areas, but eighty-three percent of those surveyed agreed that an individualized education plan for the retained student is necessary to

meet his or her educational needs the next time around. Retention is an option only after a formal assessment of the students’ academic strengths and weaknesses. Once this information is obtained and analyzed, then an educational plan to focus on the trouble spots and reinforce the child’s strengths can be initiated. A child left to simply repeat a grade is a child being set up to fail again.

A role model for this alternative can be found at Long Beach Unified



School District in California, which has set up a plan for those students who consistently failed middle-school courses. The teachers and administrators met several times and ultimately decided that “... retention programs would not be a repeat of services but provide a significantly different academic experience for retained children; multiple measures, based on proficiency with content standards, would be used for retention criteria; and, interventions would be prescribed at key, non-retention grades to ensure all children would have the opportunity

to attain grade-level standards” (Devries & Cohn, 1998, p.24). The district has set up checkpoints at specific grade levels, from kindergarten on. In the 8th grade (a critical retention checkpoint), a student demonstrating academic failure at the end of the school year will be assigned to a year-long academy (Long Beach Preparatory Academy), which is intense and targeted toward his or her individual needs. If, at the end of this year the student is successful, then they will be allowed to move on to high school.

**Multi-Year Assignment or Looping**

Thirty-three percent of the teachers I surveyed thought “looping” would reduce student failure. Looping occurs when students stay with their teachers for more than one year, so that teachers have the opportunity to get to know the child’s personality and recognize the type of learner he or she is. As Reynolds, Barnhart & Martin (1999) report, many children these days carry emotional baggage arising from divorce, violence, poverty, abuse, or some combination of these problems. They go on to suggest that in a multi-year environment, a strong relationship with a teacher can be a powerful stabilizer in a child’s life. This opportunity also allows the *family* and the teacher to form bonds that are typically difficult in a one-year setting. The consistency of such a learning environment might just be what the struggling or at-risk student may need in his or her life.

**After-School Study Programs**

Establishing an after-school program that gives students resources, such as computers, dictionaries, and encyclopedias, as well as a quiet

place to work, can also make “the difference” in students’ lives. Sixty-five percent of those surveyed agreed that these types of programs could reduce the rate of failure by reinforcing basic skills and providing resources to help students succeed in class. Currently, schoolwork generated from a computer seems to be the norm in most schools. I have heard many teachers tell their students to have assignments typed and ready to turn in by the following day. While many families own computers, a significant number do not, or they might own one that isn’t functional or is without a printer. Students who face classroom expectations they cannot meet feel defeated from the outset. However, when after-school programs are created that give students access to reference materials in a library, as well as computers with working printers, and two to three educated adults ready and willing to help, success might be around the corner for otherwise struggling students.

St. Peter Middle School in Stevens Point, Wisconsin, faced the dilemma of what to do with failing students. They created what they called the Meaningful After-School Study Hour (MASH) program, which runs on Tuesdays and Thursdays for one hour. The St. Peter MASH program was staffed by two teachers, a university volunteer, a senior citizen volunteer, and a parent volunteer. Components of this program include learning organizational skills, setting study goals and having a structured and safe learning environment (Rogalski & Jacoby, 2000). When teachers assess students, it is important for them to become as aware as possible of the resources available to each student.

While one student in the class might have internet access and a top-of-the-line computer set up, the child next to him or her might not even have a safe, quiet place to read a book. After-school programs like MASH can give struggling students the extra break they need to turn things around.

### Summer School

Seventy-two percent of those surveyed agreed that summer school for failing students can also be an appropriate intervention. Long Beach Unified school district’s program requires that if the student does not demonstrate grade-level proficiency by the end of the summer tutorial, then the student will be retained (Devries and Cohn, 1998). Other programs that I have become familiar with are less aggressive, and require that students go to summer school for about six weeks to work in their specific area of academic concern. Regardless of how the student does, he or she is allowed to move on to the next grade. In some school districts, students can fail core classes *and* summer school and still be promoted to the next level. As long as this occurs, we are going to face major problems getting these students to succeed in high school. Effective summer school programs can be appropriate alternatives to social promotion as long as students are held accountable for their learning.

### Other Alternatives at a Glance

Other alternatives presented in the survey were peer tutoring and assigning credits to courses (essentially having “graduation” requirements, as practiced in high schools). An overwhelming 72% thought that assigning credits at the middle school level would reduce the rate of

failure. The rationale here is that the way things are now, students realize they can fail and still be moved on to high school; however, if credits are assigned and a specific amount are needed to move through middle school to high school, then more students will take school seriously. The use of peer tutors is already popular in many schools. Forty-four percent of those surveyed thought that peer tutoring could reduce the failure rate. Sometimes a student will respond more positively to a peer explaining a concept than he or she does with a teacher. I can remember peer tutoring twenty years ago in the area of reading. Three times a week I would go to a classroom (usually with younger students) and read with a child who was having problems. This turned out to be successful for both of us - for me in that I realized my calling to become a teacher, and for my “student” whose reading improved a great deal over our many sessions.

### Conclusion

Research shows that we need to offer appropriate alternatives to social promotion. It is unfair to move a child up through the grades when he or she is not demonstrating competency. This will only set the child up to fail later on in school, thereby leaving him or her with a sense of confusion and failure. A personal experience I recently had with my son more than proves my point. My son received a B+ in 4th grade math. I was so happy for him that I went out to buy him math workbooks for the summer to keep his mind fresh. Imagine my surprise when I realized that my son had no idea how to multiply. He was frustrated; I was frustrated. How could this have

happened? How could he be given a grade he did not deserve and be pushed up to the fifth grade? After a talk with his former teacher, I found out that she knew he was having problems, but did not want to discourage him by giving him a bad grade. I was astonished that it did not occur to her the disservice she had done to my son. Had it not occurred to her that the discouragement will come when he is sitting in a fifth grade class and has no idea what to do?

Not all teachers think this way. The survey I conducted proves that teachers agree that alternatives are needed so students who are not making the grade can succeed. How

marvelous it would be if kids had a positive attitude about school because they were successful! When a teacher notices academic difficulty and can steer the student in the direction of success by providing alternatives for achievement and “demanding” that the child meets them, then the teacher has truly served the student. Social promotion hurts the student, as does retention unaccompanied by any creative interventions. When we start holding students accountable for their learning and providing alternatives when they stumble, struggling students will begin to succeed and to find school a happier place as a result.

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COMING UP

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Curriculum in Context

JOURNAL OF THE WASHINGTON STATE ASSOCIATION FOR SUPERVISION AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

SPRING / SUMMER 2005

# Stepping Up

School Leadership, School Shootings, and the Idea of “Captaincy”

BY AL FEIN

David Whyte (2001), in his book, *Crossing the Unknown Sea*, describes two sea captains with whom he sailed. One, who he highly esteemed, was always alert and frequently appeared on the deck to check conditions; the second captain, who was less vigilant, had once slept while the

ship had slipped its anchor and drifted dangerously toward the rocky shore. Whyte initially judged the second captain as almost criminally neglectful, especially when compared to the standard set by the first captain. Such behavior was inconsistent with Whyte’s notion of the role of captain. *Captaincy*, according to Whyte, is an inner sense of responsibility for the welfare of the ship (organization). Whyte describes how he came to realize that his initial judgment of the second captain allowed him to blame the captain while holding himself blameless. He recognized that he and other

crewmembers also failed to exercise *their* captaincy.

In *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, Heifetz (1994) states that traditional views of leadership must be challenged because “those who consider themselves “not leaders” escape responsibility for taking action, or for learning how to take action, when they see the need. In the face of critical problems, they say, ‘I’m not a leader, what can I do?’” (p. 20). Heifetz seems to echo Whyte’s notion of captaincy—that all members of the crew (organization) are responsible for its well-being. Therefore, captaincy is as much a *disposition* as a position.

## **Dangerously Close to Rocky Shores**

Schools in America have experienced their own version of drifting dangerously toward rocky shores through incidents of school violence. The 1999 shootings at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado may be the most widely known case, but most Americans can probably recall others: Frontier Middle School in Moses Lake, Washington in 1996; Pearl High School in Pearl, Mississippi in 1997; Heath High School in West Paducah, Kentucky in 1997; Westside Middle School in Jonesboro, Arkansas in 1998; Thurston High School in Springfield, Oregon in 1998; Heritage High School in Conyers, Georgia, in 1999; Santana High School and at neighboring Granite Hills High School in suburban San Diego in 2001, to name a few. Less high profiled, but nonetheless equally disturbing, acts or threats of violence continue to occur in schools.

I studied the experiences of school leaders where school shootings occurred at four sites in North America (Fein, 2001; 2003). Before beginning to research leaders’ expe-

riences of school shootings, I assumed my research participants would be superintendents, principals and other administrators. They were. However, often the name of a counselor or teacher was mentioned by these formal leaders as key contributors in their districts during and after the shooting incident. It was evident that counselors and teachers also served in leadership roles in school shooting cases. I therefore included them as equal participants in the study. The notion of captaincy—the sense of contribution and responsibility for the organization that lives within its members—was manifested by all of the men and women whose stories I was privileged to hear. Through their actions, these individuals, many of whom did not hold positions of formal authority, acted out their sense of captaincy through acts of leadership

### **Crashing on the Rocks**

In Whyte's story of the second captain, the ship did not run aground. An alert crewmember sounded the alarm and averted disaster. Schools such as Columbine High School, Frontier Middle School, Pearl High School, Heath High School, Westside Middle School, Thurston High School, Heritage High School, Santana High School and Granite Hills High School were not as fortunate. They did crash on the rocks. School shootings significantly impacted these communities, including its leaders.

Shock and denial were characteristic initial responses reported by all of the individuals I interviewed. A superintendent, who was informed about the shooting by his secretary when he arrived at his office "was thinking and praying that this was either a nightmare or that [the secretary] had something wrong and

maybe she just didn't understand or something." A counselor reported thinking, "This is just a really bad joke. [A school shooting] couldn't have happened here." A teacher interviewee described walking into the classroom where several individuals had been shot, and although he was familiar with the smell of gunpowder, he initially conjectured that the gunshots he heard may have come from "the lights and the heat register." None of these educators could imagine the reality they later faced.

After the truth of the situation became undeniable, these individuals acted. Whether or not they held formal positions of authority, they acted from a sense of captaincy within them.

### **Counselor Captaincy**

I learned that some counselors—largely due to their training and expertise—became extremely influential in the days immediately following the shooting, sometimes emerging as something like CEOs of post-shooting organizing. At one site, the superintendent announced that he planned to close the schools the day after the shooting occurred. But a counselor advised against the decision, explaining that many children might be left in situations where no adults would be available to help them cope; the children would be cared for and be safer at school. The superintendent took her advice and schools operated the day after the shooting in this district. In another setting, a counselor refused to allow the district maintenance department to patch up the bullet holes immediately after the shooting. He reasoned, "We left the bullet holes there for students. Some put their fingers in saying, 'I was here,' or 'That one came close.' Those kids needed to do that. I

told maintenance when it was time to patch them up." In yet a third situation, a counselor summarized his role: "I bore a lot of the weight of what was going on in the school [where the shooting occurred] and quite frankly, in the entire school district." Another described the "process" for selecting the leader of the district counseling response team:

I arrived right after the shooting. There were still bodies on the ground. We got everything under control and got the children home and I went up to the superintendent and said, "You have got to put someone in charge of this." He pointed his finger at me and said, "You're in charge."

Thrust into positions of responsibility, these individuals felt alone. They worried about making mistakes and they felt the weight of leadership. One counselor described what he referred to as the "boy-on-a-bike-syndrome" to characterize the personal cost of crisis intervention and the need for a team approach under circumstances such as a school shooting:

A boy is riding his bike and he falls and scrapes his knee. He gets up and sees three or four people looking at him; often he won't cry. He will get on his bike. He will peddle home as fast as he can, and when he sees his mother at the door, then he cries. So the boy-on-the-bike syndrome is what happens [to counselors] in schools. Teachers will often hold it together. Students even will hold it together, if they are being informed that the counselors and the crisis response team are on their way. But once we enter into the school, then, like the boy on the bike, there is this invisible, yet tangible transfer of power from the teachers onto our shoulders.

What this individual did not say directly, but which may have occurred, was that the same trans-

fer of power described above also occurred from formal leaders to counselors.

As leaders in post-shooting efforts, school counselors acted in administrative roles and were forced to make decisions they would not normally have made—sometimes with very few, if any, structures in place to address issues and questions that arose. For example, the need for counselors after the shootings far exceeded the school district's resources, yet there were no established guidelines or qualifications for bringing in outside counselors to serve students and staff, and no screening procedures. Some outside counselor volunteers had no experience with children; some clergy who volunteered to serve as counselors had no counseling credentials and/or subtly imposed their particular religious perspectives on the victims. There were no protocols to consult, no policies or guidelines in place. One "Counselor CEO" said, "We had nothing. We started at zero. Nothing. And I never felt so alone in my life." Another counselor described the structure that emerged at her site:

I describe it as a kind of octopus with ?\* at the center. There were several people who were like the tentacles. I was one of those people. We basically did the planning process. They [formal leaders] relied on our expertise. Those of us who were the arms of the octopus were not directly involved in facilitating groups, rather, we just kind of moved around to make sure things were getting done.

Counselors' training and expertise proved invaluable to superintendents and principals who were overwhelmed with issues they, too, had never before faced, and who had no way to make sense of their own normal responses while trying to main-

tain "proper leader demeanor." Because of their training, counselors often had a clearer vision of what was needed than did district administrators. One stated that his role and that of the team was to try to mitigate the trauma response by allowing victims "to ventilate some of their feelings in a safe environment." Another explained that he saw his role as "mega-family therapy. I applied system principles from the family and broadened it to the school and to the community at large."

Counselors' captaincy is reflected in the experiences described by the men and women I interviewed. These people also described many examples of teacher's captaincy.

### **Teacher Captaincy**

Teachers at shooting sites also assumed captaincy in many ways - comforting students, visiting victims' families, leading debriefing sessions with their students—all while they themselves were also hurting. One teacher made a particularly significant contribution at his school. His story, which began when he entered the classroom where the armed shooter was present, captures the essence of captaincy.

I [went] behind a big oak desk. Immediately to my left was the teacher and she was obviously dead. Her hands were frozen and she had the eraser in one hand and the marker in the other. The kids in the classroom were there on the floor absolutely chalky white. I noticed a student lying on the floor who I'm sure died immediately. One girl had been shot in the chest and was in a great deal of pain, so I asked [the shooter] to let me help her outside the classroom. Then I went back into the classroom and took up my position at the far side of the desk. We were talk-

ing back and forth. One of the girls, who I knew was diabetic, was one of those that were really white. Eventually, the shooter let me take her out. I came back in again and took my position up in front. A third student had been shot—had a tremendous wound—and the shooter agreed again to let me take him out, but he was so large and there was so much blood I couldn't physically move him. Two other boys helped me to kind of drag him out of the classroom. One of the boys was out of the classroom enough that the police grabbed him and didn't let him go back in, but the other boy did go back with me. [Later, the shooter] motioned me to come forward. I knew it was my best chance to take him, so I charged him and grabbed his hand—on the gun, I think—and kind of pinned him up against the wall with my body.

This teacher recognized that he "did something heroic," and when I asked him to reflect on his experience, his response articulated the essence of captaincy. He spoke about his desire to "take care of things," and though he feared for his own life, he described his sense of duty "to make [the situation] better because I'm the teacher; I'm the caregiver. I am a responsible person." He described how he "saw a problem" and recognized that he was "the guy that got to (sic) take care of this." He related that he did not know if he would find an opportunity to intervene, but he knew if he did not act—or, in my words, exercise his sense of captaincy—the opportunity might be lost.

### **The Costs of Captaincy**

One does not have to subdue a threatening student or head a crisis team to manifest captaincy. There are far less extreme ways that educators might see a need and take action.

Indeed, many such examples of captaincy occurred in the days following these crises, and do so every day in schools around the world. There is personal satisfaction in captaincy, but costs accompany captaincy as well. In the case of school shootings, the costs were considerable.

A counselor commented that administrators in her district “were going through the motions, trying to do what they had to do, but feeling a lot of pain and not expressing it because they had to be strong.” A teacher described her feelings after she had spoken about her experiences at conferences: “Some of the people who attend our presentations are voyeuristic. I’m concerned that we are not exploited.” Yet another counselor said, “We were all impacted. We were all traumatized, but at a much lighter rate than the kids.”

Both formal and informal leaders reported symptoms that are commonly associated with post-traumatic stress disorder. The most commonly reported physiological response to the shootings by all participants was sleep disorders. A superintendent described a dream in which he was unable to escape approaching cars. One counselor who headed the crisis team in his school district described his lack of sleep during the first few days after the shooting:

My sleep was four hours max a night, for that week—interrupted sleep. I would wake up, you know, a half-hour after falling asleep, panicking over something I forgot to do. Literally, I was hyper-aroused for seven days.

Counselors were typically more aware than others of their own susceptibility to secondary trauma—a result of contact with individuals who are traumatized—but that their desire to help victims trumped per-

sonal risks. Their sense of captaincy may have become a personal liability; often they did not seek counseling for themselves. Most formal leaders reported “not having time” for debriefing sessions. Like formal leaders, as one counselor stated, “[we] did not debrief as much as we should have.”

Many of the leaders with whom I spoke carry scars from the shootings. One told me, “Emotionally, I am fine.” But then he described an experience that suggested otherwise:

There’s a memorial case in the school. I walk in there and see some of the things in there. That bothers me, so I don’t look at it even now. When I get in the front door, I just avert my head because it bothers me. I don’t know why, but it does.

When they were able to draw upon their knowledge and expertise, counselors could access resources that were not available to formal leaders. One counselor CEO described looking at himself as his own “private science experiment.” As he experienced several days of hyper-arousal, he was able to look at his own experience and to make sense of it:

Is this happening to me because I am weak or because I am going nuts, or is this just a normal human reaction? The crux of crisis intervening (sic) is to try to normalize some of what victims experience. I was able to naturalize my own experience as well. At that time I realized that I was probably under more pressure than most folks, so I knew I was okay.”

#### **“We Sure Did a Lot Out There”**

As stated above, I had to redefine “leader” in order to include individuals who, acting on their sense of captaincy, took on leadership roles during and in the aftermath of school shootings, but who did not hold formal leadership positions. They saw a need

and took action. Most organizational members acknowledge that formal leaders are responsible for actions that solve problems, while those who consider themselves “not leaders” may feel free from the responsibility to take action to solve problems. Heifetz (1994) suggests that both formal and informal leaders are needed to solve *adaptive* problems—the type of problems for which no known solutions exist and which require new learning by members of all levels in the organization. Certainly school shootings may be classified as adaptive problems. The causal factors are complex and the uniqueness of each event makes learning central to post-crisis recovery efforts.

Fortunately for the four sites I studied, both formal and informal leaders were present. One counselor’s words captured what may have been true for all of the men and women who recognized and responded to their own sense of captaincy in the days following the school shootings. His words capture both the horror of such extreme circumstances and of the tremendous contributions that were made: “That was the worst three weeks of my life, but it was rewarding. We sure did a lot out there.”

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# The President's Page

BY HELENE PAROFF



**IT IS 9:00 P.M.** on the night before school starts here in Spokane. Not a creature is stirring — not even my 14-year-old son Andrew who will start high school in the morning. Phone calls, e-mails, instant messages, and text messages have all gone back and forth among friends. His brown bag lunch is waiting in the refrigerator. The new binder is ready to go in his backpack by the front door.

For nine years of Andrew's life, I have greeted the beginning of a new school year wearing my "parent hat" alongside my "educator hat." Now, in the blink of an eye, my son will be walking across the stage, receiving his diploma and going on to the next part of his journey. He is a member of the infamous class of 2008. My husband and I have attended numerous information sessions describing the graduation requirements for the class of 2008. We are eagerly awaiting the results of the 8th grade science WASL.

These are the times when my two worlds collide. Or do they? I admit I hope Andrew has met or exceeded the standard in science and that meeting the graduation requirements is something he does with ease. Whether you are a parent or an educator, isn't this what we want for every child?

I can still vividly recall how Andrew looked on his first day of kindergarten. He greeted the day with great excitement and enthusiasm. As a parent, I want nothing more than for this magic to stay alive. As an educator, I want nothing more than to understand what creates and sustains the magic, and to learn how to "bottle" it and pass it along for all children.

Then I take a different trip down memory lane, to my first day as a teacher and how I greeted the day with hope and enthusiasm — and, truth be told, quite a bit of anxiety and worry! I sit here reflecting on what it took to allow me to feel ready to meet the challenges of teaching junior high students with learning disabilities and emotional disturbances in a self-contained classroom. Passion kept me coming back day after day when I felt I had few skills to draw from, but it was more than passion that gave me the knowledge and skills to meet those challenges.

This is why WSASCD is such an important association. I believe deeply in the importance of what we do in education, but we cannot do this work alone. Fortunately, there is no reason why we would have to. Organizations like WSASCD provide the most up-to-date, cutting-edge information about best practices in education. I referred above to Andrew's use of technology to communicate. We

have come a long way since I began my career! WSASCD is a main source of connecting to other professionals through the use of technology, but also through those face-to-face interactions with our colleagues and recognized educational leaders. We can never underestimate the power of networking and learning from each other. Our passion and persistence along with our knowledge and skills is what makes schools work for everybody's Andrew!

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*Helene Paroff is assistant superintendent of ESD 101 and president of WSASCD.*

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