DIGITAL
LEADERSHIP

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INTERVIEW | 3

AN INTERVIEW WITH ERIC SHENINGER

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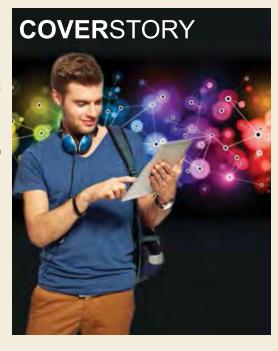
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formerly *The Journal*

COLUMNS

A message from

Frank Sutliff

SAANYS President
2013-14

Digital Leadership

As an avid user of Twitter and an occasional user of Facebook, I am pleased to see the attention to "digital leadership" in this issue of *Vanguard*. In a world where one is constantly connected, it is important that we as school administrators be as current as possible with the changing technologies and the effects, both positive and negative, that social networking has on our jobs.

In a speech I gave recently to a group of parents and educators, I mentioned the Twitter feed of Carol Burris in particular. Dr. Burris, last year's winner of the SAANYS NYS High School Principal of the Year award, has helped to give me a crash course in educational reform. For example, when appended to stories of educators helping children, Twitter hashtags such as #evaluate provide a good audience to those interested in the many positives occurring in public education.

Having recently heard Eric Sheninger speak, I find similarities to my own district concerning the cell phone issues that he describes in our cover story. Like Mr. Sheninger, I ended our nonsensical ban on cell phones early on and found the results to be positive. In fact, the instances of cyberbullying declined dramatically as "prohibition" ended and a more enlightened policy stressing personal responsibility took effect.

In our second feature story, Ms. Smithgall discusses the many opportunities for digital learning in our changing world including, but not limited to, the blended classroom and flipped learning. With the ready availability of mobile devices, the possibilities are endless and open up opportunities to make learning 24/7; this learning is then not confined by the physical limitations of the building.

I hope that you will enjoy this issue of *Vanguard,* as technology touches each of us every day whether it is in our professional or personal life. The learning culture that is created by these additional approaches can open up many opportunities for all learners.

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DIGITAL **LEADERSHIP:**

An interview with digital leader Eric Sheninger

By Peter DeWitt, EdD

When did the influx of ideas surrounding 21st century skills begin? Presently, it seems as though **there has been an explosion of technology use in the classroom over the past five years**, but if we really think hard, it's been happening for a while. It just seems as though the discussion around what to do with it is more prevalent than ever.

Over the years, many schools have increased their technology tools. They have Smartboards, laptops, netbooks, and tablets at their disposal, but did that mean technology was in those classrooms? Just because classrooms were equipped with these tools didn't mean that they were being used to their fullest potential. Sometimes a room equipped with the most innovative tools symbolized forward thinking, and other times it symbolized an opportunity lost, because teachers really just wanted an overhead projector and a VCR.

The excuses for this lack of use are plentiful. Some teachers and school leaders don't use technology because they didn't get professional development, while others don't know where to begin. In 2014 as some school leaders debate one-to-one classrooms, others still ban sites like YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. The question, why use technology? still comes up on a daily basis. Is it a tool? Is it a shiny new toy used to impress visitors? Is it a piece of expensive furniture, or worse, does it just provide a larger screen to show movies before vacations begin?

Michael Fullan has written a lot on the topic of drivers. What drives innovation and change? Fullan argues against using technology for technology's sake, and asks that schools focus on good pedagogy instead as the driver that will create change. In his new best-selling book, *Digital Leadership: Changing Paradigms for Changing Times* (Corwin Press, 2014), Eric Sheninger agrees with Fullan, and provides the "soup to nuts" approach for shepherding modern pedagogical shifts as a digital leader. *Digital Leadership* is for *any* administrator at *any* point in their digital journey.

Like many of us, though, Eric did not always embrace technology or connected learning. Sheninger said,

> "I was as stubborn as they come when it came to allowing the use of social media and student-owned technology in my school and worked very hard to ensure that they didn't surface in learning environments. My thought process was based on the perception that these types of technologies were bad and had no place in education as well as a lack of true understanding on how these New Age tools could enhance learning."

Like many of us, though, Eric had a few aha moments that involved students.

> "Two experiences changed everything for me in 2009. The first was a student who congratulated me for making a jail out of a school when I took his cell phone away from him. Then, reeling from the fact that I was failing my students, I happened to read an article about Twitter in my local newspaper, the *Staten Island Advance*. It was at this time that I decided to use Twitter to communicate more effectively with my stakeholders."

Eric, who was named the National Association of Secondary School Principals' Digital Principal of the Year in 2012, began watching more than participating.

> "Over the next couple of months I found myself lurking and learn-

"...the blinders came off when my learning in social media spaces sparked inquiry and conversation leading to a new vision for teaching, learning, and leadership."

ing more than I was communicating. This behavior shift was the catalyst for my transformation as the blinders came off when my learning in social media spaces sparked inquiry and conversation leading to a new vision for teaching, learning, and leadership. This was when I realized that it was time to give up some control and trust both my students and teachers when it came to technology."

Over the past few years, Eric has not only embraced the digital world, he has used it to his school's advantage, and *Digital Leadership* is his way to help other educators look at technology in another, more positive, way. With his book, Sheninger took a methodical approach to making sure he was bringing in educators at every level. For those new to technology, *Digital Leadership* can help with your approach. If a leader is progressive and innovative already, Sheninger stretches your thinking and provides a list of new tools you may never have heard of in your digital journey, but he didn't originally have that goal in mind.

> "I really didn't plan the book to meet this need. Believe it or not, it just evolved that way. As I began to write about my work, and that of so many other incredible leaders whose stories are told in *Digital Leadership*, I began to think about choice and ownership. Just like in our schools, one of the major keys to sustainable change in learning and teaching is giving ownership to those stakeholder groups. As the manuscript began to flow I wanted any leader who read the book to identify where they were at in regards to each pillar and find either a natural

starting point or area to enhance/improve."

Digital Leadership is not a book you have to read from beginning to end. Eric wanted it to be used as a reference. He said,

"What I think I am most proud of is that a leader can essentially pick any one of the chapters relating to the Pillars of Digital Leadership to focus on without reading the entire book sequentially. In my opinion this really caters to the ownership piece above, increasing the chances of initiating sustainable changes leading to a transformation of professional practice."

THE PEDAGOGY OF **CONTROL**

This is where Sheninger and Fullan come together in their approach. It's about pedagogy and sound instructional practices. One of the areas where Eric is most vocal is regarding adult control and student autonomy. He says,

"For so long we have been made to believe that success in K-12 education relies on controlling learning environments, decisions, and initiatives. These components have been prevalent for over 100 years as we have worked extremely hard to preserve an industrialized educational model that is no longer relevant. What

Image credit: http://3.bp.blogspot.com

makes matters even worse now is the fact that federal and state mandates across the country further sustain a system based on control and compliancy."

Sheninger believes that all of this creates a fear among adults that is transferred onto students.

"Misconceptions and inaccurate perceptions drive educators and leaders to develop overbearing rules and policies that make students hate school. [see "Why Do Teens Hate School" on page 7.] I should know since I was the one leading this charge at my school."

These rules and policies aren't created to make students hate learning. However, they do cause students to become less engaged. They have to unplug for seven hours a day, not because they want to but because they are forced to.

Sheninger believes it happens because the adults who control the school environment don't have a good level of understanding when it comes to technology. Sheninger says,

"We fear what we don't know. What we don't know we don't value. Thus, we react in ways to sustain a system that has traditionally worked very well for us, but not today's student. The easy way out is to not trust our students so we don't have to worry about the what-ifs and unknowns."

Instead of controlling more, Eric believes we need to go in the opposite direction, because what we get out of it will be much more powerful.

"Giving up control and trusting our students are pivotal in creating a learning culture that is rele-

"The main point here is to create schools that mirror the dynamic, engaging world that our students reside in."

vant, meaningful, and applicable. The main point here is to create schools that mirror the dynamic, engaging world that our students reside in. By doing so we create an environment that they want to be a part of. Giving up control and trusting students, and staff for that matter, sets the stage for them to choose how they want to learn and with what tools to demonstrate learning. This leads to true ownership of learning, which could possibly be the most important attribute that schools should be imparting to students today."

LEADERSHIP **DEMANDS**

Today's demands on leaders are unlike anything they have ever experienced before. Where technology is concerned, there is so much noise that it's hard to keep up, and easier to try to ignore it all. Additionally, there are leaders who do not believe technology will change anything they do. Sheninger doesn't buy that excuse. He says,

"Leadership is no different today than it was years ago. The only difference is that style and focus need to change with the times if we are to accomplish the lofty task of preparing students for a dynamic world that is more social and connected as a result of technology. Digital leadership can thus be defined as establishing direction, influencing others, and initiating sustainable change through the access to information, and establishing relationships in order to anticipate changes pivotal to school success in the future. It requires a dynamic combination of mindset, behaviors, and skills that are employed to change and/or enhance school culture through the assistance of technology."

Time is often the element that leaders cite as the biggest reason why they haven't shifted their leadership style to include more innovative practices, such as social media. Everyone is too busy, and their plates are already full. Sheninger understands the element of time. "As a principal in a small school (650 students) I have to do it all. My duties include the majority of the teacher observations, master scheduling, budget creation, and classroom walk-throughs as well as attending meetings, athletic contests, and other school events. My point here is that my plate is as busy as that of any other practicing building leader. It is just the nature of our frenetic jobs. This is where many misconceptions and preconceived perceptions regarding social media come into play. Many leaders see this as just another thing to do that will add to their already jam-packed schedules. The truth though is that this is the farthest thing from the truth."

Eric goes on to say,

"For me and many other digital leaders we have found natural fits for the use of social media into many of our core responsibilities. This translates into not having to do more, but instead changing the way we have been doing things for years in a way that we become more effective and efficient. Digital leadership not only takes into account recent changes such as ubiquitous connectivity, open-source technology, mobile devices, and personalization, it represents a dramatic shift from how schools have been run and structured for over a century. What started out as a personal use of technology has become systemic to every facet of leadership. The Pillars of Digital Leadership provide the framework for any leader to begin this journey."

IN THE END

Many of us who consider ourselves connected educators talk frequently through e-mail, Twitter, and Facebook. We organize Google hangouts and Skype so we can share resources or just talk about the barriers we face as we push the envelope of digital learning. Those we connect with through social media become friends, and we meet up at conferences, or better yet, create our own edcamps so we can unify our collective voices.

Connecting through social media has helped us stretch our thinking, and we all share our favorite tools to use during our days that will enhance our leadership and learning practices. In *Digital Leadership: Changing Paradigms for Changing Times*, Eric collected stories for each chapter, and I'm proud to lend one of those stories to the book. When asked about his favorite tools, Eric said,

"This is a tough question as I have seen so many. In my book I highlight the work of several practitioners who not only talk the talk, but who also consistently walk the walk. Superintendent Pam Moran stands out as one of many leaders whose transparent style provide a glimpse into how to move a district forward in the 21st century. The work that she has collaboratively led with an array of stakeholders is providing leaders with ideas on how to reinvent learning spaces that work for kids. I love seeing and reading about the makerspaces in her district. If she wasn't a digital leader harnessing and leveraging social media to tell the story of the Albermarle School District, then many people wouldn't even know what was going on there."

Eric went on to focus on other familiar names and hashtags on Twitter.

"There are leaders like high school principal Jimmy Casas in Iowa who has created the #bettpride hashtag on Twitter. This is a fantastic example of using available technology for public relations and to create a positive brand presence. Then there is Tony Sinanis, the 2014 New York State Elementary Principal of the Year, who is constantly taking pictures and videos of his students

> "This translates into not having to do more, but instead changing the way we have been doing things for years in a way that we become more effective and efficient."

doing great work. To be honest, my answer does a disservice to so many leaders out there that have decided to take calculated risks and move beyond traditional comfort zones to utilize digital tools to do what they do better. If you want to see great examples of digital leadership, follow #digilead, #satchat, and #cpchat on Twitter and join the free Leadership 3.0 community at edweb.net."

I also asked Eric to provide his favorite go-to apps. He said, "Twitter – ever since the little blue bird started talking to me everything changed professionally. Some others are Zite, Instagram, Pinterest, Dropbox, Evernote, DocuSign, and Google Drive."

It's really important that we acknowledge the fact that our students live in a connected world. Those of us who are connected see the power in using social media and our devices to enhance our learning. It only makes sense that we should stop banning our students from having the same experiences. We need to allow our students more freedom, because with it, they can do extraordinary things. Perhaps if we allowed them to show us what they can do, those expensive technological tools that we see in our classrooms will not be used for showing movies, but used to enhance learning, on the part of the students and their teachers.
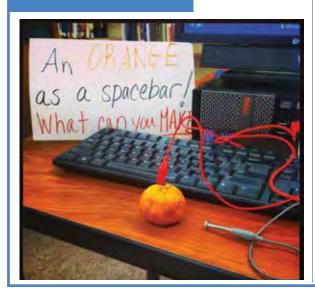
Find Eric at:
• www.pinterest.com/esheninger/
• Twitter: @NMHS_Principal

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New Milford H.S. Students Explore New Ways of Learning

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http://newyork.cbslocal.com/2014/02/27/new-milford-h-s-students-explore-new-ways-of-learning-with-librarys-makerspace/#.U2vGZX2Smg4.email

PETER DEWITT, EdD, is an independent education consultant and workshop facilitator working with schools around North America on creating inclusive school climates. He also focuses on teacher evaluation and is a Visible Learning trainer for John Hattie, director of research at the University of Melbourne (Australia). Peter is the co-chair of the National School Climate Council, which is the steering committee for the National School Climate Center, and the author of *Dignity for All: Safeguarding LGBT Students* (Corwin Press). His forthcoming books on school climate (ASCD) and flipped leadership (Corwin Press) will be released in the spring of 2014. He can be found at www.petermdewitt.com.

WHY DO TEENS Hate School?

Sarah Almeda

Student, artist, and philosopher

Teenagers hate school; everyone knows that! My name is Sarah Almeda; I'm a sophomore at New Milford High School, New Milford, New Jersey, and I love school! I'm sure that sounds strange to you, a high school sophomore who loves school…

But why do teens hate school? School is a place to learn new things, discover who you are, and make friends. School doesn't sound like a bad place – to a kindergartner! However, the amount of negativity on my Twitter feed is indisputable. Nobody wants to go to school.

Why? Here's one answer: the traditional education system seems to have at least 20 different methods for helping a student's self-esteem plummet.

School teaches children from a young age to measure self-worth with grades, athletic ability, test scores – and then proceeds to hang these on a wall. Might as well start early, right? These young, impressionable minds will compare themselves to each other for the rest of their lives!

Test scores don't accurately measure a child's potential for success in life, so why do school systems continue to foster that mindset? How can anyone be excited to go to a place that constantly reminds them of how he or she measures up to everyone else – and in many cases, how grim their future will be as a result?

If you happen to read my principal's blog (Eric Sheninger, @NMHS_Principal), you might have seen my guest post from a few months ago, where I referred to teenspeak as "that fictional language adults seem scared of." I was touching upon a major pet peeve I have regarding articles on the Internet with titles such as these: "Can you translate teenspeak?" "How to decode the signals teenagers are trying to send you!" "Understand the adolescent brain in 3 easy steps."

And then there's this poster, with the image of a cell phone along with the words, "Do you speak teen?" I have seen it in two places:

hanging in school, and posted on an Internet forum. It took me, with the collaboration of several teenagers, to translate it into English. I know I'm not a psychologist, or an expert of any kind, so I might not have a lot to back me up here… but it's my opinion that if there's another reason for students to dread school, it's because they feel their opinion is undervalued. Students believe they have no say in their own education.

Students don't want to be inspected, observed, translated, or dissected by psychologists and experts – they want to be listened to!

"But we are listening!" Perhaps the most important part of listening is creating an atmosphere that encourages students to be vocal. I could brag for ages about how great New Milford High School is – have you seen our 3-D printer? However, there's one simple thing that I feel doesn't get enough praise: our principal, Mr. Sheninger, keeps his office door open!

It's easy for anyone to pop his or her head in and say, "check this out!" or "do you think we could do this better?" Not to mention we're encouraged to e-mail or tweet, @NMHS_Principal whenever we want. And it's not just him, either.
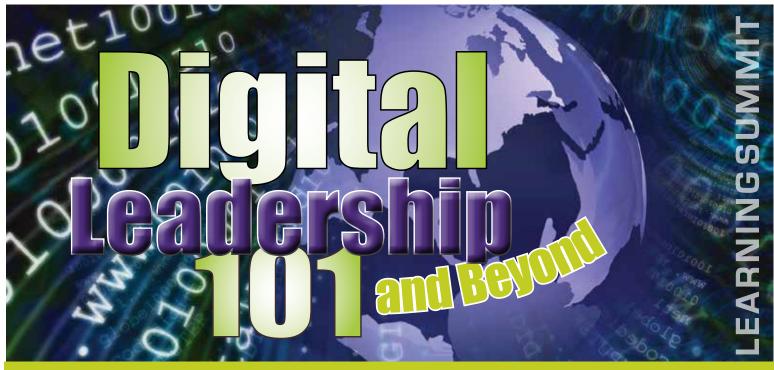
You may have heard of the awesome things happening in our library. Our Makerspace, for lack of a better term, is the bomb-diggity. We're prying apart computers, printing 3-D renovation plans, making toothbrush robots – yet my favorite part of the library is Ms. Fleming's open door and encouraging Twitter.

The connectivity at New Milford is invaluable. Our school's far from perfect, but there's an atmosphere here that encourages progress and really emphasizes the role students play in that progress.

Students want to come to a place that values learning, not grades; a place that encourages individual growth instead of rewarding cramming and cheating. Students want to know that someone's listening, because a student's voice is a powerful and necessary thing.

Students want to go somewhere where they can learn new things, discover who they are, and make friends, the way school sounded to them as kindergartners.

Teenagers hate school, everybody knows that – but they don't have to.

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– Victoria L. Day
Principal/Lead Learner East Side Elementary School, Gouverneur, NY and Digital 101 Syracuse participant

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CLASSROOMS

Enter the Digital World

By Kim M. Smithgall

It's 8:20 a.m. at Lancaster High School in western New York. Two dozen freshmen are making their way into Amy Balling's biology class. A few head to the lab tables and begin setting up microscopes and slides, while others go online to complete vocabulary puzzles and enter science discussion forums. Still another group checks on the tomato plants they've been growing, and the remaining students are taking notes as they view videos and take online exams. **Balling moves from group to group, guiding students in the blended learning activities**.

Move to a math class in the Monticello Central School District. The teacher has presented a math problem and students are busy using the iPads as slates to solve the problem. One student has found a completely different way to solve the problem compared with her peers and shares the solution with the class via Apple TV. Other students are anxious to share their work as well, showing all the steps involved.

This is not your dad's classroom. Teachers no longer stand at the front of the class and lecture to students who are sitting silently in symmetrical rows of desks taking notes.

Today's classrooms are dynamic and interactive environments characterized by an ever-growing arsenal of digital learning tools. And even within the dizzying array of new tech initiatives, New York's high-tech educators see some trends emerging.

BLENDED **LEARNING**

With its combination of online and classroom-based learning, Amy Balling's science classes are perfect examples of blended learning. "I have created an online component to our living environment [biology] class where my students can access all of the notes and instruction anywhere in the world that they have access to on the Internet. They not only have notes and videos of instruction, but they also have games and online simulations that help them review the material," Balling explained. Balling

creates many of the instructional videos viewed by the students. This hybrid approach has worked extremely well for Balling, who is a New York State Master Teacher. She started using it after seeing that some of her students were getting lost during class and/or having difficulty focusing. Balling said that blended learning allows students to work at their own pace. "They are able to obtain the same knowledge as their peers even if they are not in the same classroom or on the same assignment at the same time," she said. "Students who need extra time to write notes or process the information can take the time they need and don't have to worry about slowing down their classmates."

Balling also found that students who are shy about asking questions in class or participating in class discussions are very comfortable participating in online discussions. "I also like that the online review games can give the students instant feedback in a way that I couldn't possibly give in the past," she said.

FLIPPED **CLASSROOMS**

"Flipped" classrooms are often considered a subset of blended learning. In this case, students view lectures and review course materials online at home rather than receiving this information in a classroom setting. Once they enter the classroom, the time is used for class discussions; interactive, hands-on projects; and small-group work. Basically, students are experiencing deeper and more collaborative learning experiences during the school day in flipped classrooms.

MOBILE **LEARNING**

Mobile classroom environments incorporate portable devices into teaching and learning. "It looks different based on where you are," said Shelley Rossitto, executive director of instructional technology

> ## "I like to learn online because I don't 'zone out' while the teacher is talking."
> Melissa (periods 5 & 6)

and professional development in the Monticello School District. "This includes putting wireless in as far as we can and increasing access to mobile technology like iPads, tablets, and bring your own devices [BYOD]."

The internationally recognized NMC Horizon Report (2013), which examines emerging technologies, describes portable devices as "gateways to endless learning, collaboration, and productivity fostered by the Internet." Educators in Monticello and other districts have certainly found this to be the case, as they're continually discovering new ways to use devices to enhance instruction.

In one first-grade classroom, Monticello students used iPads to record and illustrate stories about healthy habits. Their older peers in high school chemistry classes find that the untethered nature of iPads allows them to succeed in a flipped classroom environment; one student recognized the value of this tool, saying she can better understand complex material because she is able to watch videos online at home and replay them as often as necessary. She also appreciates the ability to access her teacher when she needs questions answered.

Rossitto is thrilled with the iPad's educational possibilities, saying, "This personalizes learning. If a student is reading, he or she might get excited about a particular component and go onto the Internet and dig deeper into that topic. Other students might do something totally different, but whatever it is, it will help them build a relationship with that content."

Some Monticello teachers are also encouraging students to use their own phones and other equipment in classrooms under an emerging BYOD initiative. Other teachers are using

their iPads to participate in professional learning communities, where they can share and access materials to use in the classroom and connect with teachers around the corner and around the world.

The Highland Falls-Fort Montgomery Central School District has been using Nook Color tablet/e-readers in many classrooms. "This all started when one of our high school English teachers who was teaching British literature found that the vast majority of the texts that he was using were in the public domain, meaning they're free and could be downloaded from sites like Project Gutenberg," explained Andrea Tejedor, the district's director of innovation and instructional technology. "When he was ready for a new textbook, we diverted the textbook money to buy the new devices."

Students in the class are also able to download other educational resources provided by the teacher on his web pages, Tejedor said. The district is building on the success of the program and moving toward Nexus 7 tablets for students in upper grades, as the Nook's functionality is becoming somewhat limited as technology progresses. "We're repurposing the Nooks for elementary school students," Tejedor commented.

CLOUD COMPUTING AND **APPS**

Cloud-based tools are also among the more popular technology trends. Districts are opting to store data and back up e-mail and student database systems on external servers that can be accessed via an Internet connection (i.e., accessed on "the cloud"); instructional materials are stored in the same way, meaning they're always available to students and faculty. Districts can move away from purchasing large servers while also increasing students' access to educational content.

Google Chromebooks (similar to laptops) are specifically designed for cloud-based work and are becoming more prominent in K-12 settings due to their low cost and high functionality. So, too, is Google Apps for Education, which offers storage space, e-mail, calendar features, real-time document creation, and editing and more – all accessible from devices having Internet connectivity.

"We started using Google Apps for Education in the district this year," Tejedor said, adding that a technology leadership team considered the option for a few years. "We wanted students to have 24/7 access to their files. The reaction

has been great. Students like that they can get documents from school that they previously couldn't get and if there's an assignment that's shared, the teacher puts materials in a folder and the students can all access it. There are endless possibilities in terms of student collaboration."
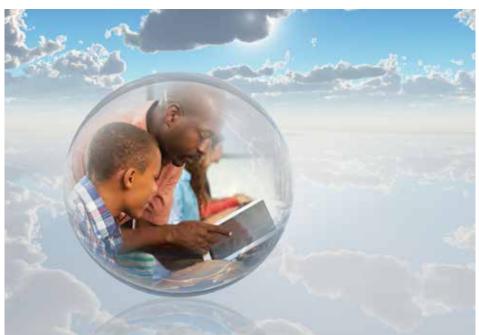
OPEN CONTENT AND **WEB-BASED MATERIALS**

Open educational resources (OERs) and web-based materials are trending in today's classrooms, as well. Web-based content that can be incorporated into lessons includes instructional materials posted on such video sites as Vimeo and TeacherTube, as well as content provided by PBS (free), Discovery Education (fee-based), and other services. "There are also many web-based tools out there to create your own media, like Blogster or Slideshare," Tejedor said.

Tejedor describes OERs as resources or content that's been developed and has an open license. "Open

> "...open content represents a profound shift in the way students study and learn."

"Make sure you're choosing technologies that will increase student engagement and will impact instruction in the way you want it to."

licenses have copyright holders and they permit reuse without permission. The content is generally free or very inexpensive and can be downloaded and used on e-readers or other devices," she said.

The open content can often be modified by teachers and students as well, creating endless opportunities for personalized learning. According to the 2013 NMC Horizon Report, "…open content represents a profound shift in the way students study and learn. Far more than just a collection of free online course materials, the open content movement is increasingly a response to the rising costs of education, the desire to provide access to learning in areas where such access is difficult, and an expression of student choice about when and how to learn."

Balling sees this on a daily basis in her classroom. "Teachers should no longer be the only source of content and material for students," she said, adding that districts should trust the teachers to be part of the process of developing class content. "The students and teachers need to make the course what they believe it should be."

IMPLEMENTING WORKABLE SYSTEMS

Educators who are ahead of the curve in implementing digital tools can offer valuable advice based on experience…and a few bumps in the road to success.

Amy Perry, CEO and executive director of the New York State Association for Computers and Technologies in Education (NYSCATE), stresses that instruction has to be the driving force behind technology. "You shouldn't just utilize technology to enhance instruction," she said. "The instruction has to come first."

Tejedor agrees, saying, "You have to be careful not to buy into the latest shiny thing that passes your way. Make sure you're choosing technologies that will increase student engagement and will impact instruction in the way you want it to."

A slow and measured approach will help lead to successful implementation. Rossitto spent more than two years researching and planning Monticello's current digital initiatives. "I researched, I did site visits and connected with other schools as partners, and I talked and talked and talked," she commented. "I know that sounds crazy, but I learned a ton from other people who already went through the process. You have to give yourself the time and have a strong plan."

Part of this process is having stakeholder input from the start. Rossitto involves different stakehold-

ers along the way, including teachers, board of education members, central office staff, administrators, and special education teachers. "My stakeholder group changes based on the solutions I'm trying to come up with," she said.

In Highland Falls-Fort Montgomery, Tejedor opted for a technology leadership team, which participates in all aspects of the decision-making process, as well as piloting and introducing new initiatives. "This team really took the lead in rolling out Google Apps for Education to the rest of the faculty this year," she commented.

Once new technologies are available in a district, Balling suggests that teachers start slowly and collaborate with colleagues from other districts. In connecting with other teachers, Balling worked through her local BOCES to connect with educators, especially those with whom she shared technology-related courses. In addition to making these connections, the professional development opportunities were vital for Balling's success. In fact, educators agreed that professional development was the top must-have accompaniment to new technologies.

"The most important thing districts can do is offer professional development so teachers have sup-

> "…educators agreed that professional development was the top must-have accompaniment to new technologies."

port as they're making the move and looking at what new technologies can do for them," said Tejedor. Her district conducted a full day of training on Google Apps for Education, and members of the technology leadership team continually provide support.

In Monticello, there are professional developers on staff who work with teachers daily. Rossitto also offers "chairside" assistance to help teachers integrate technology to improve the

impact of classroom lessons.

On the most basic level, educators' advice also includes ensuring the district has the infrastructure necessary to implement new technologies, including wireless Internet access and wide bandwidths. Rossitto brings in an independent consultant each year to conduct a network assessment. "You can align that assessment with the instructional initiatives that central office is asking for and perhaps identify any infrastructure needs," she explained.

THE DIGITAL **CRYSTAL BALL**

When gazing into their digital crystal balls, today's technology leaders see exciting opportunities in the future. "I think we're going to become even more mobile," Rossitto said. "Students will be able to collaborate outside the school and in the community – the real community, not just the institutional walls of the school community."

"I see the role of teachers changing even more," Perry predicts. "In many cases, the [technology] literacy level of students is far surpassing that of many professionals in the field. That makes it important to focus on the process of finding the answer, not just having the answer – especially in an age when most students can just Google an answer on their cell phones or iPads. The emphasis has to be on the process of how to get to that answer rather than the rote memory of the answer itself."

Tejedor concurs, adding that the sheer volume of information available to students through technological channels leads to another future obligation. "We will need to model strategies for our students on how to work with information, to curate it and to make sense of it all. This isn't a specific technology, but a skill to deal with the growing body of information," she said.

"It's been an exciting time to be in education – to see students and faculty interacting with technology – and the future will be even more amazing," Tejedor concluded.

KIM M. SMITHGALL is an award-winning communications specialist and freelance writer, designer, and photographer.

SNAPSHOT OF RESULTS TO SAANYS' SPRING TECHNOLOGY SURVEY:

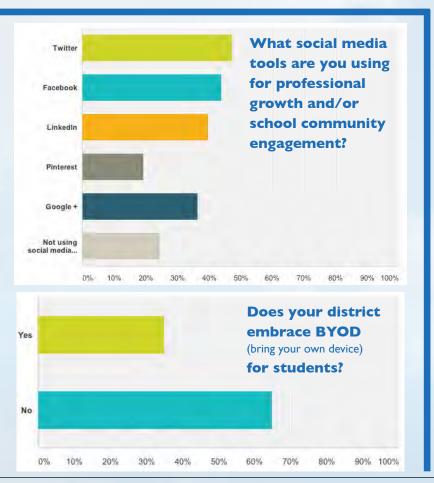### SAANYS members' Top Tech Tools for administrative functions:

1) Microsoft Office
2) iPhone
3) Twitter
4) Google Docs & Drive
5) Electronic calendar
   (Google Calendar, Outlook, iCal)

Top Ed Tech Tools being used by teachers in member schools:

1) Smartboard
2) iPad
3) Google Apps/Docs
4) Digital projectors, Document Cameras
5) YouTube, TeacherTube, & online video content
   (ie., Kahn Academy, National Geographic)

Honorable mentions: Pinterest, Chromebooks, smart phones, blogs, Adobe Creative, EdModo, and Class Dojo.

What social media tools are you using for professional growth and/or school community engagement?

Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Google +, Not using social media...

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

Does your district embrace BYOD (bring your own device) **for students?**

Yes, No

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

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The Data Teams Experience: A Guide for Effective Meetings

by Angela Peery, EdD

New York administrators are familiar with the term "data driven instruction" (DDI). Much of the information we have been provided, collectively, is through the EngageNY site and is based on the work of Paul Bambrick-Santoyo. I've talked about DDI with other NY administrators and our conversations have been honest and open. In some ways, DDI has been seen as "one more thing" to do. Many of us have found the topic overwhelming to implement as suggested by materials that are currently being shared with us.

If you are looking for a quick read that provides concrete action steps for implementing data teams in your school, this book is a must-read. It is just under 94 pages and includes many practical ideas for launching this initiative and perhaps more importantly, sustaining it!

The book is eight chapters in length and begins with a nuts-and-bolts chapter of definitions. It's a helpful chapter because it can help set the stage with your possible team and make sure everyone is starting with the same understanding. DDI is one of those terms that has been referenced in different ways over the years, so a common understanding is paramount. The book ends with a Q and A format allowing specific questions likely to occur during the implementation of DDI to be answered.

Dr. Peery explains that a data team is a small team that examines student work and monitors progress. These teams can be grade level, department level, or course-alike. The book also illustrates horizontal data teams, vertical data teams, and specialist data teams. These examples are illustrated in word and by visuals, which makes the definitions easier to understand (and easier to share with teachers). No matter the makeup of the team, there are the same basic steps for data teams to follow:

1. Collect and chart/display the data
2. Analyze data and prioritize needs
3. Set, review, and revise incremental goals
4. Select common instructional strategies to be employed
5. Determine results indicators

The book also includes rubrics for teams to use to self-evaluate their performance as a team. This could be a very useful tool to use with data team members to collect concrete yet honest feedback about team performance. This rubric is just one of the many practical tools provided.

I've read many books and articles about DDI and still wondered how to put all the pieces together. This book helped me see how the pieces could fit in a more succinct, immediate, and sustainable way.

BOOK REVIEW BY LISA MEADE
Lisa Meade is a practicing middle school principal who also served as a director of special education. She began her career as a teacher, where she remained for 12 years before moving into administrative leadership areas of responsibility. She has previously done consultant workshops for SAANYS and is very highly regarded for her passion and considerable work expertise. This year marks Lisa's 21st year in education. One of Lisa's most favorite roles is that of mom to her son Sam.

THE FLIPPED CLASSROOM

Turning Traditional Education on Its Head

Many educators are experimenting with the idea of a flipped classroom model. So what is it and why is everyone talking about it?

Many schools and classrooms have adopted the flipped classroom model. Here, we look at Clintondale High School near Detroit, which has employed the flipped classroom model to great success.

HOW IT WORKED

- Teachers created three videos a week.
- Students watched the 5- to 7-minute videos at home, or in school if they didn't have Internet access at home.
- Class time was spent doing labs or interactive activities to illustrate concepts.

Students receive instant feedback. Teachers have more time to help students and explain difficult concepts.

Students don't get as frustrated. Before, many students wouldn't complete homework if they got frustrated with it. Working on problems in class minimizes this problem.

Teachers revisit concepts students don't understand. After students watch lessons, they write down any questions they have. Teachers review those questions with students individually.

Concepts from Video

Teachers support students in class. Students who might not have technology or parents to help them outside of school now have teachers guiding them in class.

"It's about changing instructional models so the students can receive more instructional support in the classroom from the experts that Clintondale has on staff."
— Bruce Umpstead, Michigan Office of Education Technology & Data Coordination

THE RESULTS

BEFORE THE FLIP

- +50% of freshmen failed English
- 44% of freshmen failed math
- 736 discipline cases in one semester

AFTER THE FLIP

- 19% of freshmen failed English
- 13% of freshmen failed math
- 249 discipline cases in one semester

Sources: Jeremy F. Strayer, Ohio State University | Flipped Classroom Conference 2011 | Telegraph.co.uk | Blendedclassroom.blogspot.com | Khan Academy | Education Week | Converge Magazine

OPINIONS

"Most of the resources and strategies I bring to my school are from friends I've never met face to face. That is the power of being a digital leader, the power of a PLN, and the power of being connected."
— *Derek McCoy*
Spring Lake (NC) Middle School,
and NASSP 2014 Digital Principal Award Recipient

TRENDING
IN ED

TRENDING ON...
THE TEACHING CHANNEL

Google Docs in the Classroom

Scan or visit:
http://teachingchannel.org/videos/fostering-student-collaboration

TRENDING ON...YOUTUBE

Let's Use Video to Reinvent Education

Scan or visit:
https://www.ted.com/talks/salman_khan_let_s_use_video_to_reinvent_education#t-29452

TRENDING IN THE NEWS...

My Students Don't Know How to Have a Conversation

Scan or visit:
http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/04/my-students-dont-know-how-to-have-a-conversation/360993/

TRENDING IN THE NEWS...

Greer Elementary Teachers Encourage Reading Through Audio Books

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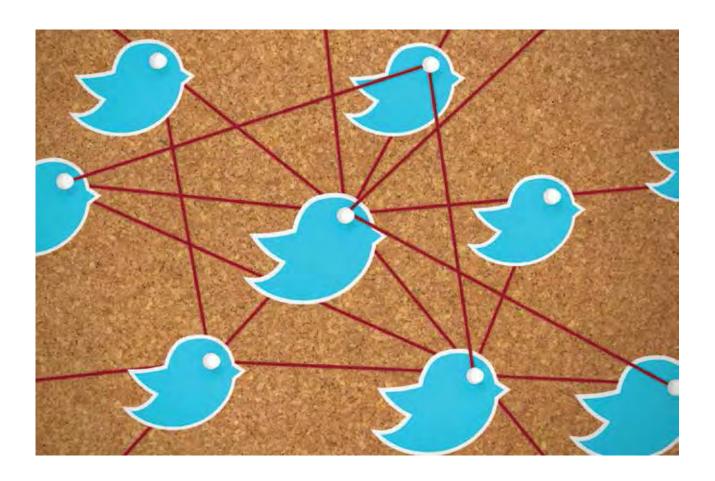
WHAT'S THIS?

Download a QR code reader app on your smart phone or tablet to launch these videos.

Practices from practitioners

Digital Leadership | SPRING 2014
Vol. 43 No. 2

Twitter: Joining the

Educational Revolution

By Tim Dawkins

There is a revolution happening in education, and if you aren't a part of it, you're truly missing out. This particular revolution begins, as many do, with people connecting around a common belief in order to enact change. We have the ability to instantly communicate and connect with professional peers from all over the world through social media. These connections may begin at surface level, but the more we engage, the more the relationships gain depth.

Our need to connect centers around the belief that in the 21st century we are surrounded by opportunities to become better educators. Sure, it's easy to dismiss social media as distractions for our students or ways for individuals in the spotlight to further their own agenda. However, by dismissing such powerful technology you are truly missing a unique opportunity to engage in professional development at any free moment. The role of the assistant principal, I have learned as I move through my second year in this position, is a complicated one. We are pulled in many different directions during the day, and through the nature of our presence in the building we are often called to be a jack-of-all-trades. While this is surely a great opportunity for developing skills that will hopefully take us into a principalship one day, it's rough on time management. On any given day I could be in a meeting regarding an at-risk student, making attempts to restore harmed relationships after a disciplinary issue, observing a lesson, conferencing with a teacher regarding an observation, developing next year's master schedule, all while assisting with any impromptu issues that may arise throughout the building. Traditionally, connecting with my fellow APs would not be something that I could place at the top of my priority list. Enter Twitter.

While I had already been very familiar with Twitter as a powerful tool of personal connection for a couple of years, I had never really looked at it as a way to reclaim my own form of personal professional development. Twitter as an educational tool has truly changed my life. No longer do I have to feel disconnected from my educational peers because I don't have time during the school day. For example:

• On any given evening there are multiple hashtag (#) chats occurring that open tremendous doors of communication across state and international borders. I have had the pleasure of following people working in the field from across the country as well as in Canada, Great Britain, and Australia among others, and we share resources as if they were sitting in the office next to me. Dis-

cussions like #nyedchat, which gathers educators from across NYS twice a month, or #satchat, which occurs every Saturday morning involving hundreds of educators, are tremendous net-working opportunities that offer access to people you'd never have a chance to speak with otherwise.

• I am currently working close-ly with a group of educators from various parts of upstate New York on developing a conference fol-lowing the edcamp model called EdCampUNY (@EdCampUNY). Without Twitter I may not have connected with these like-minded professionals who have become a source of support and feedback for me. Check them out as a great Twitter starting point: @LisaMeade23, @PeterMDeWitt, @ChristinaMLuce, @VictoriaL_Day, @PurplePatti09.

Twitter evens the playing field, connecting teachers with principals, superintendents with assistant principals, and most importantly, if done right, it can open a direct line of communication between the student population and the administration. There is no hierarchy or power structure on Twitter. There are only people looking to build their PLN (personal learning network) and share best practices and insights readily and freely.
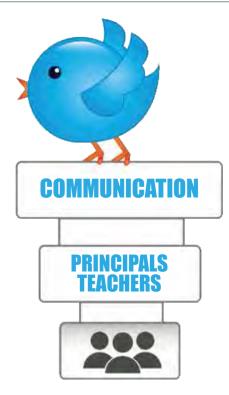
Within the last few months I have embarked on two projects in my building inspired by connections made on Twitter. First, after a stretch of feeling somewhat isolated in my office, I put a tweet out to my PLN for ideas surrounding unique ways for building leaders to connect with students. This sparked a discussion between several of us, and the end result has been me moving out of the main office during the school day for about an hour at a time and switching to "Mobile AP Office" mode. This means that I literally take whatever it is that I'm working on at

the moment and continue doing so somewhere else in the building. You may find me sitting with my laptop or tablet in the library, in the cafeteria during a student study hall, or even at a desk in a random hallway to add some variety. That last one really gets some fun reactions. I have made more connections than ever by simply changing the environment in which I get my work done. Also, surprisingly, I have found that faculty and staff are more likely to stop and talk with me when they see me out and about.

Meanwhile, I can feel more comfortable ungluing myself from behind my desk because project #2 has been to establish an assistant principal Twitter account, @MrDawkinsQHS, that students and teachers can use to track me down no matter where I am in the building. Additionally:

• I use this account as a way to communicate with the greater school community about important high school and educationally related topics, including articles and other pertinent discoveries from across the Internet. This gets the word out quickly, and it allows others to spread it on their own Twitter feeds, potentially spreading information exponentially.

• Social media helps me to be more accessible to my students by meeting them where they are. This is how they communicate with one another, and it's important that I recognize that as an opportunity. No matter how many times I have asked

COMMUNICATION

PRINCIPALS TEACHERS

students to leave me a note if they need to speak with me and I'm not available, they rarely do it. Now they are much more apt to send me a tweet if I'm not in my office.

• Twitter now allows me to get the word out to multiple stakeholders in one fell swoop before someone else does, giving me the power to partner with other staff members in establishing our school brand.

• This account has presented an opportunity for me to start a conversation with students about their role in establishing a positive school culture. Twitter can be a powerful tool in this respect. Along with the other AP in my building and a group of about 15 students from grades 9 -12, we are working on creating a hashtag that can be used by any member of the Queensbury community to highlight the positive things that happen in our school and among our student population on a given day. The development of this hashtag, #QNITED, has been student driven, creating a strong sense of ownership and pride among the group. It will be rolled out to the entire school population within the next few weeks.

I realize that not everyone is ready to dive in and start a Twitter account. It can feel like foreign territory if you've never explored it before, and all too often schools have been forced to focus on the negative aspects of social media. The emergence of thousands of educators joining up to reclaim their professional development has changed all of that. Now you can choose to slowly dip your feet in and see how the water feels by simply beginning to connect with educators from your area, or you can cannonball from the diving board and immerse yourself in the deep end of a burgeoning social-professional world as I've described it above. That's the beauty of social media today. There has never been a better time to develop your personal learning network. There has never been a better way for you to connect with great minds in education.

There has never been a better moment to discover the creative ways that educators are making learning more fun, more accessible, and more relevant. You have a great opportunity. Take advantage of it.

TIM DAWKINS is assistant principal of Queensbury High School.

Social Media:

Perception Builder

By Tony Sinanis

"People's perception becomes their reality and so we must shape the perception to create the reality we want people to have when they think of us." My superintendent, who hired me for my first administrative position, used to say this to me on a daily basis. Initially it was rooted in the fact that I didn't necessarily wear a suit each day to school and he felt strongly that the way I looked shaped the way people viewed me and interacted with me.

They had a perception of me that spread through word of mouth and thus became the reality. I was still relatively young at the time and would always fight back because I argued it shouldn't matter what I looked like but instead my words and actions should matter. Eventually I started to think about my perceptions solely based on the way someone looked, and I realized the only way I was going to get people to hear my words and attend to my actions was by creating a certain perception (that may or may not have been related to my appearance) and in turn shape reality.

This idea came back up again about a year ago when I heard Eric Sheninger (@NMHS_Principal) speak about using the power of social media to share our story and brand our schools. Brilliant – absolutely brilliant! Think of the golden arches – everyone knows about McDonald's and what a deal it is to eat there. Think about Apple – everyone knows they are always looking for the next iPhone or iPad – they are innovators and risk takers! Branding is key. Telling our stories is key! Eric was 100% right and I knew

that I had to get behind the idea and tell our story – I wanted to influence the perception of our school by sharing the daily realities. I wanted to help brand Cantiague Elementary School as the best elementary school on the planet! Why should we allow people to create their own perceptions, which could be rooted in misinformation, based on word of mouth or what is published in the local paper?

Branding, which typically is a "business world" thing, is exactly what our schools need today! There is so much bashing of public education in the media today and the landscape of public education is not a pretty one, but as educators – whether a superintendent, classroom teacher, support specialist, or the lead learner of the building – we still control everything that happens in our schools. And since we control what happens in our schools (even with state/federal mandates and policies, the final execution is our call) we know there are awesome techniques/approaches/etc. unfolding in our schools so let's spread the word; let's brand our schools; let's fuel the perceptions; and let's create

our realities using technology as the key ingredient!

For me, that journey began with my iPad. I am fortunate in that my whole school is WiFi so this year I made a conscious decision that I was going to spend as little time as possible in my office and as much time as possible walking around the building visiting classrooms, talking to children, taking pictures, tweeting about our daily adventures, e-mailing parents with the highlights of our work, and blogging about our successes in a weekly staff newsletter. Well, I am thrilled to say that one year in, our school's brand is really taking shape! Our community knows we aim to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of individual students. Our community knows we believe in as much small-group instruction as possible and that whole-class/direct instruction is at a minimum. Our community knows that we believe in the reading and writing workshop models and our goals are to nurture lifelong readers and to support passionate authors who cannot wait to publish their work. Our commu-

nity knows that we are bucket fillers and that we support the Super Six: Be a SUPERStar by being responsible, respectful, positive, safe, and kind (these are the pillars of our success). Our community knows that we work diligently to make technology integration a seamless and powerful component. Our community knows that we value two-way communication. Our community knows that we invest in building school and community spirit. And most importantly, in my eyes, our community knows that we love our kids and are dedicated, not only to their academic development, but also their social, emotional, and psychological growth.

I don't share this information as a way to "toot our own horn" but instead to share that when a conscious decision is made to brand your school and tell your story, the possibilities are endless. I have seen conversations at our PTA meetings go from talking about the logistics of fundraisers to discussing the concerns over high-stakes testing or the power of book clubs as a way to differentiate instruction. Our community is informed and that is what we want at Cantiague. It means that we have to be transparent. It means that we have to be confident in our choices. It means that we have to be open to feedback – good and bad. It means that we have to show that with every success there are at least three failures. It means that we are comfortable flattening the walls of our school and proudly telling our story so we can shape perceptions and build realities.

If you are ready to brand your school and create your reality, here are five starting points…

1) Twitter – create a school Twitter account (encourage teachers to do so also) and tweet about all the exciting things happening in your school and classrooms. Share your story – shout it from the rooftops before someone else does it for you! Don't just use it to share when the next baseball game is happening or what time the bake sale starts. Use it to share practice from inside the classrooms!

2) Storify – we used this resource to amass all our tweets from the week that were heavy on pictures and really helped shape the reality. Check out the Cantiague storify page that features our use of Twitter – this is a great way to share tweets with families not on Twitter.

3) E-mail parents (if you can) and tell them about all the awesome things happening in your school across all grade levels!

4) Create a staff newsletter/blog and give everyone a glimpse into each other's spaces so they can see all the awesome things they are doing! We often spend so much time in our own little spaces that we don't get to share ideas and learn from each other. Here is a great way to start that process!

5) Jump in the deep end of the pool and take a risk! Be the storyteller for your school and contribute to the perceptions that will create the realities. Don't let someone else do it for you!

Also, check out these other amazing educators who are telling their own stories in their own way: Matt Gomez (@mattBgomez) Erin Klein (@KleinErin) Ben Gilpin (@benjamingilpin) Jimmy Casas (@casas_jimmy) Chris Lehmann (@chrislehmann) These are just some of the awesome storytellers out there! So, pick the technology you want to use and start telling your story, shaping perceptions and creating realities!

TONY SINANIS is the lead learner at Cantiague Elementary School in Jericho, NY and the 2014 NAESP/SAANYS New York State Elementary School Principal of the Year.

Moving from Administrator to Connected
Lead Learner

By Lisa Meade and
Victoria Day

Computers and technology have evolved significantly over our careers. Remember the Commodore 64? That was the new gold standard before the Apple IIe. And then came the Mac. What a revolution in home computing! Soon the Internet was born and we all had to get online and subscribe to AOL and Prodigy. AOL also had that fancy feature where we could connect to each other and chat. E-mail was the latest thing and cell phones in a bag were the rave! **Way back then, these advances didn't impact school administrators very much.**

We are now in the 14th year of the 21st century, so we have to get beyond 21st century learning. It's over a decade old, yet the majority of educators are still in the '80s and early '90s. Yes, you may be on Facebook or LinkedIn, but are you really using these tools to be a connected educator? How does using Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, or Instagram make you a connected lead learner? When you use these platforms, you are actively creating a personal learning network or PLN.

A personal learning network is your 24/7 source for support, inspiration, and information. Developing a PLN will transform your leadership approach, style, attitude, and message! Over the last 18 months, we have been amazed at what our connections have taught us and where they have brought us. We have discovered how to use our voices while leading positive change in our buildings. Prior to social media, we would never have connected as administrators. We are principals in two different regions of NYS.

Over the past year, we have used technology to accomplish the following:

• Using Twitter as a form of connectedness: In Vicki's school, Twitter was used for a Teach Like a Pirate book study forum (#tlap) while in Lisa's school, staff are using Twitter to share teaching resources and inspiration.
• Using social media such as Facebook and Twitter: Both platforms allow us to share our

school story and push out the positives of what is happening within the school walls. We want to be the ones who tell our school story. No longer can we rely on the press or court of public opinion to spin it positively for us.
• Using smore.com and other tools for flipped communication with staff: We've been able to give back time to teachers by flipping communication. Teachers review the Smore on their own time instead of coming together at the same time to have the content provided to them. Smore can be used to announce events to parents and to create online flyers.
• Sharing "best of best" blogs to use as inspiration to begin blogging: With all that we are required to juggle and know in our positions, blogs by many NY administrators help keep us informed and up to date. Consider starting your own blog! There is a fear held by some that putting your personal voice way out in the open is risky. We would submit that not sharing an opinion is just as risky. Blogging allows you to find and refine your voice. Every leader needs to use their voice while leading positive change in his/her building. We have found that our own blogging has helped us process some of the challenges we face as administrators.

Some of our favorite blogs by NY administrators include: http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/finding_common_ground/in *Education Week* by Peter DeWitt; http://leadingmotivatedlearners.blogspot.com/ by Tony Sinanis; and http://roundtheinkwell.com/ by Carol Burris. If you are so inclined, you can also check out our blogs at http://msprincipal23a.blogspot.com/ by Lisa Meade and http://victorialday.wordpress.com/ by Vicki Day.
• Demonstrating the use of online group options (Facebook, LinkedIn, Edmodo, Schoology) for faculty use and student use: There is never enough time to collaborate on professional literature or with topics of combined interest. Using online platforms with students and staff allows more of them the opportunity to be involved, on their time, and in their own way. A learning management system is a great tool for modeling digital citizenship with your students. Using social media and technology leverages the relationships to build capacity.
• Using Google Hangouts or Twitter chats to enhance collaboration: In both schools, we use GHO/Twitter chats to host guest speakers like Rick Wormeli and Dave Burgess for our faculty. We are able to bring respected experts from the national field right into our schools for free!

• Modeling collaboration using various online tools such as Google Documents, Evernote, Quip, and other sharing applications for collaboration and planning: For instance, this entire article was a collaboration using Google Documents and Google Hangouts. Evernote allows you to share notes with multiple people and keeps them stored in one location. It is easily accessible from your smartphone too!

This may seem like too much on top of all the other tasks you are already juggling as an administrator. Some of our work is about compliance. APPR demands some of that. But beyond meeting deadlines and completing paperwork, the kind of leader you choose to be matters. Using these tools can enhance your work and approach.

The days of status quo inside our school buildings while the world outside evolves are over. Enlightened lead learners know that there is more to running a school or department than managing day-to-day operations. Enlightened leaders also know that change is required if we are to transform our schools and our collective (students, staff, parents) capacity to learn. As you juggle the challenges of new initiatives, learn how to engage with like-minded educators throughout the nation and world to help you. In the end, it's not the platform or tool that matters. What matters are the connections and relationships that are built within and beyond our school walls. Challenge yourself to try out a new tool. Model being a 21st century connected lead learner. You won't be disappointed.

LISA MEADE is a practicing middle school principal in Corinth who also served as a director of special education.

VICTORIA DAY is a principal at East Side Elementary School, Gouverneur, New York.

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Blended Digital Curriculum

to Save Money and Succeed with More Students

By Michael F. Lewis, PhD

Over the past several years the Niagara Falls City School District has faced, as have numerous small city school districts, millions of dollars of budgetary setbacks due to declining enrollment, a shrinking tax base, and unequal allocation of state aid resources. Within the Niagara Falls City School District, central administration personnel have strived **to streamline services and reduce expenses** to both limit the need for tax increases and secure the employment of as many staff as possible.

One method through which this goal has been achieved is with the deep integration of hardware- and software-based instructional technology resources that provided us with the following: 1) the ability to offer Advanced Placement (AP) courses where we otherwise wouldn't and 2) the ability to streamline instruction in our district alternative programming.

The Niagara Falls City School District was able to secure competitive funding through the Virtual AP grant offered by NYSED to provide rigorous, well developed, and College Board aligned courses through a digital course subscription. The district contracted with a national organization that provides literally dozens of online courses. This company also provides rigorous online coursework in AP classes that have been vetted and approved by the College Board. As a result of this creative use of technology and online instruction, over a hundred students were able to participate in AP classes that otherwise would not have been offered, due to limited enrollment.

Although the courses in our district are in their infancy, independent evaluations of the program have revealed that the teachers feel the content is AP-course appropriate, rigorous, manageable, and easy to use. Surveys of the AP students specifically reveal that the coursework is also rigorous and of high interest. Further, these students noted that the online but supervised nature of the courses allows them the freedom to participate in extra- and cocurricular activities (e.g., athletics or school clubs).

Of particular import is the means through which the digital AP coursework is provided. In the district's case, each AP student was provided with a district-managed tablet. This tablet was issued to the student, can be managed by the district's IT department, and has provided for ample opportunity to integrate technology into the AP curriculum. Students reported that they were not only accessing online AP course materials more frequently, but also voluntarily integrating the tablets into other classes where the technology was

not planned for or required. In one general example, students found that they were downloading note-taking apps to their tablet then using it in all of their classes rather than only the AP class for which the tablet was issued.

The other, and without question larger, deployment of online coursework was in the development and implementation of a new secondary grade-level district alternative program. As is often the case, school districts may need to contract with private agencies or BOCES to provide instruction to students who function better and meet more academic goals in an alternative setting. In the case of the Niagara Falls City School District, it was found that the programming in the previous alternative school was not producing the results that were needed as academic requirements grew more rigorous for both students and teachers. With this in mind, the district chose to go "inhouse" and develop an alternative program that would be provided in a district building, supervised by district administrators, and taught by district teachers.

Again, the district chose to make computer-based and standards-aligned curriculum a centerpiece of the program. In this particular case, reestablishing the alternative program within the district allowed for several successes.

First, the district was able to retain the services of five teachers. This is important because without the integration of digital instructional content, the creation of a district-run alternative program would have been impossible, and may have resulted in staff reductions.

Second, the district was able to more fully utilize a current district school. Previously the school where the alternative program is now housed was only at approximately 50 percent capacity. Now the entire school is being utilized. Much of the increase in utilization was due to the efficiencies of creating several computer labs for accessing the digital curriculum.

Third, the district was able to double the enrollment in the alternative program. Prior to the implementation of a digital curriculum, the district often found itself in the

unenviable position of having to create stringent rules for accessing the alternative program due to enrollment limitations. Due to the efficiencies of our digital curriculum, doubling the student enrollment allowed for inclusion (and ultimately academic success) of twice as many students as in previous years.
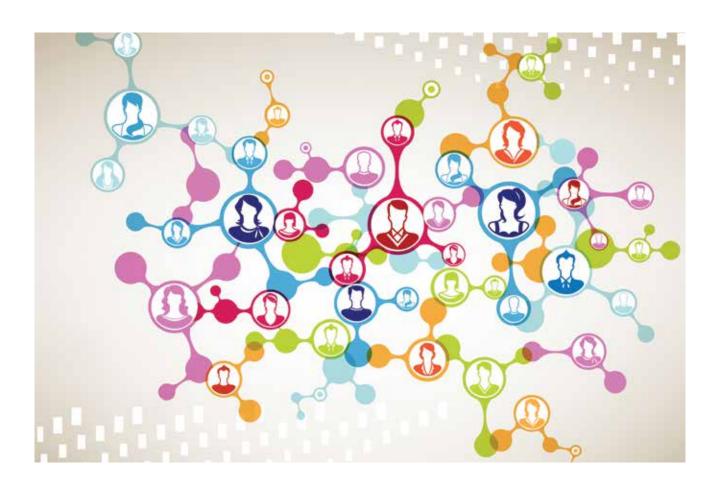
While the alternative program was developed primarily to provide high-need students with rigorous academic content, the cost effects of using a digital content provider cannot be ignored. Even with allocating one full-time administrator, one full-time counselor, and five full-time teachers to the newly developed alternative program, and with doubling the enrollment potential of the alternative program, the district was able to save over $600,000. This achievement would not have been possible without implementation of the digital courses and computer-based instructional content.

In all, it is important to note that the positive impacts the Niagara Falls City School District has experienced are due to the dedicated work of teachers in a classroom-based, but digital content blended, environment. The academic successes we have experienced are because digital content was blended with traditional instruction to reflect modern instructional strategies, a student-centered approach to curriculum and instruction, and most importantly an exciting medium through which students can access content and ultimately better consume and learn subject matter.

MICHAEL F. LEWIS, PhD is a grants coordinator and superintendent hearing officer at Niagara Falls City School District.

Doing What Comes Naturally

By Jim Dillon

Many people of my generation see the rise of social media as a negative force that replaces human-to-human connection with a virtual one. **Educators especially are prone to see social media as a competing force, distracting students from the work they are expected to do in school.** Many who hear the daily stories of how people have used social media to hurt and ridicule others are frightened by how "impossible" it now is to control what young people can do to each other.

These feelings and perceptions are strong because social media and technology threaten the very foundation of how we have traditionally viewed education. A bedrock principle of education has been that students need to be controlled in order to learn. So strong is this perception that many educators have difficulty imagining education and schools to be any other way. This mental frame that governs how most view education is only a lens and doesn't have to be an unchangeable reality.

Why is it automatically assumed that students have to be controlled? Why does this idea have such a strong grip on how we view education? The answer is pretty basic: fear of losing control. I call this the primal fear of most teachers. Teachers have nightmares of people, especially their principals, leveling this criticism: they don't have control of their classes. To most teachers this is tantamount to saying that they are incompetent and irresponsible. Social media and technology represent something teachers can't control so no wonder it is such a threat to them and everything they have been taught about education.

What do schools tend to do regarding these types of problems? They attempt to tighten the controls by creating more laws, regulations, consequences, and procedures for enforcing them. This is an automatic reaction because schools have traditionally viewed problems as negative things that only get in the way of educating, and because they don't know any other way to address a problem. Unfortunately this fear-based need to tighten controls only deepens the gap and the distrust between the adult world and the student world.

There is an alternative. Instead of viewing social media and technology as a problem to fix in order to reestablish the status quo, how about embracing it as a way to learn something about students and their needs and how we might better educate them. Perhaps instead of letting our "primal fear" drive our response and reinforce the mental frame of controlling to educate, we can let go of our fear and reexamine some of our basic assumptions of education.

HERE ARE SOME **REFLECTION POINTS FOR EDUCATORS:**

- Ask yourself if you have ever enjoyed the experience of being controlled and manipulated by someone with power and authority over you. The answer most would give is a resounding NO. If this is true for most people, it is also true for students.
- Ask yourself why students need to be controlled. Humans are wired to learn – it is synonymous with being human. Learning in school is different than learning outside of school. If students are not motivated, they are not the problem – it is what we are teaching and how we are educating them.
- Ask yourself what school would be like if learning was meaningful, purposeful, and valued without arbitrary timelines for demonstrating mastery. What if students had some choice and voice in how they learned?
- Ask yourself if the experience in schools has to be an individual experience based on meeting the expectations of one teacher and the prescribed curriculum. Why is learning together, where the social is integrated with the intellectual, not considered a legitimate way to learn in most schools?
- Ask yourself why learning in school has to be joyless or tedious. Shouldn't asking and answering intriguing questions be an exciting experience?
- Ask yourself what learning experiences in your own life were the most positive and the most negative. Where did those learning experiences occur? What made them positive and what made them negative?
- Ask yourself what is stopping you from asking students if they need to be controlled or better yet asking them how they would like to be educated.

Students' embrace of social media is part of their natural desire to connect with other people and find meaning in those connections. It also offers them the type of environment that allows them to be themselves rather than just meeting the expectations of those in authority or standardized versions for themselves. The social media environment has therefore become one that stands in stark contrast to the traditional school environment. That is why students embrace it and view it as a refuge from the adult world that they perceive as primarily concerned with controlling them.

Students do not have to be feared, nor do they have to be controlled in order to learn. Even though most of us have been taught and have come to view this perception as true, it doesn't have to be. Since we have learned that view, we can unlearn it and can see education in a different way. Educators can check their fear at the door of the school and allow students to embrace a type of learning they need but had sought elsewhere. Students want schools to welcome and support their love of learning and of connecting with others; they want schools to be places where they can be full human beings growing into the best people they can be.

"Students' embrace of social media is part of their natural desire to connect with other people and find meaning in those connections."

Students can be trusted to be learners. Students want us to trust them. Like all of us, they want and need to feel trusted and respected and allowed to have some control over what they learn and how they learn it. Students want to be partners with us in creating environments where all people are learning together.

Social media and technology can be natural extensions of human learning. Schools should be a welcoming place for them. They don't need to keep their world separate from the adult world. They need the wisdom of educators to help them understand and explore how to use these new tools in a positive and productive way.

Students are waiting for educators to discover what they have already found; they are eagerly waiting for us to join them and learn with them.

JIM DILLON is a retired administrator and consultant.

The Secret Life of Change:
The Power of Connection

By Bill Brennan

We are truly on an exciting journey in Farmingdale Schools. Our "institution of learning" is morphing into a digital age learning organization – one that is continuously learning and unlearning. **As a result of riding this wave and pushing the edges of our learning, we've dismissed the old concepts of change, and embraced a new organizational mindset.**

LESS CHANGE, **MORE MOMENTUM AND PERSPECTIVE**

Change is something every organization desires, yet how to achieve meaningful change remains a mystery. Still more mysterious is the secret to lasting change, especially as it relates to culture or the use of technology to transform teaching and learning. Imagine with me, for a minute, if we could use technology and the power of social learning and human connection to accelerate organizational capacities. I've been thinking about this, but through a new lens – energy.

Momentum and perspective – these are the two words that I used to describe why Farmingdale Schools created and hosted the Long Island Connected Educators' Meet-up (#CELI14) – a free learning event that brought together over 150 passionate educators to crowd-source innovative ideas through formal and informal conversation and collaboration. While our goal was to assemble forward-thinking and passionate educators for a day of conversation, reflection, and inspiration, it was also a strategic attempt to celebrate and share our learning, build our social capital, and recalibrate ourselves as an organization.

Minutes before introducing the panel, I asked the audience if they knew the formula for momentum, noting this was one of the reasons Farmingdale created #CELI14. A young man shouted the answer, "Momentum (P) is equal to Mass (M) times Velocity (V)." I then confessed my interest in studying organizational change and hypothesized that the same formula is true of how large organizations build capacity. In this way, Momentum (P) is equal to the Mass (or carrying capacity to learn/unlearn) times the Velocity (engagement in learning). Similar to the carrying capacity of the environment (the idea that sustainability requires balance), the carrying capacity of our learning organization is the idea that sustainability rests in our capacity to learn/unlearn.

When illustrating my ideas on perspective, I shared the following story: On December 27, 2013, I was at the kitchen table with my three-year-old daughter, Lila. She was doing a worksheet and the first question required her to complete a pattern of shapes. It showed the following incomplete pattern – circle, square, triangle, circle, square, and a blank space. I looked at Lila and asked if she knew which shape went in the blank space. She responded, "Triangle, Daddy." She proceeded to put her crayon on the table, placed her finger on the triangle, and struggled to slide the triangle over to the line. Yes, this was paper. I looked at my wife and said, "This changes everything."

CAPACITY **ACCELERATORS**

If we are to achieve true and continuous improvements, schools must be alert, awake, and able to distance their minds from old institutional memory. To me, the power of social/connected learning is that it provides not just a stream of learning, but a stream of consciousness and perspective. As I shared at #CELI14, that's a good thing, because the key to maintaining our momentum for this journey is about being exposed to new perspectives. Consider the four easy-to-implement capacity builders.

1. **Loosen content filters, unleash learning.**
   The job of a teacher is hard enough; they don't need more barriers. The more I get around, the more I hear the struggles teachers have about having to request permission to access social and other collaborative tools. What I find most interesting is when districts use social networking tools sites for public relations, but put their teachers and administrators through hoops to use them on a professional level.

2. **Model, model, model.**
   In Farmingdale we don't sell Twitter, but we do tell powerful stories of learning and how that learning is improving our practice. As more and more educators become connected, it's changed the dynamics of our learning and has changed the way knowledge of teaching and learning flows through the organization.

3. **Host informal meet-ups.**
   The concept of social learning has been around long before social media. We recognize the importance of social interaction, context, and shared cognitive schemes for learning as a source of growth. We also recognize that technology (i.e., social media) has created a renaissance around learning and collaboration; we've also started offline endeavors whereby teachers self-organize around ideas. Recently, I've presented the idea, "Ask Me Anything"; based on the principles of self-organization, an entire building or groups of teachers start a conversation and invite others in.

4. **Talk to teachers and students. LISTEN to them.** Following the experience with Lila, I was on a pursuit to shift my perspective. I contacted my high school principal to let him know I'd like to spend a week as a high school student. Shadowing high school students opened my world and also helped me better understand the needs of teachers. Too often than not, we are guilty of getting caught up in administrivia. Take the time to

really listen to teachers and students. I'm confident that just by listening with an open mind you will learn a great deal. It's really simple; just ask them what they think from time to time. They'll thank you for it and you'll learn from them.

THE "HOLY GRAIL" ISN'T TECHNOLOGY, **IT'S THE PEOPLE**

While many think technology is going to change education, it's ultimately a continuum of how the two feed off each other. In fact, I believe there has never been a more important time to have good teachers who are adaptable and seek ways to cultivate students' curiosity and passions. Technology may play a powerful role in that, but ultimately it's the relationships we have and the belief in each other.

The goal of #CELI14 was to assemble passionate, forward-think-ing educators in a room and see what happened. As I review the feedback, I get the sense we've built some energy. And, as I look more deeply, I'm noticing we've started to create conditions of emergence in Farmingdale. I'm most excited for my teachers and principals, who are revitalized and are building a stronger learning network – a source of continuous learning and a healthy dose of perspective from time to time. As the lead innovator (respectful disruptor) in Farmingdale, I'm watching how their learning will recalibrate and reorient our organization to better cultivate the talents of our educators and the needs of our stakeholders – the children.

The times demand a dramatic shift from a homeostatic paradigm of adapting to change to where our systems must begin to shape and drive change, molding a new organizational species to support a new species of learners. To me this is not a digital age, but an Age of Infinite Possibility; remember the power of social capital and connectedness and how this will be a driver for how individuals and organizations are able to thrive in this new ecosystem.

DR. BILL BRENNAN is the lead innovator at Farmingdale Public Schools and Co-Founder of School Leadership 2.0 - A Global Knowledge Network for School Leaders.

Culture Eats
Strategy for Breakfast

By Dr. Lauren Ormsby
with Michelle Helmer

I recently spent the day with IES Staff Development Specialist Michelle Helmer. I asked her to come to our district to visit classrooms and see the Common Core modules in action. Mrs. Helmer had sent me the article, "3 Reasons Why the School Principal Needs to Tweet," by Mark W. Guay, a few days before. When she arrived she suggested that **we "tweet" throughout our day to share the learning**. So, Mrs. Helmer explained in her post, [at http://bit. ly/1hO2EiT] we "set off for classrooms, iPhones in hand."

My objective starting out the day was for Mrs. Helmer and me to watch the Common Core modules being taught in as many grade levels as we could before the end of the day, with a reflection point at lunch and at the end of the day. After reading Mrs. Helmer's blogpost, [http://bit.ly/1hO2EiT] "Culture Eats Strategy for Breakfast," I was inspired to share my reflections on the day and the impact of the day we shared. Mrs. Helmer and I thought it would be interesting if I used the same tweets from her visit as a framework for my reflection.

My inspiration for this writing came from the quote, "School culture is intangible but not undefinable…" Mrs. Helmer used at the beginning of her post a reference to the article, "Why School Culture Matters, and How to Improve It," by Haberman. From Mrs. Helmer's perspective the tweets provided her a window into the culture of our building. This left me thinking: What are the essential principles of building culture in your building, and how do I as a leader adhere to these principles? Additionally, can our tweets be used as evidence?

To answer these questions, I began by doing a little research on the subject of culture building. Predictably I started with the Haberman article cited by Helmer. It was in this article that I found the answer to my first question. According to Haberman, building culture involves developing a shared sense of purpose and values, clearly establishing norms of continuous learning, fostering collaborative collegial relationships, and providing opportunities for teachers to share experiences. After additional research, I found a book by Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey, and Ian Pumpian, *How to Create a Culture of Achievement in Your School and Classroom*. In this book the authors posit that in order to build culture a school must also have "a specified set of purposeful language, actions, and routines designed to make students and other stakeholders feel welcome, comfortable, important, and understood." While most instructional leaders would readily agree that these are essential principles of culture, building the execution is

more complicated.

It is no secret that building culture involves strong leadership and vision, but many times there is a fundamental piece missing. This missing piece involves the instructional leader giving up the most valuable asset he/she has: time. According to Fisher, Frey, and Pumpian, "…culture must be purposively developed and managed to optimize the chance to live our mission, become our vision, and fulfill our educational purpose and responsibilities." And although as a profession we have become experts at "purposively developing" culture, we need to improve our ability to "manage" culture. Instructional leaders must make the time to "take the pulse" of their building to see the effect of professional development plans, to provide frequent feedback to teachers, and to model expected behavior. Monica George Fields, senior fellow for School Innovation of NYSED, calls this the "Rhetoric to Practice" gap. It is the space between what we say and what we do. How do leaders ensure that the learning opportunities they create for their faculty and staff are translated into practice in the classroom? How can leaders ensure they are providing adequate support and resources, an essential element of building a healthy culture?

So it was from this perspective that I approached the reflection of my day with Mrs. Helmer in tweets. It is my hope that I will be able to reveal through this writing how we used Twitter to capture the "practice" of culture building.

The first principle of culture building that I found evidence of is "having a shared sense of purpose and values." As Mrs. Helmer pointed out, there was evidence of this in the form of our mission statement "Every day, Every child, Every minute counts." It is found on a large carpet when you

enter the building, on our letterhead and many other places throughout the building. In fact, if you ask the students, they would easily recite it to you as well. But each of these examples is evidence of the words we say. So I asked myself what are the actions or the practice that gives power to these words. The answer is that I utilize these words, our shared purpose, in daily conversations with everyone from secretaries to the department leaders to teaching assistants. If you ask any educator or administrator to describe their biggest obstacle, they would report lack of time. By bringing them back to this mission statement in conversations, the dialogue instantly becomes more focused. In a way it creates a common ground and other disagreements become unimportant. So ultimately the answer is that in order to put the words into action it must be used as the catalyst for all decision making.

Next, I was interested in Mrs. Helmer's tweet about my "shelfie." She tweeted about the shelf I have behind my desk that my secretary and I refer to as my "bibles." This shelf is where I keep all of the books I am actively using or reading. These books are utilized in meetings throughout the school year and shared with my colleagues. From my perspective it is one of the ways I model continuous learning.

Several other tweets that were posted during our daily PD time can be used as additional evidence of the norm of continuous learning that exists at RCS. As Mrs. Helmer explained in her post, at RCS the teachers report to PD every day for 30 minutes. During this time teachers are engaged in collegial conversations and collaboration through book study, article reading, Teach Like a Champion technique practice, or other activities in order to continue their own learning. This protected time to read, discuss, and reflect is powerful in building a culture of support. It addresses the other essential principles of culture building that I identified earlier as fostering collaborative collegial relationships and providing

Mhelmer @mhelmer2   9 Dec
@theresagray Check out @ormsby25 's "shelfie" #instructional leader pic.twitter.com/LXqfwY4Med

opportunities for teachers to share experiences.

During visits to the ELA classrooms in sixth, fifth, and fourth grade, we tweeted about what we saw there and later I used these tweets to develop feedback for teachers. This is evidence of one of the most critical elements of the culture: nurturing a norm of continuous improvement. This is more nuanced in that feedback is essential and must be frequent and repeated in order to develop.

One of my favorite parts of the day was in the visit to a first-grade classroom using math modules. We saw a student independently use her tens frame to complete a math problem. I was able to see and hear the excitement of the teacher during a math module lesson. After the lesson she shared with me that she had, "never seen this type of independence in her students." This is an important bright spot I can later use when moving other teachers forward in their own implementation. Again without the firsthand experience, this would be lost.

One of the most difficult principles of culture building may be in developing "a set of purposeful language, actions, and routines designed to make students and other stakeholders feel welcome, comfortable, important, and understood." Structures and mechanisms have to be put in place and these are not self-sufficient. Similar to the other principles, they require management in order to be effective and obtain the desired result. We found evidence of this on our "Twitter Adventure" in some of the structures that have been set up for both students and teachers.

For one, while teachers are in professional development the students have recess every day. They rotate through a variety of activities including running club, quiet time (in which they write, read, draw, or listen to music), computer lab, board games, gym time, and Lego lab. The purpose of these activities is to provide students with a variety of engaging and enjoyable activities that will allow them to take a brain break in the middle of the day. Students have helped develop the recess program through suggestions and wishes. Yes, I said wishes.

Students have a wish box in the cafeteria, where they can "wish" for things. Some of the best ideas have come out of the students' minds (including the Lego lab).

These are only two of the ways I try to help students feel important. Students at RCS also have the option of participating in one of several after-school clubs in the RCS After-School Program. The after-school clubs at Ripley extend the learning of the day but are also inviting and engaging. The two we tweeted about were the Giving Club and the Library Club. Each of these clubs is student directed and creates a culture in which students feel important.

The value of the after-school clubs in building culture at RCS does not end with the students. In talking with teachers about the After-School Program, I learned that clubs also foster the development of the positive culture. According to Karen Kondrick, sixth-grade teacher, "The clubs give me an opportunity to try my hand in designing and implementing my own Common Core aligned lessons. I am learning so much about lesson design by implementing the CC modules. It has changed my teaching. The lessons I am creating for the After-School Program are stronger because of it." Mrs. Kondrick also reported that she values the freedom she has in creating lessons and feels she can really target the specific skill needs of the students in her club. Another

> "...social media tools can help administrators capture data that can be used to analyze the culture of the building and the impact of culture on change ."

strategy that I use to make sure teachers feel comfortable, important, and understood is the monthly survey I give to my teachers that Mrs. Helmer tweeted about. Every month, I ask the teachers to report what is working well, what is not going so well, and what needs to be improved. On this day, I was so excited to see so much positive feedback on the curriculum changes. I was happy that Mrs. Helmer pointed this out. I was proud, too. I have worked so hard to support my teachers in their implementation, it was rewarding to get that feedback from the teachers. It made me feel like working even harder to support them.

The question was, what is going well? Answers included "The ELA modules," "Common Core modules," and "listening and learning modules."

I cannot begin to express how beneficial this activity has been. By conducting this "experiment," I learned not only about how culture is cultivated, but how using social media tools can help administrators capture data that can be used to analyze the culture of the building and the impact of culture on change.

In reflecting on this "Twitter Adventure," I am walking away with a stronger conviction of the importance of not only developing culture, but managing it. In reflecting on our tweets it was through this perspective that I was able to see first-hand the powerful impact of simply being present, listening, and reflecting.
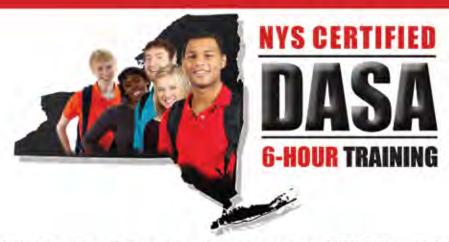

DR. LAUREN ORMSBY is the superintendent/principal of Ripley CSD.

MICHELLE HELMER is the staff development specialist at Erie 2 Chautauqua-Cattaraugus BOCES.

Lauren Ormsby @ormsby25   9 Dec
Std looking for inspiration in Lego lab... pic.twitter.com/zApRbqOu92

NYS CERTIFIED
DASA
6-HOUR TRAINING

SAANYS' Magellan Foundation is an approved NYSED provider for this 6-hour workshop to fulfill harassment, bullying, and discrimination prevention and intervention training required for certification/licensure under the Dignity for All Students Act (The Dignity Act).

PART 1:
Three hours **online** in cooperation with Legal One NY. **This is a prerequisite for Part 2.**

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Three hours **face-to-face** 10:00 am-1:00 pm (*see sidebar for locations*).

As a result of taking this workshop, participants will:

- Understand the broad scope of educator responsibilities present in the Dignity Act.
- Develop an enhanced awareness and sensitivity to the range of experiences of the specific student populations as named in the Dignity Act.
- Understand how school climate and culture have an impact on student achievement and behavior.
- Understand bullying, harassment and discrimination, including indicators, early warning signs, prevention and intervention, and how to interact with families of victims and aggressors.
- Enhance the understanding of diversity and multi-cultural environments and examine personal bias.
- Articulate the reporting requirements for educators as specified in the Dignity Act.
- **Receive a certificate of completion of the required six hour DASA course.**

Workshop Facilitator:
Dr. Michael Johnson has over 30 years of public school experience including serving as an administrator at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

Dr. Johnson is a NYSED approved DASA trainer.

6 Instructional Hours:

September 12 · Albany
SAANYS Headquarters
8 Airport Park Boulevard, Latham, NY

September 18 · Binghamton
TBD
Binghamton, NY

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October 10 · Dutchess
Dutchess BOCES, Conference Room 301
5 BOCES Road, Poughkeepsie, NY

November 12 · Buffalo
Erie 1 BOCES, Room A1
355 Harlem Road, West Seneca, NY

November 13 · Rochester
TBD
Rochester, NY

November 14 · Syracuse
Syracuse Prof. Dev./Teachers Center
1005 W Fayette St., Suite 1D
Syracuse, NY

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Cancellation/Refund Policy – Written requests for refunds (less a $25 processing fee) should be sent by email to: sjaronski@saanys.org and must be received 7 days before the workshop. After that, no refunds will be issued.

Register at www.saanys.org/events

Student Learning Objectives:
Challenges and Trends

By Cynthia Gallagher

Student learning objectives (SLOs), as used for teacher evaluations in New York, were introduced in the 2012-13 school year. Although new to New York State, SLOs have been used in other cities and states for a number of years. SLOs, as part of teacher evaluations, were first used in a pilot project in Denver, Colorado, as the cost for performance initiatives **with the goal of linking student achievement and teacher compensation**.

SETTING A **CONTEXT FOR SLOs**

Other states such as Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Ohio, as well as large school districts such as Charlotte-Mecklenburg, are using student learning objectives for teacher evaluations in a variety of ways (Connors-Tadros, Harowitz, 2014).

The term "student learning objective" is a bit of a misnomer, in that SLOs are actually an instructional blueprint for a class or section, not an individual student learning plan, as the term implies. Although SLOs are developed by examining the needs of students enrolled in a class, they are not specific to individual students. SLOs are based on past performances, instructional goals, and targets for measuring progress toward achieving objectives. The use of SLOs in teacher evaluations has gained traction as an alternative way to measure student growth in grade levels or academic areas where reliance on one assessment is not desired or possible. As part of an evaluation system, SLOs have been cast as a process that most closely resembles the work of teachers. Developing SLOs is a teacher-driven endeavor and as such provides for direct teacher involvement and input, critical to these evaluations. SLOs are a mix of professional judgment, measurement, and projections of expected growth.

RESEARCH ON **SLOs**

Teacher evaluations have been an important part of the educational system for decades. However, the shift to incorporating evaluations as part of a rigorous reform initiative is new. Recent research has highlighted the positive influence of highly qualified teachers on student performance. Correspondingly, recent studies have also highlighted how ineffective some evaluation systems have been in distinguishing levels of teacher performances and proficiencies (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, Keeling, 2009). As the public became increasingly dissatisfied with student performance in the United States in comparison to other developed nations, and as more information on the effectiveness of high-quality instruction came to light, increased attention was placed on the evaluation of teachers. In order to address this concern, federal and state initiatives have prompted examination and revisions to teacher and principal evaluation processes.

The initial use of SLOs in cities like Denver and Charlotte Mecklenburg was linked to salary incentives where teachers who met the targets established in those SLOs were eligible for increases in pay. Studies on the pilot project in Denver found that most teachers believed that SLOs improved instructional practice and that they had the potential to raise student achievement. Some studies on SLO implementation indicate that most teachers meet at least one SLO, and that trend continued in subsequent years (CTAC, 2004). Most studies on SLOs have examined statistical relationships between the quality of SLOs and corresponding improvement on student performance. A study conducted by CTAC found a positive relationship (not causality) between meeting the targets set in SLOs and student achievement on exit exams.

Overall, research on the relationship between SLOs and teacher performance ratings is limited. Studies on a direct relationship between teacher performance and SLOs and their reliability for use in high-stakes teacher evaluation are needed.

REAL **SLOs**

For over two years, I have been working with school districts on the development of SLOs and have observed, from the ground up, the evolution of thousands of SLOs. With limited guidance from state agencies or research studies, districts were forced to find their own path through a very complex task. The "exemplars" posted as models provide some guidance, but are primarily employed as tools to standardize the use of templates. They have not been helpful for assisting districts in achieving the customization needed to meet the uniqueness of each teacher, school, and district.

SLOs are developed in a variety of ways and are intended to reflect multiple goals. During the first year of implementation of the evaluation reform, school districts struggled to create meaningful SLOs in an efficient manner. The second year showed a more intentional process for developing key components such as content and targets.

The challenge for the content component is reaching a balance between breadth and focus. During the first year of implementation, most SLOs included a content component that was very broad and included a long litany of standards. Many times this listing had little connectivity to the target and rationale components. During the second year, the content component became more focused; however, disconnects between the standards/content and targets chosen for student improvement were prevalent. In states other than New York, SLOs are viewed as a way to focus learning on the most salient instructional goals and corresponding target(s). The emphasis is on strategic improvement, with measurable student performance based on a narrower range.

The student population and rationale components of the SLO show the greatest degree of variation in quality. The rationale component, intended to be the "glue" of the objective, often lacks a cohesiveness or clue on how students will be prepared for the next level of coursework. Additionally I have found that learning objectives with well-defined student population components often set the stage for focused SLOs.

SLOs FOR INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENT

As we move into the third year of SLO implementation, an opportunity arises to consider the benefits and challenges of SLOs in school districts. Some thoughts to consider include:

SLOs BEYOND THE MANDATES

Beyond their regulatory purpose, school districts may determine that SLOs have been helpful in clarifying instructional objectives and supporting conversations on best practices. Determining where to anchor SLOs is an important decision. If SLOs are aligned and focused on meeting district level goals, then SLOs may be appropriately developed in a tiered approach, by grade level. If SLOs are intended to be tied to building level objectives, emphasis may be on cohorts of students or differentiated grade level targets.

ANCHORED IN DATA

While the alignment of SLOs and their instructional goals are vitally important, the foundation for high-quality SLOs has always been the data used for target setting. Whether it is historical data from state assessments or locally developed tests that are being utilized, the data from these devices must be applied strategically and with precision in order for targets to have educational value. To gain beneficial results from these SLOs, data from high-quality assessments that contain test items aligned to instructional priorities are essen-tial. These items themselves must have a reasonable variance of depth of knowledge to be valid and informative for target setting. Striking the balance between useful items for baseline measurement and a projection of end-of-year accomplishments remains difficult. There is an inherent tension between instructional improvement goals and targets resulting in a measure that becomes part of a composite score for APPR. Metrics to guide districts in item construction are needed and unfortunately not widely available.

PROCESS USED FOR DEVELOPING SLOs

Districts across the state have used a wide variety of methods for developing SLOs over the past two years. The process used by districts played an influential role in the level of understanding of teachers in regard to SLOs. During the initial implementation, it was not unusual to see SLOs developed as an administrative-driven endeavor. This solution was effective and expedient for meeting regulatory mandates leading to APPR plan approval.

In order for SLOs to become a useful instructional tool, the development of SLOs may need to shift from an administrator function to a teacher-centered approach with administrative guidance. Maintaining fairness will require an equitable system of checks and balances.

THE WAY FORWARD

As implementation of APPR proceeds, school districts must give consideration to whether their current tools for managing SLOs are effective and efficient. At present, schools seem to be using multiple programs that are not connected. As evidence and assessment increased in numbers and complexity, districts would be well served to review their current system. At the least, districts will want solutions that are able to integrate needed data from assessments, target results, SLO components, and composite scores over multiple years. A comprehensive management product is necessary to support this complex APPR initiative and to provide much needed efficiency.

RESOURCES

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