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Association of California School Administrators
January | February 2018



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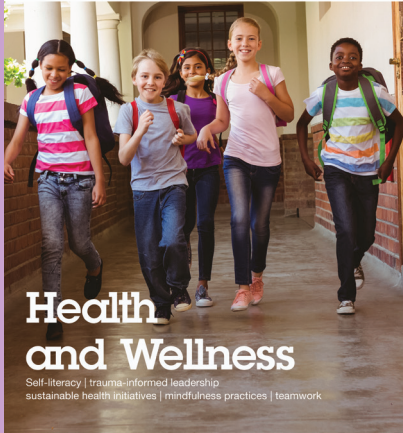
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By Scott Poland

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To Our Readers

Healthy leaders thrive on hard work, and wellness for themselves, students and others



Leadership is a calling, and it's often a physically and emotionally draining role. What are you doing to take care of you and the adults around you, while you lead and care for students? This edition of Leadership magazine focuses on myriad issues tied to health and wellness.

As a marathon coach for years, I know firsthand the importance of exercise and its impact on health and wellness. The time spent on the trails or cross-training, often with ACSA colleagues, allows for the mental down time and moments to process events of the week. Whether physical exercise or a focus on mental well-being, having that balance is critically important for all leaders.

Beginning on page 8, Know Yourself CEO Tim Howes says the time has come for education that will "prepare our kids to live full, multi-faceted lives, filled with confidence, good health, happiness and tolerance." It's time for self-literacy to be part of the curriculum. "Self-literacy is power," Howes says. "Knowing yourself makes you better at everything, literally – school, work, sports, friendships, life ... everything." Leadership coaches Shawn Nealy-Oparah and Tovi C. Scruggs-Hussein (page 12) write about the "inside-out" work of trauma-informed leadership. Learn how to avoid the cyclical conditions of trauma, which is primed for triggers and re-traumatization for adults and students alike.

San Mateo Union High School District Superintendent Kevin Skelly and Deputy Superintendent Kirk Black (page 18) share their experiences with positive work year practices that encourage "moving away from the work, relaxing, rejuvenating, and returning with a renewed commitment to the mission of the organization." Beginning on page 28, the retired director of clinical services for Tri-Valley SELPA, Edward Thompson, tells of the value of mindfulness in schools for both students and staff. "Mindfulness offers strategies and practices to help administrators manage and care for themselves so they can manage and care for others," he writes.

In this edition of Leadership we also look at the benefits of taking a social media vacation, how two school districts have implemented thriving health and wellness programs, and what we can learn about teamwork from seventh grade soccer players.

I guess when it comes to health and wellness, the question to ponder is...what comes first? Do strong leaders focus on good health, or does good health produce stronger, more effective leaders? Science-backed details of the importance of exercise, especially for leaders, abounds on the internet and in magazines. Have you made the connection yet? If not, here are a few reasons why you should:

- Health and wellness are energy inducing – the more you give, the more you get.
- Wellness increases clarity and creativity – when we are relaxed and healthy, the creative juices flow more effectively.
- Exercise and good health reduce anxiety, boost immunity, and improve sleep.
- Research shows that leaders who regularly exercise are observed to have higher, more notable leadership skills.

If the perception of effectiveness is higher in those who are healthy and well as leaders, what are you waiting for?

Cheers!

Lisa Marie Gonzales
ACSA President



Knowing more about ourselves is fundamental

What is the educational pathway that will prepare our young people to not just succeed, but thrive, in every aspect of their lives? The answer is self-literacy.

Until about 200 years ago, education was mostly about survival. The average person learned how to feed and shelter themselves and not get eaten by bears.

Enter the Industrial Revolution. Starting around 1800, the focus of modern education shifted from survival to work. Society became more mechanized; jobs moved from farm to factory; people migrated from country to city. New skills were needed to participate in the new labor force, and thus was born modern education.

In a few short decades, we evolved from one-room schoolhouses to a trillion-dollar, federally mandated education system. The results have been astonishing.

Literacy rates have risen from barely 10 percent in the early 1800s to nearly 90 per-

cent. College attendance has risen from less than 10 percent of adults to almost 60 percent, and this doesn't take into account students seeking education through apprenticeships and other forms of on-the-job training.

What's surprising, though, is that for almost two centuries, the goals of education have remained essentially the same: to teach kids to participate in the workforce.

As the jobs have changed, the curriculum has responded. To engines, add integrated circuits; to biology, add biotech; to calculus, add computer science. As technology increasingly rules the world and software controls much of our daily lives – think cell phones, cars, gaming – a more robust sci-

By Tim Howes

ence, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) curriculum is necessary so that students are better prepared for the high-tech jobs that await them.

This is all good for many reasons: higher salaries, upward mobility, the creation of a strong middle class, and entrepreneurship that leads to the founding of more companies, resulting in more jobs.

But there's a dark side to work-focused, technology-driven education and its seemingly limitless opportunities. Today's kids face obstacles for which they are not being prepared. These obstacles in turn translate into one of the most pressing parental concerns of our time: How do we keep kids grounded in their humanity in a world increasingly filled with high-tech distractions?

While technology connects us across continents and provides instant access to worlds of information, it can also be isolating. Kids plug themselves into their phones and tablets, oblivious to what's happening in the world outside. Even more troubling is the host of unforeseen challenges – cyberbullying, cyberstalking, digital destruction of reputations, easy access to inappropriate content, and new forms of overuse and addiction.

The disturbing paradox here is that while our ability to heal and our knowledge of what keeps us mentally and physically well have never been greater, we are seeing epidemic levels of preventable illness and disease in our youth: child and adolescent obesity, eating disorders, and diabetes, teen suicides and pregnancies, to name a few.

Despite all the advances of the 21st century, we are at risk of raising the first generation of young people who might not live longer than their parents.

The truth is, today's educational system is failing far too many of our children. As it prepares them to work in an increasingly technological world, it falls frighteningly short of preparing them to live in that world. Living is about much more than work.

Education should prepare our kids to live full, multi-faceted lives, filled with confidence, good health, happiness and tolerance.

So, what is the educational pathway that will prepare our young people to not just succeed, but thrive, in every aspect of their lives? The answer is Self-literacy.



Education should prepare our kids to live full, multi-faceted lives, filled with confidence, good health, happiness and tolerance.

Self-literacy means having a working knowledge of your body and your mind, and how the two work together to support your health, movements, thoughts and emotions. We may not all find a lifelong need for calculus, or gain personal insight from reading “The Catcher in the Rye,” but without a doubt, we all benefit from knowing more about ourselves.

Our humanity is the one thing we all have in common. We live in remarkably similar bodies; our brains work more or less the same way; and we are all guided by deeply felt emotional currents. Self-literacy is power. Knowing yourself makes you better at everything, literally – school, work, sports, friendships, life ... everything.

For example, how do you learn best? Are you a language learner, a spatial learner, an experiential learner? Guided by this knowledge you can learn more efficiently, retain more information, and pursue the type of

learning that suits you best. When are you at your best and most receptive to learning? Should you study first thing in the morning or late at night? When you understand how learning takes place and what methods your mind responds to best, doing well in school is not such a challenge.

What about sports? Imagine the advantage of knowing how your muscles work to propel you faster and farther, how your body converts food into energy to fuel this process, or how your body's healing processes work to repair an injury. Yogi Berra said, “Baseball is 90 percent mental. The other half is physical.” Generalizing and deciphering the questionable math, the psychological is at least as important to sports performance as the physical. Top athletes report “being in the zone” when performing at their best. What is this state, and how can you achieve it? Knowing the answers and how they apply specifically to you can help you master any



Kids love veggies!

Beets! That's right, kids chose beets as the Veggie of the Year for 2017. In 2016, it was cactus. What's this all about? The Food Literacy Center, an organization whose mission is to inspire kids to eat their vegetables.

The Sacramento-based center provides three weekly afterschool programs: food literacy classes, the Food Literacy Academy and Food Literacy Corps. Through these programs, organizers teach low-income elementary children cooking and nutrition to improve their health, environment and the economy.

In addition, the Food Literacy Center sponsors Food Literacy Month every September and the Sacramento Food Film Festival in April. The center is a multiple award-winning operation run by a very small, dedicated staff.

Each year, students vote for their favorite vegetable, sending the crystal clear message that they love veggies. But the staff knows there is plenty of work to do, since only 4 percent of kids overall are protecting their own health by eating them.

The story of the Food Literacy Center, which is funded by donations, is not only about inspiring students to eat their vegetables. The staff aims to empower them to be "fearless food adventurers." Teaching kids to eat cactus and raw beets – and looking forward to it – is certainly a sign they are meeting those goals.

Learn more about the Food Literacy Center at www.foodliteracycenter.org.

athletic endeavor.

Our personal relationships come into play here as well. Friendships are emotional bonds, and knowing how your mind works to produce emotions can help you understand your own behavior and that of your friends. What kind of friend are you? What kind of friend do you need? Do you value loyalty, honesty, empathy, fun, shared interests? Think about the friendships in your life, those that have lasted, those that haven't, the ones where you wish you'd been a better friend, or had a better friend. Wouldn't it be nice to know why?

Life is filled with choices. Most of the choices related to our bodies, health, wellness, emotions, identity, and relationships we make with surprisingly little understanding of what, why or how we are doing it. With a better foundational knowledge of our bodies, our minds, and how they work, we could undoubtedly make better decisions.

Self-literacy is not new. Indeed, it has been an ideal pursued for at least 2,500 years. From Aristotle's "Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom," to Ben

Franklin's writings, Mahatma Gandhi's teachings, and innumerable philosophers in between, self-literacy has always been recognized as the central key to our happiness, wisdom and fulfillment.

So why is it that today, when perhaps our greatest need is to keep our footing in an uncertain world, it is overlooked as a teachable skill? If we are serious about preparing our young people for success in the 21st century – at home, at work and in the community – we must ensure that self-knowledge is as fundamental to our educational systems as the ABCs and 123s.

Tim Howes, Ph.D. is co-founder and co-CEO of Know Yourself, a leading Self Literacy company that combines vetted scientific material with art and storytelling to create a series of captivating workbooks, comics and activity kits that help children make healthy choices and achieve happiness. Learn more at <https://knowyourself.com>.

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Trauma-informed leadership in schools: From the inside-out

The foundation of being a trauma-informed leader is transformational “inside-out” work that heals adult trauma and develops social-emotional intelligence. How can we teach what we do not embody?

The schools we serve are often impacted by students who have high rates of trauma. Once you have an understanding and knowledge of trauma, especially how trauma affects the minds and bodies of young people, you may experience a paradigm shift from asking, “What’s wrong with this student?” to one of asking, “What happened to this student?”

Students often come to school wounded, and we have to figure out how to best support them without re-traumatizing. Further, this information is critical for educators, so we can be more skillful in working with students who have been impacted by trauma. And we must process our own healing of trauma, so that we are not so easily triggered ourselves, re-creating a cycle of triggers that results in a poor culture-climate of the school community. Of course, along with understanding trauma, it is imperative to explore resilience strategies, so we can be responsive.

“Trauma” is defined as “a deeply distressing or disturbing experience.” A more complete definition is: “Individual trauma results from an event, series of events or circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically and emotionally

harmful or life-threatening and has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning mental, physical, social, emotional or spiritual well-being.” How did we get to that definition? The term “adverse childhood experiences” (ACE) came out of a landmark medical study from 1995 to 1997 of more than 17,000 White middle-class patients led by Dr. Vincent Felitti of Kaiser Permanente and Dr. Robert Anda from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The study originated out of an obesity clinic, but ended up revealing that aspects of obesity were directly related to trauma experienced during the first 18 years of life, categorized into three groups: abuse, neglect and family/household challenges. After deeper investigation, the study found that the higher one’s ACE score, the more prone you are to indulge in health risk behaviors and developing major long-term health problems.

The CDC has deemed ACE a major public health issue, rightfully so, as we see the impacts of childhood trauma in our classrooms nationally. In addition, childhood

By Shawn Nealy-Oparah and Tovi C. Scruggs-Hussein

trauma that goes unresolved in the adults in our educational system also impacts our classrooms.

Let's dig deeper into this fact: The higher your ACE score, the more prone you are to at-risk behaviors and developing major long-term health problems. Why? Because when students under consistent traumatic conditions become adults, often they will have a compromised immune and neurodevelopment system from a constant mindset of survival mode. Not able to discern what is safe, or not, they often develop unhealthy lifestyle habits as coping mechanisms, including overeating, drug addiction, suicide attempts and many others.

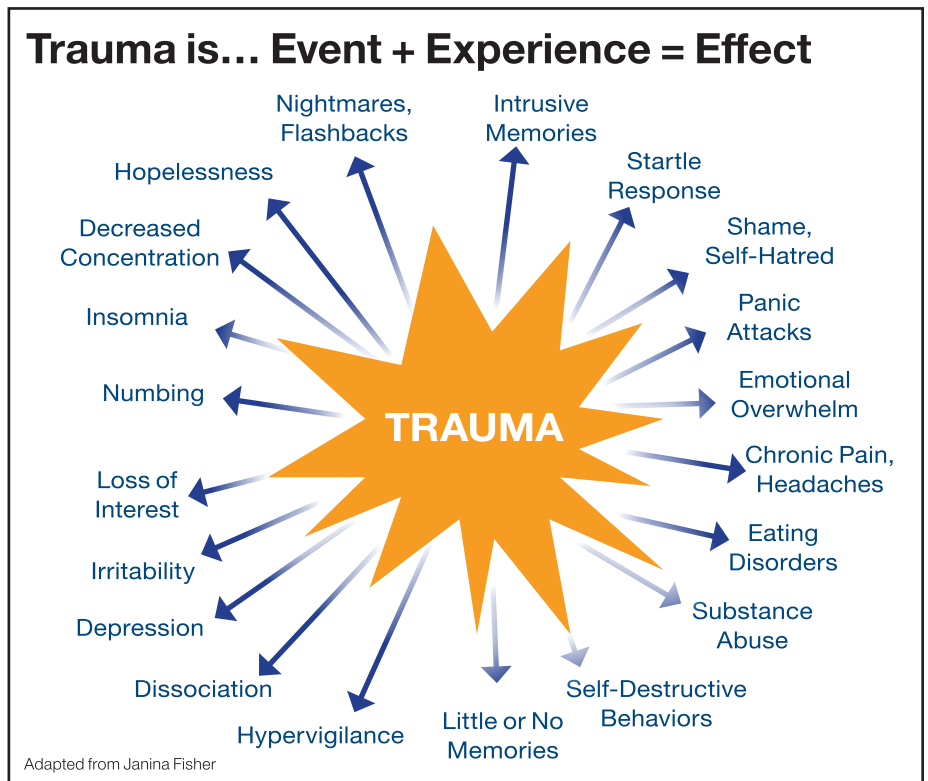
Does the student with a short temper or who just "flies off the handle" from the smallest thing come to mind? We invite you to look at the 10 questions of the ACE survey (page 16), and even take it yourself. Why these 10 traumas? The list is very intentional. There were about 60 types of occurrences, but these 10 stood out as norms of trauma, experienced and often ongoing, that damage emotional health and, thus, physical health.

Consider that most of the students we serve have a very high ACE score, and on average, more than 60 percent of adults in our nation have a score of 3-4. These students and these adults are part of our schools.

It is important to highlight that everyone responds to trauma very differently. For example, during the 9/11 tragedy, PS 234 elementary school was near the World Trade Center, and first grade student Noam Saul witnessed the first passenger airplane hit the building. Within 24 hours, he drew a picture of what he witnessed: the airplane slamming into a building, fire, firefighters, and people jumping from the windows.

At the bottom of his picture he had drawn a trampoline and explained that the next time people have to jump they will be safe. That is how he experienced it, and this was his adaptive response. It showed how his brain actually processed the event and his trauma.

He showed no signs of trauma. His brain understood that there was a safety-net for these people. There were other children who were completely traumatized by seeing the same thing. What is traumatic for some does



not have to be traumatic for all.

There are several spectrums of trauma, "compassion fatigue" in education being one of them. For the sake of this article, we will explore only a few. "Acute trauma" is one single event, whereas "chronic trauma" is repeated events of the same type or multiple occurrences of varied trauma.

Either way, trauma has a huge impact on the body. This is how it plays out: The traumatic event releases cortisol (often referred to as a stress-hormone), which impacts the adrenal system and places the child in a state of "amygdala hijack" – constant survival mode – a state of anxiety and readiness to be in a challenging situation that he is struggling to navigate. If the trauma is chronic, then this bio-response happens repeatedly, and over time the body's systems become taxed and inoperative or cease to develop in a young body optimally.

On a neuroscience level, this impacts the prefrontal cortex of the brain. All the student thinks about is navigating the threat, unable to think about other things, much less focus on learning. Here, it is important to note that the threat can be real or impending.

This is a key reason that many students have trouble being able to trust adults, as the adults in their lives may be causing "vicarious

trauma" – trauma being experienced from someone in the family, such as a parent who is suffering from illness, mental health conditions or being abusive – all causing wounds for the student who continues to be injured through re-traumatization and is not given time to heal. The adults closest to them are not providing security; thus trusting a "safe adult" is not a reality or comfortable.

For us as instructional leaders and teachers, this means that we must have the social-emotional intelligence to create schools and classrooms that are physically, socially and emotionally safe for students.

What is critical to keep in mind is that when we are talking about statistics, data and children, the ACE study was done on adults. Adults are moving through life with these traumas in a lot of ways that go unhealed. Then we go into systems – our schools – and we bring our traumas with us. At the same time, we are working with kids who are traumatized and other adults who are traumatized. We are in a whole system, working within a sphere of trauma that is reverberating. It's a cyclical condition, primed for triggers and re-traumatization for adults and students alike.

The foundation of being a trauma-informed (TI) leader is transformational

“inside-out” work that heals and develops social-emotional intelligence. How can we teach what we do not embody? There is authenticity required before creating a TI school or TI classroom. If we are not embodying it, then we cannot bring it into our classroom.

What is imperative is that we recognize our own triggers. We have to explore and examine those triggers in order to heal, so that we show up more whole to our work. Often,

the way we behave is a result of our triggers and trying to avoid them.

So whatever is triggering, then that’s where you want to start to explore. Why is that a trigger for you? Where does it stem from? Where do you feel it in your body? This connects to neuroscience as we look at the amygdala in the brain, which is basically the reactivity center. To put it simply, it governs your sense of emotional balance. If you can have less reactivity, then the better you are at

being more balanced and present – a calming presence in your classroom, in your school, in your life.

So, students are coming to school with trauma. What can we do? Research shows the following are common triggers for students, along with some trauma-informed responses:

- **Unpredictability.** Students who have suffered chronic trauma seek predictability, that is why school can feel like a good place for them. It is often predictable, but our classrooms are not when there is poor classroom management. Quality classroom management – along with school-wide norms and expectations that are followed by all staff – supports a predictable environment.

- **Transitions.** Classroom transitions are deeply significant, and we know this is connected to “unpredictability.” Often we see teachers explain directions while kids are moving. That’s when disruptive behavior starts because they are trying to navigate their safety. It is imperative that teachers make students aware of what the day’s session will involve. Remind students of what is coming next, and have a smooth transition from one activity to the next, such as warning students “there are two minutes left, and then we will...”

- **Sensory overload.** This connects tightly with the above two. Overall, students get too much stimulus that is unpredictable. For example, kids are experiencing a variety of behaviors from other students in the classroom, due to a lack of teacher-control. That results in emotional sensory overload (distressing) and the possible feeling of a threat to physical safety.

- **Feeling disrespected/called-out.** Students seek safety and respect from caring adults. It is critical to not put a student “on the spot” or create a situation where he/she can feel shame or embarrassment. It is best to pull a student aside and be discreet, use a caring tone when correcting, and give time for the student to self-correct, so he or she feels empowered and autonomous, i.e. “more in control.”

- **Confrontation.** Confrontation – verbal or proximal – immediately threatens a student’s sense of safety, especially if trusting an adult is already an issue. First, verbally,



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confrontation has a harsh-tone, which triggers the amygdala to question or anticipate if a harsher “threat to safety” is coming. A proximal confrontation could mean standing too close to a student when correcting, getting in their face/space, and even moving your hands/arms too much while correcting the student. It is always best to think “de-escalation” in terms of words, tone and body language when working with students who may be impacted by trauma.

The eight Rs

TI leadership gives you a lens to create a trauma-sensitive environment (TSE). There are eight Rs in creating a TSE. The first four Rs are about how adults need to be responsive: realize, recognize, respond and resist re-traumatizing.

As adults, we need to realize that, “Oh, some of my students have been exposed to trauma.” Once you realize that, then you recognize it by your more responsive actions, then you will not have the amygdala hijack reaction and be so easily triggered, leading to a negative interaction with a student. You will be able to self-regulate in the moment and respond appropriately. Most importantly, resist re-traumatizing the student by utilizing the shared strategies and de-escalating a situation. Remember that students are not in the same space of awareness and adult maturity.

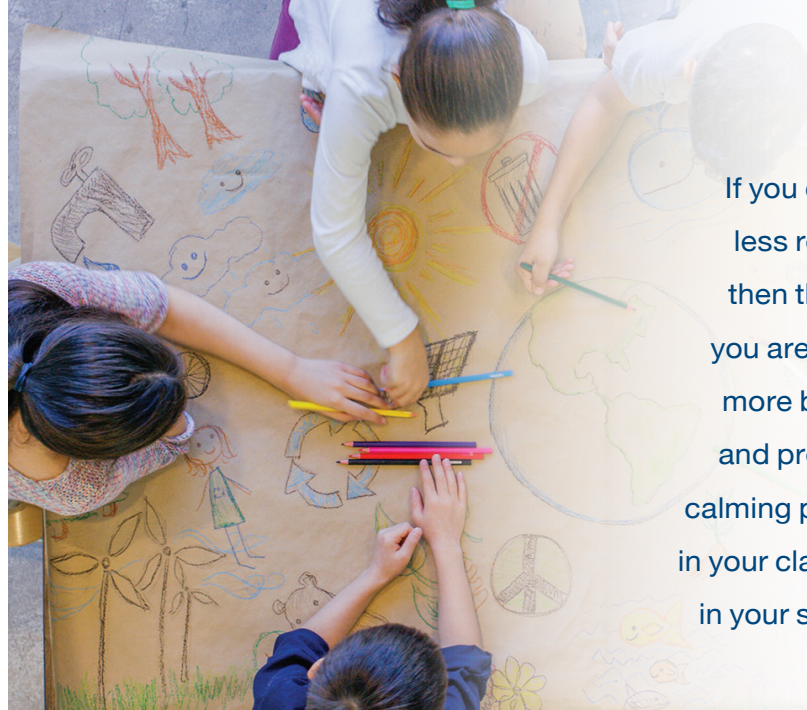
The second set of four Rs are the adult behaviors needed for a TSE:

- **Routines** – links to predictability and classroom management. Plus, if home is not a safe place, then the student can have a safe adult relationship at school. Adults need to teach routines because often students who have experienced trauma in the home do not have routines – or the routines are not healthy.

- **Rituals** – some type of ritual that helps students feel special, calm and connected; maybe it’s meditation, maybe it is circle time.

- **Relationships** – A healthy connection to a caring adult is essential to healing and resilience. Plus, a healthy connection models a healthy relationship for a child and helps to rewire the brain for positive connection.

- **Regulation** – Often, traumatized students do not have the tools to self-regulate. Adults need to model that: “You know what



If you can have less reactivity, then the better you are at being more balanced and present – a calming presence in your classroom, in your school, in your life.

I do when I’m upset? I start to breathe and just let myself calm down or I go to a quiet place for a few minutes.”

Lastly, the research shows that there are five key elements to creating and sustaining trauma-informed leadership and a trauma-sensitive environment:

- 1) Adults must adaptively change behaviors, assumptions and beliefs.

- 2) Adults must focus on student engagement with positive school-wide plans linked with positive classroom management.

- 3) All school staff need to be involved in the professional development and reflection process around TSE.

- 4) High quality, relevant instruction to engage students is essential to learning.

- 5) School leaders must create an environment where it is safe for adults to share and reflect on beliefs and practices.

All school staff need to be involved with professional development and reflection processes around social-emotional learning (SEL), around creating TSE. School leaders have to create environments where it’s safe for adults to share, be vulnerable, speak their truth, heal and have difficult conversations. We must create our work environment to be a safe place to reflect on the beliefs and the practices we engage in for those we serve.

We are creating our school culture. We have to get out of our comfort zone in that area. We so often make students who can’t relate to us adapt to us and our ways, when we can’t relate and connect to them and

their ways.

While research has provided those five key elements, we are advocating for a sixth: We have to partake in the healing work that results in greater adult capacity building of social-emotional intelligence. Again, it starts from within, from the inside-out.

Also, we are asserting that teacher and administrator preparation programs need to engage in SEL, and that this work be part of professional development, because we have to engage in our own unhealed traumas and social-emotional learning as adults. Again, we cannot teach what we do not embody.

Trauma-informed leadership is not about changing the students, it’s about changing adult behaviors. It’s not a curriculum, it’s a mindset and a way-of-being. There’s a lot of self-work that has to go into that before we implement with efficacy.

Resources

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- Australian Childhood Foundation: Protecting Children. (2010). “Making Space for Learning: Trauma Informed Practice in Schools.” Retrieved from www.theactgroup.com.au/documents/makingspaceforlearning-traumainschools.pdf.

- Burke-Harris, N. (speaker). (2014, February). TED. “How childhood trauma af-

Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Questionnaire:

Finding your ACE Score

While you were growing up, during your first 18 years of life:

1. Did a parent or other adult in the household often ...

Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you?

or

Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?

Yes/No If yes enter 1 _____

2. Did a parent or other adult in the household often ...

Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you?

or

Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?

Yes/No If yes enter 1 _____

3. Did an adult or person at least five years older than you ever...

Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way?

or

Try to or actually have oral, anal or vaginal sex with you?

Yes/No If yes enter 1 _____

4. Did you often feel that ...

No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special?

or

Your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?

Yes/No If yes enter 1 _____

5. Did you often feel that ...

You didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes and had no one to protect you?

or

Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?

Yes/No If yes enter 1 _____

6. Were your parents ever separated or divorced?

Yes/No If yes enter 1 _____

7. Was your mother or stepmother:

Often pushed, grabbed, slapped or had something thrown at her?

or

Sometimes or often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist or hit with something hard?

or

Ever repeatedly hit over at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?

Yes/No If yes enter 1 _____

8. Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic or who used street drugs?

Yes/No If yes enter 1 _____

9. Was a household member depressed or mentally ill or did a household member attempt suicide?

Yes/No If yes enter 1 _____

10. Did a household member go to prison?

Yes/No If yes enter 1 _____

Now add up your "Yes" answers: _____ This is your ACE Score

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Shawn Nealy-Oparah and Tovi C. Scruggs-Hussein are colleagues at Partners in School Innovation, adjunct professors at Mills College, where they co-teach a course on trauma-informed leadership, and facilitators of transformational leadership with an SEL focus. Scruggs-Hussein also serves as ACSA's Region 6 state equity rep.

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Positive work year practices promote wellness and rejuvenation

Encouraging and promoting not working is an important step a district can take to support the social, emotional and mental health of its administrative leadership.

A school or district administrator's job is a jealous lover – it constantly craves more of our energy; it relentlessly demands our thoughts, and whether we like it or not, there always seems to be more to do to support students and staff.

Keeping perspective is always difficult, and when we are out of kilter, it's particularly difficult to make wise decisions. We need to be at our best to do our best for the students, families and staff we serve.

Most districts in the state have job descriptions that set specific expectations around the number of days an administrator works and then, after subtracting holidays, derive the number of vacation days the employee receives. This practice has the potential to conflict with other efforts one might devise to promote healthy work/life balances among district leaders because in this model people have an incentive to “store” days in exchange for money at retirement.

Instead, we believe that having a specific number of work and non-work days for each position and no accrued vacation – what is known as a positive work year – is far superior for multiple reasons, and in no small part because it promotes the wellness of the district's leadership team in a way that sets

the example for others.

Loving the work we do is a good thing, but, like every relationship, our love affair with our work must be healthy. While there's no panacea for the challenge of work-life balance, we believe that sometimes encouraging and promoting not working is an important step a district can take to support the social, emotional and mental health of its administrative leadership.

We are convinced that positive work year calendars promote employee health and are sound personnel management practice.

The value of vacations in creating a healthy work-life balance

We educational leaders, like everyone else, need recharging and rejuvenating. Our positions entail punishing hours, including multiple night meetings and weekend commitments. The school year rushes by. Others look to us for strength and a giving spirit no matter the circumstances. Every parent group and school activity “expects” to see administrators at their meeting, activity or contest.

We often feel that the highest compliment we can hear is “she's everywhere” or

By Kevin Skelly and Kirk Black

“he’s always at school.” And while we can clearly see the damage long hours take on other staff, it’s easy to be blind to the toll our work takes on ourselves and the relationships most important to us.

In our district, when we are at our best, we unequivocally promote the value of moving away from the work, relaxing, rejuvenating, and returning with a renewed commitment to the mission of the organization. We tell those we supervise that taking breaks to recharge batteries is sometimes just as important for an employee’s success as the long hours that inevitably come with their jobs.

While we would like principals and other administrators on duty when school is in session, we also support reasonable use of non-work days during school that enrich and enhance parts of administrators’ lives outside work.

We have recently adopted a similar positive work year schedule for confidential employees and pushed other employee groups to have positive work years for the same reason. And, while it sometimes feels heartless to refuse extra pay for more days worked, we almost always say “no” at every juncture.

But it’s more than just recharging and rejuvenation. By not working we can gain the creativity that comes from a healthy emotional distance from the challenges of a school year. New approaches to enduring challenges can flower when we overthrow the tyranny of the urgent. At a time when our students seem busier and more stressed than ever, we leaders can model the health benefits of down time.

In sum, we honor the often Herculean efforts of our fabulous team, and then urge them to go away and regain their strength and a balanced sense of self.

The trouble with counting vacation days

In theory, a traditional “work schedule with vacation days” policy matches a positive work year strategy when employees exhaust their vacation balances at the end of every year. The trouble starts in the rare instance when district leadership would want to grant permission for employees to carry over days to the next year becomes the widespread practice of allowing district administrators



While we can clearly see the damage long hours take on other staff, it’s easy to be blind to the toll our work takes on ourselves and the relationships most important to us.

to accrue unused vacation days.

Not taking all of one’s vacation days annually creates something akin to another retirement savings account. Over one’s career, employees can accumulate a bank of unused vacation days that can be cashed in when one retires or moves on. The bank’s value, and corresponding unfunded liability of the district, grows much faster than district revenues as an employee’s pay increases with time in the district and any move up the organizational ladder.

Unchecked, this amount can equal or surpass a year’s worth of salary, and its existence represents a sizeable, and often growing unfunded liability on a district’s financial books.

There are also perverse incentives under this traditional scheme. Employees at all levels have a strong incentive to underreport their vacation days to build their vacation balance. Allowing vacation balances to grow reinforces this practice. Upper management employees with little or no supervisor oversight are often the most difficult to monitor in this regard and, sadly, some of the most egregious abusers when a district’s poor management comes to light.

Every year it seems there is an investigatory story where districts are accused of mismanaging vacation day balances. Or there is an exposé of a retiree whose last year included a big vacation day payout that is painted in the worst light. This damages confidence in K-12 education in our state.

Abuse of vacation balances is preventable by using a positive work year. Yes, employees can work more days. But in our district, they are not going to get paid for this time unless they have pre-approved days with specific extraordinary tasks to perform approved by the board on the personnel report.

Conclusion: Improved employee health that is free (or better than free)

Districts offer health insurance to employees and cover much or even all of the cost of premiums. Many of us provide extensive employee wellness programs. Both of these support employee health and wellness, but come at substantial costs.

Moving from vacation days, that may or may not be used, to a positive work year guarantees employees will not work more than their contracted days. It is a cost-free strategy to encourage a productive work-life balance. The positive work year calendar ensures that employees will take time to relax away from work, focus their energies elsewhere, engage with family and friends, and come back to work with renewed vigor and appreciation.

What’s not to love about that?

Kevin Skelly (kskelly@smuhsd.org) is superintendent of the San Mateo Union High School District. Kirk Black (kblack@smuhsd.org) is a deputy superintendent of the district. They can be reached at (650) 558-2200.



The benefits of a social media vacation

A social media break is a great way to reconnect IRL (in real life) with loved ones and acquaintances alike. It allows time for coffee, connection, hugs and smiles that stretch far beyond emojis.

Social media is an incredible tool. It allows us to connect, keep in touch, explore ideas or even vent. University of Pittsburgh researchers have found a distinct correlation between use time and feelings of isolation and even clinical depression. Noted scholar Brené Brown has written extensively on the ways that social media seems to have increased fear and loneliness, both noted dangers to health and well-being.

Humans crave personal connection – it's part of why we are so attracted to social media in the first place. At the end of the day, however, talking online or looking at a friend's pictures of their children or a vacation that you didn't take can bring out the worst in us: envy, fear, comparisons and a sense that wherever we are, the grass is most definitely greener everywhere else.

A social media break is a great way to reconnect IRL (in real life) with loved ones and acquaintances alike. It allows time for coffee, connection, hugs and smiles that stretch far beyond emojis. If you want to

take a break, but use social media for work or as a primary news source, it can be hard to figure out how to take the space you need.

Here are a few tips to get you started:

1. If you use your phone to check social media accounts, move all of the apps to a blank page, where they aren't the first thing you see when you pick up the phone. If you have to swipe three or four times to get there, you are far less likely to check in on your feeds 30 times a day.

2. Set designated times to check in on specific channels and for a specific amount of time. If you are an obsessive user, this can help you wean off slowly. Set a timer for, say, 10 minutes on Facebook at 11 a.m. and another 10 minutes on Snapchat at noon. This way, you don't endlessly scroll multiple feeds but are checked in enough to maintain a presence.

By Darcy Totten

3. Let people know that you are going to take a break from one specific channel, like Facebook. Set it up the same way you would an email away message and set up an auto response bot to answer any direct messages you may receive while on your social media vacation. Post the date that you will return and then simply log off. For many of us, it will take a week to remember our passwords again anyway!

4. If you use social media for work, consider taking a break from your personal accounts for an extended period of time. If you are on Twitter all day, don't check accounts for more than five minutes when you get home at night. Better yet, check your own accounts on your lunch break and power down as you leave the office, committing to family, pets, friends or any other real-life interaction when you are not at work.

5. Call up old friends. You know, the people you usually only see on Facebook. If you don't have their phone number or wouldn't want to hang out with them in person, do yourself a favor and take a day to declutter your social media friends list.



Social media is a very valuable tool in today's world, but that doesn't mean you have to be on every channel all the time.

6. Track your usage for a few weeks before your planned break. There are apps that can help with this. Facebook Runner is a good one, or use any other usage tracker. If you can see that you are spending 20 minutes or

more (many people spend nearly an hour) on each of several social media sites per day, it can make it easier to wrap your mind around taking a break.

7. Turn off your notifications. If you haven't done this yet...what are you waiting for? There is no reason for your social channels to cause you the same sort of anxiety as unread emails. If you miss something... let it go. The half-life of a Tweet is only 16 minutes. You'll catch the next one.

8. Install a blocker on your desktop browser that you can remove when your break is over. This will prevent you from checking certain sites until you are ready to come back. Think of it as insurance against a late-night craving...sort of like not keeping cookies in the house if you are powerless to resist their siren call at midnight.

9. Don't stop taking pictures. Just because you aren't posting your pictures for the world to see, doesn't mean you shouldn't take them anyway. You might be surprised how many fewer images you take now that you aren't digitally performing for a crowd. Be aware of that impulse and let it guide your future



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Room for a private moment

It's her first day back from maternity leave. She feels anxious, tired from waking up in the middle of the night, and she is wondering where and when she will be able to express milk upon returning to work.

A staff member just found out from a phone call that, miles away, a close relative passed away, and he feels anxious. It's clear he needs a little time to collect his thoughts, and he doesn't want to show this in front of students, nor in the office.

These two staff members need a private space. The school needs a small room, perhaps that used to be for storage, where there may be an air-conditioned space, and particularly a space that few have ever had a key to access. We all have seen this room, that storage or separate room with a separate key from the master key.

This room may have the possibility of being used for nursing mothers, staff needing a private moment, or a social worker to have a needed conversation. It's best if the colors are light and it has a small refrigerator, electrical outlet, comfortable chair, with relaxing environment.

It is essential that there are only two keys for this room, and perhaps another emergency key. It's best if only the front secretary has the two copies. A lactating mother may give her schedule of when she will use the room. The secretary only gives out the other key when the lactating mother is not using the room, to prevent any accidents.

This can be done. Dool Elementary had a small storage room, which had an AC window unit, and happened to have a door connecting it to the women's restroom. It also happened to have a separate key.

At the end of my second year at this school, during a teacher's baby shower, she walked to this room, and was surprised by what she had to look forward to, to best serve her family's needs, when she would return. It also has demonstrated to staff that their mental health, and their family's health, is valued by the school and district.

Joan Hanson, principal, Dool Elementary, Calexico USD

sharing when you come back to your accounts.

10. Finally, if you love your break so much, consider that you might not need all of your accounts. Social media is a very valuable tool in today's world, but that doesn't mean you have to be on every channel all the time. Think of it like cleaning out your closet...winnow it down to just a few essentials that you can't live without. Maybe Facebook and Twitter are your favorites but you occasionally post to Instagram or check in on Snapchat. Think about if you really need all of the accounts and consider only keeping the ones that truly bring you enjoyment.

A last piece of advice about getting too excited about breaking up with social media. Once you delete an account it is gone, and all of the photos, messages and connections that go with it. Consider simply not using the account as much or, in the case of Facebook, deactivating your account, which will keep it but render it inactive until you decide to reactivate it at a later date.

Social media is a wonderful tool and a

great source of entertainment and connection – in the right amounts. If you feel overwhelmed by it all, consider taking a break. Like any vacation, you'll return relaxed, refreshed, and ready to take on the world.

Resources

• Brené Brown, research professor, Huffington Endowed Chair at the University of Houston. Website: <https://brenebrown.com>.

• Pitt Center for Research on Media (2014). "Using lots of social media sites raises depression risk." University of Pittsburgh Brain Institute: www.braininstitute.pitt.edu/using-lots-social-media-sites-raises-depression-risk.

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Darcy Totten is ACSA's social media specialist and a member of the Communications team.

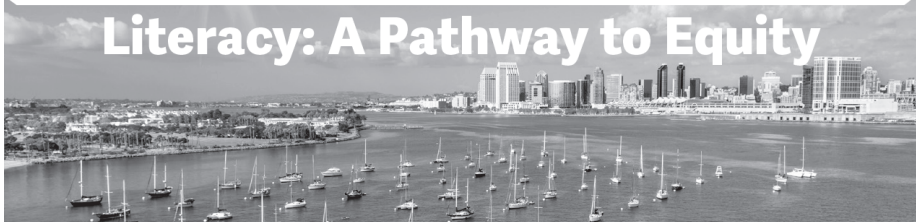
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Run, teach, eat, sleep, repeat

To say that Walnut High teacher and alumnus Jerry Knox is passionate about running might be an understatement. He laces up his running shoes five days a week, clocking five to eight miles a day, and 15 miles every Saturday.

Knox usually runs a marathon each month, and in the past 11 years has crossed the finish line more than 80 times. Every medal is displayed in his classroom, and the AP geography, bio-ethics teacher and cross country coach has been known to wear the event T-shirt to school on Mondays following a race.

In 2009, the 23-year veteran educator decided to up the ante and go for a world record “just to make it interesting.” Knox said he always liked the Guinness Book of World Records as a kid.

When his son Alex was 8, he announced, “Dad, you can beat that” after reading that someone held the world record for dribbling a basketball during a marathon. And he did. Knox crossed the finish line at the London marathon in 3 hours, 42 minutes, 20 seconds.

Knox didn’t begin running marathons until he was 36 years old and fellow teacher SoHee Tan mentioned that she had just completed one. “If she can do it, so can I,” he said.

That also began his transition to eating better. “Every year I seemed to click off something different,” he said about first giving up ground beef, then fast food, fried food and soda. He recently went vegan.

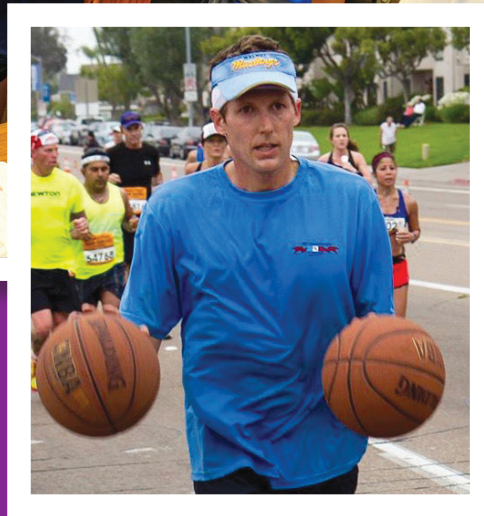
Knox doesn’t actively recruit fellow educators and students to join his healthy lifestyle, he prefers to quietly lead by example. Snacks of fresh fruit and vegetables and a “Want to get fit? Join cross country – no experience necessary” recruiting flier can be seen near his desk.

The coach also joins the student cross-country team for their daily training runs. “It’s better when he’s out on the course with us,” said junior Jason Yen. “He understands our pain.”

Knox broke four additional world records in 2017: running the fastest marathon while jumping rope, with a time of 4:20:31 on Feb. 19, and the fastest marathon wearing German lederhosen at the Los Angeles Marathon on March 19. At the OC Marathon May 8, he crossed the finish line wearing a graduation cap and gown. He smashed another record by 35 minutes while skipping an entire 26.2-mile race in 4:49 on Dec. 3 in Sacramento.

Yen says his marathon-running teacher is setting a good example for fellow students. “He has a goal and achieves it by practicing and not giving up,” he said.

Kelli Gile, Office of Community Resources, Walnut Valley USD





Practical strategies are key to sustainable health initiatives

Dry Creek Joint
Elementary School
District's very first
wellness initiative was
incredibly simple,
focusing on the benefits
of simply drinking water
and how it can make a
big difference in daily life.

The trick to creating a wellness program in the workplace with long-term engagement is to keep it simple. One of the greatest mistakes employers can make when it comes to rolling out a wellness program is biting off more than they can chew.

Large scale, complicated programs are challenging to administer and manage for employers, and difficult to understand and participate in for employees. When first introducing a wellness program, you need to eliminate as many barriers to entry as possible in order to have a high rate of employee buy-in. You can always add to your program, but like the saying goes: You only have one shot to make a good first impression.

Keeping these simple guidelines in mind, Dry Creek Joint Elementary School District has been able to implement and maintain a successful wellness program over the course of the past several years. In fact, their very first wellness initiative was incredibly simple.

"After evaluating many ideas and options,

we decided to kick-off our program with a very basic and practical strategy: getting people to understand the importance of hydration," said Rebecca Toto, Dry Creek JESD's director of human resources. "Anyone, no matter their understanding, or physical level of fitness, has the ability to track their intake of water.

"We focused on the benefits of simply drinking water and how it can make a big difference in daily life. We provided hydration stations at our school sites and district office, encouraging staff members to track the ounces of water they consumed each day."

Toto firmly believes that beginning with a challenge or an awareness initiative as simple as tracking water intake is an un intimidating gateway for employees who otherwise traditionally would not participate in a company sponsored wellness program for a variety of reasons, be it feeling overwhelmed

By Gina Nielsen

or crunched for time. With something so simple and basic, employees are able to experience how one little change can have a significant impact on their overall health and wellness. Once they have a positive experience, employees are more apt to take part in the next challenge or awareness initiative.

Toto also advises organizational wellness programs focus on incorporating wellness in the workplace, specifically, and not just at home. For many people, it can be an overwhelming task to implement a before or after work exercise routine, while balancing their family's busy schedule, or to implement new cooking strategies in a home filled with picky eaters.

However, taking advantage of the time people are clocked in at work, and focusing on improving their workplace behaviors is a perfect opportunity to expose employees to easy and practical health-wise tips and strategies. For example, this past year, Dry Creek JESD's wellness team decided to simply offer a sampling of healthy snack options in each staff lunch room.

The team paired up with a local fruit

vendor and provided each school site and district office break rooms with a variety of both easily recognizable fruit, such as mandarin oranges and bananas, as well as non-traditional fruit, including Asian pears and pluots.

The goal was two-fold. The first was to encourage employees to replace less healthy snack favorites, like chips for example, for a healthier grab and go option like fruit. The secondary goal was to expose them to healthy food sources they may not have purchased and tried on their own. By literally bringing it into the workplace, all staff members had an opportunity to participate.

Another simple way to bring wellness into the workplace is by encouraging employees to incorporate more walking into their day. Dry Creek administrators were encouraged to replace traditional meetings with walking meetings when possible. Each school site also has a walking path identified, where teachers and traditional staff alike can walk as a stress reliever, stretch their muscles, or just to get up and move.

So many people at work sit upward of

eight-hours a day. A New York Times article (<https://goo.gl/ibGzvj>), focusing on the movement research of Dr. James Levine showed that simply walking around the office for two minutes three times an hour was more beneficial in reversing the devastating health effects of a sedentary lifestyle than spending an hour at the gym after work.

Encourage employees to take a few minutes each hour for self-care. Implementing something as simple as a quick walk can have powerful and measurable effects on a person's physical and mental state. The cherry on top is employers will also reap the rewards of having refocused, healthier, less stressed employees.

Even though many of Dry Creek JESD's wellness program initiatives involve very easy and practical ways to participate, Toto said her team "knows that some people need added encouragement and incentives to say 'yes.'"

In an effort to reach all employees, supportive teams are built and her team checks in on team leaders frequently, gauging how things are going. If additional steps need to

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take place in order to ensure success of the program at hand, she advises organizations to do weekly raffles, where every participant is automatically entered to win health related prizes. Things like water bottles, exercise balls and workout bands in her experience have made great giveaways. For programs that have a competition component to them, such as “most miles logged,” bigger prizes, such as bikes and Fitbits, have proven to be

very popular prizes.

When Dry Creek JESD does not have an active wellness participation initiative going on, our wellness team communicates to employees via targeted awareness campaigns. Awareness campaigns include tips, opportunities like a free six-week gym membership, encouragement, recipes, and best practices on how to be the healthiest you.

Articles and videos selected cast wide

nets and are applicable whether you are a seasoned triathlete, or are just becoming interested in ways to make healthier food and exercise choices. Campaigns are emailed directly to staff members.

Another thing to consider is hosting an event. Toto oversees the district’s annual Health Fair. The Health Fair is traditionally held during the classified employees professional development day. Employees get to walk the fair and have the opportunity to get their fitness levels assessed, learn about the different health insurance benefits being offered by the district, and receive chair massages.

Employees walk away from the fair with bags filled with healthy fruit and vegetables, as well as recipes provided by local farms. When not walking the fair, employees are able to take classes led by industry professionals, most of which are district service providers, on topics such as healthy meals for families on the go, yoga chair stretches, “laughter is the best medicine,” and how to be a “bucket filler,” infusing positivity into relationships.

Dry Creek Joint Elementary School District believes by providing a supportive culture at work, employees are able to obtain a healthy work-life balance.

In closing, whether your organization is just thinking about starting a wellness program, or has implemented one that you wish were more successful, keeping things simple is key to maximizing participation and longevity. By starting simple, you set the stage for reaching the largest number of employees.

Being mindful of incorporating healthful initiatives in the workplace is also a way to ensure employees are more apt and open to participate. Once they have a positive experience, they will be more open to the next opportunity your wellness team presents. Providing a supportive work culture is imperative for employees to continually develop and fine tune healthy life habits.

Gina Nielsen is communications officer for Dry Creek Joint Elementary School District in Roseville. She can be reached at gnielsen@dcjesd.us.



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IUSD employee well-being program responds to site needs

Irvine Unified School District cares about its employees and is continually making improvements to ensure IUSD is a great place to work. The district recognizes its most valuable resource is its employees, and that their health and well-being has a direct impact on the continued success of IUSD.

Through collaboration between Blue Shield of California, the district's medical plan provider, Gallagher Benefit Services, the district's employee benefit consultant, and the IUSD Benefits Management Board, the IUSD Employee Well-Being Committee was established in 2014. To date, funding for the program has been provided through a grant from Blue Shield of California.

The purpose of the IUSD Employee Well-Being Program is "to create a sustainable, confidential, comprehensive well-being program that encompasses aspects of well-being (career, social/emotional, community, financial, physical/nutritional), improving the health of all IUSD employees and their families." IUSD focuses on these essentials of well-being and integrates them into its culture.

In addition to two program coordinators, each school site and department has a designated site-based well-being champion. These volunteers, who have an interest in promoting health and well-being at their sites, provide additional support to the program by disseminating monthly newsletters and program information to staff. Monthly newsletters and posters, which include health-related content and nutritious recipes, are created by Gallagher Benefit Services. In addition, the well-being champions maintain a Well-Being Program bulletin board, where program information is posted at their site. The well-being program also maintains a website.

The IUSD Employee Well-Being Program was launched starting with an employee interest survey distributed in December 2014. A total of 1,518 responses were collected, providing sufficient data to guide the IUSD Well-Being Committee to provide programs and initiatives of interest to staff members.

Based on the survey data, 52 percent of employees reported they did not know their health numbers, including cholesterol, blood pressure and glucose levels. To provide this information to staff and to establish a program baseline for the level of employee health, on-site health screenings were offered to all interested employees. As a result of the biometric data collected from the 828 health screening participants, the IUSD Well-Being Committee chose to target blood pressure reduction, managing cholesterol levels, diabetes education/prevention and weight loss/decrease body fat.

Well-being initiatives and programs offered to district employees now include discounted gym memberships, self-defense workshops, fitness classes, cooking demonstrations, retirement planning workshops, hospice information workshops, identity theft prevention seminars, résumé

writing workshops, interviewing skills workshops and weight loss and nutrition programs.

The IUSD Employee Well-Being Program has been embraced by individual school sites and district departments. Through a grant application process, sites and departments were able to apply for funds to implement specific well-being programs based on their site's needs.

Portola High School was awarded a wellness grant to address physical/nutritional well-being with an emphasis in community and social areas by way of group fitness classes and healthy cooking demonstrations. The benefits of the site-based programs included healthier food options at meetings, exercise opportunities, including yoga and Pilates classes, and nutritional education via lunch-time education sessions.

Participants reported they thought the cooking demonstrations were awesome and delicious. It also brought employees together for some great laughs. Based on a survey developed by the site's well-being champion, 91.7 percent of employees would be interested in more site wellness initiatives in the future.

The Employee Well-Being Program aligns well with IUSD's focus on building a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). Just as students should have access to best first instruction and preventative measures at the Tier 1 level, the well-being program provides services to all employees focused on enhancing their well-being.

Like Tiers 2 and 3 of MTSS, the IUSD Employee Well-Being Program provides opportunities for employees to receive more targeted support, whether on improving physical health, weight loss, mental health, financial support or self-defense workshops.

IUSD has worked hard to ensure all employees have access to a variety of means to support their well-being. Over the past three years, the Employee Well-Being Program has grown and implemented many well-received initiatives. With the support of site well-being champions, IUSD looks forward to expanding and enhancing the program.

Connie Jacobs, MS, PPS, lead counselor, and Jennifer Payton, BA, confidential assistant, co-coordinators of the Employee Well-Being Program; Sunghie Park Okino, Ed. D., coordinator of Prevention and Intervention, Irvine USD.





Mindfulness for students and the adults who lead them

School administrators have complex jobs. Mindfulness offers strategies and practices to help leaders manage and care for themselves, so they can manage and care for others.

Mindfulness has been spreading like wildfire for a number of years. An internet search shows more than 75 million hits for “mindfulness,” 35 million hits for “mindfulness in education” and 700,000 hits for “mindfulness for education leaders.”

What was once an unknown concept and practice for many people in the western hemisphere has grown to a movement affecting organizations from Sesame Street to Wall Street. Companies such as MindUp, founded by Goldie Hawn, and Mindful Schools based in Emeryville, Calif., offer school and district-wide training programs, and curriculums to promote mindfulness in schools. Both groups report to have reached close to 1 million students with their mindfulness programs.

While the value of mindfulness in schools has been studied and written about, less has been researched about mindfulness and school leaders. What is mindfulness, where did it come from, and what are the implications for educational leadership?

Mindfulness: Thousands of years in practice

Although it is often associated with eastern religions, the importance of mindfulness has long been recognized in western cultures. William James in his book “Principles

of Psychology,” published in 1890, wrote: “The faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention over and over again, is the very root of judgment, character, and will... An education which should improve this faculty would be the education par excellence (quintessential). But it is easier to define this ideal than to give practical instructions for bringing it about.”

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines mindfulness as, “the practice of maintaining a nonjudgmental state of heightened or complete awareness of one’s thoughts, emotions or experiences on a moment-to-moment basis.”

The four foundations of mindfulness are:

- Mindfulness of body.
- Mindfulness of feelings.
- Mindfulness of thoughts.
- Mindfulness of phenomena, or how we interact with the world around us.

Mindfulness can be practiced using a variety of techniques, such as visualization, intentional breathing, yoga, muscle relaxation and meditation. It can be done individually or in a group, and be part of a short term or ongoing program.

Interest in mindfulness burgeoned in the 1960s and ’70s as a result of popular and professional attention. In 1975, Dr. Herbert Ben-

By Edward Thompson

son, a Harvard physician, studied meditation and the effect on stress. His findings, published in his book “The Relaxation Response,” indicated that daily mindfulness practices, including breathing techniques, progressive muscle relaxation, meditation or visualization, can be helpful in reducing stress and related reactions, such as anxiety disorders.

In 1979 Professor Jon Kabat-Zinn of the University of Massachusetts Medical Center developed a program called Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). Originally used to augment pain management, MBSR and mindfulness practices were shown to benefit many life and work factors, including emotional regulation, enhanced attention and reduced stress.

Daniel Goleman coined the term “emotional intelligence” (EI) in his seminal book of the same name, and in a 1998 article for the Harvard Business Review cited the benefits of EI in the workplace. Among his findings, he concluded that good leaders are distinguished by a high degree of emotional intelligence.

Mindfulness in schools on the rise

Success in school requires the use of executive functions such as attention, memory and impulse control. These neurodevelopmental abilities, which mature over time, can be positively or negatively affected by genetic (nature) or environmental (nurture) factors.

Teachers quickly recognize those students who need to improve their ability to attend, self-regulate, and manage the demands of a class environment. The practice of mindfulness has shown promise in providing students with skills to increase self-management of cognitive and emotional functioning related to school success.

The positive effect of mindfulness practices on learning and school functioning has been extensively studied. An overview of research examining the effects of mindfulness programs in education (Campbell, 2014) reported positive results in improving anxiety management, reducing stress and improving social skills in students. Participants in the studies reported increased feelings of self-acceptance and improved self-regulation when practicing mindfulness.

Amy Saltzman, M.D., in collaboration with the Department of Psychology at Stanford, studied the effects of mindfulness practices with fourth through seventh graders and their parents. The results showed that after one hour of mindfulness training for eight consecutive weeks, the children demonstrated increased ability to orient their attention, as measured by an attention network test.

Researchers from Oxford and University College London are currently studying the long-term effects of mindfulness training in schools. According to an interview with Dr. Matthew Brelsilver, program director of Mindful Schools (personal communication, Oct 3, 2017), the Mindful Schools program has been used with more than 750,00 students nationally and internationally.

Dr. Brelsilver suggested that schools previously exposed to social-emotional learning programs tend to be more open to mindfulness training. He stated, “The intrinsic curiosity of teachers lends itself to interest in mindfulness.”

Some well known researchers have voiced concerns about the mindfulness craze. In an

article entitled “Don’t Believe the Hype,” contributing editor Linda Heuman interviewed Dr. Catherine Kerr, a neuroscientist studying meditation at Brown University. Dr. Kerr stated that increased media reports often seemed to cherry pick studies with positive results. She called for a more balanced review of the science behind mindfulness.

Jon Kabat-Zinn in a recent panel discussion at the New York Society for Ethical Culture discussed the future of mindfulness and worried that the explosion of programs would result in “watered down” versions lacking scientific rigor. Mindfulness like all evidence-based programs, requires intentionality and commitment to fidelity to be successful.

Managing the school environment

School administrators have complex jobs. Research has found that principals commonly report high levels of stress related to the competing demands in meeting the educational, social and emotional needs of students and staff. Principals are frequently presented with new and unexpected issues that compete for their time and attention.



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Joyful Rewards

By Cindy Costa

Active insights to enrich the work you do from a 36-year veteran, who happily served as a middle school teacher, secondary administrator and district team member, retiring in December from Hesperia Unified School District's Innovative Technology and Communication Department.

Always put children first

Believe you are a difference maker

Care when others forget

Dare to go beyond

Exercise balance often

Forgive always

Grant another chance

Highlight talents often

Ignite the fire

Jump at opportunities even if uncomfortable

Keep the faith

Let go to grow

Mentor others often

Navigate with kindness

Organize via “do, delegate, delete”

Praise without boundaries

Question often

Restore the mind, body, soul

Servant leadership is a gift you give

Take time for self often

Understand first

Vacation with family and friends often

Wisdom seeks counsel

Xtraordinary acts of kindness kindles the flame

Yearn to stretch

Zealous minds revive landscapes

Technology, gender identity and equity are recent examples.

Jerome T. Murphy, the former dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, has written about the challenges of educational leadership. He reported that more than 80 percent of administrators he polled expressed feeling overwhelmed, stressed and self-critical about their performance.

In an article called the “Leadership Trap,” he wrote: “At its heart, the leadership trap is this: To shine as a leader, you seek to control your distressing thoughts and emotions in order to steer clear of feeling (and looking) weak. Running away, suppressing your feelings, and hiding are common methods of control. Yet the more you struggle to control your insides, it turns out the more you undermine your outsides – your ability to build trust and take charge as a leader. The more you bury your stress, for instance, the more stressed and reactive you become.”

Caryn Wells, writing in the September 2013 NASSP Bulletin, reported on the increasing stress that principals experience related to heightened expectations for student achievement. She recommended mindfulness practices as a way of managing the tension and related stress in school administration.

Just as parents manage and set the emotional tone in a family, the school administrator manages and influences the emotional tone or climate in their school. School leaders become the “holding environment” for upset, anxiety and frustration associated with challenging situations.

The task of responding to daily needs of students and staff while taking care of oneself requires skills that are not typically part of an administrative credentialing training program. Mindfulness offers strategies and practices to help administrators manage and care for themselves so they can manage and care for others.

Mindfulness and emotional intelligence

The importance of understanding relationships in organizations has long been recognized. The Tavistock Institute of Social Relations has been studying methods of improving human relations in organizations since 1947. The group focuses on the often-

unconscious factors that affect how people react to factors such as authority, age or gender in the workplace.

Tavistock offers leadership training programs to assist individuals in gaining awareness and insight in order to improve work relations and effectiveness. One participant in a workshop reflected, “I realize that the principle benefit of the support I receive is to provide me with thinking time and the discipline of treating that thinking time as a priority because of the leadership challenges I face in my role. “These insights would be impossible to acquire without the benefit of skills, professional judgment and experience that is available through the coaching.

“I sometimes wonder how often people find time in busy schedules to think about the strategic issues they face individually and organizationally. I suspect only a minority would answer affirmatively. At times, dealing with complex organizational choices on a daily basis makes me break into a sweat.”

The work of Daniel Goleman, author of “Emotional Intelligence,” has emphasized the importance of awareness in recognizing one’s own feelings and the feelings of others in order to manage emotions and relationships. Emotional intelligence is an important theme in the Leadership Coaching programs sponsored by ACSA, and referenced in “Blended Coaching,” by Gary Bloom, and “Evocative Coaching,” by Megan Tschannen Moran.

Bloom writes, “As important as professional knowledge and skills are, it is no secret that school leaders often fail not because they lack brains, determination, knowledge or skills, but because of what is often characterized as ‘style’ or ‘people skills.’” Tschannen Moran includes listening “attentively, mindfully and openly” as critical skills in building trust, expanding understanding and gaining insights in supporting school leaders.

An informal survey I conducted with leadership coaches showed 75 percent agreeing that although daily mindfulness practice is difficult it would be beneficial to school leaders and students. All surveyed felt that mindfulness practices would add to positive relationships between administrators and staff members.

In my work as a leadership coach, I often

hear administrators report on the emotional challenges presented by students, staff or families. As I listen to their stories, one question I always ask is “How do you take care of yourself?” I hear the different strategies but no reference to mindfulness techniques or practices.

Administrators are pressed to use their emotional intelligence to listen, empathize and respond to issues that often have no “right” answer. While most administrators rise to the countless challenges in a school day, the job can be taxing and leave individuals feeling exhausted, overwhelmed, and in some cases, burnt out.

Mindfulness for schools and school leaders

Mindfulness programs in schools are growing, and research supports the benefits for students, staff and overall school climate. In 2014 Lidia Tilahun, M.A., and Lucy Vezzuto, Ph.D., compiled a document for the Orange County Department of Education Instructional Services Division, titled “Mindfulness Practice in K-12 Schools:

Emerging Research on Stress, Well Being and Achievement.”

In a review of the research they reported that factors essential to learning and school engagement such as attention, emotional regulation and social functioning could be improved with mindfulness practices. Studies cited also reported that teachers practicing mindfulness showed lower levels of stress and burnout.

The degree to which schools can access programs for mindfulness will vary according to needs and resources. Although mindfulness practices can benefit all learners, the skills acquired can be most beneficial to those students requiring Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions.

The Rockland County, N.Y. Board of Cooperative Educational Services received a \$1.2 million grant in 2015 from the U.S. Department of Education to pilot a program incorporating mindfulness for students with severe emotional disabilities. Mindful Schools in Emeryville offers financial assistance to school districts in need, and reports that it has trained teachers in all 50 states,

helping more than 750,000 students.

Adding new programs in a school is a process that requires engagement and support of all stakeholders. Mindfulness practices can be part of a daily routine and after time can become a more natural habitual way of being. The positive effects benefit learning, behavior and overall well-being. Developing habits take time and intention and the prospect of adding “one more thing” to an educator’s schedule can meet with resistance.

James Clear is an author who writes about the science of self-improvement and suggests that new habits have a greater chance of sticking when they are added to already established routines. He uses the term “habit stacking” to describe this process. Most schools have programs that support social and emotional growth for students. Frameworks such as the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) offer a model and guidelines for incorporating complementary programs within a school system.

Educators become administrators for various reasons. A common theme is a passion for learning and improvement and a belief

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that they can lead others in the right direction. As the saying goes “It is lonely at the top,” and many administrators once in the job find themselves isolated as they shoulder the ongoing responsibilities.

The natural tendency to avoid appearing weak can reinforce the isolation and increase the stress of leadership impacting productivity and well-being.

Guides to mindfulness practices are readily accessible and can lighten the load of school leaders. Mindfulness is best understood by practice, and leaders who model mindfulness will have greater buy-in from staff and students. Valerie Brown and Kristen Olson (2015) provide excellent detailed descriptions of mindfulness exercises for school leaders that are easy to learn.

Schools are dynamic systems of growth that reflect the changes and challenges of a fast-moving world. Educators and school leaders are increasingly tasked with addressing multiple issues beyond learning that affect student and adult performance.

Students from diverse backgrounds often come to school lacking attention and

self-regulation skills, while adults desire a greater degree of empathy and understanding while at work. Interpersonal interactions that are inherent in collaboration require greater emotional intelligence for students and staff alike.

Children living in a world of “stimulation on steroids” have the greatest need to hard-wire habits that can quiet their brains, calm their senses and allow them to grow and learn at their highest level.

Mindfulness has proven benefits for the physical, emotional and cognitive well being of students and educators. It can contribute to and help sustain positive school climates. The benefits of mindfulness and emotional intelligence are associated with successful school leadership.

In some ways the increased popularity of mindfulness may reflect a decrease in recognizing those factors that are related to a well-balanced life. In contrast to our Gross National Product index that measures abundance of goods and services, the country of Bhutan has a Gross National Happiness index that measures psychological well-

being, health, time use, education, cultural diversity and resilience as factors of a good life. That sounds like something to be mindful about.

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Edward Thompson, Psy.D., is retired director of clinical services for Tri-Valley SELPA, an ACSA Emeritus member and leadership coach, and founder of MTI Educational Consultants.

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What seventh graders can teach us about teamwork

Creating a culture of collaboration and an environment of support is not a quick process.

It requires strong, consistent messaging from you with support and empowerment.

Recreation youth soccer teams, like many kids' sports teams, can be described as a mélange of ability, effort and ambivalence. For every star player on the team, there is a player participating by force of parent.

In many ways, it is exactly what many education leaders confront when they look at their district or site teams. There are stand-outs and those who work hard. And there are those who are just going through the motions.

Turning a group of individuals with unique talents and personalities into a cohesive team requires leadership. But how do you get them to buy into a common focus and goal, while cultivating mutual respect and support? How do you get your staff to develop an understanding that every person has an equal share in the success of the team?

Finding the solution requires a strategy and determination for what you're trying to

accomplish. The strategy you use as a district or site leader to transform a group of individuals into a team committed to each other could rest with lessons learned from a bunch of seventh-grade girls.

Piranhas soccer: The beginning

Formed in first grade, the Mighty Piranhas soccer team was about as awful as you can imagine. A single victory for the first two seasons, with players and families celebrating anything that resembled a tie. As a coach, it was comically dreadful in every manner. One match, we put a player down by the opponent's goal the entire game just so we could score a goal. But we still couldn't score.

Things began turning around for this collection of players around third grade. The girls began to see that winning was fun. They won six matches that year and were

By Naj Alikhcn

league champions by fifth grade. When the players arrived in the fall of 2016, they were five-time champions between tournaments, outdoor and indoor soccer seasons.

But for all the late elementary school soccer success, a host of new issues arose as the players got older. Especially when they reached middle school, a transition that many will admit is the most difficult transition for any student.

Time to build the 'Family First' environment

Identifying your leverage point for change can be a challenge. If you are new in your position or at your school site, the moment of change is easier to identify. It's the moment you step into your new environment.

But if you're looking to strengthen your team under a new strategy, and you've been entrenched in your position for some time, there may be more difficulty. It may force you to use the calendar as the leverage point: a new school year; perhaps returning from a long vacation like winter break.

The transition to middle school would be the appropriate place to leverage a culture change with our team. We called it "Family First," and we began installing it when the players and families returned to practices in the summer.

Under the Family First strategy, players were to support and respect each other on the practice field, at matches, and perhaps most importantly at school. The same went for the parents. This was a collective effort to build positive affirmation and commitment to each other.

As I mentioned earlier, recreation soccer brings unique abilities, and the Family First strategy was a team effort to prevent the "Mean Girls" syndrome. This strategy would allow everyone to comfortably have a say in what we did and how we operated, as well as open a dialogue focused on trust and understanding.

Some players, as you would expect, were still more vocal than others. But there was positivity in the air. The players didn't hesitate to pull the coaches aside and talk strategy or their role on the team. Before this strategy was put in place, it would normally be the parent who spoke up for their player.

It proved powerful to all of us because we had the buy-in of every member of our soccer family.

But for every strategy, there is that moment that can throw all of your good work and your 9-0 season record out of the window: Crisis.

We watched it come together

There is an aura that comes with playing for the city championship under the lights in

a real stadium on a Friday night. The spotlight, however, can strengthen some and crush others.

It was crushing for the Piranhas. The team hadn't fallen behind in a match all season, but 15 minutes into this championship we were down 2-0. The players were stunned. The coaches were stunned. The families were stunned. The cheering on the other sideline was deafening.

Then the lights went out in the stadium.



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Not metaphorically speaking; the towers of lights really went to black. And unlike many who wondered if the match would continue, the blackout couldn't have come at a better time for the Piranhas.

Players and coaches sat on the ground together. At this crisis moment, we all needed to look at each other eye-to-eye and rely on the strength of our Family First bond to pull us through this tough time.

As coaches, we only talked for about two minutes. A few instructions and some words of encouragement. Then we got up, and as we walked away, we told the players, "It's on all of you. You've spent all season relying on each other...supporting each other...trusting each other. We're a family, and now it's on all of you as a family to figure this out."

Measuring the success of our strategy happened about two minutes later. Huddled

up on the field, the players supported each other, and more importantly, they challenged each other. On their own, words of encouragement and strategy came out from the players. One comment from our goalkeeper stuck out: "We've worked hard all season to get here, and we're not going to waste all that work by losing this game."

That was incredible, and so was what happened.

The Piranhas came back. They scored three goals in the next 20 minutes. They held off their opponent the rest of the way, relying on each other at every moment to protect their lead. There was "no I in team" all season, and there certainly wasn't on this night.

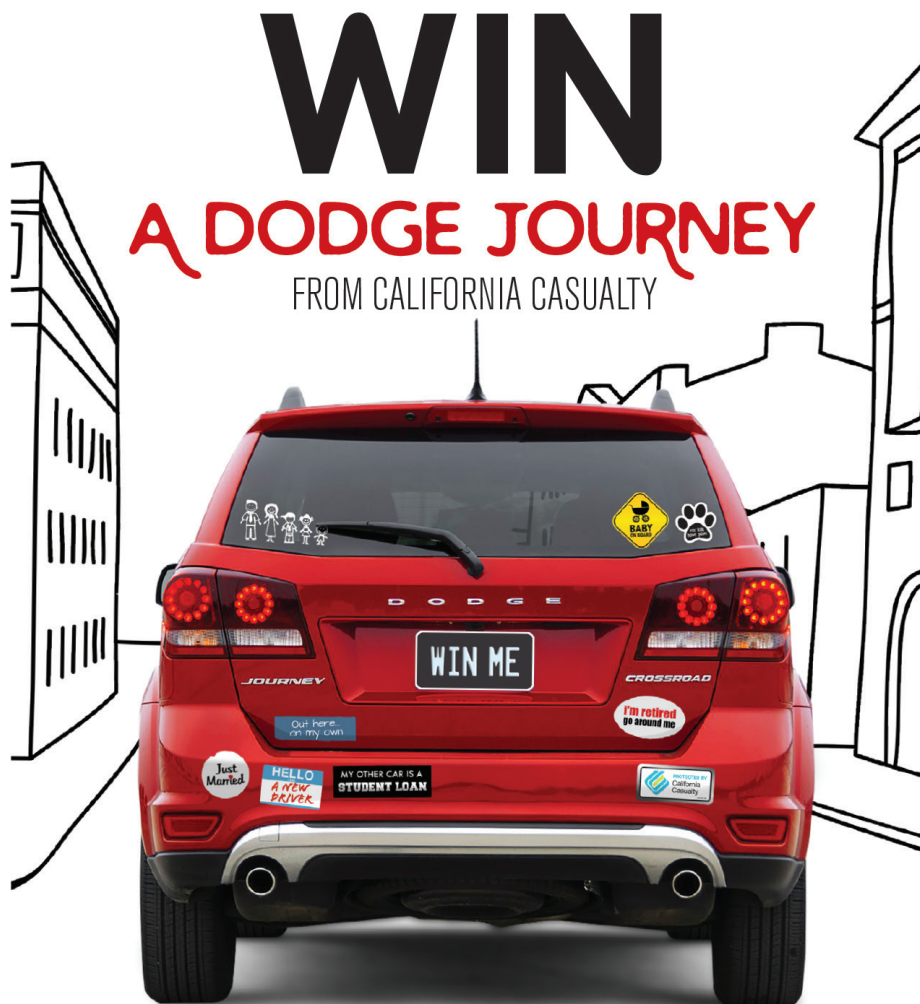
When the final whistle sounded, there was jubilation among the players and joy on our sidelines. And there was a sense of relief among the coaches. The strategy of building a Family First environment worked for this group. There were no "Mean Girls" moments. Players were vocal in their support for their teammates. And when it mattered most, none of the players were afraid to speak up and challenge one another.

So what does this mean for you?

The Family First strategy that we put in place worked for seventh graders. Will it work for you? It comes back to your strategy and what you're trying to accomplish.

Creating a culture of collaboration and an environment of support is not a quick process. It requires strong, consistent messaging from you with support and empowerment. It requires staff buy-in and eliminating exceptions. Nobody is more important than anyone else, everyone has an equal part of the team's success, and everyone has a voice.

Be patient but be steadfast in your strategy and what you're working to accomplish. While your strategy and your accomplishments may be different, it really comes down to the culture and environment you want to create.



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Communication that reflects a healthy school culture

Design thinking can be the primary lever for applying practical strategies for meaningful communication that ensures a school functions each day and that adult problems don't get in the way of student needs.

Before I could stop myself, I blurted out “She didn’t even eat my cupcakes!” Naturally, this confused both my boss and I – what did the current disagreement that I was having with my colleague have to do with cupcakes? Absolutely nothing, but absolutely everything.

I would love to say that I have solely focused on improving student outcomes, but that just isn’t true. Adult problems get in the way of student problems, and as education leaders we have to proactively address them. School climate is a priority for both the students in our classrooms and the staff supporting them. However, miscommunication often leads us to focus on our peers, rather than our students.

Through this article, I will give an overview and practical applications of how “design thinking” strategies can be used to create a meaningful communication system to positively impact our professional climate.

Why communication?

Design thinking uses analytic and creative processes to create and iterate systems by gathering feedback from users in an effort to redesign (Razzouk 2012). A key element in design thinking is that the challenges with the current system are met with a pro-

cess to solve the problem by the folks who use the system each and every day.

One of the biggest systems at our schools that lack intentionality is our communication system. At schools, we thoughtfully plan interventions and how to accelerate students, but we rarely consider how, what and why we communicate. For school operations, communication is the primary lever to ensure that a school functions each day. A strong communication system can be the root cause of a school climate that is student-centered and positive.

Without effective communication, it is difficult to meaningfully collaborate or share best practices to truly transform the site.

Designing communication systems should be one of the first priorities that are addressed by new school administrators or schools that need a culture shift. Co-constructing this process with teachers creates collective buy-in and ownership of communication, climate and culture.

Facilitating change

At Oakland Unified School District, design thinking has helped me facilitate schools to re-set norms and strengthen col-

By James Hilton Harrell



laboration systems. Co-creating solutions is enthralling and helps build trust between administration and teachers. However, if the feedback is not followed up or appears to be ignored, it can absolutely destroy a professional working culture.

The first step in designing your communication system is simple: Have your community tell stories. In pairs, let folks tell stories about a time that communication faltered, while their partner takes notes and listens. Was there a miscommunication? Was information not received in time? Why? Asking folks to tell stories is liberating. Everyone has one, and it's easy to facilitate as a leader. As you walk around, you'll be surprised to hear what people are identifying as growth areas. Often, they aren't what you expected.

From these stories, individuals will reflect on what they needed that they didn't get. Have folks write them on a sticky note, and then group these needs to identify trends. Identifying trends is often surprising. When I completed this process for feedback on an instructional program in Oakland, teachers surprised me with their pain points. Despite working with them each week, I didn't understand their lived experiences. Through this process, I was able to see what was actually challenging and create the needed supports for the next year, significantly increasing teacher buy-in.

These trends then inform the questions you are trying to solve. Translating needs into "How might we...?" questions lets folks co-construct a communication system that works. Some examples from staff engagements that I've led have been: "How might we create a communication system that prioritizes teacher expertise?" "How might we build more trust in a staff?" "How might we know that we are heard?"

Often these communication systems underscore important climate and culture issues, and allow for an easier avenue for folks to identify their own social-emotional needs. Communication isn't just information transmission; it's relationships, politics and engagement.

Once the right question is asked, have folks generate the who, how, what and where via a brainstorm. Primed with their needs, teachers are able to create a system that ad-

Communication isn't just information transmission; it's relationships, politics and engagement.

dresses their concerns or the guidelines for an administrator to focus on. This process can be transformational for staffs that are feeling disempowered, allowing them a cathartic release to both identify their needs and then construct the ideas of a new system.

A word of caution: Completing this design process and not following through with implementation or clear changes can be disastrous. It is important that the leadership team is ready to dive deeply into this work and follow-through with next steps. When teachers feel they have a voice and then it gets taken away, it can undermine any and all work at sites.

A note on inclusion

Designing new communication and doing school culture work is tough, especially if the process is new to your staff or you're a new administrator. This process requires having a profound understanding of your community, trusting your own leadership, being able to see the bigger picture, and choosing a process that will ultimately have a positive impact for all of your stakeholders.

With any school-wide improvement process, it is important to reflect on both diversity and inclusion. Diversity signals who is in the design process, and inclusion means who can meaningfully contribute to the design process.

Throughout the process, identify universal, or near-universal, truths that exist for your underrepresented staff members. For example, are people of color having an entirely separate experience than your White teachers? An effective communication system actively ensures that all of your staff

members are included and part of the work.

In conclusion

Most change initiatives fail because we aren't addressing the right concerns, and stakeholder voice is lost in translation. Using design thinking to facilitate discussions on communication often leads to an improved focus on professional culture, as communication is much more than information transmission.

At the beginning of the article, my issue wasn't actually cupcakes, it was that I didn't have an avenue to communicate effectively with a teammate. This process can be scary and should be completed by leaders who are genuinely willing to change or refine their systems. Leaders have to cede control and be open to addressing problems they don't know about. The more open you are in distributing leadership and power, the more you'll find the process to be renewing and restorative (Aye 2017).

Resources:

- Aye, G. "Design Education's Big Gap: Understanding the Role of Power." Medium. June 2, 2017.
- Razzouk, R. and Shute, V. (2012). "What is Design Thinking and Why Is It Important?" Review of Educational Research, Vol. 82, Issue 3, pp. 330-348

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