

NEWSLETTER

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President's Message



Dear Colleagues,

Spring is here although I am writing this while snow is blanketing the ground. It is a busy time of year with budget meetings and hiring staff for next year, but remember summer will be here before you know it!

The annual Commissioner's Conference will be held in the Bar Harbor area on

June 24th and 25th. MSSA is working collaboratively with the DOE to plan the agenda. This event is a great way to unwind and connect with colleagues, acquire new information and knowledge to take back to our districts, and celebrate the accomplishments of our peers at the Awards and Recognition Banquet. Please make it a priority to attend this valuable conference as it strengthens our organization.

Recently, many of you attended the inspiring Manny Scott presentation. He points out that people entered education because they wanted to make a difference in the world, but many of them are tired. They are tired of the politics, tired of being under-resourced, tired of being underappreciated, and underpaid. Manny reminds us why people entered the teaching profession by focusing on the following:

- Our work is not in vain.
- We have the power to change someone's life.
- Even on our worst day, we can still be a student's best hope.

I recently read an article called "Seven Keys to Restoring the Teacher Pipeline" by Douglas Reeves. Reeves says the current U.S. teacher shortage is the result of a "perfect storm of lowered respect, toxic teacher evaluation systems, adverse working conditions, inconsistent leadership, lack of efficacy, professional isolation, and inadequate pay." But Reeves believes the following steps will restore teaching "to its rightful place in an equitable society:"

Boost respect. "The essence of professional respect is not instant popularity or approval by students or parents," says Reeves, but the confidence that great practice requires patience and challenge."

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Uncompromisingly Learner-Centered Schooling

California's Lindsay Unified Schools have spent a decade developing a performance-based system

By Barry E. Sommer

Imagine an environment where excited student learners cannot wait to return to school each day. A place where learners are met at their developmental level, are challenged and ultimately are successful. A place where students have positive relationships with adults and work collaboratively with peers. A place where learning is customized and meaningful and where students leave as graduates with lifelong learning skills, ready for the future of their choice.

This education system is not based on the constructs of time. It does not become a reality through simple initiatives or standard reform efforts. It's transformational, demanding systemic shifts in thinking, leading, teaching and resource management across the school system and the community.

It's *uncompromisingly learner-centered*, built on the diverse needs of learners versus the convenience and preferences of adults. It's also possible, as we are demonstrating in the Lindsay Unified School District, a PK-12 school district in central California's San Joaquin Valley.

Second-Order Change

Lindsay Unified, serving about 4,000 students, sits in a region that is home to a large population of immigrant families and English learners. About 87 percent of school families live below the federal poverty level, with low levels of literacy in English and parent education. Almost a third of the district's learners come from migrant families who work in the surrounding fields and production areas.

For decades, student achievement in our district was flagging. Schools were grossly underperforming, and apathy characterized student and staff dispositions. Instructional reforms were ineffective. What we needed was systemic, second-order change, a new way of seeing and doing.

This required us to tear down the constructs of traditional education, to change our philosophy about teaching and learning and to emphasize collaboration over isolation. Of our early moves toward transformation, Jaime Robles, Lindsay's executive director of human resources, says, "We didn't want a better version of bad. We wanted a good version of right."

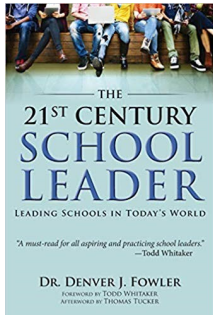
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Good Reads

The 21st Century School Leader

Leading Schools in Today's World

By Dr. Denver J. Fowler



This ground-breaking book titled *The 21st Century School Leader: Leading Schools in Today's World* focuses on effectively leading schools in the digital age (21st Century and beyond) where a majority of all stakeholders including students, staff, parents, community members, and business owners are digital natives. Written by an award-winning practitioner and international scholar, the author infuses this approach as it applies to all aspects of school leadership.



OUTSTANDING LEADERSHIP AWARDS

MSSA established a program in 1984 whereby superintendents will be recognized annually for their "Outstanding Educational Leadership," with awards to be presented at the Commissioner's Conference in June. The awards policy identifies four criteria which will be considered by the Executive Committee in selecting the recipients of the awards. These include: (1) leadership, (2) professional service to the Association, (3) exemplary educational programs with which they have been associated in a leadership capacity, and (4) service to the profession of education.

Nominees must be a member of MSSA for a minimum of three years. The MSSA Executive Committee will accept and review all nominations and allow the ranking process to dictate the total number awarded. (Please note that nominees must obtain a certain level in the rankings and all nominees may not necessarily receive the award).

Nominations for Outstanding Leadership may be made by regional presidents/associations, and awards limited to one per region.

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

The Distinguished Service Award is not necessarily an annual award. Its recipient must be a person who has:

- Made real, recognizable, and outstanding contributions in the field of education on the local, state, and/or national levels.
- Been responsible for having promoted better education in the positions held.
- Assisted other educators in the development of worthy educational objectives.

Nominations for the award are subject to the approval of the members of the Executive Committee of the Maine School Superintendents Association. Send any recommendations to Executive Director Eileen King at MSSA.

RETIREMENT RECOGNITION

Please inform Executive Director Eileen King eking@msmaweb.com of any superintendents from within your region who plan to retire this year.

Nominations will be made during the April Regional Meetings and then forwarded to MSSA.



President's Message

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Improve feedback. Feedback on classroom performance needs to be fair, accurate, specific, and timely, always with an eye to the impact of specific instructional practices on student learning.

Strengthen leadership. For more than two decades, says Reeves, teachers have been "at a sea amid a squall of inconsistent initiatives and demands." What's needed from school leaders is frequent coaching on teachers' practices, which will bring about dramatic improvement in professional engagement and teachers' quality of life.

Build efficacy. Researchers agree that one of the key factors in classroom success is teachers' belief that they can make a difference. "Therefore," says Reeves, "it is essential for school leaders to elevate policies that support teacher efficacy - for example, publicly linking teachers' practices to student success and helping teachers build on strategies that are having an impact."

Allow autonomy. Studies have shown that a major factor in teacher attrition is the micromanagement of classroom curriculum choices. "School systems hire teachers because they are bright, creative, and independent," says Reeves, "and then seem deeply disappointed because they turn out to be bright, creative and independent."

Foster collaboration. Schools that orchestrate professional learning communities are by far the most successful for students and teachers, says Reeves. That means "collective ownership of student results, deliberate reflection on teaching practices, explicit intervention for struggling students, and clear strategies for extending learning for students who need it."

Raise the pay. Reeves addresses this one last because he believes it's "a necessary part of fixing the teacher pipeline equation, but insufficient on its own." Nurses, social workers, therapists, and teachers "seek meaning, not just remuneration," he says. But of course "money is an essential ingredient in securing the future of the teaching profession."

I hope the school years ends on a positive note for all of you, and I look forward to seeing you at the Commissioner's Conference at the end of June.

Reference: "Seven Keys to Restoring the Teacher Pipeline" by Douglas Reeves in *Educational Leadership*, May 2018 (Vol. 75, 8, online), <https://bit.ly/2rFSU8B>

Patrick

Years of Service Survey

We are in the process of updating our records for the Years of Service awards to be presented at the Commissioner's Conference in June.

Please complete and return [this Survey](#) to Debbie Swift via email at dswift@msmaweb.com at your earliest convenience but prior to **Friday, May 3, 2019.**

Uncompromisingly Learner-Centered Schooling

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Learners at the Center

National school reform experts Bea McGarvey and Chuck Schwahn helped the district develop a community-driven strategic design — a blueprint to reimagine Lindsay’s schools and empower learners and staff members. In spring 2007, the leadership team organized a series of community stakeholder forums and asked five essential questions:

- » Why do we exist as an organization?
- » What are the core values that govern how we will interact with one another?
- » What are our guiding principles?
- » What is our vision for the future?
- » What is the description of our graduates?

The answers led to the July 2007 adoption of the Lindsay Strategic Design, a crucial turning point for the school system as it established the mission, core values, beliefs/guiding principles, vision and lifelong learning outcomes that would create transformation. It became a community mandate to develop and sustain a performance-based system that ensured academic and social success for all learners.

Transformation Underway

Our shift to a learner-centered culture began with a new lexicon. We called our students “learners.” Teachers co-constructed learning and became “learning facilitators.” Classrooms were “learning environments” and schools “learning communities.” At all levels of the organization, the new terminology contributed to the district’s and community’s investment in the new culture.

Next, leaders agreed that rather than trying to create curriculum that addressed every core standard, the district would collectively decide what was absolutely essential for learners to learn. Narrowing the curriculum to essential knowledge and skills was difficult, but it made the curriculum viable, meaning it focuses only on the essential learning outcomes and that these outcomes are achievable for all learners.

By working with a more focused curriculum, Lindsay Unified could also ensure that learners understood exactly what they were expected to know and be able to do. Because the curriculum is viable, it also is guaranteed, meaning that, without exception, every single learner will learn it.

Instruction now centers on essential measurement topics and learning progressions. Measurement topics are composed of multiple learning targets, within a common unit of study, that are divided into performance levels reflecting a 1–4 scoring scale. Within this scoring scale, the level 3 content represents the minimum learning level for every Lindsay learner and is intended to demonstrate that the learner has achieved proficiency in that learning target.

Using formal and informal assessment measures, as well as summative district assessments, learners and learning facilitators track learners’ progress toward mastery of each measurement topic.

As Lindsay transformed its model, more and more elements of the time-based system, including bell schedules and yearly promotion by age, progress and report cards, became roadblocks to a truly learner-empowered culture.

We began to customize structures for grading, facilities, schedules and grade levels. For example, as we renovate our schools, we are using a “lab” structure that combines several traditional classrooms into a larger, open, technology-infused space. Our newest lab houses six learning facilitators and 180 learners in a single learning environment.

To fulfill the strategic design’s vision for 24/7 learning, Lindsay implemented the “One World Initiative.” All learners are given their own device to use at school and home. However, we recognized early on that connectivity at home was limited because of economics, so we spent two years developing our community Wi-Fi - project (with our own ISP) to ensure all learners are connected to our curriculum, and the world 24/7.

Critical Considerations

The district’s journey has seen many successes. Graduation rates at our two high schools — Lindsay High School and our alternative high school — now exceed 90 percent. Student achievement is showing steady and progressive growth.

School climate is rated at the 99th percentile on statewide measures, and the number of high school graduates enrolling in four-year colleges has doubled in six years. Suspension rates have dropped significantly and the percentage of students claiming gang membership has fallen from 18 percent to 3 percent.



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Uncompromisingly Learner-Centered Schooling*(continued from page 3)*

Robert Marzano, addressing the district's progress, wrote in the foreword of *Beyond Reform*, "In a relatively short period of time, Lindsay USD transformed its system into one that can and should become the model for K-12 education for the next several decades."

Based on our experience, these are a few critical considerations for any organization interested in transforming to a learner-centered model. All should be addressed early in the process.

Involve learners from the beginning.

Valuing the learners' voice upfront increases their empowerment and leads to more effective problem solving. Many learners know better than adults how to fix the education system.

We include learners on leadership teams and acknowledge their voice when building a compelling case for change. In Lindsay USD, learners have multiple opportunities to grow and demonstrate their leadership as ambassadors. For example, learners serve as tour guides for visitors and often facilitate workshops and presentations at local, state and national conferences.

Clearly state the expectation that all members of the leadership team use the strategic design as the guiding document for the transformation.

The strategic design reflects the voice of the community and conveys the values and principles all leaders must embrace and pursue to lead successfully and to accelerate the vision for personalized learning. If all leaders do not carry out the strategic design in their daily work, the entire vision will be ignored, placed on the shelf to collect dust like so many other initiatives.

Make the strategic design the centerpiece for the entire community.

Foundational aspects of any organization become better aligned when everyone fully embraces the strategic design as early as possible. Strategically and intentionally educating all stakeholders about the key components of the strategic design is critical to ensuring that staff, parents and the community clearly understand and embrace the transformation.

Make lifelong learning part of the core curriculum.

To ensure learners become highly motivated, self-directed and fully empowered to take ownership of their learning, school systems should value and promote the standards for lifelong learning to the same degree they value standards for reading, writing and math. Lifelong learning standards, which define what qualities a community wants in its newly minted graduates, should be the social-emotional backbone of all learning in a learner-centered system.

Remain focused on the intended outcome of a learner-centered system: all learners reaching their full academic and personal potential.

Education organizations are obligated to produce learning results. During the transformation process, it is easy to become overwhelmed with doing "things" and implementing "pieces" of the system and losing sight of the goal, which is to improve learning of students. Therefore, it is essential to be relentless in the effort to ensure academic achievement and personal success for all learners.

Measures of Success

Transforming from a traditional grade-based, schedule-driven system where time is the constant and learning is the variable, to one that is performance-based, continues to require changes in culture, systems and structures.

Now 10 years into development, we have accomplished many elements of our vision, yet so much work remains. We must continue to develop our lifelong learning and adult learning curriculum and ensure that learning is relevant and meaningful in today's world.

Dismantling a 125-year old educational system is incredibly challenging. The true measure of success is the voice of the learners who embrace their new opportunities and embody a new way of looking at their growth.

"It used to be all about the teacher," says one 13-year-old Lindsay learner. "Now it's all about us."



BARRY SOMMER is director of advancement and an educational psychologist in the Lindsay Unified School District in Lindsay, Calif. Twitter: [@Lindsay_USD](https://twitter.com/Lindsay_USD). He is a co-author of *Beyond Reform: Systemic Shifts Toward Personalized Learning*.

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Mark Your Calendar



EVENT	VENUE	DATE	
108th DOE Commissioner's Conference for Superintendents	Coastal Maine location (TBD)	6/24-6/25/19	Save the Date
AASA Legislative Advocacy Conference	Hyatt Regency on Capitol Hill Washington, DC	7/8-7/10/19	More info

Professional Vacancies

MSAD 53

Superintendent of Schools

Burnham, Detroit, and Pittsfield, Maine

Application Deadline: April 19, 2019

Effective Date: July 1, 2019

MSAD 75

Assistant Superintendent of Schools

Bowdoin, Bowdoinham, Harpswell, and Topsham, Maine

Application Deadline: April 26, 2019

Effective Date: July 1, 2019

Please apply online at: <http://applitrack.com/link75/onlineapp>

Moosabec CSD #917 & School Union #103

P/T Superintendent of Schools (3/5)

Jonesport and Beals, Maine

Position will remain open until a suitable candidate is found.

Milford School Department

P/T Superintendent of Schools

Milford, Maine

Position will remain open until a suitable candidate is found.

For more information on vacancies, please visit

<https://www.msmaweb.com/services/job-vacancies/>

MSSA Mission Statement

The Maine School Superintendents Association (MSSA) is an organization that is committed to leadership:

- *Leadership to provide equity, create opportunities for and promote the success of every student;*
- *Leadership to develop ethical, visionary and competent leaders by:*
 - *Offering professional learning opportunities for leaders*
 - *Promoting community and legislative support for education*
 - *Providing member services*

Core Values and Beliefs

We believe members shall:

- *Maintain high expectations for all students, staff and ourselves*
- *Advocate for resources essential to student learning*
- *Act with integrity and model professional behavior*
- *Champion the advancement of public education*

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If you have questions about any articles in this newsletter or suggestions for improving this publication, please let us know.

You can contact me, MSSA Executive Director Eileen King at eking@msmaweb.com.