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had no idea when I agreed to take over the Impact Journal, I’d be doing it during a pandemic. However, it seems appropriate that when school life is changing so drastically, maybe it’s time for the journal to undergo a few changes of its own. If you tuned in to the Covid Zoom discussions for junior/middle school and high school principals last month, led by UASSP leaders from around the state, you are starting to notice the new approach the board has decided to take in helping school leaders. UASSP wants to make it easy for you to have your own personal learning community for help and collaboration for education needs around the state, large and small. Hopefully, another component of that will be the new UASSP E-Magazine format. Our hope is that it will be an even more interactive and useful document that provides you with good ideas, current topics, and research in the field of school leadership - the same as always, it just does it in a convenient electronic document.

The coming months should bring changes and updates to the UASSP website. It is going through some renovations to its look and feel that we’re very excited to share with you. Follow UASSP on Instagram and Twitter so we can re-post your school life through social media. Every school is doing great things so let’s spread the word!

For this “Summer Issue” it’s all about things you need for this unique school year, whether you’ve just gone back or you’re well into the first term, whether you’re on-line, hybrid, or all in, your challenges are happening, and probably changing every day. It has been a stressful few months and it’s not letting up any time soon so Audrey Fish, Asst. Principal at Oquirrh Hills Middle School, has given some great ways to look after staff and student SEL this year and Gary Twitchell, Principal at Westlake High School will help leaders maintain and improve school culture during this unprecedented year or any school year.

We look forward to receiving ideas from you this year. Impact wants short ideas on current topics and quick plans to solve school problems; don’t feel like it always has to be a deeply researched article like the two in this issue. We want a variety of ideas on any topic that’s plaguing your school and how you’re solving it. UASSP will be posting those ideas on our UASSP website so solutions are reaching other school who may be facing the same problem. We would like your feedback on our new format, our new website, and the changes we are making to how UASSP reaches it members. Essentially, how can we better serve you? Let us know. support@uassp.org Submit articles: julie.barlow@uassp.org

Julie Barlow grew up working in the family printing business before becoming an English teacher and yearbook adviser. She began her 24 year teaching career at Green River High School then moved to Layton High School. Currently she is an assistant principal at Layton High School.
The rabbit hole. Do you have one? Do you have that one thing, that once you start, you cannot stop. A couple hours later you are sitting on the couch with empty Diet Coke cans, a Cheetos bag, and Peanut M&M’s suddenly gone? Did you start by browsing social media for what you thought would be a few minutes, and two hours later you are watching your fiftieth YouTube video? Maybe it is just me. The rabbit hole can be a variety of things for different people. Mine is news. That’s right. I’m a news nerd. I cannot get enough of it. Well, until lately. It has become my rabbit hole. I have found myself watching the news, all different news channels, seeking new information, comforting information, and most of all, guaranteed, correct information. You can see where this is going. As educators, we want answers. We are in the business of having the answers. I have often heard educators say, “I am willing to try anything to get students to learn.” Yet, I know many of us have a fear of not having the answers. So, what we really are saying is, “I am willing to try anything, as long as there is a guarantee it will work!”

Well, if there is ever a time that nothing is guaranteed, this is it! We are going through an unprecedented, unpredictable, and challenging time, and having guarantees does not seem to be happening any time soon. We find ourselves attending meetings, hearing mandates, providing feedback on how these mandates will affect our schools, only to have everything be obsolete by the end of the meeting. Constant change is an understatement. However, there are some things which have not changed, our overall purpose in what we do. So, I call on all of you, to look past the guarantees, take some chances and some risks. I call on you educational leaders, to Rise Up and Lead!

Rise up and tune out the noise. I have heard from many of my colleagues how daunting it is to listen to the news
or peruse social media. On one hand, being informed and connected is important, on the other hand, it can be overwhelmingly negative and depressing. It does not help that it is also an election year, which always seems to amplify the noise. Some would say, as a nation, we are more divided than ever. With the school year upon us, it is time for us to lead. With so much out of our control, it is imperative that we stay focused on what is within our control. We can control our attitude to the various restrictions and stipulations put into place by being positive and reassuring that student and teacher wellness and student learning remains the focus of our efforts. As educational leaders, we are called upon to lead our faculty in providing equal learning opportunities for all students. Although we may have to get creative, the mission has not changed, and we should assure our students, parents and teachers that we can Rise Up and be successful in providing high levels of learning for all students during this challenging time.

Lead by listening. With so many concerns surrounding our return to school, it is easy to get caught up in trying to quickly provide solutions to all of the issues being discussed. Listening to our students, faculty and communities is essential to understanding specific concerns. Once we return, we will have been out of our normal school routine for five months. We may not completely understand the cognitive and emotional effects of this disruption for quite some time. We prolong understanding what our students and faculty have been through if we fail to listen to them. We prolong solutions and the ability to provide support to those in need, if we fail to listen. In a time where I feel like I need to provide so much information to many different groups, I am reminded of a quote by Edward Bowes, “Your ability to listen is an indication of your ability to lead.” We are in the business of making connections. However, we are also in the business of making decisions. With each new “mandate” I feel the pressure to inform everyone of “how this is going to be done.” However, if I fail to truly listen to the concerns, thoughts and ideas of others, I will miss out on a chance to build trust, build relationships and to learn. We are also in the business of learning.

Rise Up and Lead together! Now more than ever, we need to lean on each other to get through this tough situation, together. Each of us has felt the impact of this pandemic. Every school in the nation is feeling the impact. We have been called to Rise Up and Lead like never before. Our normal lives came to a screeching halt. Students, parents and government officials asked us, “Can you still do this?” We answered loudly and clearly, “Yes we can” and we did! Although we may have found some gaps and some inconsistencies in our systems, we did it! As we move forward, into more of the unsurety and unknown, I encourage you all to rise above the noise, sharpen your listening skills to better understand the needs of students, staff and communities, and make connections. I also encourage you to reach out to others. Build a collaborative community of leaders you deem as the “smartest people in the room” to help in making decisions. We are still in the unchartered territory. There is no pandemic handbook for us. The rabbit hole of seeking information from sources who do not have the answers, keeps us from what is important. We will have moments of regrouping and reconfiguring. We will have to take a leap of faith and be risk takers without guarantees. However, I will avoid panic. Why? Because I am confident in all of you. I am confident that we can do this together. I am confident that we will do what we do best for our students and teachers. I will also avoid the rabbit hole. The answers are not there. The answers are with all of you, or all of us - the smartest people in the room. I will look to you to help me Rise Up and Lead!

Taking the “business as usual” approach is not an option. We must make shifts in our methods to meet the various needs of our students and staff. I am reminded of a quote by the late John Wooden, “Failure is not fatal, but failure to change might be.” We can take this new challenge as a way to push us out of our comfort zone. To get creative and to provide education in ways we may have thought were too difficult or impossible. However, we do not have to go it alone. Lorne Michaels, longtime producer of Saturday Night Live, once said, “If you are the smartest person in the room, then you are in the wrong room.” We are very fortunate to be working with the best educators in the nation and I am confident that when we put our heads together, the answer is in the room, or in our State. I am grateful to be surrounded by some of the most inspiring educators, and encourage each of us to reach out, ask questions, provide insight and listen to each other. We can achieve greatness when we lead together.

“We are very fortunate to be working with the best educators in the nation and I am confident that when we put our heads together, the answer is in the room, or in our State.”
We Heal Together: 3 Major Actions to Re-open Schools

by Audrey Fish
Asst. Principal, Oquirrh Hills Middle School

On March 13, 2020, Governor Herbert announced a “soft closure” for Utah schools due to the COVID-19 outbreak across the world.

A pandemic that would change the human landscape, and impact us physically, socially, and emotionally.

The Utah COVID-19 Community Task Force devised a three phase plan to minimize the impact of the pandemic. The phases are:

- Phase 1 - Urgency
- Phase 2 - Stabilization
- Phase 3 - Recovery

The phases may be compared to our current educational experiences.

Phase 1 - Urgency. Urgency can effectively be described by looking at the Latin word “urgen” which means “to press” or “to drive”. This phase was focused on minimizing the spread of the disease to avoid overloading our healthcare system. In education our urgency phase required every educator and student to drive all teaching and learning to the virtual world. Within five days, schools were converted to this new platform. We provided professional development, issued Chromebooks, provided jobs for classified employees, and sanitized buildings; we completed all of this all while stress levels were rising.

Phase 2 - Stabilization. To secure the state during this phase, Utah officials focused on public health measures and economic interventions (Utah Leads Together, 2020). Securing education during phase two emerged as we attempted to maintain normalcy amidst the chaos. As administrators and educators, we asked ourselves what can we control, and what can we NOT control? What we could control was how we communicated with students, parents, and each other. Across the state, we found certainty and strength in communicating with students, parents, and each other. Administrators held regular virtual meetings, teachers supported each other through Professional Learning Communities, Instructional Coaches mentored teachers, and Digital Coaches provided training and expertise. We did what we could to stay connected during a time of disconnect. These efforts stabilized our educational experiences. Among the many aspects we were unable to control were students logging in to continue their learning, or whether their families were suffering from emotional, physical, medical, or economic hardship. We also could not control whether teachers were assigning the appropriate amount of work or if they were suffering and needed more support. We also couldn’t control the elements. Ironically, the stabilization phase began with a 5.7 magnitude
As every Utahn has been asked to lead in the recovery process, every educator must take a leading role in educational recovery. As we lead together, we will heal together. Let We Heal Together be our mantra too. We will heal as all educators take three major actions to reopen schools:

Step 1 - Practice self-care
Step 2 - Be trauma informed
Step 3 - Make time to celebrate

We heal together by practicing self-care. Why? If you don’t take care of yourself, you won’t have anything left to give others. Kristin Soures stated in “Fostering Resilient Learners” you have to take care of number 1 if you are going to be any value to numbers 2, 3, and 617” (Soures/Hall 2016 p.197). Any amount of self care can contribute to life’s fulfillment. Reducing stress can help us respond vs. react when faced with difficult situations. When educators were asked why they don’t take time for themselves, they responded: we are givers, we’re altruistic, we believe that it should not be about us (Soures/Hall 2016 p.41), no time, we feel pressure and stress, we’ve never been taught to have a life/work balance, and we don’t give ourselves permission to do so (Kryza 2020). Sometimes we just need a little encouragement and permission to care for ourselves.

The following three strategies could assist you and your staff in your own self-care: mindfulness, cultivating gratitude, and exercise. Most self-help books and educational journals emphasize the importance of mindfulness. Mindfulness focuses on the magic of the present moment. Rather than fretting about consistently associated with greater the past, or worrying about the future, happiness. Gratitude helps people feel the aim is to experience life as it unfolds moment by moment. Examples experiences, improve their health, deal with adversity, and build strong relationships. Gratitude reduces toxic emotions and has the ability to change brain chemistry” (Wong & Brown, n.d.). Gratitude helps people to appreciate what they have instead of always reaching for something new in hoping to find greater happiness. Gratitude also enables us to be happy even when physical and material need is not met. Gratitude helps people refocus on what they have instead of what they lack. And, although it may feel contrived at first, this mental state grows stronger with use and practice (Harvard Health Publishing).

Cultivating gratitude requires deliberate action. Keeping a gratitude journal, writing gratitude letters or thank you notes, counting blessings, praying, meditating, and thanking someone mentally, are a few suggestions for cultivating gratitude.

We heal together by cultivating gratitude. In the article titled “How

“You have to take care of number 1 if you are going to be any value to numbers 2, 3, and 617.”

We heal together by exercise. Our bodies naturally move. The benefits of exercise go beyond physical health. Exercise lowers blood pressure, strengthens our heart, increases energy levels, and improves our overall mood.
Endorphins released during exercise reduce stress, increase patience, and balance priorities. Extensive research supports the science of the idea of exercising for 40 minutes, three times a week, to regulate our bodies and nurture our mental health (Souers & Hall, 2016).

**Step 2 - Be Trauma informed**

We heal together as we become trauma informed. During this pandemic, we need to know what trauma is, how it manifests, and create trauma sensitive learning environments for students. Trauma can take many forms and may involve the family, a community, the nation, or the entire world. Because we have endured the COVID-19 pandemic, students with trauma experiences will increase in our buildings as we return to school. So, what is trauma? The American Psychological Association describes trauma as “an emotional response to a terrible event” (Cavanaugh, 2016). “Trauma is an exceptional experience in which powerful and dangerous events overwhelm a person’s capacity to cope.” (Rice & Groves, 2005, as cited in Souers & Hall, 2016, p. 15). Such trauma can lead to challenges with self-regulation, social relationships, and the development of physical symptoms due to anxiety (Cavanaugh, 2016).

Trauma manifests in many ways and the sooner we can identify the motives behind student behavior, and help them discover what they need, the better we’ll be able to help them utilize new ways of coping that are less disruptive to the learning environment (Souers & Hall, 2016). When a person is functioning in the limbic system of their brains, where the amygdala is located, they react with fight, flight, or freeze responses. Listed below are some of the behaviors students impacted by trauma exhibit when they are struggling with self-regulation:

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<th>Fight</th>
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<th>Freeze</th>
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<tr>
<td>Withdrawing</td>
<td>Acting out</td>
<td>Exhibiting numbness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fleeing the classroom</td>
<td>Behaving aggressively</td>
<td>Refusing to answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skipping class</td>
<td>Acting silly</td>
<td>Refusing to get needs met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daydreaming</td>
<td>Exhibiting defiance</td>
<td>Giving a blank look</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeming to sleep</td>
<td>Being hyperactive</td>
<td>Feeling unable to move or act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding others</td>
<td>Arguing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiding or wandering</td>
<td>Screaming/yelling</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Becoming disengaged</td>
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(Souers & Hall, 2016, p. 29)

These classroom behaviors are best addressed with love and compassion, rather than with punitive discipline measures. A warm relationship with a teacher increases a student’s success with self-regulation. If a student is being disrespectful to other students or the teacher, positive power comes when the teacher handles it by pulling the student aside and making time to find out the root of their problem. Not by sending them to the office. Creating trauma sensitive classrooms takes time and deliberate action. As educators, we influence the tone of the learning environment. Our approach, demeanor, behavior, volume, and presence impact how our students perform in our classrooms. When we intentionally create safe, stable, and consistent classroom environments, learning happens. The following are some suggestions for creating a trauma sensitive space for learning:

1. Establish Safety. Structure and routine are key to solidifying a safe space for learning. We must design safe zones for students to access when self-regulation is needed. Safety does not just refer to the physical space. It’s knowing who will advocate for them in time of need. Safety also means clear expectations stated and understood each day.
2. Build Relationships. Relationships are built over time. Trusting relationships are the foundation for learning. Authentic positive interactions strengthen relationships. High rates of praise strengthens the relation-
ship, improves the safety of the learning environment, and positively impacts the classroom culture. Praise has been acknowledged as the simplest classroom management strategy to implement (Caldarella, et al., 2020). The following are two simple ways to create an authentic relationship with a student.

a. Greet every student in a personal and warm way. Address students by name. Recommended praise for students should sound like, “Billy, it’s so good to see you today.”

b. Use the 2x10 approach to get to know students. This means two minutes of conversation every day for 10 days. Talk about anything but academics (Ginsberg and Wlodkowski, 2004).

Connecting to kids and helping them feel safe doesn’t require extra letters to our names. It simply requires that we be human (Souers & Hall, 2019, p. 65).

**Step Three - Making Time to Celebrate**

We heal together when we make time to celebrate. Across the globe, we have mourned the impact COVID-19 has had on our lives. We grieve the loss of life, loss of time together, loss of experiences, and loss of certainty. In a webinar conducted by Dr. Feifer he emphasized the importance of celebrating as we re-open our schools. He said, “When 300 million students across the globe have been out of school for 11+ weeks our re-entry plan should include developing a celebration” (Feifer, 2020). Celebrations lift our moods and create gratitude. Celebrations lighten our burden of grief and provide hope as we reconnect with one another. Connections lead us back to what is safe and familiar. The positive energy that permeates during a celebration brings joy into each experience. These celebrations will be unique to you and your community. Just like the varied graduation ceremonies across the state celebrated the class of 2020, our re-entry celebrations will be unique. Will there be music in the halls? A balloon arch? A teacher welcoming tunnel? Be creative, relax, and have a little fun while transitioning back into the classroom. Students sense when they are welcome in a space. Set the tone for your students to thrive beginning the first day back. Make sure the culture sustains caring for the whole child.

In conclusion, we must address the needs of the whole student as we reopen schools. We can do this as our educational plan mirrors the state phases. As we transitioned from urgency to stabilization and now to recovery, our healing deepens. As we heal together through self-care, being trauma informed and celebrating, we will ADAPT, INNOVATE and OVERCOME.

**References**


Audrey Fish began her career teaching biology, aerobics, weight training, and PE at American Fork High School. Audrey is a reflective practitioner who works hard to keep up with research and enjoys attending and leading professional development because she is always looking for ways to improve her practice. Her passion for mindfulness, social emotional learning, restorative practices, and instructional coaching has strengthened school culture for students and staff at Oquirrh Hills Middle School where she serves as assistant principal. Audrey was the 2020 Utah Assistant Principal of the Year.
Changing a School’s Culture

by Gary Twitchell
Principal, Westlake High School

Building a positive school culture is essential to school improvement. School culture is determined by the perceptions and beliefs held by the staff, students, and patrons. Culture measures the willingness and motivational level of staff, students, and patrons to embrace change in order to promote student learning.

Schools that have a positive culture are not afraid of looking at data and identifying potential weaknesses within the school. Teachers constantly try to improve their instructional practices; and they look at ways to motivate students. A negative climate exists when teachers are fearful or complacent. If a teacher is afraid to offer a rigorous course of instruction, then students are not challenged. If a teacher believes “my students are doing fine, so I don’t need to do anything different,” then the teacher will not be motivated to try new learning strategies. If the teacher believes that the students are incapable of doing better, then the students’ learning will reflect that; and the students will not achieve high levels of learning. There is a quote from Inside Out Coaching, by Joe Ehrmann, which summarizes the relationship between how a coach coaches and the outcomes for athletes:

- If I coach with hostility – my players learn to be hostile.
- If I coach with ridicule – my players learn to disengage.
- If I coach with shame – my players learn to be ashamed.
- If I coach with sarcasm – my players learn to hide.
- If I coach with tolerance – my players learn to be patient.
- If I coach with encouragement – my players learn to be encouraged.
- If I coach with compassion – my players learn to care about others.
- If I coach with praise – my players learn to value themselves.
- If I coach with fairness – my players learn justice.
- If I coach with affirmation – my players discover their full potential (225).

Ehrmann’s words apply to teaching. Students reflect what teachers and staff say about them and how they are treated.

Changing a school culture is very difficult. Good schools are reluctant to change, because they feel that they are “doing ok.” Bad schools are reluctant to change, because they have the philosophy that change is impossible, or because of the lack of parental support in the home, or the belief that the students are incapable of learning at high levels.

I experienced these negative attitudes toward change at some of the schools in which I have worked. When I interviewed teachers at one school, some of the teachers told me that the students were “doing great.” They cited anecdotal evidence about students who had gone onto college and appeared to be doing well. The reality was that the school was performing well below average on end-of-level tests, average ACT composite scores, and enrollment in college preparatory or college level classes.

Teachers in another school in which I worked indicated that students were not able to achieve high levels of learning, because the community did not have a “college going” culture. Students were discouraged by some teachers and counselors from taking rigorous courses and especially Advanced Placement (AP). Students were told, “That is a really hard class. You will probably struggle in that class.” The low expectations set by the
school culture (stakeholders) resulted in a significantly lower number of students enrolling in AP courses, compared to other schools with similar enrollments and demographics. Passing rates on AP exams were also significantly lower.

School culture is a determining factor to offering an equitable educational experience. If school personnel, students, and patrons do not believe that students can learn at higher levels, then the students will not be as prepared as their counterparts for post high school opportunities. Low expectations is a great disservice to students and necessitates a culture change.

When trying to change a culture, there are ten steps that need to be followed:

Step 1. Gather data to help the staff understand the need for change. Gathering data is often called, “facing the brutal facts.” For example, Westlake’s passing rate in AP Calculus was 36%. Enrollment in Calculus was about 50 students (over 150 students less than highly successful schools with similar populations).

Step 2. Review the implications of the data. Ask essential questions such as, “How does this affect students?” “Are our students being prepared to compete for scholarships and admittance into college?”

Step 3. Leverage your influence with your staff. Don’t try to convince everyone at once. This means seeking out key personnel who have social capital within the school and getting their support. There are always some teachers ready to embrace change, because they want to help students succeed.

Step 4. Establish a leadership team to address the problem and utilize the leadership team to address weaknesses that have been identified by data reviews. Make sure the leadership team understands that this is a team effort and the administrator is just a part of the team. The leadership team in my current school is chaired by one of the assistant principals and focuses on student learning and over-all school policy. The leadership team shapes the school’s vision for learning and guides all professional development. A couple of their primary roles is that of helping PLC’s set learning goals and developing Tier 1 quality classroom instruction. The leadership team also determines many of the financial expenditures for the school.

   a. There are two main guiding principles that are always used in making decisions:
      - Always act in the best interest of students.
      - Focus on a relentless pursuit of excellence.

   b. The team is composed of the following:
      - 2 assistant principals, the principal
      - PLC Team Leaders from English, Math/Science, Counseling, PE/Health, Social Studies/World Languages, CTE
      - A parent representative from the SCC or PTA
      - A certified staff representative
      - A student council representative

Step 5. Determine a vision of learning. Ask the questions, “What do we want our students to be able to do?” “What dispositions should our students have that will help them become successful?” “What do we want our students to know?” “How will we measure these things?”

Step 6. Set small, incremental, realistic goals. A school cannot go from an enrollment of 50 students and a 36% passing rate to an enrollment of 200 students and a passing rate of 80% in one year. However, schools should be able to get a 5% increase. Very few teachers will feel that this is impossible.

Step 7. Set benchmark measurements to analyze progress toward the goals. Review the benchmarks using the PLC process.

Step 8. Remove perceived obstacles to learning. Provide the resources needed. For example if the teachers feel that they need to attend seminars, then provide them the opportunity to attend the seminars. However, make sure that you are meeting with the teachers to review how the provided resources are helping to meet the goals. For example in a PLC meeting the administrator could ask, “Can you give me something that you learned in your last seminar and how you
are going to use that in your classroom?” If the teachers requested iPads, then you would ask, “What great things are you doing with the iPads; and how is this helping your students?”

**Step 9.** Celebrate success. Celebrations could recognize the following:

- If the team meets a benchmark, then send an email out to the entire school to praise the team. “Congratulations to our Math department. They have raised their Calculus enrollment by 10% compared to last year.” This communication lets the entire school know that it is possible to do better.
- Personally congratulate individual team members.
- Make announcements over the intercom system, like you would if the basketball team won their game. “We would like to congratulate the Math department for their great success in raising end-of-level test scores!!!!” These positive announcements help the whole school feel the importance of the accomplishment.
- Provide lunch for PLC teams.
- Post successes on social media. Advertising achievements helps patrons see the improvement and get them excited to see more changes.
- Hang a banner for a District Math Championship, similar to what is done for a Region Basketball Title.

**Step 10.** Once one team has started making successful strides in changing their culture, then have them share with other teams. Teachers providing professional development for other teachers is another example of leveraging influence. Teachers excited about the changes they have seen become your best resource in convincing others that change is possible.

This ten-step method has produced good results at schools in which I have worked. One school went from being in the bottom 10% in academic achievement to the top 10% in five years. The school that did not have a “college going” culture four years ago has seen AP enrollment tripled and passing rates have risen dramatically. Students now believe that they can be successful in AP and college preparatory classes.

**References:**


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Gary Twitchell comes from a family of educators and has raised several of his own. He began his career as a science teacher at Dixon Middle School. He served for many years as an assistant principal at the middle school and high school levels before being named principal of South Summit High School. His work there earned him the Huntsman Award for Excellence in Education in 2007. Since his appointment as principal at Westlake High School he has worked with his leadership team of teachers, counselors, and parents to increase AP enrollment, AP tests passed, and to grow the school’s concurrent enrollment college credits earned. Their efforts have increased graduation rates from 89.3% in 2014 to 93.5% in 2019 at Westlake High. Gary was the 2020 Utah Principal of the Year.
A student approached me in tears, “I am not LDS, my skin is not white, and my family doesn’t have money. I am different in so many ways. I don’t belong here.” My heart sank as I listened to the student express her feelings. I wondered how many other students in our school were comparing themselves, in one way or another, to other students? What was most alarming was that, as the leader, it was my charge to create conditions wherein students and adults could perform at their best. How could a student, who felt this way about her environment, learn and achieve at high levels?

Fortunately, we had assembled our faculty and staff a year prior for a vision-building activity where we attempted to describe the school we had hoped to become. Six key components emerged. One was “to create a school where all students felt valued, accepted, and respected, regardless of their individuality.” We knew we couldn’t change home environments directly, but we could influence how students felt about themselves while they were with us. And just maybe, their feelings could travel with them throughout their high school experience and beyond.

We were a diversely evolving student body of 1500, and a great school, but how could we take this component of our vision from “looks good on paper” to reality? How could we create a school where all students could say, “I matter. I feel valued. I am an equal.” We went to work.

Acknowledging we had a rather large number of students, we knew we needed a critical mass of influential individuals to center the student body’s thinking around our shared vision; so, we looked to our students. We had an excellent student council, but we realized that 30 students were hardly a critical mass. We had other student leaders, but they had traditionally been utilized to fulfill assignments within their respective teams. We had not yet tapped into the idea of a student leader coalition, a team of diverse students large enough to create a critical mass.
I would like to report that the three-day retreat made all the difference in changing our culture, but it didn’t; it was just a starting point. Like the infamous Titan football team from the popular movie, Remember the Titans, we too returned from our retreat to everyday life. Consequently, we had to create time and space to assemble the coalition and remember our shared pursuit. We became more purposeful in our efforts and our everyday planning: to greet someone by name, to extend a hand of friendship, to look outside ourselves, to be inclusive, to refrain from gossip and judgement, and to teach students how to do the same. Our relentless efforts to reinforce, celebrate, model, and teach found their way into students’ hearts and minds; we began to change the culture.

A brief visit with a newspaper reporter reinforced our progress. He asked me what was unique about our school. I said, “Students feel, valued, accepted, and respected, regardless of their individuality.” I challenged him to ask any student what they liked most about our school. He returned and reported, “You’re right, after questioning a few students, I found that they felt unified, accepted, and valued, and that this was their favorite thing about school.” He continued, “There’s a unique and wonderful feel here.”

It has been years since our first attempt to bring leaders together. The coalition, its leaders, and the school community continue to model, nurture, and strengthen this component of the school’s vision. Mobilizing a coalition and pursuing a shared vision fostered a culture of acceptance, inclusion, tolerance, and love—one that shaped a culture, changed lives, and created an environment conducive to high performance.

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Leading Daily Deep Learning

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Educators recognize more and more that traditional surface-level learning cannot meet the increasingly complex demands of a dynamic global economy (Collins, 2017). The best minds in education have sounded this warning for the last several years (Fullan et al., 2018; Robinson & Aronica, 2015; Wagner & Dintersmith 2015), and many schools are responding. Some focus on moving up levels on Bloom’s Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956) or more intentionally pursuing greater depths of knowledge (Webb, 2006; Hess et al., 2009). Other schools recognize that while content mastery is essential, in isolation it is inadequate. They recognize the need to deliberately develop essential skills (like collaboration, critical thinking, communication, & creativity) and dispositions (like citizenship & character; see Fullan et al., 2018; Levin, 2012; Marzano & Heflebower, 2012).

As we make this cultural shift toward deep learning, many educators worry that an increased focus on skills and dispositions could rob students of time and resources needed for content knowledge mastery. Unfortunately, this happens when a business-as-usual learning mindset accompanies an occasional Pinterest-worthy deep learning task. Deep learning requires more than fun, fluffy projects. We need school leaders who advocate for daily deep learning in which teachers and students pursue daily deep learning goals that focus on the balanced development of knowledge, skills, and dispositions. A daily deep learning goal relies heavily on quality content as the vehicle that allows teachers to deliberately develop skills and dispositions in meaningful and engaging ways. Quality content knowledge, skills, and dispositions synergistically fuel each other in mutually beneficial and balanced ways (Kay & Greenhill, 2013) that ultimately led to daily deep learning of content that lasts. This is a high stakes proposition, because wellbeing resides at the nexus of these three elements. For student, teacher, and societal well-being to flourish we need to deliberately develop all three (Murphy & Seashore-Louis, 2018; Clinton & deGroot 2019; see Figure 1).

Some traditional pedagogy and assessment can help us toward these goals. However, we also need to improve additional forms of pedagogy (such as problem-based, inquiry, personalized, blended, simulations, design thinking, engineering-design, podcasts, webinars, internships, externships, etc.) and assessment (self, peer, collaborative, 360-degree, portfolios, performances, exhibitions, adaptive, etc.; see Quinn et al., 2020). To deliberately pursue new ways of teaching requires teachers to take risks. If principals present deep learning as a mandate for teachers, or if administrators do not deliberately create conditions where teachers feel safe to take such risks, schools will flounder in their deep learning efforts. In short, to accomplish this kind of daily deep learning, principals must deliberately cultivate the following conditions for deep learning pedagogy and assessment to thrive. Principals should not tell teachers what to do or how to do it,
but instead, create the conditions for teachers to thrive in a deep learning environment.

**Condition #1. Nurture leaders’ vision & understanding of daily deep learning.** How does a school whose vision has traditionally focused on student content-knowledge mastery move to this expanded, balanced vision? Ellwood Cubberly, a pioneer in the field of educational leadership noted over a century ago: “As is the principal, so is the school” (1919, p. 351), meaning that whatever vision of deep learning the principal adopts, that is likely the vision that the majority of the school will eventually adopt. As such, principals need opportunities to expand and refine their own vision for deep learning through targeted reading of best practice, visits to deep learning schools, and collaboration with other principals and schools engaged in deep learning. Other efforts can support principals, such as effective principal coaching, partnerships with universities or businesses, and ultimately tasting the fruits of deep learning at their own schools. Principals will not effectively lead something they do not believe in themselves. School-wide daily deep learning must be led by a principal committed to daily deep learning.

**Condition #2. Co-create a shared vision & build capacity.** If “the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers” (Barber & Moursched, 2007, p. 4) then it logically follows, principals interested in pursuing deep learning as a school must also provide vision-expanding experiences to faculty, staff, parents, students, and other stakeholders. This shift in vision will NOT happen through a few days of sit-and-get, spray-pray-and-walkaway professional development that we’ve relied on in the past. Deep learning should be a compelling mission for teachers. If a principal presents deep learning as a district mandate, or tells teachers they need to “accomplish deep learning” without making it safe to take the risks that deep learning requires, then a school will not actually dive into deep learning. If we “want a school where students think, challenge, take risks, learn from mistakes, and give their best thinking every day, [we] must foster this environment for our staff and for our teachers” (Wiseman et al., 2013, p. 55). Adults need consistent, ongoing, job-embedded, daily deep learning as well. Principals must provide teachers the needed opportunities to safely struggle and experiment with the why, what, and how of deeper learning through readings, videos, school visits (in-person and virtual), collaboration with other deep learning schools, coaching, risk-taking, feedback, and reflection. This shared learning will allow principals to partner with teachers and parents in refining a co-created shared vision for daily deep learning at the school. Principals can’t articulate a vision and then tell teachers to implement it—this vision must be co-created so that teachers truly own the vision. A high functioning school leadership team most effectively moves a whole school toward this co-created vision.

**Condition #3. Distribute & adapt leadership.** Schoolwide deep learning is impossible with only the sheer determination and vision of the traditional, heroic, charismatic principal. It would seem totally incompatible for principals to ask teachers to more fully engage students’ minds, hands, and hearts through deeper, more inclusive classroom learning, while the principals themselves continue to model a more traditional top-down leadership approach with those on the formal leadership team and in more informal situations (Elmore, 2004). “No leader, no matter how competent, is capable of single handedly developing the right vision, communicating it to vast numbers of people, eliminating all of the key obstacles, generating short term wins, leading and managing dozens of change projects and anchoring new approaches deep in an organization’s culture. Putting together the right coalition of people to lead a change initiative is critical to its success” (Kotter, 2017). Principals will never be able to do this alone. In an endeavor like this, we must have the “group leading the group” (Fullan, 2019). Principals must nurture a growth mindset where the team is expected to figure it out as they go. Leaders and their leadership teams must be adaptable in this process of creating a new mission, vision, and culture or deep learning (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009). Empowering a high functioning school leadership team and being adaptable creates internal motivation and accountability that far exceed the power or coercion of external accountability. Surely, “deep learning changes the nature of leadership” (Fullan, & Kirtman, 2019, p. 106).

**Condition #4. Collaborate inside and outside of the school.**
No educator, alone, can meet the demanding deeper learning needs of every child in a school. Consistent, effective, and focused collaboration by teacher teams inside our schools is a must if teachers are going to meet the demands of daily deep learning. Fortunately, many educators have already learned how to effectively collaborate in a PLC to support student content knowledge mastery by following the basic processes of PLCs. These same processes will support teachers in pursuing daily deep learning of skills and dispositions as collaborative teacher teams. As principals, we must continue to support and build the capacity of our teachers to collaborate effectively on their teams as well as between teams inside the school. In addition to improving collaboration inside the school, most deep learning schools have found benefit in collaborating with others outside of their schools. As Fullan advocates, “The point is not for you as principal to pay less attention to intraschool matters but rather to engage outside in order to increase learning within your school” (2014, p. 99).

One school interested in pursuing ongoing deep learning partnered with two other schools and came together several times throughout a school year to learn together about deep learning. They engaged in shared readings, collaborated on lessons and materials, visited other deep learning schools, and observed each other teaching deep learning lessons. The principals from another group of schools met twice a month in a principal PLC to collaborate on their deep learning work, and occasionally brought their teachers together to learn from each other. The school leaders within a high school feeder system came together once a month to collaborate, coordinate, and align deep learning for students k-12. Many schools have found benefit in learning from other deep learning schools, whether that be the school down the street, or a school across the globe. Surely deep learning schools “spend time learning from other high performers” both inside and outside of our schools (Kirtman & Fullan, 2016, p. 118).

**Condition #5.** Allocate resources creatively.

Sometimes schools striving for deep learning automatically jump to the shiny bling-bling of new physical learning spaces, technologies, and schedules without first clarifying their deep learning goals. As Betty Despenza-Green, former principal of Chicago Vocational Career Academy explains: “Instead of starting from the physical, you need to start with the program you know you need to have. Then you can see how your existing structure won’t let you do that. And then you do the work of making physical changes” (Davidson, 2001). Surely, designing “new learning environments starts with defining the outcomes” (Pearlman, 2010, p. 122). Admittedly, most of us don’t have a lot of control over our school’s architectural design, our budget allocations, the starting and ending time of our school day, or our FTE/instructional aide allocations. However, we do have some wiggle room within each of those areas to creatively reallocate in ways that will support our priorities. DuFour and colleagues point out: “A school’s schedule should be regarded as a tool to further priorities, not an impediment to change...Your schedule is not a sacred document. If your current schedule does not allow you to provide students with something...you should change it” (2008, p. 266). In addition to schedules, this same creative and flexible can-do mindset should be applied to our approach to budgets, human resources, and physical spaces. We do not advocate that principals go against district or state policy, but we do advocate that within the set parameters, schools creatively adjust how resources are allocated to support daily deep learning. Some principals are surprised to learn that what they thought were obstacles and parameters were merely the remnants of tradition ready to be re-examined.

For example, one school replaced their traditional desks with rolling desks that could easily be put into any conceivable configuration (rows, tables, circles), and found that this small change didn’t cost more money, but did support daily deep learning pedagogies. Other schools have provided deep learning labs or maker spaces at the school, and even some within the classrooms to support the inquiry and exploration that often accompanies daily deep learning.

Other schools have reallocated FTE or aide allocation monies to provide arts integration teachers and deep learning coaches. Another school has adjusted its professional development schedule to provide more consistent deep learning for teachers. They replaced the full day of sit-and-get PD with an online module created, delivered, and supported by its teacher-led, school leadership team over several months. Teachers shared research, examples, challenges, and triumphs, and other
teachers throughout the school provided feedback through written and in-person comments. Another school converted a few classrooms into deep learning hubs for students, and two other classrooms into collaboration hubs for teachers. Schedules were then rearranged in ways so that students and teachers could collaborate on their daily work and projects. The list goes on and on. The bottom line is, once we’re clear on what we’re really trying to do, we should creatively reallocate resources to support our goals. As Jim Rohn observed, “If you really want to do something you’ll find a way. If you don’t, you’ll find an excuse.”

**Conditions #6: District coherence and support.**
Principals of deep learning schools have much more success in fully fostering the other five conditions when their efforts are supported by a district that also embraces these five conditions. As Fullan and Kirtman (2019, p. 69) explain: “Students cannot be empowered by unempowered teachers, and principals cannot empower teachers without being empowered themselves.” Do district efforts support or hinder school-based deep learning conditions? “When school-level people talk about the goals, strategies, and progress being made by the district, is the message across schools consistent with what central office leaders say” (Fullan & Kirtman, 2019, p. 66), or does “the district as a whole lacked a sense of common intent…a system driven by a series of random acts of self-improvement at the school level with no unifying vision or mission districtwide” (Johnson, 2015, p. 4)? School boards and superintendents need to champion and co-create and district-level deep learning vision, distribute leadership, collaborate with other districts, and creatively reallocate resources. Surely, “when principals and schools work together under the guidance of the system, the whole system improves” (Fullan, 2014, p. 106).

While there are many ways to pursue daily deep learning, the six conditions presented here will move a school closer to this objective by creating the ecosystem for deep learning to thrive in every classroom (Figure 2).
Interestingly, these six conditions mirror many of the same conditions we would expect to see in classrooms engaged in daily deep learning. Surely, turning a traditional school into a deep learning school requires daily deep learning for everyone in the building. Similar to deep learning with students in the classroom, it takes deep levels of collaboration, communication, critical thinking, creativity, character, and citizenship among the adults to effectively move an entire school or district toward deep learning. We would echo the advice of Eaker and Keating to “Get started, then get better. There are those who want to wait until conditions are just right before beginning the journey... The time is never right” (2009, p. 55). Let’s start daily deep learning today!

References


