# Utah Association of Secondary School Principals

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Impact Journal

*Impact Journal* is an open-ended theme journal published by the Utah Association of Secondary School Principals (UASSP). Impact is published twice each year.

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Impact Journal Publication Guidelines

Impact Journal is an open-ended theme journal published by the Utah Association of Secondary School Principals (UASSP). We welcome opinion essays, interviews, program descriptions, research reports, theoretical pieces, school climate pieces, reviews of books, humor, satire, poetry, and cartoons.

Impact is published twice each year to correspond with the UASSP annual winter and summer conferences.

Form
• Impact editors use American Psychological Association (APA) style manual.
• Manuscripts can be sent by e-mail attachment.
• Most of our articles are between 1000 and 3000 words.
• Submit a cover sheet with the manuscript. The cover sheet should include the title, author(s), each author’s present position and school (if applicable), each author’s academic status (if applicable), each author’s mailing address, telephone, and email address.

Submission deadlines are November 15 and April 15 of each year.

Manuscripts will be reviewed as to content and acceptability. Authors should assume that manuscripts will be edited to conform to length and clarity.

Send manuscripts electronically to the editor.

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Letter from the Editor

Mary Rhodes, EdD
Editor

I have always enjoyed a daily jog to float along to music. One day, a sixteen-year-old in four-inch heels passed me, and I realized I needed help with a work-out routine. The services at the local rec center were perfect. Now Sheri and Amy and I are new and fast friends. I started with Sheri’s cardio-tone class, almost quit because I was going left when everyone else in the mirror was right, and I showed up again because those right people encouraged me. My brain is learning the steps, and my heart rate is increasing. I added sessions with a personal trainer, and Amy is ruthless. Although she wasn’t unimpressed with my current level of fitness, she challenges me to maintain a plank, develop peripheral muscles, and strengthen my core. Every article in our summer edition is a challenge that will raise your heart rate, build power, and strengthen those core values.

Bryan Bowles challenges us to tackle the pervasive physics problem of time and gives us practical steps to take control of our time, including “Me Time.” Kelli Miller attacks the problem of students focusing on grades rather than learning and challenges us to do the heavy lifting to shift that thinking. To remind us that students are our focus and idealism lingers somewhere in our cardio realm, student voice is included in an editorial by Isabella Ashton, who assumes the challenges of speaking on the a highly controversial topic.

The centerpiece of our article is the epitome of challenge; Karen Gorringe changes the routine of professional development in a stark and joyful journey—literally, physically, and intellectually—that she fashioned for her staff. Kim Schaefer, Seth Allred, Trent Kaufman, and Hollie Pettersson epitomize clients and trainers in team work with gratifying results--success for two Utah turnaround schools, and the foursome tells you how they did it.

David Boren and Joe Jensen do not let us rest on any PLC journey. Their challenging pushups and pullups take us to new heights. Paul McClatchy, in an important, pragmatic, and powerful piece, coaches us to meet the challenge of troubled students through judicious collaboration with the mental health professionals assigned to our school.

Challenging journeys are not accomplished without accomplices. The endurance of Brent Sumner meeting deadlines, Dave Tanner providing tantalizing photography, and Robert King formatting complicated graphics and presenting Utah landscape for the cover is never-ending, and Carl and Jane juggle this duty—one among many-- with the flexibility of yoga masters.

My challenge continues. I am shocked that Sheri changes the routine weekly and that Amy adds weight every week. I am aghast that I get exhausted and each of them ignores exhaustion and instead reminds me to stay strong, to keep pushing, and to notice progress. Speaking of progress, as I was jogging last week, it was a 30-year old mother pushing three-year old twins in those new buggies that passed me. I define that as personal advancement. Your challenge is to find the articles close to your heart, use them to build your power, and engage your core values for your teachers and students.
Take Control of Your Time

W. Bryan Bowles, EdD

Excerpt from a Farmer’s Journal

“Decided to cut the hay. Started to harness the horses and found that a harness was broken; took it to the granary to repair it and noticed some empty sacks; the sacks were a reminder that some potatoes in the cellar needed the sprouts removed; went to the cellar to do the job and noticed the room needed sweeping; went to the house to get the broom and noticed the wood box was empty; went to the woodpile and noticed some ailing chickens. They were sad looking --- poor things; decided to get some medicine for them. Out of medicine, so jumped in the car and headed for the drugstore. On the way, ran out of gas.”

Now that is going nowhere --- full speed ahead. The episodes of this farmer’s journal stand as a striking example of living life by chance --- and not by choice. Many of us feel like we have no choice in what happens each day as we are tossed about by the waves of school crises and chance.

School leaders navigate through each school day from one encounter to another: a substitute teacher fails to arrive, the school improvement plan needs to be finished, the PTA president drops by to ask about next month’s meeting agenda, a drinking fountain is spraying water from a broken hose, teacher evaluations are due, your new volleyball coach resigns, an upset parent wants to talk about her son’s teacher, the band teacher wants to know who put his music stands in the auditorium, the district special education director stops by to talk about moving your favorite special ed. teacher to another school.

Bolman and Deal (2017) describe a principal’s job as “...a hectic life, shifting rapidly from one situation to another. Much of it involves dealing with people and emotions. Decisions emerge from a fluid, swirling vortex of conversations, meetings, and memos.”

And those are just the events of the school day. You may also have home, family, church, and community commitments to manage. You find yourself caught in an exhausting juggling act that rarely lets up.

As you complete one task, another assignment lands on your plate.

In a Stanford University study, Horng, Klasik, & Loeb (2010) found that secondary school principals spent the majority of their time (48.41%) completing administrative and organizational tasks while critical day-to-day instruction and instructional programs only clocked 12.61% of their time. Unfortunately, the nagging “other” tasks chewed up more time (18.68%) than instructional improvement. This study also found that principals spent 63% of their time in their offices and only 8% of the time in classrooms. When these researchers examined student achievement and school accountability grades in relationship to how principals spent their time, they discovered (no surprise) that principals who spent more time on instructional practices also realized higher student achievement and higher school grades --- and greater teacher satisfaction.

We all want higher student achievement. We all want our teachers to find satisfaction in their work. We know that we need to spend more time in classrooms, supporting and coaching teachers though we often conclude a school day not having achieved one item on our “to do” list. Student learning and instruc-
When these researchers examined student achievement and school accountability grades in relationship to how principals spent their time, they discovered (no surprise) that principals who spent more time on instructional practices also realized higher student achievement and higher school grades — and greater teacher satisfaction.

Those principals don’t have more time; they have just learned to control their time.

What is the definition of time? Time is simply defined as the occurrence of events in sequence one after the other. “Time has no independent existence apart from the order of events by which we measure it.” (Albert Einstein)

Management is the act of controlling, so time management is the act of controlling the events in one’s life.

If you control your time, you control your life. (Benjamin Franklin)

The simple reality and ultimate truth is that time is not manageable. Time is a finite, limited, predictable resource. We have 1,440 minutes in a day, 7 days in a week, and 52 weeks in a year. All the time management in the world will never change that. It is not time that needs to be managed but rather what we choose to do each day. The reality is that we don’t change the amount of time we possess; we use our time doing that which is most important, or conversely, wasting time on unimportant, time-consuming pressures. We make a choice to control the situation, or we allow chance tasks to control us.

Those who say: “I didn’t have time for that” should really say: “I didn’t choose to do that.” You have the same amount of time as everyone else to do what you choose to do. You just chose one task instead of another.

Obviously, you can’t control every episode and emergency in life. You can, however, control more than you may currently believe you can, and with some proactive planning, you can put safe guards in place that smooth out the unpredictable occurrences and allow you to more effectively achieve your goals.

The third habit in Covey’s (1989) important book is “putting first things first,” which provides a great place to start thinking about what is most important in our lives. Covey (1989) suggests starting with a list of the various roles you play in your life: parent, spouse, friend, school principal, sibling, child, community volunteer, ecclesiastical leader, youth soccer coach. . . In addition to your role as a school principal, you want a rich family and personal life. You may serve in your community or with other organizations. Listing up to seven roles provides a foundational framework for balancing your life events so that you don’t neglect an important role. In the long run, what does it really matter if you are revered for exceptional school improvement plans if your daughter regrets a life in which “Dad never saw one of my dance recitals. He was always too busy.”

Prior to the beginning of each week, ask yourself this question. What is the most important thing I should accomplish this week in each role? For me, for example, one week I determined that it was equally important for me to attend a bread baking class with my daughter (father role) as it was for me to complete a multi-million-dollar grant application (school leader) or attend a hospital board meeting (community volunteer). Those events were scheduled into my planner first before anything else. I also made appointments with myself for walking and reading. And I never break “me” appointments. I never break appointments with a colleague or a parent, so why would I break...
The reality is that we don’t change the amount of time we possess; we use our time doing that which is most important, or conversely, wasting time on unimportant, time-consuming pressures. We make a choice to control the situation, or we allow chance tasks to control us.

By taking a few minutes weekly to consider each of my roles and decide what is the most important thing I need to accomplish in each role that week allowed me to balance my life and lock in times before my calendar filled up with a lot of “other” tasks. Of course, emergencies happen, and I may have to re-arrange tasks, but I stay devotedly focused on what matters most for success in each role. I assure that those tasks are completed.

I also found that my best principals always completed the important tasks they outlined while some principals almost bragged: “I had a ‘to do’ list sitting on my desk, and I couldn’t do even one of those things.” While days like that happen, effective principals re-group at the end of the day, staying focused on what matters most for success in each role. I assure that those tasks are completed.

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**Use Your Secretary**

Have regular meetings with your secretary and allow her to be an extension of your work. If you have a shared calendar, task her with setting your appointments within the boundaries you establish. My secretary knew what to schedule, what to delegate, and what not to schedule. Allow her to screen calls and visits. When you are out in classrooms and a parent arrives with an issue, empower your secretary to decide if the parent needs to be seen now, assigned to someone else, or re-scheduled to a time that you are available. You may think you can’t control those visits, but many of them you can. A courteous, pleasant, welcoming secretary builds points with families who may decide they don’t need you after all, that someone else can help them, or that they are willing to wait for a better day.

**Manage Mail**

Have a clear organizational system for managing your mail. Let your secretary open your mail and discard any junk before bringing pertinent mail to your attention. With your secretary present, read each piece of mail and decide what action needs to be taken. Right then, schedule a time for you to fully respond to the request or assign the task to someone else. If the mail needs a response, explain or dictate a response to your secretary so that she can follow-up.

**Control Your Technology**

An Adobe survey reveals that the average person devotes four-plus hours each workday checking or dealing with email. That’s 1,000 hours a year. Wow! Limit the number of times a day you check your email. Don’t become victim to the tone that alerts you each time a new email message arrives. Ferriss (2009), author of *The 4-Hour Workweek*, uses auto-reply messages to explain his email pattern: “So that I can visit classrooms and support teachers, I am checking my email once each afternoon. If your concern is urgent, please contact my secretary at 444-4444.”
If you sit in your office waiting for the next crisis, the next crisis won’t disappoint you, and it will arrive. As you circulate through the school, you are more likely to proactively solve issues, prevent problems, and understand needs.

Delegate Tasks
Give your assistants, secretary, department chairs, team leads, custodian, and others the opportunity to think through problems and find solutions. Build the capacity of your team by giving them opportunities to grow. They may not solve the problem the way you would solve it but go with their solution and thank them for their work. If you are a micromanager ---someone who insists on controlling or doing all of the work yourself because you can’t trust anyone else to do it correctly --- get over the fear of handing work off to someone else. “If something can be done 80% as well by someone else, delegate!” says Maxwell (2009), author of How Successful People Think: Change Your Thinking, Change Your Life.

Leave Your Office
As frequently as possible, circulate through the school, visit classrooms, observe teachers, talk to the lunch ladies, walk through the front gardens with your custodian, stop on the playgrounds during practice, learn student names. If you sit in your office waiting for the next crisis, the next crisis won’t disappoint you, and it will arrive. As you circulate through the school, you are more likely to proactively solve issues, prevent problems, and understand needs. Carry your phone or paper/pen to take notes that will remind you to follow-up on items needing attention.

Master meetings
The average organizational leader spends approximately half of his week in meetings (Yermack & Yuanzhi, 2014). Try logging your hours and compare. If you didn’t call the meeting, bring something with you to do if the discussion bogs down. If you are leading the meeting, prepare an agenda and distribute the agenda ahead of time so that attendees can prepare for more pertinent discussion. Don’t discuss what individuals can read for themselves. Curtail the length of your meetings, recognizing that individuals can only focus so long.

Discover Opportunities
Become aware of your time-wasting habits and discover opportunities for using time in better ways. For example, if you like to send congratulation notes to students, you will find that you have fewer interruptions writing those notes in the back of a classroom than sitting at your own desk. Carry a stack of notes cards on a clipboard or in a notebook along with a list of students you would like to congratulate. While visiting a classroom, write two or three appreciation notes which you can drop off with your secretary later to address and send --- or slip in a teacher’s mailbox to thank her for the hundreds of hours spent on the school play. Never just wait in a hair salon or doctor’s office without something else to do. You will be surprised how may minutes are lost if we aren’t consciously aware.

Keep A Grass Catcher List
Keep a grass catcher list of tasks worth your attention. Write things down and forget them. Don’t try to remember everything that requires your attention. Write them down. A grass catcher list is a place to catch all of your ideas, so they aren’t lost. Then during your weekly planning session, review your grass catcher list, and pull out the items that
are the next most important tasks to accomplish or delegate. By keeping a written list, you unclutter brain so that you can be present in the moment on the current task rather than being distracted by what’s coming up.

Say No

Are you a person who has a hard time saying “no” to people? If so, you probably have far too many projects and commitments on your plate. This behavior can lead to poor performance, stress, and low morale. Taking on too much is a poor use of your time, and it can get you’re a reputation for producing rushed, sloppy work. Some people get a rush from being hyper-busy: the narrowly-met deadlines, the endless emails, the piles of files needing attention, the frantic rate of last-minute meetings. The problem is that “addiction to busyness” rarely means that you’re effective, and it can lead to stress. Instead, try to slow down, plan, and learn to manage your time better by selectively saying no.

Taking control of your time requires discipline. You won’t succeed overnight. Success requires incremental changes. Student achievement and teacher satisfaction are largely based on your decision to live by choice instead of by chance. Your family, friends, and responsibilities outside of school depend on your wise choices --- choices that involve determining what is the most important task for you to accomplish in each role that week. Controlling the events in your life takes practice and focus. You will fail, learn, and can begin again with new understanding. I encourage you to approach this work with a growth mindset. Your well-being and opportunities for others hinge on your personal time victory.

References


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At the beginning of every term, my school’s counseling center is overrun with students who are requesting a schedule change. These requests are made for a wide variety of reasons, but more and more often, we have students and parents demanding a change in class level or teacher because they perceive the change will result in a higher grade for less effort. How much they may or may not learn in either class does not often seem to be a part of the decision.

Similarly, teachers reach frustration with students’ attitudes about grades and assignments, especially toward the end of each term. Teachers will often be presented with questions like: What can I do to raise my grade? Do you offer extra credit? Can I bring in some boxes of tissues to help my grade? Why are you ruining my GPA? These types of questions communicate to teachers that their students are chasing the grade, not valuing the learning, and teachers themselves often feel devalued.

Despite the frustration these scenarios cause for teachers and other school staff, we cannot discount the fact that grades are (and should be) important to our students. They have become so important to many students and families, though, that they will seemingly do anything to earn a certain grade. It is more and more common that we experience their “fear of failing to be perfect, ideally an effortless perfection...[This], versus the joy of learning creates situations where students opt for an easy grade as opposed to challenging themselves to learn” (Hall, 2017). It is this attitude that leads students to choose classes and teachers they perceive to be easier.

Grades help get students into college, but it is the learning and skills they acquire that keep them there. So, when many students have their focus on raising their grade, and teachers have their focus on raising the knowledge base of their students, we are no longer working toward the same goals. How do we alleviate this conflict? How do we shift the focus in our schools to the learning? Perhaps, it starts with making sure our students and their families are well-informed.

Provide More (and Better) Information

Every spring, as we prepare for the next school year, students and families receive a lot of information about the classes they need to take to meet the graduation requirements. If we want to put a greater emphasis on what students learn in their classes throughout high school, this should also be communicated with the graduation requirements. Instead of simply listing the classes that students need to take, we should be communicating the knowledge they will gain and why it is important. For example, we could do a better job of explaining why students must take four years of English Language Arts, at least two years of lab science, and three years of math. Additionally, if course descriptions are solely
focused on what students will learn, not what they will do, in each class, it becomes clear to families that the school holds knowledge as its priority.

Most schools spend a good deal of time and effort in communications with families, encouraging students to take rigorous classes, but many students move out of honors and AP classes, opting for classes that will result in a higher grade with less effort. We often find that students and families are surprised to learn that colleges and universities have holistic approaches to admission, and for many of them, the rigor of classes and standardized test scores carry as much or more weight as GPA. Many admissions offices look for students they are confident can pass college-level classes, so they want students who take honors, AP, IB and concurrent enrollment classes and who at least pass the benchmarks on the ACT.

ACT has spent a great deal of time conducting studies on student performance and setting their benchmarks at a level that indicates which students are likely to succeed in college classes, and many colleges believe that the ACT score is a stronger indicator of this than GPA. Students and families need to understand this, and they also need to understand that ACT has found that the most effective way to score well is to take a rigorous course load throughout middle and high school.

Many colleges believe that the ACT score is a stronger indicator of this than GPA. Students and families need to understand this, and they also need to understand that ACT has found that the most effective way to score well is to take a rigorous course load throughout middle and high school.

In most classrooms, students need to draw their own conclusions about how the lesson objective and the assignment given are connected, as this is not clearly defined for them. If teachers spent a little more time, not just explaining the objective for the day but how the activity or assignment will help students practice the learning or show what they have learned, the focus will shift.
written on their board that they discuss at the beginning of each class. However, when we look more closely, most of the discussion and preparation is based on what student will do in class, not what they will learn. This is understandable: doing is tangible, and learning is usually not, so it is easier to focus on the doing. If teachers spend most of this part of their class time on describing the procedures for an assignment, though, it is no wonder that students are focused more on what they need to do to get a higher grade than what they need to learn. What if teachers presented all assignments to students as new learning opportunities, and “when they ask what we ‘want’…what if we introduced every assignment by discussing the knowledge and skills it advances? Or we could put the question to students, ‘What might you learn by doing this assignment?’” (Weimer, 2017). In most classrooms, students need to draw their own conclusions about how the lesson objective and the assignment given are connected, as this is not clearly defined for them. If teachers spend a little more time, not just explaining the objective for the day but how the activity or assignment will help students practice the learning or show what they have learned, the focus will shift. This may also result in teachers reevaluating many of their assignments to ensure they are meaningful and clearly connected to the learning.

Another important aspect of refocusing on learning in our schools is to make sure that there is alignment between teachers who teach the same subject.

Skills and standards can be put into the gradebook in logical groups, and objective trackers could be used to help students understand what they need know and be able to do to perform well on the culminating assessments or projects.

If we truly want students to focus as much on the learning as they do the grade, the two should be closely connected. For almost every teacher, grade reporting primarily communicates what has and has not been done. In high school, there is little feedback to students or families about the the skills and knowledge gained. If we want the focus on learning, families should be able to look at the grade and see what has been learned and what has not. What are we communicating to students about our expectations and values through what teachers put into the gradebook? That value what students are willing to do or what they can learn?

For most of the classes we teach, it is not possible to communicate every, single standard separately in the gradebook. However, the skills and standards can be put into the gradebook in logical groups, and objective trackers could be used to help students understand what they need know and be able to do to perform well on the culminating assessments or projects. Objective trackers can come in many forms, but they communicate...
to students which learnings they will be expected to demonstrate at the end of a unit of study. Along with providing this clear communication to students, they also provide the opportunity for teachers to give students feedback throughout the unit on what they are learning, or better yet, the opportunity for student metacognition regarding their own learning process. With objective trackers, “students can clearly see what is expected of them, they can monitor their progress through a unit, and they can self-evaluate their comprehension as they prepare for assessments” (Kuntz, 2012). If used effectively, students are more likely to be looking for opportunities to demonstrate their understanding of the content than they are to ask for extra credit.

All teachers receive the inevitable question: “What can I do to improve my grade?” Whether it is with the use of objective trackers or another strategy, our teachers need to be encouraged and trained to flip the conversation and respond with: “Here’s what more you can learn and how you can show me you have learned it.”

**Adjust the Culture**

If we want to shift the attitudes of our students about learning, we may need to make some adjustments to ensure that we are fostering a school culture that promotes learning and growth. Showing students that we care about their learning takes more than simply stating so in the mission statement. In everything we do, we need to communicate that we care about our students’ success and that success comes when the whole school community is working hard to seek greater knowledge. “In workplaces, employees are more likely to display growth mindsets when they believe that the organization believes in developing abilities” (Blad, 2016), and the same is true for our students. If they believe this about their school, they are more likely to challenge themselves and work harder in their academics.

One way we can positively affect our school culture is to be deliberate about the awards we give to students. We need to publicly give awards that emphasize students’ passion for learning and hard work in the classroom. “So many students still cling to the notion that grades measure ability, and that good grades result from big brains, not time and effort devoted to study” (Weimer, 2017). Because of this, less successful students often see others receive awards for good grades and believe that they do not have the ability to do so themselves. When we give academic awards, we need to emphasize the student’s hard work, commitment and perseverance, as well as our belief that all students can develop these qualities.

Another important way to develop a culture of learning is for all staff members to become good models of lifelong learners. This starts with the teachers in their own classrooms. Students are motivated by their teachers’ enthusiasm for their subjects. “Thus, the teacher’s passion for learning has a high impact on student motivation and engagement” (Gregory & Kaufeldt, 2015). If the teacher is excited about a subject, students are much more likely to be interested in learning. As administrators, we can help with this, as well. When we visit classrooms, we can be engaged and interested in the subject matter. When we visit with students, ask them about what they are learning in class and why that learning is important. If our conversations with struggling students focuses solely on improving their grades by completing missing assignments, we are communicating that what they do is more important than
what they learn. We can help teachers connect the assignments to the learning in these conversations with have with students.

Above all else, however, unless students are engaged in the learning process, they cannot gain the knowledge each class is designed to impart. Engagement starts with students actually being physically present at school but also includes the efforts we make to mentally and emotionally engage them when they are. Study after study has shown that the most effective way to improve our students’ attendance and engagement levels is to develop positive relationships between students and school staff. For example, the latest PISA testing results report that students “who attend schools with better teacher-student relations reported a stronger sense of belonging and greater intrinsic motivation to learn… [and] are less likely to report having arrived late for school or skipped classes during the two weeks prior to the PISA test” (OECD, 2012). Students need to believe that their teachers and the school staff treat them fairly, care about their well-being, and are willing to help them when they are struggling.

Many teachers and other staff members display behaviors and attitudes that they do not realize are alienating and discouraging their students. We need to help those staff members develop more positive relationships with their students. All other strategies for helping students focus on learning are not effective if students are not engaged in that learning process, and they can only become engaged if they feel valued and cared for while at school.

References


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Kelli Miller is the assistant principal at Brighton High School in Jordan School District. She can be reached at kelli.miller@canyonsdistrict.org.
Dear Fellow Students,

This is a love letter to you. This is a love letter to your compassion, your thoughtfulness, and most of all to your idealism.

After the Parkland shooting, our world was thrown into a state of uncertainty and chaos. It became another senseless blight on our nation’s bloody record of gun violence. It was hard not to feel hopeless.

But rather than offer thoughts and prayers, students across the country made a choice and declared that enough was enough. Suddenly, anger was blossoming into action. For the first time in a long time, it feels like a change is possible, all because we are dreaming for, demanding a better future. There is hope. It might seem like this hope stems from naiveté. Pessimistic politicians and disillusioned adults tell us that nothing will truly change, and that our drive for reform will peter out.

Here’s what they don’t understand: We don’t hope because we want to; we hope because it is a necessity. This generation has grown up in a world where mass shootings are the norm and violence is accepted as an unfortunate yet unsolvable problem. A new culture of fear has been allowed to permeate and disturb the classroom as senseless death is unable to shock society into action.

So yes, it’s about time for students to call out conditions they never should have to live in.

Our future is directly impacted by the action we take at this present moment. And our action is linked to the future we imagine. Will we be bound by the reality of now? Or will we imagine a world where students’ lives outweigh a corrupt gun culture? Maybe that’s impossible. But maybe we can’t accept anything less.

In fact, the world needs more people who refuse to adhere to the status quo. It has always been dreamers who generate progress. By its very nature, progress is impossible to achieve without first rejecting existing conditions and believing that improvement is possible. When others denounce us as idealists, may we wear that title proudly. When they complain that we are too brash, may we be grateful for our voices. When individuals become victims to complacency, may we galvanize our efforts.

I am proud to be a part of this generation. There is a palpable energy we have captured, and I know that we will not falter. This battle for reform will not be easily won. We will face countless setbacks. But so long as we believe that change is written in our future, hope remains.

Sincerely,

Isabella Ashton

Isabella Ashton will be a senior at Taylorsville High School for the 2018-2019 school year. She is coeditor of the Taylorsville High newspaper, The Warrior Ledger. Isabella can be reached at isabasht9539@granitesd.org.
John Hattie’s groundbreaking research has impacted education in profound ways. His meta-analysis combined findings from 1,400 meta-analyses, 80,000 studies and over a quarter of a billion students. His work identifies patterns that can inform educational practice. (Hattie, 2009, p. 5). Some instructional practices have greater impact on student learning than others. In fact, according to Hattie, 95-97% of the things we do to kids has a positive effect, but that doesn’t mean that it is the most effective thing. Hattie’s research assigns numerical values to various instructional strategies with a 0.40 effect size as the “hinge point” (Hattie, 2009, p. 9). An effect size of 0.40 or higher defines strategies that, when properly applied, result in students making a year or more of academic growth during the school year. It’s simple really; teachers just need to design instruction to use 0.40 or higher effect size strategies, and administrative attention to effect size can propel learning to new levels for teachers and hence, students.

Going further into the research, John Hattie, Doug Fisher and Nancy Frey (2016) wrote a book titled, Visible Learning for Literacy. The authors state, “Each surface, deep and transfer levels of learning have their place. At times, the focus of why students are learning gets lost. The teachers are so busy teaching on the surface level that students never get to experience deep and transfer levels of learning. The level of learning used depends on the type of learning teachers want the students to achieve.” ((Fisher, Frey, & Hattie, 2016, p. 3). So, why don’t educational leaders plan professional development that influences teachers to use these deep and level strategies?

Planning professional development is challenging. First, we must meet the needs of an entire staff of varying experience, skill, and will levels.

What holds us back? Why don’t we take our staff on a professional development adventure where they will EXPERIENCE first-hand surface, deep and transfer levels of learning? Why don’t we teach professional development using effect size strategies purposefully designed to influence learning? Ignoring any obstacles and based on an examination of effect size, we designed an innovative experience for staff. With the help of professional ski instructor Nancy Thoreson and Snowbird Ski Resort President and CEO Bob Bonar, my staff at Terra Linda Elementary in Jordan School District experienced an adventure that met the needs of the entire staff, was fun, and had endless impact (Outdoor Adventure Programs Effect Size = 0.52).

In preparation for this adventure, teachers were invited to bring sturdy shoes for
Answering the questions ambiguously was purposeful. It helped teachers reflect on their own practice when they don’t disclose the objective or overwhelm the students with too much information.

Surface Level Learning (Direct Instruction Effect Size = 0.59)

On an August day last summer, my entire faculty loaded onto a bus to begin their journey to positively influence learning at Terra Linda Elementary School. When the bus started up Little Cottonwood Canyon, the teachers were given a packet of information and asked (just like they tell their students) not to look ahead. It was humorous to watch some teachers immediately look through the whole packet (just like their own students.) With this packet they were encouraged to be cognizant of their own levels of understanding and asked to compare each stage of the activity with the surface, deep, and transfer levels of learning. Along with the packet, we gave them a goodie bag of trail mix. The many ingredients of the trail mix symbolized the multiple paths of learning they were going to encounter throughout the day. (Meta-cognitive Strategies Effect Size = 0.69).

Stories Are Data with a Soul.

The story was shared about a young girl who struggled in school because she was constantly worried about her mother. Her mother suffered multiple strokes. Often after a stroke had occurred, the young child would find her mother collapsed on the floor needing her help. The girl’s academic struggle was not due to any lack of academic ability, but rather her preoccupation and concern for her mother’s well-being. (Not Labeling Students Effect Size = 0.61) Like this girl many students struggling in our classrooms can learn and succeed when given the proper support. We just have to make the time to learn their stories and find out what is holding them back. (Teacher-Student Relationships Effect Size = 0.72.)

The second page of the packet included the poem, “Good Timber,” by Douglas Malloch. The poem was read. We discussed the symbolism behind the poem and how it is key that educators build a good rapport with students to value them as “good timber.” (Student centered teaching effect size=0.54)

Good Timber

by Douglas Malloch

The tree that never had to fight For sun and sky and air and light, But stood out in the open plain And always got its share of rain, Never became a forest king But lived and died a scrubby thing.

The man who never had to toil To gain and farm his patch of soil, Who never had to win his share Of sun and sky and light and air, Never became a manly man But lived and died as he began.
Good timber does not grow with ease:
The stronger wind, the stronger trees;
The further sky, the greater length;
The more the storm, the more the strength.
By sun and cold, by rain and snow,
In trees and men good timbers grow.

Where thickest lies the forest growth,
We find the patriarchs of both.
And they hold counsel with the stars
Whose broken branches show the scars
Of many winds and much of strife.
This is the common law of life.

The bus ride symbolized surface level learning because although it was getting them somewhere, they were not putting forth any effort to get themselves there. They were just along for the ride.

If you are not familiar with John Hattie’s work, he talks a lot about success criteria. In the book, success criteria is defined as teachers communicating the level of performance that students are expected to meet (Hattie, 2009, p. 17). Once Mount Baldy, Snowbird, Utah was within view, teachers were given the success criteria for the day. The success criteria stated that they needed to climb over eleven thousand feet to the top of Mount Baldy, while working as a team (Cooperative Learning Effect Size = 0.42), all staying together, each supported at their level, all growing and progressing at different rates, and all becoming successful. (Expectations Effect Size = 0.43).

We arrived at Snowbird Ski Resort, boarded the tram, and traveled 2,900 vertical feet in ten minutes. This was still considered Surface Learning because although we were moving fast through the day’s curriculum the learners were still along for the ride.

Deep Level Learning- (Piagetian Programs Effect Size = 1.28)
Once the tram ride ended, we began our deeper level of learning phase. Mount Baldy stood proud and tall in the distance and we were reminded of the success criteria for the day. It is important for teachers to keep the expectation in front of students. Although the tram carried the staff to 11,000 feet Mount Baldy is 11,068 feet. This is symbolic of teaching. We provide foundational support with modeling, demonstration and direct instruction, but it is not until the students start to experience the concepts themselves that they truly begin to understand on a deeper level.

We began to hike and experience first-hand multiple paths, high altitude, shortness of breath, pika, and the support and fellowship of good friends. One of the success criteria was to all work together. Each time we stopped, the teachers and staff members were asked to switch who they were working with (Cooperative vs Individualistic Learning Effect Size = 0.59). Although this made it uncomfortable for some staff members, it helped them to understand that working with peers can be helpful in creating success (Peer tutoring effect size=0.55). We pointed out that deeper learning, like hiking, takes place one step at a time and often requires hard work. Deeper learning isn’t all difficult, just as the hike has flowers and beauty along the way. Deeper learning is about pacing, hard work, students pushing themselves, and discussing the learning that is taking place.
We pointed out that deeper learning, like hiking, takes place one step at a time and often requires hard work. It was interesting to watch which staff members needed support (Comprehensive Interventions for Students who Are Learning Disabled Effect Size = 0.77). All traveled at their own pace just like the learners in our classrooms. Sometimes it was good to stop, rest and look how far we had gone (Providing Formative Evaluation Effect Size = 0.90). In our classrooms it is important to stop, rest, look back on our path and celebrate progress. When we got closer to the summit and the path grew very steep, we momentarily lost sight of our goal. Isn’t this just like deeper level understanding? It’s possible for students to become frustrated when they are on the verge of a major breakthrough (Concentration, Persistence, and Engagement Effect Size = 0.48). One member of our staff became sick and needed our nurse’s support. Does this sound like specialized education personnel or RTI? With the nurse’s assistance, this staff member was still able to achieve leveled success (Response to Intervention effect size=1.07).

The beauty on top of Mount Baldy was breath-taking. The wildflowers were unmatched in stunning beauty and the success and exhilaration of my staff could be heard as an audible cheer (Tactile Stimulation Programs Effect Size = 0.58).

We had lunch on top and took a deep breath to reflect. During the reflection we asked the faculty to find a personal space for twenty minutes to reflect on learning for the year. After twenty-minutes staff members were invited to add a rock to the rock monument symbolizing, “Rocking Learning” at Terra Linda for the 2017-18 school year. This symbolized students’ independent work and the fine results that come once the students have the deep understanding of a concept (Self-Verbalization and Self-Questioning Effect Size = 0.64).

Transfer Level of Learning- (Mastery learning effect size=0.58)

On the return trip, staff members were asked to walk on a different path. The path looked as though there was no way down. Teachers were unsure and questioned the path (Questioning Effect Size = 0.48, referring to an inquiry-based classroom). This compares with what our students do when we have taught them a concept and we are helping them transfer their new knowledge to a new situation. They do not trust their own learning (Self-Concept Effect Size = 0.47).

What my teachers didn’t understand was that at the end of this unfamiliar trail/task, a tunnel had been carved out of the mountain that would lead them to a ski lift. The tunnel is an old mine shaft turned into a museum. It’s filled with old pictures depicting mining activities in Big Cottonwood Canyon many years ago. Transfer learning can be like this. Fascinating new discoveries can be found in unexpected places when current knowledge/skills are applied to new and unfamiliar situations. Teachers may be amazed at what level their students can attain by applying new knowledge (Quality of Teaching Effect Size = 0.48).

Reflections

The effect size of reflections is considerable (Self-Reported Grades/Student Expectations Effect Size = 1.44)

One of the most valuable parts of this professional development has been the reflection that took place the next day and the applications during the school year. Ac-
According to Hattie, when teachers see learning through the eyes of the student, they are better able to help students see themselves as their own teachers. The following are samples of the reflections from that day of professional learning that demonstrate Hattie’s point:

**Teacher Reflections – Success Criteria**
- Our students come from different backgrounds, and it is important to know them personally.
- Collaboration plays a huge for the success of a team (Collective Teacher Efficacy Effect Size = 1.57).
- Stating clear objective helps relieve nerves and gives opportunity to prepare and gear up.
- Start with a goal in mind because it is important for students to know where you want them to go (Goals Effect Size = 0.50).

**Teacher Reflections - Surface Level Learning**
- Pay attention.
- Be enthusiastic.
- Remember what it’s like for students to learn and why we need to pre-teach.

**Teacher Reflections - Deep Level Learning**
- Take time, breaks and walk at your own pace to make the journey more enjoyable.
- Evaluate where you are and to see how far you’ve come. Being together as a group help to motivate me to keep going even if it was from people I didn’t know or had just met.
- Deeper learning includes time, taking little steps, hard work, discovery, concrete experiences to solidify deeper understanding.
- Pay attention to details because they can be multifaceted and makes learning a concrete process. Attention to details in flowers, colors, size, shape, we need to take time to “notice and appreciate.”
- Sometimes in the middle of something difficult our students will feel like they can’t finish or that they won’t succeed, but with encouragement and support they can do difficult things.
- The hike was exhausting, and I wanted to quit. However, I saw the end in sight. It renewed my energy and helped me to push on. I think this is helpful for my classroom because I need to give my students an “end in sight,” so they can persevere.
- You don’t have to know or do everything “right now.” You just have to keep moving forward. Take what you know and add it to what you’re learning. When it seems too hard, just take it one step at a time.

**Teacher Reflections - Transfer Level Learning**
- To get to a transfer level of learning, you have to scaffold the learning process. It also takes thought and preparation to plan transfer learning.
- We need to create more concrete time to explore and discover for the transfer level of understanding.
- We need to push out of comfort zones and realize it takes a lot to get to the transfer level of understanding.
- We need to consider all the pathways to get to a destination. We can all adjust our goals and try again.

Learning, even for teachers can be challenging and fun, and sometimes challenging is what makes it fun. It is important, as leaders, that we impact learning in a positive way for lasting change in classrooms.

**References**

Karen Gorringe is currently the principal at Terra Linda Elementary school in Jordan School District. She has served as assistant principal at West Jordan High School for three years. She can be reached at karen.gorringe@jordandistrict.org.
Ed Direction has been extremely fortunate to work with 15 schools, four districts, and four charter boards throughout the state spearheading student-centered school leadership focused on rigor and results. To share the best practices they are using, we have co-authored with two phenomenal secondary school principals currently leading Utah schools: Seth Allred of Mont Harmon Middle School (in Carbon School District) and Kim Schaefer of Whitehorse High School (in San Juan School District). While these are just two examples of meaningful school improvement in Utah, they are representative of the work being done by numerous schools across the state—in rural, suburban, and urban communities and in a variety of unique local settings. While there are numerous root causes of underperformance in secondary schools and unique contexts across UT, our hope is that other secondary school principals (and their schools) will benefit from these case studies.

**The Secondary Principal’s Challenge**

It is simply unrealistic to expect today’s school leaders to give equal priority to all initiatives. Kim and Seth successfully enabled deep implementation of the priorities most important to their respective schools by becoming Lead Learning Officers. They used a systematic approach where root-cause issues affecting student learning were identified, and priorities were committed to by all stakeholders. History has taught us that the best developed plan is worthless if it isn’t implemented to a deep enough level and broad enough scale to impact teacher expertise and student learning. By narrowing the focus of their work, Kim and Seth have created the conditions for teachers to build their own expertise and students to engage fully in rigorous learning.

**Mont Harmon Middle School**

First established in 1913, Mont Harmon Middle School has a rich history as a Price community fixture. Today, the school serves 600 students with nearly 40 staff members and has been led by Principal Seth Allred since the 2015-2016 school year. In 2015, Mont Harmon was identified as an underperforming school and provided
outside support through Utah’s School Turnaround Act. In the past 3 years, the school has focused on: building an inclusive culture that fosters a safe and academically rigorous learning community while empowering teacher leaders. Focusing only on instructionally-relevant priorities that anchor evidence-based practices to rigorous grade-level standards.

Increasing teacher team impact using instructional cycles and effective meeting practices to make meaning and purposeful action from collaborative time.

An Inclusive Culture of Collaboration

From the first day on the job, Seth knew that culture needed to be shaped in a way that promoted data-driven instruction, meaningful collaboration, and trauma-informed practices. Mont Harmon started with a focus on fostering an inclusive culture of collaboration—both among school staff and with students, families, and community members. They identified teachers who were well poised to serve as teacher leaders, establishing new systems of support through the formation of the School Transformation Team, including Seth, Assistant Principal Karlene Bianco, and several teacher-leaders. This model empowers teachers to own the improvement efforts because they help make key instructional decisions for the school, lead implementation of those decisions, and support their fellow teachers in applying evidence-based strategies.

Key steps in this process have included:

• Increasing parent and family involvement in student learning and school activities by better defining the role families can play in their student’s education. Often families want to engage but don’t know how; Mont Harmon decided to clear the path and make engagement less complicated.

• Growing community partnerships to support student learning. Price is a proud and cohesive community. With a little outreach, Seth was able to form meaningful connections that directly impact the work of the school (Sun Advocate, 2017).

• Implementing strong systems of support for student behavioral and emotional learning. Teacher teams created plans to make sure that no student was left unsupervised. This included frank discussions about the need to connect with students who need adult support and can be hard to connect with due to behavioral challenges.

• Implementing and improving durable structures for teacher collaboration, for example revamped Professional Learning Communities with clear expectations for curriculum, instruction, and assessment outcomes.

• Adopting efficiency supports and empowering teacher facilitators so that effective meeting practices were implemented across all teams. This included clear team norms, agendas with articulated outcomes, and data analysis protocols.

Leadership that is Focused and Coherent

Research has shown that “leadership is second only to classroom instruction among school-related factors that affect student learning” (The Wallace Foundation, 2013). Developing strong leadership among staffs begins with the principal, whose first and most important responsibility is as the school’s instructional leader or Lead Learning Officer.

At Mont Harmon, Seth has helped teachers to narrow their focus by creating and implementing measurable goals to improve teaching. For example, teacher teams decided to implement an instructional cycle emphasizing student engagement, better explicit instruction, and standards-based assessment. The creation of a fully-functioning School Leadership team comprising of team leads from all core subject areas, co-curricular courses including PE/health and music, and even the school facilities manager (custodian) who has a pulse on the culture of the school. These meetings demonstrate distributed leadership—shared facilitation.
and transparency--and helped narrow the staff’s focus to a manageable number of high-leverage, evidence-based strategies designed to improve instruction. To support this goal, the school welcomed improvement coaching from Ed Direction and established a series of 90-day action plans with specific work steps and timelines. The instructional cycle has become an iterative exercise at Mont Harmon, where teachers continually monitor their progress toward personal learning goals and student learning outcomes. The leadership of Principal Allred has helped teachers focus on the right things and make real-time adjustments in their lessons as students demonstrate learning needs.

**Rigorous Lessons and Evidence-Based Instruction**

Mont Harmon has also worked extensively to transform classroom instruction. As part of the goal-setting process described above, the school participates in an annual appraisal process designed to identify key areas for instructional improvement. Based on the appraisal findings, the school sets targeted instructional goals focused on evidence-based strategies. Then, throughout the school year, teachers receive professional development on those evidence-based strategies and regularly collect and analyze data to gauge their progress.

The teacher leaders carefully reviewed data sources and came up with a theory of action that centered on teacher preparation and lesson delivery that followed a proven instructional cycle where data drive instructional decisions.

**Instructional Improvement: Theory of Action**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEACHERS</th>
<th>STUDENTS</th>
<th>IMPACT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| If teachers are well prepared to deliver dynamic lessons with clear learning intentions and student success criteria | Then students will be more engaged because they clearly understand what they are learning, why it is important, and how they can show they know | Resulting in:  
- Teachers making a greater impact on their students  
- Students achieving at higher levels |
Teacher Learning Data

Every 90-days Ed Direction collects student engagement data to help Mont Harmon determine if their instructional plans are making an instructional difference. For example, the change in off-task and down time from the first observation to the second in the table below suggested that student engagement is getting stronger. Armed with the observation data, the School Leadership Team decided to double-down on the instructional cycle.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>September 2017</th>
<th>December 2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active Engagement: Student learning is visible and/or audible</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive Engagement: Students appear to be on task, but their learning is not visible and/or audible</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off Task: Students are not engaged in the learning task</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Down Time: There is no discernible learning task for students to engage in</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student achievement data:

With the convergence of culture, leadership, and instruction, Mont Harmon is making a difference in the lives of their students. Seth is an excellent leader who is quick to credit Mont Harmon’s staff for their dedication to improving classroom instruction. “The teachers are working their guts out, and the change they are making, it is amazing.” (Sun Advocate, 2017).

Mont Harmon Looking Forward

Success breeds success-- Mont Harmon is building a sustainability plan to ensure that these effective practices will be durable. Mont Harmon has improved academic outcomes for hundreds of students. The school has already moved up one letter grade since entering Turnaround status (from a ‘D’ in 2015 to a ‘C’ in 2017) and is poised to continue improving for many years to come.

Whitehorse High School

Located in the Four Corners area of southeastern Utah, Whitehorse High School serves approximately 250 students in grades 7-12 on the Navajo Nation. Kim Schaefer currently serves as principal, having worked at Whitehorse as a teacher and administrator for nearly two decades.

Like Mont Harmon, Whitehorse was
identified as an underperforming school in 2015 and provided with support from Ed Direction through Utah’s School Turnaround Act. Like Mont Harmon, Whitehorse has adopted evidence-based strategies to address root causes of underperformance identified through the on-site appraisal. Three prioritized components of their school turnaround plan include:

- Building a more inclusive and culturally-responsive approach to leadership and instruction,
- Planning more deliberately to build academic language skills and increase student engagement, and
- Refining organizational coherence with teaming structures, student engagement in learning, and further refining the Whitehorse way.

**Culturally Responsive Leadership and Instruction**

As part of its work to transform leadership and instruction, Whitehorse has made a concerted effort to establish a culturally relevant and responsive learning environment. A critical first step in this process was establishing a School Transformation Team that emphasizes Native American-led school transformation. This team of teacher leaders at Whitehorse includes three Navajo teacher-leaders and regularly solicits feedback from students and other Native staff members to ensure the school continues to prioritize integrating the community’s cultural richness and identity with the school’s transformation approach.

Individual teachers also bring their own unique skillsets and cultural perspectives to the classroom. Kim Dee, a member of the Navajo Nation and science teacher at Whitehorse, emphasizes the numerous connections between Navajo culture and her curriculum when she teaches. “In my biology class, I relate it to what is going on around us, and [how it] is similar to Navajo culture—we interact with the earth and affect it with our decisions. I constantly try to connect biology and science with Navajo culture” (Ed Direction, 2018).

This consistent emphasis on culturally responsive school leadership and instruction has played a major role in Whitehorse’s transformation over the past few years. Families report that they feel much more welcome and included in the day-to-day operations of Whitehorse. Students report that their teachers like them better—a great indicator that the hard work that the teachers are doing to be more culturally responsive is visible to the students.

**Instructional Planning**

During the on-site appraisal Ed Direction heard from several adults that students were not interested in taking an academic path, making engagement extremely passive and leaving learning tasks lacking rigor. After observing all classrooms on two separate occasions, in the winter and spring of 2016, the team hypothesized that perhaps students were disengaged because of the lack of rigor. This conclusion was reached after:

- Comparing information from student focus groups, where the prevailing view was that people didn’t believe in them and that they shouldn’t dream too big and risk disappointment;
- Reviewing notes from classroom observations where an interesting trend emerged— in classrooms with highly rigorous expectations and learning tasks, students were actively engaged, in classes where the rigor was low, or it was obvious that the teacher had not prepared a lesson that was well aligned with Utah’s Core Standards student engagement floundered.

This was a call to action. The administrator and teacher leaders devised a plan to increase student engagement and rigor. All teachers focused on key learning skills that were high leverage and necessary for progress to the next level of understanding. For example, using Utah’s state assessment data (i.e. SAGE), it was noted that students struggled with reading literature. The teachers further investigated this finding and came up with a theory of action that included academic vocabulary and culturally responsive teaching focused on rigorous standards.
Whitehorse’s School Transformation Team also used student engagement data and reviewed evidence on effective ways to increase the use of academic language in lessons. With the support of administration, teacher leaders were able to redesign a common lesson planning process. Teachers also implemented six-week instructional maps to maintain strong coherence across all grade-levels and content areas.

**Teacher Learning Data**

- **TEACHERS**: If teachers embedded academic language and culturally responsive teaching practices into their daily lessons through more deliberate lesson planning.
- **STUDENTS**: Then students will be more engaged because they will be able to use complex vocabulary more fluently, see relevance in their learning, and feel like their cultural heritage is valued.
- **IMPACT**: Resulting in:
  - Teachers making a greater impact on their students
  - Students achieving at higher levels

**Student Engagement Levels**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sept 2016</th>
<th>Jan 2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Off Task</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Down Time</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive Engagement</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Engagement</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The teachers at Whitehorse have embraced the planning process, producing more thoughtful and thorough lesson plans that include clear learning objectives, deliberate practice using academic language, modeling of student success criteria, opportunities for collaborative student work, intentional checks for understanding followed by immediate re-teaching, and opportunities for enrichment for students who have demonstrated proficiency. While the school staff recognizes there is still much instructional work to be done, Whitehorse has seen substantial gains in academic proficiency since 2015. In fact, in the fall Whitehorse was recognized for being a leader in student growth among Title I high schools.

**Student Achievement Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Year 0</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ELA</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Proficiency Rates**
**Organizational Coherence**

By clarifying the expectations for administrators, teachers, para-professionals, non-instructional staff, students, and families, Whitehorse has developed a school system that is moving in the same direction. For years, there were competing agendas and lack of honest communication, leading to a fractured approach to education for students with much potential. By committing to one another, all stakeholders are now part of the dialogue and this has brought a greater sense of community.

**Whitehorse Looking Forward**

In the words of Principal Schaefer, “Our school has tried a lot of things and for the first time in over 15-years we are all moving in the same direction, experiencing shared successes, learning from one another, and feeling part of something special, we’ll keep going.”

Key Takeaways for Utah Schools

Showcasing the hard work and meaningful results that Mont Harmon Middle School and Whitehorse High School have achieved illustrates that school improvement is possible if professionals are willing to sift through the distractions inherent to secondary schools and focus on student learning and teacher expertise. We at Ed Direction believe in teachers and promote a strong focus on their professional growth and impact on students.

But, none of this progress would be possible without the focused and coherent leadership of the school principal. Seth and Kim are quick to share credit when talking about the improvements that their schools have made. However, Ed Direction works in hundreds of schools across the country, and we have learned that without leadership like Kim and Seth provide, that:

- Narrowly focuses on a few high leverage strategies,
- Champions evidence-based instruction, and
- Commits to inclusive collaborative cultures,

School improvement efforts risk being disenfranchising, disjointed, unnecessarily expensive, and ultimately futile because they lack meaningful results and the durability necessary to sustain over time.

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What’s the Big Idea?
PLCs Planting for the Future

David Boren, PhD and Joe Jensen, EdD

Three men plant trees for a living. The first man digs holes. The second man places a sapling into each hole. The third man fills in the holes. On a particular day, the second man stays home from work. Staying true to routine, the first man digs holes while the third man follows behind filling in the holes. They repeat this process all day, and, ironically, leave work satisfied that they successfully accomplish their day’s work. On days when all three men attend and do their jobs, they work hard and accomplish a lot. On days when one man misses work, and behaviors of the adults in any school determine the school’s culture. Most schools start the PLC journey emphasizing this first big idea of a PLC because it focuses on the school’s culture. We must recognize that “the core mission of formal education is not simply to ensure that students are taught but to ensure that they learn. This simple shift—from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning—has profound implications for schools” (DuFour, 2004, p. 8). This paradigm espouses that all students can learn at high levels. We, as the adults in any school, must do all we can to ensure that each student learns at high levels, not merely offer them opportunities to learn.

Deeper Learning for Students
To ensure deeper learning for each student, we need clarity in defining student learning. Deeper learning expands the definition of learning to include academic content knowledge and life-changing skills and dispositions. Ample research suggests that skills and dispositions are more crucial to long term success in careers and life than traditional...
As teams clarify norms, consistently do the right work, and trust in and depend on their teammates, they begin creating a healthy culture of collaboration to accomplish the second big idea of PLC’s.

Academic knowledge (Brunello & Schlotter, 2010; Heckman, 2008; Kuhn & Weinberger, 2005; Levin, 2012). However, our work in PLCs still primarily focuses on helping students master academic content knowledge. Recent emphasis on deeper levels of knowledge benefits students by going beyond the academic content knowledge to purposely develop these student skills and dispositions (Fullan, Quinn, & McEachen, 2018). Some worry that focusing on skills and dispositions undermines core academic content. “This argument relies on the false dichotomy that we actually have to choose between teaching content and skills. The correct answer is that the best teaching and learning actually blend rigorous content mastery with higher-order thinking skills. The two can and should be mutually supportive of one another” (Kay & Greenhill, 2013).

Perhaps learning skills and dispositions should be our primary goal, with academic content knowledge acting as the vehicle to accomplish that goal. To develop knowledge, skills, and dispositions we must deliberately put first things first. Rather than merely being a hit or miss by-product of teaching, “we must all think anew about the important outcomes of education as we prepare students for a vastly different future than we have known in the past. The first task is to identify what we believe to be the critical dispositions of deeper learners and then suggest ways to design instructional and assessment strategies intended to cultivate the growth of deeper learners over time” (Costa & Kallick, 2015, p. 55, italics added; see also Collins, 2017; Tough, 2012; Wagner & Dintersmith, 2015). Rather than describing our focus on learning as knowledge, skills, and dispositions, a more appropriate description might be knowledge for skills and dispositions. And ultimately, the real reason we care about knowledge, skills, and dispositions is that together they increase student, teacher, and societal well-being (Seligman et al., 2009; see Figure 1).

Has your school collectively wrestled with and clarified your definition of deeper student learning?

Deeper Learning for Adults

If “the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers” (Barber & Mourshed, 2007, p. 4), then it logically follows that we must go after deeper learning for the adults who serve them. “Too often principals focus only on student learning—and that’s an oversight. Of course, the purpose of school is for students to learn, but students’ learning will be constrained unless their teachers are also learning” (Hoerr, 2016, p. 87). Should deeper learning for adults include external efforts like district workshops, graduate courses, endorsement classes, or visiting other school sites? How about internal efforts like instructional coaching, team coaching, lesson studies, peer observations, and team collaboration? Would principals and teachers also need access to the latest research, best practice, and the most effective practitioners engaged in this work (Guskey & Yoon, 2009)? All of these efforts have merit, but, like students, what teachers and principals often lack is the ongoing, job-embedded experiential learning that transfers learning into practice (Curry & Killion, 2009, p. 62; see also Croft et al., 2010). As we deliber-
ately focus on deeper learning for adults, students will also learn at deeper levels. What more could be done to ensure deeper learning for you and the adults in your school?

**Big Idea 2. Culture of Collaboration**

People talk about being part of something larger than themselves, of being connected, of being generative. It becomes quite clear that, for many, their experiences as part of truly great teams stand out as singular periods of life lived to the fullest” (Senge, 2013, p. 12).

By creating a vision and culture focused on learning for students and educators, principals have done the job of digging a hole for the tree, but much work remains. No educator, alone, can meet the demanding deeper learning needs of every child and adult in a school. Through collaborative teams we improve our odds of progress. Unfortunately, there is nothing magical about collaboration in and of itself. Teachers have had significant training in their academic content area and in pedagogy, but most have had little to no training in team dynamics and improvement processes. Thus, while “people organize together to accomplish more, not less” (Wheatley, 1997, p. 22), some of our teams actually accomplish less when they’re together than if they just spent collaboration time working in isolation. As teams clarify norms, consistently do the right work, and trust in and depend on their teammates, they begin creating a healthy culture of collaboration to accomplish the second big idea of PLC’s.

**Establish and Revisit Norms**

Teams must set and consistently review norms for how they will work together. Differences of opinion, styles, and approaches are an asset if we can set ground rules for how we will spend time together. “It would be truly tragic if meeting the needs of students became impossible simply because the adults in the building cannot treat each other professionally” (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2012, p. 41). Collaborative teams that create authentic and realistic norms have a much greater chance to improve deeper student and adult learning. Are your teams genuinely guided by norms?

**Consistency Over Intensity**

In 1911, Britain’s Robert Falcon Scott and Norway’s Roald Amundsen raced to be the first to reach the South Pole. Both men assembled teams of tough, experienced explorers to reach their goal. The British team covered great distances when weather was favorable, and rested when conditions were unfavorable. In contrast, the Norwegian team sought measured progress every day, in both calm and calamitous conditions. Because conditions in Antarctica are rarely ideal, Amundsen beat Scott to the South Pole by five weeks!

Steady consistency proved more effective than sporadic intensity. For some teams, the only thing steadily consistent is the inconsistency of productive team meetings. Some teams struggle to consistently meet because teachers feel the need to prepare for parent conferences, schedule appointments, or the principal calls an impromptu faculty meeting, etc. Other teams meet consistently, but focus on the wrong work such as talking about schedules, preparing reports, complaining, or just chatting. Following good norms also helps team consistency. How could teams at your school more consistently do the right work during teacher collaboration time?
Trust and Interdependence

During the 2004 Summer Olympics, the media heavily criticized an Australian rower after she stopped rowing for the last several hundred meters of the coxswain eight finals race, contributing to her team’s last place finish. In that same Olympics, 21 men and 16 women marathoners dropped out with very little notice or criticism. Why the difference? The rowing team’s success depended on every member. The work we do in our collaborative teacher teams, should not reflect a grueling individual marathon. Instead, we must row with each other toward the same goal. The success of the group depends on every member’s contributions. Successful teams trust in and depend on each other. Only team members that care about, trust, and interdependently can effectively function as a PLC. Do the teams at your school have a spirit of individual promotion and competition, or mutual trust and interdependence?

Steady consistency proved more effective than sporadic intensity.

Big Idea 3: Results Orientation

Never confuse motion for action. Benjamin Franklin

If we only develop the first two big ideas of a PLC, we mimic the two metaphorical men digging and filling holes without planting trees. If PLCs lack a results orientation, the culture may have improved, and people may work together more than before, but we miss the very purpose of creating a focus on learning and putting together collaborative teams. It seems ridiculous to dig and fill holes without planting the tree, but when we lack clear learning goals, evidence of learning, and analysis and reflection on how students performed, it is equal to not putting the tree in the hole before it is filled. Sometimes we get so caught up doing the tasks of PLCs, that we forget to examine whether we’re getting the results we care about. We must determine the impact we’re having on the learning goals we care about (Hattie & Zierer, 2018). We must nurture a results orientation.

The Right Work

A collaborative culture for deeper student and adult learning “can only be accomplished if the professionals engaged in collaboration are focused on the right work” (DuFour et al., 2016, p. 59). For years, many schools have focused on the four essential questions of PLCs. These guiding questions helped schools nurture the first two big ideas, but often we have only dabbled in the 3rd big idea—a results orientation.

By relying exclusively on these four questions, we treat the PLC process as a checklist of essential components, rather than a dynamic cycle—And, we leave out crucial components of the PLC process, especially those related to a results orientation (See Figure 2; the shaded portions represent parts of the learning cycle addressed by the four essential questions of PLCs). We incorrectly assume that if we have essential standards, common assessments, and interventions, then we must be a high-functioning PLC. Without a results orientation, our efforts lack the engine that drives improvement. The only way we can effectively determine if we are a high-functioning PLC is if our efforts are having the desired impact on the results we care about. We must stop assessing our “effectiveness on the basis of how busy [we] are or how many new initiatives [we] have launched and begin instead to ask, ‘Have we made progress on the goals that are most important to us?’” (DuFour, 2004, p. 11, Italics added). Collaborative teams’ clear, measurable student learning goals will guide teacher teams to connect the other essential elements of the PLC results cycle.
Figure 2. Team Learning Cycle (Based on PLC Results Cycle used by Alpine School District)

**Team Learning Goals**

A team’s clear, measurable student learning goal for each learning cycle will guide the team in creating common formative assessments, designing effective Tier 1 instruction, assessing lesson impact, and determining which students need intervention. Without a clear goal, teams do not know how to calibrate assessments, where to focus their Tier 1 teaching, what evidence to collect, nor how to target intervention and extension. Reflecting on how to improve becomes less likely because a team can not reflect on how they did on their goal if there was no goal in the first place.

Many teams are willing to set norms, meet consistently, identify essential standards, and design and administer team-created common formative assessments. However, most of those teams do not set clear goals that actually drive their work. If teams do set goals, many teams have not had the courage to collectively review and respond to the results of those assessments in a united way to determine if their learning goals have been met. Collective review of common assessment data allows a review of learning goals to determine if lessons need to be retaught, how to target intervention and extension, and which teachers and resources are best suited to meet the identified needs. A team’s learning goals guide each of those decisions. Do we ever get stuck in the cycle of discussing standards, assessments, and intervention, but never really benefitting from collectively reviewing and responding to team-created common formative assessment data in relation to our shared learning goal? Michael Fullan warns that if collaboration only enables “teachers to work together and does not help forge the final link to actual learning, the process will fail.” (2014, p. 66).

Benefits abound when teams set clear, short-term goals. Collaborative teams will know how to effectively spend their time together, focusing their efforts on achieving their shared goal. The school leadership team can stop spending time on administrivia, and focus its efforts on supporting teams and team leaders in achieving their team goals. Instead of acting as uninformed bystanders during weekly collaboration, coaches and administrators can offer targeted, ongoing support to teams. Schools with a clear results orientation move from the ineffectiveness of “PLC lite” to experiencing “dramatic
improvement in learning by both students and adults” (DuFour & Reeves, 2016, p. 71). If a team flounders, or bogs down in “PLC lite,” you are very likely to find that they don’t have meaningful goals that drive their daily work. Supporting teachers in setting meaningful goals will accelerate the development of a PLC culture. Do your teams have a results orientation by setting clear goals for each learning cycle?

**Planting for the Future**

The best is yet to be. Robert Browning

These three big ideas are not new. We’ve heard them again and again, and they may not hold the same allure as other shinier and flashier approaches. Often “in education we are always looking for the next big thing before we’ve gotten good at the last big thing” (Wiliam, 2017). Without a consistent focus on developing all three big ideas of PLCs, we will expend countless metaphorical hours digging and filling holes. As we improve our focus on learning, create cultures of collaboration, AND embrace a results orientation, we will truly be planting beautiful forests of deeper learning now and for future generations.

**References**


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Maximizing and Understanding the Roles of Mental Health Professionals in the Schools

Paul L McClatchy, Psy.Spc., MEd

So, you have a social worker, a school counselor, and a school psychologist at your school. To get the most out of these diverse team members, the key is to get to know their roles, job expectations, and discover their unique skill sets which directly impact what they can do for you.

A critical thing to know is this: All of these mental health professionals provide “educationally supportive mental health services.” These services are not a replacement for outside mental health counseling but are in place to support student’s functioning in the school setting. It is a vital distinction. Parents and other educators often think that mental health professionals and private professionals do the same thing. Not so. Our licensures are different and allow private professionals to diagnose mental illness and provide therapeutic treatment, which they do because the job demands are drastically different. Private professionals can schedule appointments as needed for clients and see them on a more regular basis which is the foundation for therapeutic treatment. School mental health professionals take students many times on an as needed basis and are forced by assignment, emergencies, intense needs to triage who they see. IEP (Individualized Education Program) clients are also in the same boat but are seen more regularly as circumstances allow. Below is a description of secondary mental health providers and by knowing what they specialize in you can maximize services to your student body.

Our School Mental Health Professionals

The School Counselor

It is easy to know what the school counselors supposed to be doing because you work with them every day. They set up the student’s class schedules, monitor their progress towards graduation, present preventative topics in the classroom, assist students with some counseling. They communicate with the teachers about problems the students are having and act as a bridge between the parents and the educators for problems and intervention. They develop the overall schedules and pathways for the school of classes, and they assist with transitional needs of students from elementary or junior high to students going to college. They help with deciding awards and scholarships, and they often manage school-wide testing such as the ACT. They’re also often involved in crisis intervention in the event of a tragedy. The list is long and varied and very demanding.

The struggle for many school counselors is with very severe mental health problems
School social workers are more deeply involved in student mental health problems. They might go on home visits to assess student needs or interview parents to obtain background information as part of student assessments.

Social workers are also a bridge between parents, outside professionals, and the schools in assisting students to get their needs met. They often provide group counseling for students with similar problems such as those who have been sexually abused, who are struggling with anger management, or are grieving. Many do one on one individual supportive counseling and coordinate with mental health professionals outside of the school system that the students are working with privately. It is not unusual to find social workers were also licensed for private practice outside of the school system, which means, that they’re quite capable in the field of mental health disorders.

The School Psychologist
School psychologists are often involved in psychoeducational assessment and reevaluation of students in special education. Many times, like social workers, they have service minutes on the students IEP, such as 15 minutes a month.

School psychologists are often first responders in crisis intervention and can help coordinate, like the social worker, the crisis response from the school due to a tragic death or suicide. School psychologist are the main hub in the assessment of intellectual disabilities, behavior disabilities, and emotional problems that require special education, accommodations for learning disabilities, and other IEP related problems.

In addition, school psychologist provides unique insight into mental health services for student’s due their knowledge of learning disabilities and brain functioning at developmental ages. They’re highly trained in assessment and intervention of mental health and learning problems.

They often provide individual educationally supportive counseling to students on a broad range of mental health problems, and they are a bridge for the parents, outside medical professionals, and educators in coordinating services for students of varying needs.
School psychologists and social workers are often involved in crisis intervention, which could be as simple as calming an upset student, working on anger management skills, or to direct intervention with suicidal students, which is the top priority of all mental health professionals at the school. School psychologists often have high caseloads and often have more schools than school social workers because there is a nationwide shortage of school psychologist, and there is a shortage in the state of Utah of school psychologists. School psychologists frequently have two to as many as seven or more schools. School social workers may have one to three schools and rarely more than that. This makes it particularly challenging for school psychologist to be able to meet the needs of their students, particularly, all the IEP minutes for counseling. Some school districts employ solely school psychologists due to their roles in special education and counseling.

The MTSS team meetings are a valuable resource for secondary schools in that it brings together all the mental health practitioners at your school to address student needs and concerns.

Mental Health in the Schools is Not the Same as Mental Health in a Clinic
Most school psychologists, social workers, and school counselors are not licensed to do therapy in the schools unless they have a private license outside of their educational certifications. Those without such licenses are not allowed to diagnose and treat mental illness in the same way as private clinicians do. It’s not part of their licensure. Often, parents think because there is a psychologist or social worker in the school they can get free counseling which is commensurate to private therapy. This is not the case. Educational social work and school psychology is just that, educationally-oriented.

Psychologists, social workers, and school counselors are there to provide assistance for educational achievement. Anger management classes are to help to keep the student in class so that they won’t embarrass themselves or harm others or disrupt the classroom setting. It’s meant to keep them on the track of educational attainment.

Roles
The roles vary for the mental health practitioners in the schools due to factors such as: time, experience, licensure, assigned number of days at the school for each practitioner. It is all very different depending upon the individual and their skill set.

The MTSS team meetings are a valuable resource for secondary schools in that it brings together all the mental health practitioners at your school to address student needs and concerns. Each one in their own right is a valuable resource to school administrators, parents, students and other educational professionals in the remediation and the assistance in school based problems.

Here’s an example of how some of the professionals can and did work together in the school. A social worker had been working with one of their students who failed to make progress academically and was failing despite being in a self-contained behavior unit. The student received outside therapy from the family physician and was on medications for mental health condition. On consultation the school social worker requested the school psychologist interview the student to get ideas of what could possibly be wrong and why the student was declining emotionally and academically.

On interview, the student related that he was hearing and seeing things such as seeing a car drive at him, and he would dive into the driveway to avoid it only to realize later that these events never really occurred. The
school psychologist contacted his mother and conducted an interview and agreed to do an assessment on her son. Those results were forwarded to the family physician who then changed the medications the student was on, and the hallucinations went away. Soon after that, the students’ grades went from Fs to Bs, and his behavior at school improved. He started to experience more social acceptance from peers and eventually ended up in high school with a girlfriend. His whole life got a lot better thanks to the interventions of school mental health practitioners working together with parents, physicians, and educators.

There are so many more stories just like this that I could share. School mental health professionals make a big difference in students lives as do all educators. I’m grateful to be involved with such a group of caring individuals who work so hard and help so many.

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