**Utah Association of Secondary School Principals**

*Executive Board Members*

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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.

Julie Barlow
jbarlow@dsdmail.net

Layton High School
440 Lancer Ln
801-402-4800
Letter from the Editor

Mary Rhodes, EdD
Editor

A national trend that passed critical mass a few years ago is investigation of ancestry, and I credit our state of Utah for having been a leader in the field and in the builder of a significant database. I jumped in and was so surprised by the results that I sent my test tube to another organization so I could be surprised again. The ethnic heritage, the possible matches, the real matches, the coincidences, and the surprise connections are startling. The branches of my family tree extend to the sun and back.

Interactions are like these DNA connections, and our professional associations are like family. The people we encounter daily are similar to close relatives that show up in your family tree and those new introductions are like the invitations from unknowns to connect through the database. Sometimes interactions are deeply meaningful, and sometimes the meaning of the chance interaction is inconsequential, obscured, or mysterious. This edition of our journal explores interactions in surprising ways.

Margaret Bird opens the journal with stories of interactions at the highest levels state government about our shared professional history regarding Trustlands. Margaret’s interactions with Justin Atwater, director of a newly formed advocacy office, led to our second article explaining the role of that office and the position of Utah as a leader in the country and in ethical practices in place currently to protect that precious resource. David Boren and Joe Jensen interact theoretically to give us an article on professional development, and Joe Jensen and Michelle Jensen vault the theory into practice in a description of professional development at Timpview High. Todd Dawson interacts with a photo closer to his family tree than you can imagine. Diana Suddreth interacts with Utah nature to provide us with leadership wisdom, and Julie Brown gives us a list of guidelines that will improve professional interactions.

Margaret Bird opens the journal, and her article closes it in a description of her interaction with us, UASSP, at our 1999 summer conference and of a mystery principal who approached her and gave us a happy mutation to the inheritance of Trustlands money. Margaret called recently about articles, and our interaction was remembered and renewed and glorified after 30 years.

The journal is the example of massive interactions. Dave Tanner is the epitome of clever renderings of our family reunion conferences, and Carl Boyington must be recognized for sustaining this opportunity for Utah voice for years. Jane Bradbury and Brent Sumner contribute the energy for the ever-important vendor presence, and Clint Tyler keeps our Utah presence in cyberspace. Robert King continues to inspire awe with photographs that capture vistas and ideas and quintessential Utah. The symbolism of aspens on the cover represents to me a family rooted together in a grove of white light. My gratitude to our family of authors and readers is unparalleled. Jess Christen is congratulated and thanked for the willingness to continue the journal and to appoint Julie Barlow, qualified and willing, as the new editor.

As I contemplated retiring as editor, the thought of losing interactions with authors, with the Impact team, and with professional contacts was painful. Understanding that the double helix of intertwined interactions does not diminish and understanding that interactions—remote, peripheral, and intermittent, or close, central, and frequent—promise unexpected opportunities for fierce advocacy for our profession excites me.
How Schools Got to Be Billionaires

Margaret Bird

Thirty years ago, no one in Utah had heard of school trust lands. No one knew that our schools were the beneficiaries of a huge endowment that should have been supporting them. Revenue from over three million acres and from a $40 million School Trust Fund was going into that enigmatic pot called education. After all, who really understood the state education budget? Six million acres had been granted to support schools in 1894 and for the next century, just about everything that could go wrong did. This incredible endowment was almost lost. Lands were sold for $1.25 per acre. The state had sold known coal lands for pennies and covered it up as the lands were transferred illegally to coal companies. Lands were sold at the lowest possible price to cities and counties for public purposes then resold for a profit. Schools received 15 cents per ton on coal produced from their lands while federal lands collected twenty times that amount, and school lands were captured inside federal national parks and inside state parks with no payment. During a budget shortfall in the Matheson administration, tens of millions of dollars were liquidated at a loss from the School Fund without repayment even though the state constitution indemnified that fund from loss or diversion. Only Dallin Oaks, on the Utah Supreme Court at the time, stood up to that diversion.

For two decades, I had been researching various components of the funding from trust lands, finding that the state was not getting a fair shake in grazing revenue, oil and gas production royalties, coal leasing, sales of land to counties, cities and other governmental agencies to mention a few. I took this information to Superintendent Bernarr Furse, and he hired me to research school coal leasing; the result was a $21 million repayment for underpaid coal royalty, thanks to a lawsuit won by Gayle McKeachnie.

Lily Eskelsen, President of the Utah Education Association, understood. While some education leaders said trust lands do not generate enough money to pay attention to, Lily said, “The lands should be making a lot for schools. The fact they are not making much is the problem.” Sandra Skousen from Garfield County had brought the issue of school lands to the state PTA convention and got a resolution passed for the PTA to find out why the school lands were not supporting schools. The state PTA produced a video to tell the story, and Karen Rupp and Joyce Muhlstein took this message to every school in the state. Principals began to wonder why all the money was going to the State Office of Education, when the grant was to “common schools.” The bottom line, literally and at zero, was no one could prove a penny of the funds ever made it to schools who were the beneficiaries of the trust. At this point the education family fought to change everything about how the school trust lands and funds were managed and distributions were made.

This incredible endowment was almost lost.

The bottom line, literally and at zero, was no one could prove a penny of the funds ever made it to schools who were the beneficiaries of the trust.
As education leaders discussed these complex issues, a consensus evolved that three main issues needed to be fixed. The school trust should:

- Be run like a profitable business
- Generate revenue that should be saved and prudently invested
- Distribute the revenue only to schools—the only rightful beneficiaries!

The UEA filed suit to overturn a sale of over 2,000 acres adjoining the Green Springs golf course for $200/acre. That got the legislature’s attention. The Elementary and Secondary Principals Associations, the UEA, State PTA, the State Board of Education, the Superintendents Association, and the School Board Association pushed together for a Legislative Task Force to find out what was wrong and how to fix it.

The chair of the legislative task force was Rep. Mel Brown, a rancher from Coalville. As it turns out, Rep. Brown was also a former math teacher for 18 years and a huge supporter of schools and school trust lands. He went on to be the sponsor of every piece of legislation reforming and empowering school trust lands. After two years of legislative study and an additional year by a citizen task force required by newly elected Governor Mike Leavitt, a new agency was created to use a business model to optimize revenue from 3.4 million remaining acres. The new agency was called the **School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration**, sometimes referred to as SITLA today. Revenue has gone from $5 million annually to within the range of $63 million to $117 million in the last 10 years—all from the same lands that used to make $5 million annually. The first issue was addressed.

In 1894 Congress had required that all proceeds be invested in a permanent State School Fund. This had not been occurring. Only sale revenue was being saved. The education leaders pushed the task forces, and they agreed that all net revenue must be deposited in the School Fund which would grow over time to meet the needs of schools. The education leaders with State Treasurer Ed Alter also pushed to allow the School Fund to be invested as a prudent investor would. Ultimately, in 2014 an investing agency, the School and Institutional Trust Fund Office (known as SITFO), was created to prudently invest the funds under the direction of a board chaired by the State Treasurer and including four of Utah’s most outstanding institutional and private investors. A Chief Investment Officer, Peter Madsen, was hired. Under this model the funds have increased to $2.7 BILLION, and almost $1 billion of that are from market gains. The second issue was addressed.

Now came the hardest and the most important fix. All the funds from the School trust were going into the Uniform School Fund. The funds were not flowing directly to schools, the beneficiaries, as required by trust law. Education leaders met and threw out many ideas for where the funds should go such as school libraries, or school fees, or specific academic areas. Paula Plant and I insisted that the funds must go to schools and that the principal and teachers of each school should make the choices. We drove to Coalville to meet Representative Brown who not only loved the idea but made some essential changes. He wanted the committee, who would decide the expenditures, to include a majority of parents elected by the parents, teachers elected by the teachers, and the principal. He also wanted each school to be required to publicize how the funds were used. The first year of the School LAND Trust Program was 1999, and it was a planning year with just less than $5 million to be sent out in 2000.

Can you believe that in School Year 2020-2021, about $89 million is to be distributed to the public schools in Utah? The state is honoring the trust created at statehood. Thank you, Melvin Richins Brown, for getting the legislation needed for SITLA,
SITFO, and the School LAND Trust Program through the legislature. The schools and students of every generation will be the beneficiaries of this grand design. Principals played an essential role in this plan every step of the way. The third of three listed issues is being addressed every distribution.

Principals now continue to play an essential role in assuring that every dollar expended honors the trust and improves academic performance in their school. If every dollar is carefully spent for academic purposes and accounting is made to legislators, the degree of funding that will be available to our public schools in the next century as the trust has another 100 years to grow is unimaginable. Please be sure to have a letter from your school telling how the trust dollars were spent each year go to your representative and senator. That will keep their support for the funding being determined by each school. The fourth issue is up to principals. Guard how this trust is spent!

**Under this model the funds have increased to $2.7 BILLION, and almost $1 billion of that are from market gains. The second issue was addressed.**

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Margaret Bird is Chief Executive Officer at Children’s Land Alliance Supporting Schools. She can be reached at margaretbird@advocatesforschooltrustland.org
As tax reform takes center stage at the 2020 Utah Legislative General Session questions abound as proposed legislation threatens the constitutional guarantee and earmark of income taxes for public education. While the battle for funding education in Utah will continue for the foreseeable future, one source of funding will stay the course. At no cost to taxpayers, $89 million will flow directly to local K-12 public schools in Utah during the 2019-2020 school year from the school and institutional trust system. While the amount alone is staggering (and record-breaking), the source of these funds and the direct path to our children is even more remarkable. Utah’s legislative leadership solidified the perpetual nature of the school and institutional trust by the recent creation of the Land Trusts Protection and Advocacy Office; and set a nationwide precedent for best trust practices.

Since SITLA’s formation in 1994, SITLA has generated nearly $1.96 billion in proceeds to help grow the Permanent School Fund and other perpetual endowments for the benefit of public schools and other designated institutions. Annual distributions from the school trust system have increased exponentially (nearly double) in the last 10 years.

Investment in education has a direct impact on economic growth and prosperity of our state and should be a central component of Utah’s economic development plan. Every year the Utah education community advocates for more funding for schools and yet Utah remains at, or near the bottom, of per-pupil funding in the nation. Dollars generated by the school and institutional trust system will become increasingly important to the overall funding of education in Utah. Lands and earnings from the school and institutional trust system are perpetually dedicated to supporting public education and are virtually guaranteed to remain at or above current levels. This growing endowment and its upward movement is made possible by Utah’s (the nation’s gold standard) trust land and fund management system.

The Three-Legged Stool
Four state agencies and one constitutional officer (the State Treasurer) share trustee and fiduciary responsibilities for land management, fund investment, distributions, advocacy, and administration of the school and institutional trust system. Each agency, working independently, ensures integrity, growth and protection of Utah’s trust lands and funds to benefit the designated beneficiaries; primarily Utah’s school children.

SITLA, the School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration, manages Utah’s 3.3 million acres of school trust lands, depositing revenue into the Permanent State School Fund. SITFO, the School and Institutional Trust Funds Office, invests the $2.5 billion Permanent State School Fund. The School LAND Trust Program at the Utah State Board of Education administers the School LAND Trust Program. This office trains and supports...
School Community Councils as they prepare academic plans to be reviewed and approved by local school boards. Created in 2018 by the Utah Legislature, the Lands Trust Protection and Advocacy Office represents the beneficiary interests of Utah school children (together with the other beneficiary interest).

Collectively, these agencies are often referred to as the three-legged stool of the trust. SITLA manages land and real estate assets; SITFO prudently invests endowment funds; and the Protection and Advocacy Office protects the trust assets by monitoring trust activities and advocating for trust growth and preservation.

Utah Land Trusts Protection & Advocacy Office

Protection and Advocacy Office

Much has been written about SITLA, established in 1994 and SITFO, established in 2014; and their achievements are outstanding. The Protection & Advocacy Office completes the circle and early vision of the sponsors and creators of SITLA; a system of checks and balances ensuring undivided loyalty to current and future beneficiaries of the trust. It is only appropriate the first chairman of the Protection & Advocacy Committee is former Speaker of the Utah House of Representatives, and sponsor of the bill creating SITLA, Melvin R. Brown. Mr. Brown’s dedicated service to the State of Utah, specifically in the trust land and public education arena will have an enduring legacy. Joining Mr. Brown as original committee members are: Thomas Bachtell, former SITLA Board Chairman, Paula Plant, director of the School Trust Program, Steven Ostler, former SITLA Board Chairman and Brigham Tomco, business owner, entrepreneur and influencer.

As the inaugural director of the Protection & Advocacy Office, I am humbled by the enormous responsibility of the Protection & Advocacy Office’s mission. In a landmark legal decision by the Idaho Supreme Court regarding mismanagement of trust property by the Idaho Board of Land Commissioners, the Court pronounced the importance a single institutionalized representative, protector and advocate for all trust land beneficiaries. Strangely, the Attorney General for the State of Idaho sued the Board of Land Commissioners for breach of trust on behalf of the trust beneficiaries because the State of Idaho had not established an institutionalized beneficiary representative. The Court remarked, “[i]t is passing strange that no school officials or endowment beneficiaries have stepped forward in this litigation.”

Recently, at the Western States Land Commissioners Association summer conference, the former deputy attorney general for the State of Idaho, recounting the Wasden case, reiterated the challenges and difficulties in enforcing school land trusts against the multiplicity of attacks from all angles. He maintained the best way to enforce the trust obligations imposed on the trustee is the have an independent institutional advocate and representative for the trust beneficiaries. To my knowledge, as of the date of this article, Utah is the only state to create such an entity. Utah’s Protection & Advocacy Office Act grants to the Protection & Advocacy Office expansive access to information and rights of enforcement to ensure trust fiduciary duties are upheld. Institutionalizing these rights guarantees the long-term retention of information, access and inclusion of beneficiaries within the trust process.

As important as the protection and representation functions are, the advocacy role of the Protection & Advocacy Office is critical to the continued and sustainable growth of the Utah school and institutional trust assets. It has been said, the approximately 46 million acres of state endowment lands spread across 24 states are “the most frequently ignored and least understood categories of land ownership in the American West.” While trust lands are widely misunderstood,
the lands and revenues from the lands have a significant impact on education in Utah. Distributions have a direct impact on the instruction of students in areas of greatest academic need. The funds play an important role in purchasing instructional items or hiring personnel needed to help children be successful.

Increasing community knowledge and awareness about trust lands, their importance to the education community and role in education funding is a powerful step in advocating for the trust beneficiaries – the school children. The Protection & Advocacy Office will work closely with various organizations, including the Utah PTA, local PTOs, the UEA, and other like-minded groups and associations to raise awareness and understanding of trust lands.

**Protection and Advocacy Office Involvement and Goals**

Getting involved has not been difficult in the first year of the Protection & Advocacy Office. Both SITLA and SITFO have been welcoming of the Advocacy Office and collectively have implemented policies and procedures that will define beneficiary rights for years to come. With the aid of the State Treasurer and Protection & Advocacy Committee, the Protection & Advocacy Office has presented and advocated for the trust system in multiple venues and a wide range of audiences.

When asked how the success of the Protection & Advocacy Office will be measured, I boldly state, in large part, “by the incremental growth in distributions to current trust beneficiaries and the growth in the trust endowment for future generations.” It is our expectation the distributions will continue to grow from year-to-year and the average funds available to each school will have a greater and greater impact on public education. The use of the dollars from the school and institutional trust are largely discretionary to each local school and are likely the most important dollars with direct impact on the most pressing academic needs.

While economic measures provide a general understanding of success, we are acutely aware of the underlying steps to achieve metric growth.

The Protection & Advocacy Office will vigorously remedy noncompliance with trust responsibilities in order to safeguard the interests of trust beneficiaries while at the same time working closely with the key entities and individuals within the trust system to protect and enhance the long-term economic value of the whole trust. We will cultivate prudent decision making and entrepreneurial business practices, advocate for goal-oriented management and engage in large-scale, long-range planning efforts that will result in significant upward mobility of the trust for years in the future.

There are many important issues the Protection & Advocacy Office has identified as critical to trust success, including:

- Infrastructure investment.
- Advocating for proactive management of trust lands.
- Access and regional transportation.
- Revenue enhancement.
- Collaboration among trust entities and key personnel.
- Refocused marketing efforts.
- Attaining 100% understanding from public of the mission to fund public schools.
- Increase awareness and adherence to public access on trust land.
- Maintaining collaborative relationships with local elected officials.
- Maintaining support for the mission and initiatives of the trust from federal and state legislatures.
- Encouraging rural economic development.
- Seeking additional resources and funding through available grant monies.
- Collaborating with schools to provide
educational opportunities on state trust land within the core curriculum.

The Founders of our Nation and Pioneers of our State had great forethought and mindfulness toward public education. In 1896, nearly 124 years ago there was a vision that lands could provide an important support and source of education funding. In recent years Utah has taken important and significant steps toward realizing that vision. The establishment of SITLA, SITFO, the School Trust Program and now the Protection & Advocacy Office roots the school and institutional trust system on firm ground with the proper checks and balances to ensure a legacy of public education funding for the State of Utah.

Justin Atwater is the Director of the Land Trusts Protection and Advocacy Office and can be reached at 801-359-4379 or justinatwater@utah.gov.
How would you briefly describe professional development (PD)? When asked this question, a group of educators responded:

- Sit and get.
- Free lunch!
- A looooonng day!

Death by Power Point.

PDA (Public Display of Administration)

Unfortunately, PD is too often viewed as a long day of sitting, listening to administrators give largely ignored presentations that are interrupted by a free lunch. That does not sound like a source for meaningful improvement.

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 in our schools. “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), and despite our best intentions, PD does not always result in the type of adult learning and behavior change we seek. Fortunately, we know what PD should look like (see Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Unfortunately, too much of our PD does not align with best practice.

What if our teachers traded hours from traditional PD days to direct their own professional learning? When asked this question, a group of teachers provided a diverse list of possibilities:

- “I’d work in my classroom with an instructional coach through a series of coaching cycles to improve my tier 1 instruction.”
- “I’d visit other teachers and teams to learn what is working for them. I’d do this both in person and online.”
- “I’d collaborate for half a day with my team to design a few deeper learning lessons, and then we could observe each other teach those lessons and give each other feedback.”
- “I’d do an action research project with my team, digging into best practice, using it in our teaching, and reflecting and learning from our results.”
- “I’d do a best-practice book study with teachers from outside of my normal collaborative team.”

Let’s examine how what these teachers requested aligns with current best-practice research on effective PD.

provide a variety of learning opportunities

These teachers requested a variety of ways to improve. The term “PD” has become synonymous with a day when the entire faculty meets in the same physical space to learn. Just as differentiated and individualized
instruction matters for students, it also matters for adult learners. Applying this mindset to professional learning. PD should happen all the time and take many forms. Curry and Killion (2009) advocate the use of a variety of both macro and micro learning opportunities to enhance teacher learning. Macro learning opportunities generally consist of larger, less frequent events such as conferences, district trainings, institutes, coursework, and full-day meetings. These macro opportunities can be a great way to raise awareness about new ideas, gain expanded vision, and get excited about improvement. Just as kindling is necessary for starting a fire, these full days can get teachers motivated about improving. However, unless supported and followed by more job-embedded, ongoing, consistent micro-learning opportunities like coaching, collaboration, peer observations, and others, that desire may not keep burning (Showers & Joyce, 1996). PD should be more than just a one-and-done, sit-and-get, standardized experience for educators. “One size does not fit all, so a variety of structures must be utilized. Teachers need ample opportunities to learn in a variety of settings” (Sweeney & Mausbach, 2018, p.105). As principals we need to expand the vision of what PD is in our schools. We can provide a variety of macro and micro learning opportunities for teachers and teams that will light their learning fire and keep the fire burning.

**Nurture a Culture of Consistent, Ongoing Teacher Improvement**

Maxwell (1981, p. 7) states that “Flash floods are no substitute for regular irrigation. Teachers wanted consistent time to learn. It’s humorous when children earnestly brush their teeth right before they go to the dentist. We all intuitively understand that brushing our teeth 60 seconds a day is much more effective than brushing once a month for 30 minutes, even though the brushing time is equal in both scenarios. Yet, traditionally in our schools, we brush our PD teeth a couple of times a year all day long and then neglect those same teeth for months at a time, and then wonder why we end up with instructional cavities in our classrooms. Learning that transforms takes consistent time; one review of the research found that it takes up to thirty hours of macro and micro learning over an extended period for adult learning to stick (Guskey & Yoon, 2009), and another review found that fifty hours of PD throughout a school year was associated with a gain in student achievement of 21 percentile points (Yoon et al., 2007). In most areas of life, consistency yields better results than short bursts of intensity. PD for faculty is no different.

Some schools creatively craft efforts to provide consistent time to build teacher capacity. For example, several schools make every meeting, no matter the focus of the meeting, an opportunity to learn and grow together by reflecting on ideas in a quote or a portion of a TED talk. Other schools take the first fifteen minutes of faculty meeting to engage in shared learning, leaving the management items for last or just addressing them over email. One school replaced a full day of sit-and-get PD with an online module created, delivered, and supported by its teacher-led, school leadership team. Teachers shared research, examples, challenges, and triumphs, and other teachers throughout the school provided feedback through written and in-person comments. Carving out time for consistent capacity building is challenging in our traditional school schedules; however, as we deliberately nurture this culture, consistency in our capacity building will improve.

**Generally, we can be tight on the expectation that every teacher and team sets, pursues, and monitors meaningful learning goals that drive what they do, and loose on how those goals are pursued.**

**Other schools take the first fifteen minutes of faculty meeting to engage in shared learning, leaving the management items for last or just addressing them over email.**
Create Choice
Teacher appreciate choice. While parents expect their children to brush their teeth daily, they could be loose on the color of toothbrush and flavor of toothpaste. Allowing choice increases motivation to meet expectations. “Adults learn best when they are self-directed, building new knowledge upon pre-existing knowledge, and aware of the relevance and personal significance of what they are learning” (Croft et al., 2010, p. 8). While teachers’ goals and professional learning opportunities should contribute to the overall school mission and vision, most teachers will learn more when school leaders “present the whole professional learning picture to teachers and provide them with a variety of entry points regarding how they engage. . . .[Thus,] the principal guides the teacher to engage on their own terms” (Sweeney & Mausbach, 2018, pp. 76-77). This requires a loose-tight balance that will vary between teachers and teams. Some teachers may need more direct guidance. Other teachers may flourish with a less directive approach. Generally, we can be tight on the expectation that every teacher and team sets, pursues, and monitors meaningful learning goals that drive what they do, and loose on how those goals are pursued. As professionals we “want to be the origin of our learning and want control over the what, who, how, why, and where of our learning...We need to see what we are learning is applicable to our day-to-day activities and problems” (Aguilar, 2013, p. 55). One school created teacher learning teams that allowed teachers from different disciplines and departments to use their traditional PD time to research topics of interest and conduct action research in their classrooms, using their topic teams as peer coaches. This school saw teachers fully invested in their own improvement.

Foster Feedback, Reflection, and Coaching
These teachers wanted regular feedback, reflection, and coaching. While more passive, macro-learning opportunities serve as a good catalyst to improve, teachers “resent going to inservices where someone is going to tell them what to do but not help them follow up. Teachers want someone that’s going to be there, that’s going to help them for the duration, not a fly-by-night program that’s here today gone tomorrow” (Knight, 2007, p. 1). We learn best on the job with loads of ongoing support after our initial learning. Guskey & Yoon urge: “Virtually all of the studies that showed positive improvements in student learning included significant amounts of structured and sustained follow-up after the main PD activities” (2009, p. 3). Teacher trainings are notorious for rolling out a new idea or expectation with little follow-up, or even time to plan or implement the new initiative.

We learn by doing, yet PD rarely involves doing. “Tennis players don’t practice by listening to speeches about ground strokes, they improve by hitting thousands of practice shots” (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012, pp. 140-141) accompanied by just-in-time expert feedback. Teachers rarely receive the kind of just-in-time feedback they need from infrequent principal evaluations or hit-and-miss instructional coaching visits. There just aren’t enough administrator and coach hours to go around. Fortunately, there are many other good sources for feedback and coaching. Teachers engage in several hours of active, real practice every day, and for an observant teacher, dollops of real-time, targeted feedback are available. A few sources for this feedback could include the examination of student work, filming portions of a lesson, or
reviewing the responses from a student/parent survey. These reviews can certainly be done by individual teachers, but feedback will be extended and enriched if done with peers, coaches, or trusted administrators. How quickly would tennis players improve if they couldn’t see the results of their shots and had no feedback from peers and coaches?

**Focus on Individual and Team Capacity Building**

These teachers wanted to learn with others. Teaching and leading are team endeavors. We have all seen less-talented yet more cohesive athletic teams outscore more-talented, less cohesive teams. Interestingly, some athletic teams focus the bulk of their recruiting efforts and practice time on individual skills with little focus on collectively leveraging those skills. Like some athletic teams, some schools are full of passionate, caring, skilled teachers that don’t know how to effectively work together. Leana and Pil (2006) found that students fare better with an average teacher on an effective team than with a highly-skilled teacher on a less effective team. Good teaching and learning are team endeavors, and are “not just about how creative or smart or driven you are, but how well you are able to connect with, contribute to, and benefit from the ecosystem of people around you” (Achor, 2018, p. 21).

Currently, much of our PD focuses on building teachers’ individual skills, with very little training on how to collectively leverage those skills as a team. If “transforming teaching from an individual race into a team sport is arguably the single most important goal for principal[s]” (Johnson et al. 2017, p. 138), then some of our PD efforts should be focused on improving our collective work. Many of us provide consistent time for our teachers to work together as teams. Yet, we all know that “collaboration does not lead to improved results unless people are focused on the right work” (DuFour et al., 2016, p. 12). Have teams and team leaders been trained on how to set effective norms, follow an agenda, follow up on assignments, hold crucial conversations, build candor, trust, and safety, and focus on the right work? If “time devoted to building the capacity of teachers to work in teams is far better spent than time devoted to observing individual teachers” (DuFour & Marzano, 2011, p. 67), then perhaps we need to invest more time in teaching teachers how to work effectively in teams.

**Establishing Cultural Conditions for Meaningful PD—Leading Learning Together**

School improvement is more likely when the group leads the group. Whether it’s for students or adults, PD should lead to improvement. But, how do we lead this kind of PD? This type of “deep learning changes the nature of leadership” (Fullan, & Kirtman, 2019, p. 106). In a complex endeavor like this, distributed leadership is crucial. No longer can the mythical, all-knowing, heroic principal unilaterally design and deliver effective PD. Today’s principals know that “putting together the right coalition of people to lead a change initiative is critical to its success” (Kotter, 2017), and that “leadership brilliance is expressed more in ‘we together’ cooperation than in an ‘I alone’ delusion” (Schein & Schein, 2018, p. 114). Empowering a school leadership team (SLT) to co-design a clear mission and vision and then follow that best-practice professional learning at the school will provide the ear-to-the-ground nuanced insight necessary to support this type of authentic, real-time learning experience (Fullan, 2019). If teachers are given a candid voice about the design and execution of school PD, they will effectively guide a principal away from less effective strategies to more meaningful and authentic PD.

Leading PD requires adaptability. Gone are the days of a 6-year strategic plan. We need to constantly assess where we are and
Leaders must be prepared to support such diversity, to welcome the surprises people will invent, and to stop wasting time trying to impose solutions. Where we need to go next to accomplish our goals. This type of learning only happens when the school can nimbly adapt its PD approach to constantly changing circumstances (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009). Schools following the ideas presented here will likely be unable to design comprehensive and clean PD plans for even an entire year, recognizing that they will need to embrace the discomfort of “unprecedented levels of messiness” at the edges. This constant tinkering, this localized hunt for solutions never looks neat. Freedom and creativity always create diverse responses. If conformity is the goal, it will kill local initiative. Leaders must be prepared to support such diversity, to welcome the surprises people will invent, and to stop wasting time trying to impose solutions” (Wheatley, 1997, p. 24). PD plans can and should change and evolve based on changing needs and the changing abilities of faculty.

Real goals drive teacher improvement and foster culture-based accountability. This type of learning relies on teachers, collaborative teams, and leadership teams co-creating learning goals they truly care about, not just the hoop-jumping goals they think the principal or district wants them to set. Working together on goals that we truly value results in sustainable internal accountability, rather than relying on the heavy-handed, top-down external accountability so popular in education today (Fullan, 2019). When we work together on goals we collectively care about, we help each other accomplish those goals.

A culture of openness and candor among our faculties fosters these elements to thrive. This type of learning demands innovation and risk taking in a safe environment. If we “want a school where students think, challenge, take risks, learn from mistakes, and give their best thinking every day, [we] must foster this environment for our staff and for our teachers.” (Wiseman et al., 2013, p. 55).

**Conclusion**

If teachers’ opportunities for learning and growth “are among the most important predictors of satisfaction and commitment” (Murphy & Louis, 2018, p. 24) and subsequent student learning, then we need more effective, deliberately co-designed PD. Whether it’s starting fires and keeping them burning, consistently brushing teeth with our preferred flavor of toothpaste, getting just-in-time feedback for athletic teams learning how to play as a team, or teachers learning deeply, effective PD likely requires more than an all-day sit-and-get in the media center twice a year. To summarize, teachers need a school leadership team that:

- Provides a variety of learning opportunities
- Nurtures a culture of consistent, ongoing teacher improvement
- Creates choice
- Fosters feedback, reflection, and coaching
- Focuses on individual and team capacity
- Establishes cultural conditions for meaningful PD

With these principles in mind, what could PD look like in your school?

**References**


Joseph N. Jensen, EdD is the principal of Timpanogos Highs School in Alpine School District where he nurtures a strong PLC culture in between bike rides. Joe can be contacted at joejensen@alpinedistrict.org or 801-369-2920.

David Boren, PhD is the director of Brigham Young’s University’s School Leadership Program and has most recently worked as a principal in Alpine School District. David can be contacted at david_boren@byu.edu or 801-422-0059.
Reframing Professional Development at Timpanogos High School

Joseph N. Jensen and Michelle Jensen

In February 2017, the Alpine School District (ASD) formally announced a new Vision for Learning (VFL) outlining why ASD exists. This new VFL clarified student learning as our explicit focus, and further defined student learning as the knowledge, skills, and dispositions students need to be successful in life. Our new VFL clarifies skills as creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration and dispositions as citizenship and character. This new vision for learning is synonymous with “the 6C’s” or “deep learning” (DL). It represents a seismic shift away from a primary focus on academic test scores. It focuses on the whole child and places an implicit value on student well-being. At Timpanogos High School (THS) we quickly realized we could not accomplish this vision by doing the same things we’ve always done.

Since 2017, THS has worked diligently to create a school-wide culture of DL for all students. We have strived to align professional development (PD) to support this goal. Our journey has been challenging but rewarding. What follows is just one example of what reframing professional development (PD) could look like. No “one-size-fits-all” solution exists, but here we offer one concrete example detailing how we implemented principles behind effective PD. Every school needs to customize these principles to their own situation, to pursue their own goals, but we are excited to share our journey and hope it will be helpful to others seeking to improve adult learning in their school. We have found that a high functioning school leadership team (SLT) is crucial to this work because no principal can pull this off effectively alone. With the principles of effective

We have found that a high functioning school leadership team (SLT) is crucial to this work because no principal can pull this off effectively alone.

Figure 1. The ASD Vision of Learning

Students develop attributes of citizenship and character
- Collaboration
- Communication
- Creativity
- Critical Thinking

Students acquire the capacities of
- Students understand and use essential information in content areas

Students understand and use essential information in content areas
- Collaboration
- Communication
- Creativity
- Critical Thinking
We developed subsequent modules with guidance from faculty feedback from the previous module. This was uncomfortable for the SLT members, because we naturally want to feel like we have control of where we are headed. Deciding to be adaptable, despite the discomfort, was crucial.

What This PD Looked Like: Overcoming Deep-Seated Traditions

After the district unveiled the new VFL, we spent the next year and half in this traditional PD setting trying to further this new VFL. We mostly focused on the “why” and the “what” of our VFL, and in the process, we created an awareness and built consensus around this worthy goal. Kay and Greenhill (2013) point to near universal agreement that this is the right goal for schools, but they caution, “Be careful to fully understand what this kind of consensus really means. If you ask your stakeholders whether all students need these skills, you will find general agreement. But if you ask the same people to identify the best ways to teach and assess these skills, you will not find much consensus—in fact, very rapidly you’ll start to see a wide range of conflicting opinions” (p. 31). Understanding this dynamic is crucial to moving DL forward. We have to be loose and tight on the right elements of DL, or we could quickly create a counter-culture of resistance to a DL culture. As an SLT, we realized we needed to get to the “how” but our March PD day was far distant.

Our SLT consists of five teachers (2 of whom serve as half-time PLC coaches), our innovative learning coach, one counselor, an assistant principal, and the principal. In the fall of 2018, the SLT asked, “If time is our currency, how could we most effectively spend the eight hours in the upcoming March PD day?” We felt limited by having to wait until March to continue our DL momentum. An idea emerged from the SLT that proposed we leverage our digital learning platform, CANVAS, to create an ongoing, job embedded conversation about how to move our VFL forward from that of sitting in the media center in March. We decided to take this risk and offer every faculty member the choice to opt-in to a CANVAS based conversation over a series of months rather than sitting in the media center for a PD day. If they engaged in the CANVAS PD, they would get March 4 off. We made it clear that if they didn’t want to engage, they could come on March 4 instead. Ninety-eight percent of our faculty opted into the CANVAS PD.

Our PD goal was to create conditions and build teacher capacity for DL to thrive at THS. The SLT agreed that we had to be adaptable in this approach. We decided early on that we could not build the entire course and then deploy it. Our SLT thoughtfully considered many ideas, and our meetings were marked with candid critique, silent thought, group discussion, and eventually consensus on a modified direction. We developed subsequent modules with guidance from faculty
feedback from the previous module. This was uncomfortable for the SLT members, because we naturally want to feel like we have control of where we are headed. Deciding to be adaptable, despite the discomfort, was crucial. We were much more effective by being real about where the faculty was rather than just creating a “canned” course that they could complete start to finish. We were deliberate about not creating a “sit behind the keyboard and jump through hoops” experience. Therefore, we purposely built in face-to-face interactions along with the digital dialogue. We also wanted to exemplify deep learning for adults, so we purposely avoided a digital “sit-n-get.”

How THS Reframed Professional Development

We kicked off our PD with 6 small group lunchtime meetings in early December. The principal and at least one member of the SLT explained our desire to create an ongoing PD conversation about how to improve our DL efforts. For our focus, we modeled an idea from the book *Creativity, Inc.* by Catmull and Wallace (2014). In each lunch meeting we posed this idea and question:

“Imagine that the year is 2021, and students are thriving in a deep learning environment in every classroom at THS. What had to happen to make that a reality?”

We also gave teachers a copy Ed Catmull’s summary of the cultural conditions that allowed PIXAR’s creative work to thrive. We asked teachers,

“As you read these cultural descriptions, ask yourself which elements reflect THS culture, and which ones we could work on to improve our ability to accomplish our VFL.”

This face-to-face kickoff spurred excellent conversation, people appreciated lunch, and we emphasized that if they chose to opt in, they were already 30 minutes into the effort. We also explicitly emphasized that we would be sensitive to not going beyond the hours expected in a traditional PD day. (Video of this kickoff is available on the website.)

Between January and May our SLT designed 3 modules for this PD that all focused on improving our ability to more deliberately develop DL in all students. There is not space in this article to detail the content of each module, but you can see the entire course in complete detail on the website. The modules included the following elements:

- Videos featuring our own teachers’ efforts to set deep learning goals in which the teachers described how their curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment shifted to meet those new DL goals.
- Face-to-face interaction and dialogue.
- Digital dialogue on electronic discussion boards. We generated upwards of 150 single spaced pages of quality dialogue and thought.

Most importantly, this generated thousands of ongoing conversations over a series of months. In the final module teachers self-selected into groups to work on a specific element about deep learning that they cared about. The groups addressed topics such as:

- How do we create the time to make these shifts to DL?
- How do we continue to nurture a culture for DL?
- How do we leverage digital tools to improve DL?

How does traditional grading impede DL efforts? What can we do about it?

Our teachers devised some outstanding solutions. For example, a team of math teachers took on the problem of never having enough time to design and develop deep learning curriculum. By the end of their work on this problem, they figured out how to get the time they needed, during contract time, in a way that was cheaper than other alternatives, and in a way that an administrator could never effectively mandate. Check
out their solution on the website. These deep learning collaborative groups successfully determined next steps to overcome some of the major impediments to a deep learning culture.

In short, we accomplished far more with this effort than we ever could have by planting butts in seats in the media center. We were pleasantly surprised that the digital platform actually enhanced our face-to-face interactions among staff rather than fostering isolation, even between content areas. This wasn’t just PD to disseminate information—it started a movement and a shift toward a DL culture for the adults at THS. We brushed our PD teeth daily and as a result, had less instructional plaque. Our school wide conditions and teacher capacity both improved.

The Professional Development Results:
Applying the Elements of Quality PD
Consider these principles of leading effective PD and how they were or were not leveraged effectively in this THS case study:
• Provide a Variety of Learning Opportunities
• Nurture a Culture of Consistent, Ongoing Teacher Improvement
• Create Choice
• Foster Feedback, Reflection, and Coaching
• Focus on Individual and Team Capacity Building

Establish Cultural Conditions for Meaningful PD—Leading Learning Together
The cultural conditions to lead learning together is one of our biggest strengths at THS. The former principal, Theron Murphy, did a phenomenal job with members of the SLT to lay a foundation for the group to truly lead the group as Michael Fullan (2018) describes. After Theron left, the SLT continues to lead the school effectively. One of the reasons is the commitment to be constantly adaptable. These two elements lead to an internal accountability to each other that is more powerful than any punitive or external accountability (Fullan, 2018). This PD was not done in isolation. We also worked diligently to foster feedback, reflection, and coaching by focusing faculty meetings, instructional leader meetings, and PLC team meetings on this goal. We also had excellent PLC and innovative learning coaches constantly supporting individuals and teams in DL development. Administrators deliberately created conversations around deep learning, formally and informally. In short, we tried to bring clarity and coherence to all of our efforts. While we made major progress through this effort, we still have plenty of room to improve.

Another significant advantage was belonging to a school district supportive of this kind of risk. We appreciate Alpine School District for supporting our effort. Some schools may hesitate taking a risk like this because their district may discourage or not permit it.

Results for teachers:
It is easy to claim this was a successful PD effort. But, more powerful is to hear from the actual participants in the PD. We have limited space, so what follows is only a smattering of the whole data set, but all participant comments appear on the website. In May, we asked participants to assess this PD effort. Consider how the following comments echo the principles of quality PD and deep learning for adults:
“I have loved this approach to PD, because instead of being ‘talked at’, we are being ‘talked with.’” —Eric Schultz
“Little bits at a time are easier to internalize than a dump truck of information.” —Anonymous
“I have learned that it is okay to take risks, and fail—this is how we learn and progress. I feel that incorporating the six C’s is very important, and I like that we are working together to achieve these expectations.” —DeeAnn Brew-
ster
“It’s reassuring to know that I work with individuals who recognize the need for change, and are willing to work for that change.”—Kristen Greer
“Participating in the discussion has been worthwhile for the motivation it has given me to better assess my own thinking and strategies and how things can be done more creatively, more effectively and with deeper learning as the goal.”—Carl Johnson
“I think this has been a better approach to PD. It’s easy to spend 7 hours in a meeting and feel as if you gotten nothing out of it other than an item to check off your list or extra money on a paycheck. I’ve spent time thinking about the different modules and seeing how they relate to my teaching practices. I’ve also enjoyed reading other teachers’ comments.”—Tricia Bray
“Doing this canvas PD I think is way better than a full day on March 4 because I have had a chance to reflect on each little piece over the time in between modules and it has had a lasting impact. A full day of PD can feel overwhelming, but this way it seems more manageable to incorporate what I’m learning into my teaching.”—Hillary Burr
“Learning occurs as a result of learning collisions. One of the things that made this successful was that it greatly increased the number of learning collisions that occurred at our school. These collisions occurred in a casual non ‘hey-look-at-me’ sort of way.”—Byron Tanner
“I am learning how important it is to switch my focus from the content to the 6Cs, using the content as a vehicle.”—Joette Kuhni
“I have a much better attitude about approaching this sort of learning rather than a regular PD day.”—Alex Nicholas

Results for students: Did this translate to better classroom instruction?
Early this fall, as a follow up, we asked teachers how they improved their deep learning instruction in the past year. These were a few of the typical responses:
“We have goals which tie directly to the 6 Cs. I am more explicit in my instruction, pointing out the 6 Cs, and helping students incorporate them into their own lives.”
“I design my grading criteria around the focus on learning instead of assessment, and center my teaching around a “struggle first” mentality to encourage character and critical thinking.”
“I’m more specific in my assessments and I try to really emphasize what the purpose behind them is beyond the “school” value. Our assessments are more about the 6Cs. . . . I try to help them grasp that what we’re doing is for life and will aid them not just for my class.”
“I have gone away from traditional assessment methods like matching and multiple choice in favor of more in-depth questions like compare and contrast, cause and effect, etc.”

Following up the previous question, we asked our teachers what helped them make these improvements, most pointed to elements of our PD:
“I feel like the regular discussion last year actually helped things to sink in and stick.”
“Focusing on a deep learning goal has been the driving point.”
“In PD we have discussed application, not just theory.”
“I have been asking myself before each unit and as I plan things, ‘How can I make deeper learning the focus rather than only the content?’ Also hearing the amazing things that others in the school are doing like Brian Saxton and the math department has been really inspiring.”
“I think the blended PD helped the most.”
“Just sheer excitement for it. I love the direction we are headed.”

Conclusion
We emphasize that this effort was far from perfect, and it required significant engagement and effort from the members of the SLT. It would have been much less work to plan a “PD day.” However, we accomplished much more and further nurtured our culture in ways a PD day never could have produced. Our process was solid with the SLT leading the way. We asked teachers recently to give direction for PD this year. Here’s how they responded:

The reason for this rare kind of consensus is that these principles of PD resonate with educators. Educators want to improve, and we all want better schools.

This year we are building on what we started last year. The THS SLT is currently working on this year’s ongoing PD. We believe we can make this year’s PD even more impactful as we improve on what we did last year. Rarely in our careers have we seen the kind of excitement and consensus that our staff demonstrated around this effort. We still have a long way to go on our deep learning journey, but we are well on our way, and approaching PD this way is an important vehicle to move us further down the road.

See more complete details of our PD at: bit.ly/ReframingPD

References

Joseph N. Jensen, EdD is the principal of Timpanogos Highs School in Alpine School District where he nurtures a strong PLC culture in between bike rides. Joe can be contacted at joejensen@alpinedistrict.org or 801-369-2920.

Michelle Jensen, EdD is a former math teacher and now works as the innovative coach at Timpanogos High School and Orem Junior High. Michelle can be contacted at michellejensen@alpinedistrict.org or at 801-319-9372.
Some years ago, while watching a major league baseball game on TV, I heard the color analyst, a former major league player, comment that the wiry, strong, hard-throwing young pitcher struggling to throw strikes was “cake batter.”

I remember the next few comments when the play-by-play announcer asked, “What do you mean, ‘cake batter’?”

“Someday this pitcher standing on the mound will be a dominant pitcher in this league, perhaps even Hall of Fame material at the end of his career, but right now he’s cake batter.” The color analyst continued, “He has all the ingredients, but he’s not a finished product. Cake batter is messy, gooey, sticky, hard to control, needs extra support and attention, but, if you were to taste cake batter it would taste like cake. It’s all in there. What I’m saying is that this pitcher has every ingredient necessary to be an amazing major league player: height, strength, technique, and stamina, but he needs to go though the process. He’ll get there.” Or, words to that effect.

I’ve baked cakes. I know that cake batter tastes like cake: sweet and delicious. While that may be true, cake is meant to be eaten after it has been baked. The finished product is the goal of the baker. Likewise, a student becoming a successful and competent adult is the goal of educators. However, just like the change process cake batter goes through to become cake, we should not apply the rules of adulthood to adolescent students. They are in a ‘cake batter’ phase of development.

As students, teenagers are very capable of many things—things we should hold them ac-

I think it is such a powerful way of viewing others that are in a growth process. Just as it would be inappropriate or even crazy to attempt to put frosting on cake batter, so it is inappropriate to apply finished product expectations to an unfinished product.

A baker doesn’t panic when cake batter is messy and sticky. This is because he or she understands exactly where in the baking process the cake batter stage falls. To expect cake without cake batter is preposterous. As an educator, I would likewise be thinking in a preposterous manner to believe that a middle school student will be able to perform as, or have the defining characteristics of, a high school or college student. Yet, sometimes, educators get caught up in wanting to apply the “they won’t accept that when you get to high school or college” mantra to educational policies, philosophies, and so forth in the middle school classroom. We sometimes even do this without realizing it.

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countable to, no doubt. Kids can be on time, they can show respect to others, they can listen and speak at appropriate times, they can follow instructions, be creative problem solvers, and so forth. Yet, they are also at times, impulsive, emotional, short-sighted, forgetful, (did I say emotional?), and, really, just kids! I shouldn’t expect a twelve-year-old to act sixteen or twenty. For instance, I didn’t act twenty until I was twenty. Cake batter isn’t truly a cake until it is baked.

Sitting next to my computer in my office is a 5x7 portrait of an eighth-grade student. He is wearing a powder blue polo shirt, has neatly combed and styled hair, and a smile filled with white teeth and silver braces. The young man in the photo is me, age 13. It is my school photo from over thirty years ago. I have come to love this photo because of how it has transformed and enhanced the way I do my job.

Let me explain. In 2010 I was the assistant principal at Snow Canyon Middle School in the Washington County School District. While observing a class, I took the opportunity while students were working at their desks to question the teacher about a wallet-sized photo on the top left corner of her computer monitor. I said, “Is this your daughter?”

She replied, “No, that’s me. That’s my ninth grade school photo.”

I asked her to elaborate, and she said, “I teach ninth grade and I keep that picture there to remind me exactly who I’m working with. It helps me understand my students.” Brilliant. Sheer genius, really.

I went home that very night and started digging through old boxes and photo albums and found my eighth-grade photo. It has sat on my desk, or has been taped to the wall near my desk, every day since. It has taught me so much about the students I am working with. If you had known me in the eighth grade, you would understand why. I was the perfect balance between awesome and royal pain in the rear.

When I look at the photo, I can better understand my students. I know more about what questions to ask, how to work with them, how to listen and encourage, and both what they are capable of and what they are not. I can better relate to what they are experiencing, better understand their needs and challenges, as well as their motives, desires, and what is important in their lives.

The combination of the photo on my desk and the analogy of students as cake batter empower me as an administrator. I would encourage every administrator to get your school photo and put on your desk. Trust me, it will make you better in your relationships with kids. If you think you already understand kids well, I believe you! However, you will grow and be even better if you embrace the concept behind this action.

It may be worth asking yourself if you or your staff are currently trying to put frosting on cake batter. If so, consider a different approach. Remember, it would be foolish to try and put frosting on cake batter. Are you sometimes baffled by the actions and decisions of students? Have a good reflective look at your school photo to try and walk in their shoes for a minute. This simple shift in perspective may be key to building or strengthening a relationship, gaining a key insight, or just allowing a feeling to help guide your next steps.

The work we do matters. So, put on your metaphorical baker’s apron and embrace the cake batter phase of student development. The rewards will be amazing.

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Todd Dawson is the principal at Vista Heights Middle School in Alpine School District. He can be reached at tdawson@alpinedistrict.org.
We are so blessed to live in Utah where the beauty of nature surrounds us and is so accessible to so many. I’ve learned to appreciate that beauty even more while camping in my Sport Trek travel trailer, and have found that leaving the city behind allows me to clear my head and see things more clearly. In fact, camping has given me some new ways to think about leadership, and I’ve learned a few lessons along the way.

If You Want to Get Somewhere, You Need to Be on the Right Road

We were trying to find the historical cabin. The GPS indicated that it was just a short way to the east, but try as we might, we couldn’t get to it. We zig-zagged past it, frustrated that it was so close and yet inaccessible to us. And that’s when we realized, we had left the highway a road too soon and the path we were on would never get us to our desired destination. We had to go back and start again.

Too often, leaders know where they want to end up and they take what looks to be the easiest road, without analyzing the best path. We know that creating a vision, a destination, is paramount to our success, and good leaders spend time with their staff crafting and refining that vision. The next step, once the vision is created and held by all, is mapping that pathway to success. There may be more than one road, and for success to be realized, it is best for everyone to be on a single road where they can offer aid and encouragement along the way. As the leader, it is your responsibility to find that road in consideration of the strengths and weaknesses of those who will be on it with you. It is also your responsibility to ensure that everyone has the roadmap to prevent losses and confusion along the way. The trip is much better when you do what you can to make sure you’ll reach your desired destination.

The Journey Can Be as Impactful as the Destination

When I plan a camping trip, I put hours into preparation. I read RV blogs, plan menus, shop, map out a desired path. I study our destination on Googlemaps, read books about the area, and choose interesting stops along the way. I throw myself into the planning and it gives me great pleasure to do so. When the time comes for travel, I find that I enjoy getting there as much as being there.

Major initiatives can be like that too. When accreditation moved from a checklist to a process of improvement, it was confusing at first, but eventually leaders saw this as an opportunity for real change and growth. Just as important as it is for teachers to have lesson plans that include daily and unit outcomes, leaders also need to design learning for the staff as they move towards their goal. Those changes may be incremental at first, yet their cumulative effect is substantial. Enjoy the learning along the way.
Preparation Will Save You
I was new to camping and so preparation was a challenge. I wasn’t sure what I might need or when I might need it and so would find myself without things I needed or wanted. Somehow grilling fish without a grill doesn’t work so well and not being able to capture the beauty around me because the camera was left behind is frustrating, so I found experts and used their experiences to develop templates and lists to use as I readied myself for a trip.

There are plenty of experts in education and many leaders who have led their faculties to success that we can draw on to create our own templates and lists. Their experiences shed light on possible pitfalls and challenges so that others can avoid them. Their successes provide information that leaders can include in plans and replicate. Being prepared for change will help faculties deal with uncertainty with confidence and will help leaders as they support their teachers through what can be trying times.

Be Ready for the Unexpected
Anyone who has spent any time in the mountains knows that the unexpected must be expected. The weather can change. Equipment can fail. Plans can go awry. You can’t actually prepare for the unexpected, but you can be ready for it with the right mindset, and you can deal with it when the time comes. Instead of taking that hike on a sunny day, it might be a good time for playing cards listening to the rain on the trailer. Instead of eating freshly caught fish for dinner, a hamburger might be just fine.

Leaders who have a growth mindset know that setbacks and unexpected events are part of the journey. Parents might be unhappy, teachers might rebel, students might not respond as anticipated. That doesn’t mean that the plan should be abandoned, that the vision isn’t worth pursuing. It merely means than adjustments must be made. Perhaps communication could be better. Maybe it’s time to provide some extra professional support for teachers. The unexpected gives us a chance to reflect on what is working and what isn’t and adjust.

Just Because Everyone Else Is Going There, Doesn’t Mean You Need To, Too
Have you ever been to Yellowstone in the summer? The crowds detract from the beauty and grandeur of the park in ways that can make both the journey and the destination disappointing. On the other hand, have you ever found a haven of peace where you and your family could enjoy the stars at night in the quiet of a remote location? Personally, while it seems necessary to check Yellowstone off the bucket list, I much prefer a cool night under the stars where I can hear myself think.

Choosing the right destination in education can be difficult. There are always new ideas, new research, and pressures to go with the crowd. But sometimes, finding the right place for your students and teachers means choosing something that isn’t what others are choosing. It means that you have to know and understand your community and define a journey that will lead them to success. It means studying the new ideas, research, and pressures to find what makes them impactful, and then using that knowledge to move forward. You might decide that Yellowstone is still the destination you desire, but you might find your own starry night that will be more meaningful to support students in the long term.

It’s OK to Have a Little Junk Food Sometimes
Normally I’m very vigilant about the food I feed my family. I prefer organic fruits and vegetables when I can get them and es-
chew soda and snacks full of empty calories, but when we camp, I find myself buying chocolate and marshmallows for s’mores, chips for afternoon noshing, and treats that I normally never purchase. Those treats make camping something different, something fun.

Educating our youth is hard work. It involves long hours of planning, challenging moments with individual students, and constantly learning and honing the craft of teaching. It means studying data, choosing interventions, and dealing with the public. It is a profession that impacts every member of our society and it is extremely important. That said, it’s okay to have a little fun. Some days it’s more important to hear a student tell a story than have him analyze one. It’s important to run and jump and enjoy the world. A regular diet of treats is harmful, but once in awhile it’s invigorating to do something a little different.

You Probably Can’t Do Anything about the Neighbors’ Smoke

Sometimes we camp in places where we are close to neighbors who like to build a fire. While we appreciate the beauty of the lapping flames and the mystery of a beautiful fire, we don’t appreciate the way the smoke aggravates our lungs. We get frustrated when that beautiful night under the stars turns into a night in the trailer because we can’t breathe outside. And yet, we’ve learned, there is little that can be done about it.

Our education community is like a campground full of schools, and sometimes what is going on next door has an impact on us. Leaders may or may not understand why their peers are pursuing certain activities and those activities may have a local impact. Nevertheless, sometimes you have to just remember your own vision, focus on the students under your care, and ignore the smoke.

While the Comforts at Home Are Nice, the Next Adventure Awaits

The hardest thing about change is the discomfort. While it’s fun to be in the mountains or at a new destination, eventually I long for my own bed and a long hot shower. I get tired and I want to go home. But it doesn’t take long until I am restored and planning for the next adventure. I can’t wait to get back to the mountains, relax with my family, and learn new things.

Change in a school can be like that. Teachers may long for a familiar lesson plan or program and may drag their feet at making changes. They may need a little R&R to restore them for the next event that might seem like a disruption to their lives. Leaders can help teachers through change by acknowledging those desires, providing respite when needed, and then forging ahead to provide a better experience for students and teachers alike. Teachers want what is best for their students and with the proper support will eagerly engage in initiatives that improve learning.

It Might Be A Lot of Trouble, and It’s Worth It

Camping takes a lot of time. The preparation, the maintenance, the journey, and the cleanup all consume a great deal of time. Sometimes things go wrong; sometimes things are annoying. Mostly, though, it’s great fun and I have come to understand why some people become full time RV enthusiasts, living and learning while on the road.

Education is like that too. It takes a lot of time, preparation, maintenance and sometimes cleanup. The journey is intense and doesn’t always go as planned. People can be uncooperative and surprising. And yet, nothing is as important as educating our youth, and it’s no wonder to me why so many of us become full time education enthusiasts, living and learning while on the road.

Diana Suddreth is the retired Director of Teaching and Learning, Utah State Board of Education and former math teacher.

She can be reached at Diana.suddreth@gmail.com or 801-717-7262.
Advice on Being a Great Principal…
from Someone Who is Not a Principal

JoAnne Brown

In my 23 years as an educator, I have worked with 11 different principals. What has that meant to me as an educator? Drastic changes at times. Personal struggles at times. Satisfaction and respect at times. But there is no question that the principal has more influence on the climate of a school than any other factor I have observed.

With that in mind, here are 10 tips for being a more effective principal based on my experiences. (These opinions are my own and based on unique experiences and observations. Take what you like and leave the rest).

**Be Accessible**

One of the most important traits I’ve seen in successful principals is simple: they are in their building and willing to talk. A principal who keeps the door open, who is willing to meet with teachers, parents and students informally or formally increases morale and improves communication. A principal who is accessible makes their own job easier, as issues tend to be brought to their attention long before they blow up into something unmanageable. There are principals who act as if problems will go away if they ignore them. What inevitably happens is that someone must deal with the problem anyway; usually the teachers pick up the slack when the principal doesn’t. This results in a spiral of negative morale and expectations which ultimately harms the students. Teacher satisfaction correlates directly to their attitude in the classroom. When they feel supported and know their concerns will be addressed (even if not solved), it will lead teachers to take more initiative and be willing to try new things.

**Be Visible**

A principal who spends time out in the building makes a world of difference to the students and the teachers. Many principals see this practice as simply a discipline technique, but it goes much deeper than that. I have had years go by when I felt that no one except my students would notice if I didn’t show up. What did that do to my morale? It was rock bottom. Why should I go the extra mile? Why should I challenge my students to improve? Luckily, I never let myself let my students down. I’ve seen many teachers leave the profession for those reasons alone. There are principals that teachers only see when there is bad news. There are principals that teachers only see in their classrooms when they are being evaluated. There are schools where the students don’t know the principal’s name. Most teachers put a great deal of effort into their classrooms, their lessons, and their students, not expecting notice or recognition. Principals can learn a lot about the teachers they work with simply by dropping by and seeing what happens day-to-day in the classrooms. I understand that principals are incredibly busy, but taking time to stop by classrooms without judgment or taking time to greet students at the beginning of the day or at lunch is a relatively painless way to improve climate and make everyone feel valued.
Be a Filter

Teachers understand that the most challenging part of being a principal is filtering out all the information and demands that come at them from all directions. Parents, students, the school district, teachers, community members...everyone has to get their two-cents in. District administration bombards principals with demands for compliance, paperwork, implementation, regulations, budget adherence and more. Teachers, parents, students and community members all want what’s best for students, but each group has its own priorities and interpretations. The principal has the unenviable position of being in the middle of all this noise and needs to be able to make decisions and communicate them.

One frustration is the principal who passes along everything--no filter at all. Teachers know everything that could possibly (but probably won’t) impact their day-to-day lives. Another frustration is the principal who keeps teachers in the dark about everything. In that case, what ends up driving the building’s culture is rumor. Be the principal who holds back the things that don’t need to be dealt with right away, who deals with the little things without needing to tell us, who advocates for our school to the outside critics and district mandates, and who lets us help when the real, meaningful work needs to be done. It can be a thankless job, but trust me, we will know, and we will thank you.

Be Firm

Yes, it’s true. We want you to be tough. We don’t want to see students and parents always getting away with things. We also know when our colleagues are not being held accountable for leaving early or not doing their fair share. A great principal will make sure things are fair and rules are enforced while keeping things positive. Calling the whole faculty together for one or two people’s transgressions is never a good idea. Deal with things as they come up. Be flexible and willing to work through issues. Involve those who can help or who need help. Be tough and stick to your principles while still being willing to listen to other perspectives. And those discipline problems we call the “frequent flyers”? Make sure there are consequences and stick to them.

Be Consistent

Consistency is as important for principals as it is for teachers. Teachers know when principals play favorites. We know when we are being expected to do more than our share or we are being reprimanded when others who do the same thing are not. Teachers are a lot like the students...we pick up on subtleties and are hyper-aware of fairness. Teachers really thrive when we are encouraged to work together instead of creating rivalries. We thrive when we know that discipline problems will be dealt with in a predictable way. We are more consistent when we can count on what to expect.

Be a Problem-Solver

I enjoy working on teams with my fellow teachers, and I like helping to come up with solutions for our day-to-day logistics and struggles, our curriculum, and our building. I like having my voice heard and making contributions to the well-being of my school and students, but I don’t want to be the only one contributing. In general, the principal is given more information about issues that come up, about curriculum demands, and even about what students and parents need from us. A great principal should be a problem-solver right along with the teachers and staff. They should be able to make hard decisions and justify them. I’m not asking for a full explanation of every action (see #3), just the knowledge that the principal is part of every process and that they care about the outcomes enough to be involved.

Be Willing to Laugh

I teach junior high. That by itself should tell the reader that a sense of humor is required to be successful and happy for 20+ years in such a unique and awkward environment.
required to be successful and happy for 20+ years in such a unique and awkward environment. Laughing is part of my job...perhaps the BEST part of my job. Usually, I laugh with my students. Often I laugh with my colleagues. I rarely laugh with my boss. Why is that?

Let’s back up a little. There is a distinctive line between teacher and principal that can’t (and shouldn’t) be crossed. This is a person who can have a major effect on my life and career in either positive or negative ways if they so choose. This is a person who has to make decisions for the good of the school, and some of those decisions will be unpopular. So I’m definitely not suggesting a principal not be serious. A principal who tries to be everyone’s pal ends up nobody’s friend or ally in the long run.

With all that in mind, though, a great principal can have and share a sense of fun and humor with the school. Be willing to make cheesy jokes. Be willing to put yourself out there for a good cause (dunk tank, anyone?). Be willing to laugh when something doesn’t go as planned in a PD. It helps us relax, and it makes us want to work harder for you.

**Be Appreciative**

A few years ago, there was a change in funding that prevents school money from being used for food and treats for faculty meetings and PD. We had a principal who continued to serve us food and treats. We all knew that it came out of his own pocket, and that made it all the more significant. It’s a lot of little things that add up to make us feel like we matter. A gift when we are in the hospital or have a baby. Something small on our birthday. A faculty holiday party. A meeting we thought was going to be awful that turns out to be fun. I once had a principal who gave each teacher a certificate for Christmas that was good for one class period off when he would cover for us with no sub plan. We didn’t leave the building, but what an experience to get an extra hour off! Just stopping by to let us know you’ve noticed something cool we’re doing makes us feel like it’s a JOB worth doing. Appreciate us, and we will appreciate all that you do as well.

**Be Organized**

I can tell you that even the least organized teacher appreciates an organized meeting. We work in a profession that gives us more to do than we can possibly ever finish. We always have things nagging at the back of our minds, and our priority is our own classroom. If there is meaningful professional development or meetings that we know can help us, we are more than willing to participate, but nothing drives us more crazy than showing up to a PD that is only partially planned, has activities that are irrelevant, or wastes what precious time we have during the hours we’re getting paid to be at school. A principal who is organized understands that we might seem less engaged than another audience in a different profession would be and takes that into account. It doesn’t mean to rush through training or skip it altogether. It just means to choose wisely what to have us do and make it helpful and meaningful so that we can do our jobs better. We will thank you for that.

**Be Yourself**

It may seem like this article has been an endless list of demands, a dream of the perfect principal who anticipates needs and wants, who laughs at the right times and makes the right people accountable. All in all, being a principal is a tough job, and being a great principal is even harder. Even more, principals tend to have one of those jobs where you only hear about the problems. If you’re amazing at your job, you’re likely to be left alone by most people. But I promise,
JoAnne Brown is a junior high science teacher with 23 years of experience. She is National Board Certified, a Utah Fellow Teacher, and a department chair. She can be reached at jrbrown@granitesd.org. A motto that guides her is from Thomas Edison, “Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration.”

there are those of us who are watching and appreciating your hard work. And the things we will most notice are the things that make you uniquely you. Don’t hide who you are! Everyone has a distinct leadership style, and you can incorporate the good habits while still being true to what’s most important to you. Find your own path, and teachers will want to follow along with you, and we can enjoy the journey together.
Isn’t it interesting, how in life, as in history, at just the right moment, just the right person comes forward? That happened at the annual meeting of the Utah Association of Secondary School Principals in June of 1999.

In 1999, legislation sponsored by Representative Mel Brown had created the School LAND Trust Program. The price tag on the legislation was a hefty $5 million. That was a heavy lift for Representative Brown. This program sent the money from the school lands directly to schools for the first time in the history of Utah. Though the grant of six million acres made by Congress in 1894 was to schools, Utah had never sent the millions to schools. This program was the first of its kind in the nation.

There was not a penny in the legislation to distribute the funding; we did not want the fiscal note any higher. When I asked Superintendent Scott Bean if I could send out a letter to each principal to inform them of the need to form a trust land committee and reporting how much their school would receive, I learned we could not send letters without legislative approval of the funding. Superintendent Bean had been a warrior for reforming the trusts.

This program was on a very shifty foundation with the Governor’s opposition and no way to notify principals.

All of this brings us to that one special principal who was the right person at the right time. How I wish I had gotten his name. Perhaps you can help me find him. He was probably thinking the same thing all of you were thinking after I made my presentation at the conference, but he was the one who was gutsy enough to speak up about the elephant in the room—the elephant I did not even know about. I had finished speaking about the trust lands and how for the first time in over one hundred years the annual millions from the trust were going to the actual beneficiary—the SCHOOLS. We were all doing what everyone does at a conference, milling around the morning break food. A man came up and introduced himself to me. I think he was a principal in one of the smaller districts in the middle part of the state. He said, “Lady, what makes you think I will ever see a penny of this money?” I had no idea what he was talking about. I was naïve enough to
think that the money would go to his school just because the legislature passed the bill. We talked, and I listened. And he explained education funding to me in a way I had never understood before. Education was starving for funding, and money at the top rarely made it all the way to the schools at the bottom as there were so many needs and so many hands that it had to pass through.

What that wonderful man said was exactly what I needed to hear. I had worked for over 25 years to get the school trust to benefit schools. Now I needed to worry about the governor opposing the funding in future years, and I also had to worry about whether that measly $5 million would actually get to the schools that were the only ones entitled to it.

If you are that principal who made the difference or you know who he was, please call Margaret Bird at (801) 597-6701. You saved a program that is still growing!

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This school year $83 million was distributed to schools—16 times as much as in the first year. The distribution is primarily based on the number of students, but the average elementary school received $68,000; middle school $106,000; and high school $138,000. The hard-working staff at the School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration under David Ure and the prudent investors at the School and Institutional Trust Fund Office under Peter Madsen have built a $2.7 BILLION trust that is helping the students of our state. Thank you, principals, for your wise and conscientious use of these hard-fought dollars. Keep sending your letters to your representatives and senators explaining how the funds are making a difference in your school. If you are that principal who made the difference or you know who he was, please call Margaret Bird at (801) 597-6701. You saved a program that is still growing!

Margaret Bird is Chief Executive Officer at Children’s Land Alliance Supporting Schools. She can be reached at margaretbird@advocatesforschooltrustland.org
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