

# NEW SUPERINTENDENT UPDATES

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## Students Need to Talk More

I recently read an article titled *Middle-Grades Students Are Up for Discussion — And That Might Be Just What America Needs Right Now*. This [article](#) pointed out several insights that I think teachers in general need to pay attention to. The author writes the following:

*I'll give you a hint: It's not worksheets or rote memorization.*

*The students I had the pleasure of speaking with in this California Bay Area middle school had a message for educators: They want to wrestle with their learning. They want to think. Hard.*

*And they want to talk about it with their peers.*

*"I love class discussions," a towering eighth-grade female point guard spoke up. "Because you get to see everyone's point of view, their thinking. And it's better because a lot of other stuff we do feels like busywork sometimes. But I like classroom discussions where you can see how it really relates to your life and stuff."*

I wrote about this in an earlier Update, that I observe teachers doing too much of the talking and the students are doing too little of the talking. The learner needs to do the learning. In classrooms where I view students talking, the students are more motivated to learn and demonstrate their knowledge of the teacher's learning goal by demonstrating through talking about what they know.

Just like we want students to do more talking in the classroom, you as a supervisor of building level administrators should make sure that the teacher is doing the talking in both post observations and reflective (those discussions that need to occur every time a teacher evaluator collects evidence on a teacher in an informal observation) conversations. Far too often the evaluator does the talking and the teacher does the listening. As referenced above, for the learner to learn they have to be actively engaged in the learning. This is true for students in a classroom and also for a teacher in the teacher evaluation process.

Later in the above referenced article a female eighth grade student related the following:

*“We have a lot of in-class discussions about our writing prompts. And it kind of happens in every class,” shared a female eighth-grader. “In history, we’ll discuss, like, how we’re responding to resources we’re given. Like in biology, we’re in groups and we’re talking about our writing. In English, we work a lot in teams to talk about what our opinions are. Or sometimes we just have a big brainstorm with the entire class about what we think a quote means — or what something we’re learning means. It helps to just bounce ideas off of everyone — just add more, give more insight that you didn’t have before.”*

Check out your district’s classroom and see if this type of discussion is happening.

### **Superintendent’s Advisory Committee**

When I was a superintendent, I started a “Superintendent’s Advisory Committee.” This committee consisted of the teachers’ union president and teacher representatives from each of the buildings elected by the staff in each building. This committee met once per month and it allowed me to communicate to staff about concerns or celebrations in their buildings. This was not meant to circumvent the authority of the building administration but it did allow for communication from the building to the unit office.

In addition to this committee, I also invited the union president to sit at the administrative cabinet committee meetings. When I first suggested this to our administrators all the administrators had reservations about this concept. However, we discovered that having the union leader at the meetings allowed us to hear the important reflection on the issues we were discussing from the teacher point of view. Many times this helped steer us in the right direction or solution.

### **Tip of the Week**

When talking to your administrators or to your teachers and the person is explaining a problem or a situation that they are dealing with it is a good idea to try some “coaching” techniques to get the individual to reflect and solve their own problem.