

# NEW SUPERINTENDENT UPDATES

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## **What does student engagement look like?**

As I work with building level administrators and department chairs to improve their observation and evaluation skills I realize more and more that we need to work on “engaging students” in their own learning. I recently ran across a short video of Phil Schlechty describing student engagement. According to Schlechty students are engaged when they are 1) attentive, 2) persistent and 3) committed.

Slechty describes attentive as students paying attention to the learning in the classroom. Students who are compliant are not necessarily attentive. Students have to demonstrate via some action that they are attentive. Persistent is described as students caring about their own learning. Students not accepting that they have not mastered the lesson concept. When students have difficulty learning the concept they insist that the teacher reteach the learning concept. Students being committed means that students are willing to allocate their own time outside of normal classroom time to work on the learning goal. Students would do this voluntarily.

Students learn that which is important for them to learn. It is the teacher’s role to attach meaning and value to the information being learned. The student has to demonstrate mastery of the learning through some observational process such as speaking, writing, debating, performing, acting, etc...

Slechty stated that he has little value for “classroom walkthroughs” as they are too short to determine if students are truly engaged. I am sure Schlechty would say that one informal and one formal observation are too short for an evaluator to determine if students are engaged.

What do the classrooms in your school district look like? Are students attentive, persistent, committed and placing meaning and value on what they are learning? If they are not, what are you as the leader in your school district doing about it?

## **Part III – Fit to Lead**

This is the third of a three-part series on the topic of “Taking Care of You.” School administrators have been encouraged to exercise, eat better, spend time with family and friends and, generally, to think of themselves first from time to time.

This week's topic involves eating for fitness. The authors of Fit to Lead stress a healthy diet. I like that the recommendations allow occasional eating out and enjoying some of your favorite foods, as well as rewarding yourself with a favorite meal when a goal has been achieved.

We all know people (or maybe ourselves) who tried a fad diet, lost a lot of weight and when returning to a normal routine, gained back all or more of the weight they lost. A few years ago, three superintendents I know chose to have a weight loss contest, sort of like the TV program, *The Biggest Loser*. All three lost more than 50 pounds and one lost close to 100 pounds. They looked great, felt great and were very proud of their accomplishments. One of these men took up running and ran a six-mile course with me at the Triple I Conference.

But, one year later each had gained back most of the lost weight. Fad diets do not work. It takes a change in lifestyle, both in diet and in exercise, to form a good health habit that will last. As we age, our metabolism slows and fewer calories are utilized through the day. So to maintain the same weight, we must eat less, exercise more or both.

The major recommendations in Fit to Lead fitness may be summarized simplistically, "When it comes down to the basics, you need to eat fewer calories to lose weight, and simply switching to a lower-fat diet doesn't always translate to fewer calories." As you may know, not all fat is bad for your health. "Some types of fat, such as the monounsaturated fats in nuts and olive oil, and the omega-3 fatty acids found in fish and flaxseeds, help to boost mood and energy, as well as quell hunger."

"About 50 to 70 percent of daily calories should come from complex carbohydrates (such as fruits, vegetables, legumes, and whole-grain products) not from candies, desserts, or simple sugars, which are classified as simple carbohydrates." A friend of mine has lost a considerable amount of weight by staying away from all desserts (no exceptions) and eating breakfast regularly. You would be surprised how simple solutions such as this work.

The authors recommend that when eating out, order fish as often as possible. Also, eat 20 to 35 grams of fiber daily. Great sources include oats, oat bran, oatmeal, apples, citrus fruits, beans, lentils, barley, peas, potatoes, raw cabbage, and strawberries. Some additional tips are to consume fresh fruit rather than fruit juice, snack on nuts, and eat whole-grain bread over processed bread.

Both men and women need 1,500 milligrams of calcium daily. A good way to achieve this intake is to eat a bowl of healthy cereal with skim milk every day. It is recommended that we eat five to nine fruits and vegetables per day, so put some fruit on that cereal. The authors even recommended that you can get calcium soy latte. When eating out, opt for grilled chicken or fish. You can have a burger, just hold the cheese. Take advantage of salads and salad bars, but avoid high calorie dressings.

If all else fails, do what I do - exercise enough so that you can work off any extra calories you have eaten. The more you exercise, the more you can eat. Of course, eat healthy foods.

In summary, observe and evaluate yourself to determine your present fitness and health level. Set goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time specific. Remove negative temptation, such as the candy dish on the coffee table. Increase positive cues, such as scheduling a specific time to work out with a friend. Find natural rewards that you will enjoy. I like to run and get a lot of enjoyment from it. Find something you like to do and you will be more likely to continue the exercise. Use mental imagery to help keep you motivated. You might vision yourself in that new swimsuit or with a new outfit that reveals the “new you.” Good luck and be sure to tell me about your successes in “taking care of you.”

### **Reflecting with Teachers**

I am spending more and more time training teacher and principal evaluators to allow the people they are evaluating to reflect on their own practice rather than the evaluator “telling” the teacher or principal what to do.

Teacher and principal evaluation consists of collecting data in both informal and formal observations and sharing that data with the employee. I recommend that evaluators be focused on one particular Domain/Component when observing teachers. For example, when observing a teacher the evaluator may want to concentrate on 3b. Questioning and Discussion. In the process of collecting the data the evaluator may have recorded 25 questions asked during the observation. The evaluator should keep track of who is asking the questions (teacher or student), who is answering the questions (teacher – student, student – student, student – teacher, teacher – teacher, nobody), what is the level of higher order thinking (analyzing the verbs and adverbs used in the question by Bloom’s Taxonomy), amount of wait time the teacher and/or student give the respondent to answer, etc...

When collecting this data an example of a summary of the data might be the following: The teacher asked 25 questions; students asked two questions; the teacher answered 10 of her own questions, five questions were not answered by anybody and 10 questions were answered by seven different students with two of the students answering two questions each. Of the 25 questions asked by the teacher, 23 were basic knowledge level, one was application and one was evaluation. The two student questions were both knowledge level. The teacher would receive this summary from the evaluator as soon as possible following the observation. I use an electronic device and program and email the teacher the observation data before leaving the class and in this email I suggest a time and date for the evaluator (me) and the teacher to meet and discuss the observation.

In this reflective meeting I do not have to again summarize the data from the observation. The teacher has read it and if the data does not support excellent rating via the Danielson Framework both the teacher and I know that. Instead of asking questions such as “How could you involve more students in the questioning and discussion?” a more appropriate reflective question might be one or more of the following:

- How did you feel about the level of student engagement in this observation?
- What strategies have you used in the past to engage students in the questioning and discussion?

- What would an observation of questioning and discussion look like if 100% of the students were engaged?
- How could you make this happen in your class?

Following this reflective conversation during which the teacher does the vast majority of the talking the observer can ask the teacher if there is anything that they have talked about concerning questioning and discussion that the teacher would feel comfortable with writing into a SMART goal? Once the teacher commits to a strategy that they are incorporating into the SMART goal, the teacher writes the SMART goal into the observational evidence and the administrator commits to returning to the classroom in the near future to see these strategies put into practice.

Sometimes teacher evaluators ask me what they should do if the teacher does not come up with strategies or suggestions. If the teacher is a first or second year teacher I consider this to be mentoring the teacher and the observer should give detailed specific recommendations. If the teacher is a veteran teacher then the observer can enter into a discussion concerning various strategies but it should be made clear to the veteran teacher that this is his/her responsibility to improve their own instruction.

In either case cited in the paragraph above, if the observer has to direct the learning then the rating according to the Danielson Frameworks would be a Level 2 or Needs Improvement. If the teacher can determine their own improvement then the observer should delay scoring the observation until the teacher has time to demonstrate the new skills.

### **Superintendent Influence on School Boards**

The January 2012 edition of the AASA School Administrator has a short article on “Superintendent Influence on School Boards”. This is a great follow up article to the recent series I wrote on Board-Superintendent relations. The source for this article was a 2010 survey on The American School Superintendent. In this article the first sentence reads “An overwhelming percentage of superintendents said they have considerable influence with their school boards. Studies of district administration have established a nexus between influence and positive personal relationships...”

“In the study, 91 percent of the superintendents said 90 to 100 percent of their recommendations had been approved, and another six percent said between 80 to 89 percent of their recommendations had been approved.” This evidence supports my recommendation that you establish a positive personal relationship with your individual board members.

As I work with school superintendents the biggest issue superintendents have trouble with is their relationship with individual board members. As a friend of mine used to say in jest, whatever four school board members tell me to do I do. When you establish a positive communication path with your school board you will find they will support your recommendations and what these four board members tell you to do will be what you want to do anyway.

## **Use Video for Teacher and Principal Evaluation**

I have been a very vocal advocate of using video for teacher and principal evaluation purposes. When I mention the use of video for evaluation purposes I get mixed reactions. Teachers are generally opposed. Administrators are leery. Few stand up and say, "Let's do it!"

Why are teachers opposed? Some say it will be used as a punitive measure, others worry about the legal aspects of recording students, and I think others are worried because they feel they will not "look good" on video.

Administrators are leery because they think it will be an expansion of more time they will have to spend on teacher evaluation.

Those who feel they will not "look good" on video are not worried that their appearance will be bad, they are worried that the video will become evidence used against them for rating purposes.

The ability to use video for professional teaching improvement has been around for decades. When I was student teaching in the early 1970's my university methods teacher used to record my student teaching lessons and then meet with me to discuss my performance. Every teacher who earns the prestigious National Board Teacher Certification has to video record their own teaching and reflect on their teaching with fellow colleagues and professionals.

My enthusiastic support for video goes back to my coaching days. As a high school football coach we used to video tape all games and grade each player for each play. This took a huge amount of time but was well worth the effort. As an example, before grading game film my offensive linemen really were not accountable. From the sidelines I could not tell, most of the time, if the offensive linemen made the correct block or not. However, when grading film I would run the film back and forth and grade each player. I would prepare a chart with the grade I gave each lineman for each play and I would post this in my classroom. My players would arrive early on Monday's to read the chart and I even let them challenge the grade. We also awarded linemen helmet decal stickers for grading at 90% or better.

The result of this video grading is that each lineman knew I would be looking at his performance and they wanted the helmet decal and they wanted to score high. The best example of this is the performance of the backside tackle (the tackle on the opposite side of the ball that the running back was running to). Most of the time the backside tackle's job was to run downfield and block the safety. This was hard for the tackle to do because it meant running 10 to 30 yards down field and nine out of ten times the back was tackled before this block was needed. However, when the back did get this far, this block usually resulted in a touchdown because the tackle was there to block the safety. Before using video the tackle rarely made this block. After using video the tackle always at least attempted to make this block.

The importance for video recording teaching behavior is similar. If the teacher knows administrators will be videotaping the instruction, they will perform their best. Better yet, both the teacher and the administrator can actually play the teaching back, stop the recording; replay the recording, etc... to talk about the teaching. This is extremely powerful.

Some teachers are trying out the concept of “flipped classrooms.” This is a process whereby teachers prepare lessons ahead of time and students either view the lessons during their normal class time or in some cases teachers assign the lessons for homework. Most of these flipped lessons are really not video, they are screenshots with the teacher talking and using an electronic means of writing on a whiteboard. These flipped lessons are often put on the Internet for students to view 24/7. Guess who else can view these lessons? Parents, administrators and others would have access to view these lessons. The teacher would be recording the best possible lessons because he/she would realize that the lessons would be available for others to view and evaluate.

Another advantage of taping lessons is the potential to establish a library of excellent lessons that administrators could use for mentoring of new teachers or to use as exemplars for other teachers needing improvement.

Finally, the real advantage to using video for teacher evaluation is the fact that the video records everything that is happening in the class versus the administrator trying to script evidence of what is happening in the classroom. I often ask administrators if they can correctly verbatim record in writing every question asked by the teacher and every question asked by students. The answer is they cannot. No administrator can accurately record evidence of everything that is happening in a classroom while a properly positioned camera with good sound recording can.

### **Tip of the Week**

When you leave your present position for retirement or another education position what will people say about you? Manage today like you will want to be remembered tomorrow.