

# NEW SUPERINTENDENT UPDATES

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## Mentoring Opportunities

The new superintendents who attended the IASA New Superintendents' Conference learned about the mentoring opportunities offered by IASA. For those of you who could not attend the conference the following are the email addresses of the three Field Services Directors who are primarily responsible for mentoring. These directors serve the IASA three super regions in the state. Dr. Gary Zabilka [gzabilka@iasaedu.org](mailto:gzabilka@iasaedu.org) serves the Northeastern Super Region, Dr. Bill Phillips [bphillips@iasaedu.org](mailto:bphillips@iasaedu.org) serves the Northcentral Super Region and Dr. Nick Osborne [nosborne@iasaedu.org](mailto:nosborne@iasaedu.org) serves the Southern Super Region. Please contact these IASA Field Services Directors if you would like to participate in the IASA mentoring program which is provided to you at no cost as part of your IASA Active membership.

## Classroom Furniture

It's time for school administrators to start thinking "outside the box" concerning the purchase of any new classroom furniture. When I am leading administrators' academies on the topic of teacher evaluation, I show the participants four pictures of classrooms. I then ask the participants to pick the classroom (without students present) that they would predict would have the most engaged students. Participants almost always pick the classroom that has furniture arranged in small groups. See picture below.



The classroom that gets the least votes is a traditional classroom in rows and columns.



The days of traditional desks connected to chairs is definitely a thing of the past. At the least students need desks and chairs that can be moved and reconfigured into a variety of grouping arrangements. Another idea is to replace student chairs with new round type bases such as pictured below.



Most of you know I am an exercise addict. How about the following as an idea for student desks? Bet that would help with your ADHD students.



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### **Teachers Giving Feedback To Students**

In the August 30, 2014 edition of the Marshall Memo 550, author John Hattie and Gregory Yates define feedback to be “information allowing a learner to reduce the gap between what is evident currently and what could or should be the case” – in other words, guiding students to the next step they need to take. Hattie rates teacher feedback to students as one of the top 10 teacher activities that make a difference for student learning. Hattie writes “Effective feedback, on the other hand, can double the rate of learning and is among the top ten influences on achievement.”

When evaluators are recording observational evidence for 3b, Questioning and Discussion, the evaluator should keep track of the feedback that is given to students during a lesson. Generally teachers claim they give lots of feedback to students but students do not agree. Evaluators should keep track of the type of teacher feedback and also to what degree each student in the room is learning and growing from the feedback.

Feedback reminds me of a quote from a middle school teacher in Eureka who was using a “flipped classroom” approach for her Algebra I and 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Math classes. The teacher told me that using the flipped approach allowed her to give specific feedback and comments to every one of her students every day. Prior to using the flipped approach she told me that on a normal day she may only talk individually to four or five students a day.

### **Communication Now – Prevents Big Problems Later**

In the School Administrator, author Jim Buckheit writes about the extraordinary number of adverse actions against Pennsylvania superintendents. “The first thing a superintendent considers upon realizing something is amiss is the need for legal help. But in the early stages it is often not a legal problem, but rather a relationship or communication breakdown with one or more board member, a district staffer or community members. These problems, if tackled early, can be resolved.”

Buckheit's advice is spot on. Relationships and communications are major sources of potential conflict. At the New Superintendents' Conference I recommended that new superintendents spend time with each board member individually. These board members need to get to know you and you need to get to know them better. The same could be said for all members of your staff, both professional and support staff.

Of course there still is the possibility that some rogue board or staff member will be out to get the superintendent for any number of reasons. However, if you work on building relationships with others then your relationships should prevail. A metaphor I have used in the past to explain this is the following: Imagine putting pennies into a savings container on a regular basis. You would soon fill up the container. You just hope when you ultimately make a decision that will result in people being upset with you, when the container is taken off the shelf and turned over, somebody will stop the spilling of the pennies, right the container, and some pennies will be left. You then start depositing pennies again into the container to withstand the next conflict.

### **Ideas from AASA**

I picked up a couple of interesting ideas from the AASA magazine School Administrator that I think you should consider. The first comes from the article titled *Walking in Other's Shoes*. The author describes how he utilized an idea he generated from the TV series titled *Undercover Boss*. In the TV series (I do watch this program) the boss disguises him or herself and works in various positions for the company. The boss often discovers very dedicated and motivated employees and always discovers ways to improve the company. This superintendent decided to replicate this idea in his new school district.

The superintendent randomly selected several employees of the school district and then worked alongside the employee for a day. In this case, the superintendent worked as a cafeteria worker, PE teacher, administrative intern, middle school social studies teacher and nurse assistant.

I think this is a great idea to show employees that you value what they do and I also believe you will gain valuable insight into the work of your employees. In the above-mentioned case you can see that the superintendent worked a variety of jobs including both certified and non-certified positions. My bet is that an exercise like this one will leave you with many ideas for your future strategic planning.

The second idea comes from the article titled *Using Student Voices to Drive Improvement*. In this article the superintendent describes how he set up a process for students at all grade levels to provide feedback for the school district. He asked the students to talk about two items. These items were 1) describe the perfect classroom and 2) describe the perfect teacher.

Student responses to a perfect classroom were:

- the classroom needs to feel like home
- it needs to be clean, fresh, neat
- it needs to have encouraging posters
- it needs to have photos of students
- to needs up to date technology
- it needs soft chairs
- it needs furniture that allows for student collaboration
- it needs an animal for a class pet

Student responses to a perfect teacher were;

- understanding

- caring about academic achievement
- sense of humor
- creative
- doesn't favor certain students

Wouldn't it be interesting to find out what your students think is the perfect classroom and the perfect teacher?

### **Tip of the Week**

While working in a school district this week, I listened to a conversation the superintendent was having with one of her principals. The superintendent communicated that she had seen a post on the community Facebook page where a citizen was being critical of the schools. This citizen was claiming that the schools were dirty and that the teachers did not really care about the students.

The superintendent decided to contact the citizen via the Facebook link and invited the citizen to call her and she would take the citizen on a personal visit to the schools. The citizen took her up on the offer and they visited several schools. This particular parent had been home schooling her children and decided to enroll the students in the school as a result of this communication and visit with the superintendent. I was very impressed that the superintendent had a practice of communicating to citizens if they posted negative information about the district. The superintendent told me she had used this same strategy several times in the past.

A good strategy for you to implement is to monitor social media communication and respond positively to its message. Some believe that you can just ignore the negative social media communications. However, if you do this then the negative impression may become a "reality" in the eyes of the readers. This is the main reason you need to develop a positive media communications plan for your district's schools.