

Marshall Memo 889

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
May 31, 2021

In This Issue:

1. [Keepers from Covid-time](#)
2. [Effective equity work in schools](#)
3. [Michael Petrilli on finding common ground](#)
4. [Getting higher-ups to adopt a good idea](#)
5. [Five components of clear writing](#)
6. [Will snow days be gone forever?](#)
7. [Recommended children's picturebooks](#)
8. Short items: (a) [A video on infectious diseases](#); (b) [Was online instruction all bad?](#)
(c) [The Massachusetts Acceleration Roadmap](#); (d) [New ideas for U.S. history and civics](#)

Quotes of the Week

“When you teach online, every single student is sitting in the front row.”
Eric Mazur (see item #8b)

“The future of education is less about adopting online learning just because we are better at it, and more about using it to design learning experiences that move schools closer to agency, equity, and transfer.”
Eric Hudson (see item #1)

“An essential element of grading for equity is that grading structures and learning outcomes are transparent and understandable to students.”
Eric Hudson (*ibid.*)

“To accelerate learning, it is essential that districts and schools have the systems, processes, and practices in place to allow teachers to know quickly whether students are making appropriate progress... Weekly or bi-weekly assessments and check-ins... and coaching supports need to be in place to leverage when appropriate progress is not being made.”
John Kim and Kathleen Choi in [“Accelerating Learning to Address Learning Loss”](#)
in *District Management Journal*, Spring 2021 (Vol. 29, pp. 16-29)

“Even advocates of longer school days and years emphasize that extra time by itself often doesn't have an impact. What you do with the time matters. Devoting the extra time to a daily dose of tutoring seems the most promising. But tutoring can work equally well even when the school day isn't lengthened... What is clear is that using the extra time for just more hours or more days of traditional instruction doesn't appear to achieve much.”
Jill Barshay in [“Proof Points: Could More Time in School Help Students After the Pandemic?”](#), *Hechinger Report*, May 24, 2021

1. Keepers from Covid-Time

“The future of education is less about adopting online learning just because we are better at it, and more about using it to design learning experiences that move schools closer to agency, equity, and transfer,” says Eric Hudson in this *Global Online Academy* article. He believes a number of online instructional practices are worth continuing as schools return to in-person instruction (for screenshots and links to resources, click the full article below):

- *An online learning hub* – Accessible to students anytime, from almost anywhere, a robust platform can display all the information needed for a class or course, including: the schedule, philosophy, goals, learning objectives, modules, homework assignments, teaching videos, rubrics, assessments, final projects, reminders, and housekeeping details.

- *Student choices* – Hudson says an online platform can also “offer students a variety of learning pathways, or the opportunity to design projects that matter to them, or the chance to explore the world beyond the classroom and present their learning using tools they know well.”

- *Pre-recorded videos* – Teachers can flip instruction, having students view online mini-lessons outside school hours and then engage in discussions and hands-on learning in the classroom. Videos don’t have to have great production values, says Hudson, as long as the pedagogy is sound.

- *Student-made videos* – Tools like Flipgrid give students an alternative, creative way to demonstrate learning and explain their thinking asynchronously.

- *Digital portfolios* – Students can use online platforms like Seesaw to curate evidence, share artifacts, describe their learning process, and demonstrate understanding.

- *Online assessments* – Quizzes, polls, and asynchronous discussions are more flexible and avoid the social pressures of in-class tests. Students can take an online quiz several times and use immediate, automated feedback to figure out errors and misconceptions.

- *Differentiated pacing* – Students can work at their own speed as they follow an online content playlist to complete a unit, project, or other learning experience.

- *One-on-one video conferences* – A platform like Zoom “can make targeted support more accessible and flexible,” says Hudson, “whether it’s via teacher-hosted office hours or individual conferences or small discussion groups.” Students can check in while doing independent projects, fieldwork, internships, and community-based work.

- *Asynchronous discussions* – Tools like Padlet and Jamboard can “broaden our notion of ‘class participation’ and make it more meaningful for more students,” says Hudson. They give students more time to “compose and express their thoughts, and shift the power dynamic

in discussions from favoring the extrovert or the more verbose.” In addition, students can share ideas via text, audio, or video.

- *Improved feedback* – Quizzes, polling, and assessments built into learning management systems can give students real-time feedback, and screencasts and multimedia tools like Mote support feedback via video or audio. Peers can also provide feedback, improving the quality of work that’s submitted to teachers and lightening their correcting load.

- *Open gradebooks* – “An essential element of grading for equity,” says Hudson, “is that grading structures and learning outcomes are transparent and understandable to students.” Online gradebooks, included in most learning management systems, help teachers collect, visualize, and use data – and nudge them to rethink outmoded grading practices, emphasizing mastery over compliance. Online gradebooks also allow students to monitor their work and see a pathway to success.

- *Student project management and collaboration* – Tools like Kanban Boards and Greenlight Spreadsheets give students responsibility for monitoring their work, with the teacher looking over their shoulders electronically. Tools like Microsoft Teams and Slack can support students as they share and coordinate with each other inside and outside of the classroom.

- *Partnering with families, communities, and the outside world* – One of the most positive developments during the pandemic has been improved communication with families – both in remote conferences and by making the curriculum more transparent. Teachers have also learned how to bring a wide variety of outside speakers and resources into their classrooms and give students authentic audiences for their learning products.

[“13 Online Strategies for All Learning Environments”](#) by Eric Hudson in *Global Online Academy*, May 27, 2021

[Back to page one](#)

2. Effective Equity Work in Schools

In this *District Management Journal* interview, John Kim and Rachel Klein speak with social psychologist Robert Livingston (Harvard Kennedy School of Government). Some excerpts:

- Livingston describes growing up in a predominantly black, middle-class neighborhood in Kentucky. “The school I attended was integrated,” he says, “but we black students were in the advanced classes and we were the cool kids.” When he went to college, it was a shock to learn “how negatively black people were perceived by much of the world.” But the “solid armor” provided by his first 18 years allowed him to approach the problem with curiosity, asking in college and graduate school, *What is racism? Where is it in the brain? What causes it?*

- Livingston has developed a step-by-step model for addressing issues of racial equity in the workplace. He sums this up in the acronym PRESS:

- **Problem awareness** – It takes work for people to shift from seeing racism as a few “bad apples” to understanding the group advantages that have been embedded in the system over many generations.
- **Root-cause analysis** – This involves shifting from a defensive stance (*I’m not a racist*) to seeing the systemic factors that create racial advantage and disadvantage. Schools play a vital role when they do an accurate job teaching U.S. and world history.
- **Empathy** – From the first two steps, there’s usually an understanding of the historical and right-now challenges experienced by people of color and a desire to take action.
- **Strategy** – There’s a variety of effective interventions to address individual attitudes and institutional policies.
- **Sacrifice** – To make a difference, individuals and organizations need to invest time, energy, and resources.

PRESS can be summed up in three questions: (a) Do I understand what the problem is and where it comes from? (b) Do I care enough about the problem and the people it harms? and (c) Do I know how to correct the problem and am I willing to do it?

- “I think a rookie mistake that a lot of organizations make,” says Livingston, “is wanting to jump straight to a solution without going through this process of education and conversation before you get to action.” He quotes Albert Einstein’s famous quip that if he had an hour to solve the world’s most difficult problem, he’s spend 55 minutes thinking about it and five minutes on the solution. The first stage – education – involves putting facts, versus opinions, on the table. In the second stage – conversation – it’s important to focus on the problem at hand (racial inequity) not personal characteristics (*Who’s the racist in the room?*). Of course people’s feelings need to be addressed, especially the fear of being ostracized or “cast out” of one’s group.

- Livingston says leaders interested in promoting equity usually have to figure out the best strategy to use with three types of colleagues, anthropomorphized as:

- **Dolphins** – They care about promoting social justice and know what to do. Leaders only need to appeal to their better angels and provide tools and opportunities to shine.
- **Ostriches** – They are apathetic, uninformed, or don’t know what to do. Leaders can use the PRESS approach, perhaps accompanied by incentives to act constructively.
- **Sharks** – They are vehemently opposed to change. Leaders may need to use sanctions to prevent harm and nudge them to act in accordance with institutional norms.

Livingston cites research indicating that fewer than half of people are in the dolphin category; leaders shouldn’t be naïve about the need for carrots and sticks to bring along those who are apathetic, uninformed, or resistant.

- On confronting racism and microaggressions in the workplace, Livingston cites studies showing that when people of color speak up, “it has the intended effect, but there’s a cost to the individual – they’re often seen as being a complainer or a troublemaker... and [they] have to calculate the trade-off between the cost and the benefit. But white people are able to be antiracist with more latitude and more impunity... So I think that puts an even greater responsibility on white people to do this work.”

- On the question of using SAT, ACT, and other standardized test scores for college admission, Livingston uses the analogy of the Kentucky Derby, where people who place bets have lots of data on each horse, but most of them do not predict the winner. In addition, the horse that wins the Derby seldom wins the Belmont Stakes and the Preakness. Clearly there's no single characteristic or environmental factor that predicts the outcome of a horse race – or a student's success in college. “So what I say,” says Livingston, “is pick good candidates and invest all your energy into developing them. That is the message for educators.”

- Livingston says he often hears from people of color that it's best to have a mentor of the same racial or ethnic group. In fact, he says, “the research shows that your mentor or sponsor does *not* have to look like you... Sponsorship from a person who's not from your group is seen as more credible because there's no group interest involved.”

[“Pressing Toward Racial Equity: An Interview with Dr. Robert Livingston”](#) by John Kim and Rachel Klein in *District Management Journal*, Spring 2021 (Vol. 29, pp. 6-14); Livingston can be reached at robert_livingston@hks.harvard.edu.

[Back to page one](#)

3. Michael Petrilli on Finding Common Ground

In this *Education Gadfly* article, Michael Petrilli weighs in on the current debate about race in U.S. schools, suggesting five “promising and praiseworthy practices” on which he believes most educators and families can agree:

- *Culturally affirming classroom materials* – Students should feel represented and valued in the books and activities that are adopted and implemented in schools. “Mostly that's about making sure the canon is inclusive and diverse,” says Petrilli, “with authors and characters that represent America's diversity.” He's encouraged that several ELA programs accomplish this, especially EL Education's, which has received top ratings from EdReports.

- *More-diverse educators* – “This is simply common sense,” says Petrilli, “especially because of the large demographic gulf between our student population and our educator corps.” It's especially important for students of color, since research points to achievement gains when these students have same-race teachers in their K-12 trajectory.

- *High expectations* – “Simply put, it's racist to expect less from black children and other children of color,” says Petrilli. “It's also un-American.” Of course everything has to be handled well: appropriate state standards for each grade level; high-quality assessments and classroom materials; fair grading practices; and careful attention to “the subtle messages that educators send to their students.”

- *Empathy* – Teaching children to see the world through the eyes of others has been part of character and civics education for thousands of years, says Petrilli, but “given America's growing diversity and inequalities, it's more important than ever...” Privileged children need to understand that many kids have it much harder than they do, and empathy is key to white students grasping how an accumulation of historical factors makes growing up in America considerably more challenging for schoolmates of color. “We also need to help students learn

to listen to each other,” says Petrilli, “and engage with views from across the ideological spectrum.”

- *Accurate history* – The curriculum must tell the (age-appropriate) truth about slavery, racism, Jim Crow, discrimination, red-lining, and other painful chapters in U.S. history, making comparisons to the nation’s founding principles and current aspirations. “This isn’t reinventing the past on the basis of today’s values,” says Petrilli. “It’s correcting efforts to sugarcoat the horrors of those chapters in American history.” He hopes for a curriculum that is “both critical and patriotic,” describing historical evils and significant progress that’s been made.

“The Common Ground on Race and Education That’s Hiding in Plain Sight” by Michael Petrilli in *Education Gadfly*, May 27, 2021; Petrilli is at mpetrilli@fordhaminstitute.org.

[Back to page one](#)

4. Getting Higher-Ups to Adopt a Good Idea

In this *Harvard Business Review* article, Andy Molinsky (Brandeis University) and Jeff Tan (Epizyme) suggest how junior employees can get their innovations recognized and implemented:

- *Figure out who has the power to get your idea implemented.* It may be that there isn’t one person who has that role, say Molinsky and Tan, and they recommend doing a RACI analysis to determine who is:

- **Responsible** – the people in charge of completing tasks or reaching an objective;
- **Accountable** – the person who must give final approval for those people’s work;
- **Consulted** – those whose input is needed for work to be done well;
- **Informed** – the people who need updates on status and decisions.

Doing reconnaissance on the people in each of these roles is a key starting point.

- *Choose your champion.* “Few young professionals have the social capital to get their ideas immediately noticed by the right people,” say Molinsky and Tan. That’s why it’s important to build trust with someone with formal or informal power who might advocate for your idea in high-level meetings.

- *Do your homework.* Think the idea through and test-drive it with a variety of stakeholders to fine-tune the logic and fix problems you may not have noticed.

- *Frame your proposal in the most compelling way possible.* “When pitching your idea to your champion,” say Molinsky and Tan, “you need to have a clear objective, purpose, and success metrics. That’s why it’s critical to frame your idea as one that will not only improve the organization, but also make your champion’s life easier.”

- *Follow through and follow up.* If your champion is on board, when will the idea be on the leadership team’s agenda? At this point, schmoozing with administrative assistants can be helpful. If your champion is not on board, what are the personal and organizational obstacles? Patience and persistence are essential.

[“How to Get Your Big Ideas Noticed by the Right People”](#) by Andy Molinsky and Jeff Tan in *Harvard Business Review*, April 21, 2021; Molinsky is at molinsky@brandeis.edu.

[Back to page one](#)

5. Five Components of Clear Writing

In this article in *The Atlantic*, former teacher John Maguire says that as a veteran college writing instructor, he’s had lots of students who believed they couldn’t write – and indeed, their writing was dense, overly abstract, and often unreadable. “They didn’t realize,” says Maguire, “that it’s because they lacked certain skills that were common among college freshmen 40 years ago.” He admires secondary schools like New Dorp High School in New York City that asked the question, *What skills do these students lack?* and followed up with a program that brought about dramatic improvements in their writing (see Memo 454 for a description).

In [this video](#), Maguire describes five keys to clear, readable writing that he believes can and should be taught at every level (along with a growth mindset: you really can learn to write well):

- Short sentences (averaging 17 words);
- Concrete nouns (real objects, says Maguire; things you can drop on your foot);
- Active verbs;
- Telling about real people;
- One-syllable words (75 percent).

Practicing these skills, and having students stop doing the opposite (long sentences, abstract nouns, passive verbs, not including people, polysyllabic words) has brought about dramatic improvements in his students’ writing – and delight at being able to communicate much more clearly in academic and real-world settings.

[“The Secret to Good Writing: It’s About Objects, Not Ideas”](#) by John Maguire in *The Atlantic*, October 2, 2012; Maguire can be reached at maguirejohn@comcast.net.

[Back to page one](#)

6. Will Snow Days Be Gone Forever?

In this *New York Times* column, Michelle Goldberg says one of her children has been miserable about online Zoom classes, saying at one point, “I wish I wasn’t alive.” Goldberg commiserates: “As we emerge from the worst year of our lives, I care a lot more about their lost happiness than their lost learning.”

When the New York City schools announced that there would be no more snow days in the 2021-22 school year (they will be replaced by remote learning so the district can comply with the state’s 180-day school year), Goldberg was upset. “It seems like callousness bordering on cruelty to scrap one of childhood’s greatest pleasures in favor of a rehash of pandemic life,” she says. “After what our kids have endured, we shouldn’t take such an uncommon, blissful reprieve and turn it into a day of drudgery.” True, snow days mean that families have to scramble to arrange child care. But with remote learning, the obligation to supervise online

learning means it's no longer an option to send kids to play outside or park them in front of a long movie.

Goldberg found a kindred spirit in Jamaal Bowman, a former New York City educator who is now a member of Congress. "If I was still a middle-school principal," says Bowman, "I would strongly advocate for my kids using technology as rarely as possible because they've been staring at a freaking screen for over a year!" He wants more funding for teachers and counselors who can give individual attention to students who've fallen behind and suffered losses, but he believes that "play is going to be a very important part of dealing with this trauma."

["Save Snow Days!"](#) by Michelle Goldberg in *The New York Times*, May 8, 2021

[Back to page one](#)

7. Recommended Children's Picturebooks

In this feature in *Language Arts*, Grace Enriquez, Summer Clark, and Erika Thulin Dawes (Lesley University), Gilberto Lara (University of Texas/Austin), and Katie Egan Cunningham (Manhattanville College) highlight what they believe are the most outstanding fiction and nonfiction picturebooks published within the last year:

- *Your Name Is a Song* by Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow, illustrated by Luisa Uribe
- *The Blue House* by Phoebe Wahl
- *A Bowl Full of Peace: A True Story* by Caren Stelson, illustrated by Akira Kusaka
- *We Are Water Protectors* by Carole Lindstrom, illustrated by Michaela Goade
- *Your Place in the Universe* by Jason Chin
- *Already a Butterfly: A Meditation Story* by Julia Alvarez, illustrated by Raúl Colón
- *Feathered Serpent and the Five Suns: A Mesoamerican Creation Myth* by Duncan Tonatiuh
- *Dandelion's Dream* by Yoko Tanaka
- *The Ocean Calls: A Haenyeo Mermaid Story* by Tina Cho, illustrated by Jess Snow
- *Nesting* by Henry Cole
- *Me and Mama* by Cozbi Cabrera
- *¡Vamos! Let's Go Eat* by Raul the Third, colors by Elaine Bay
- *Window* by Marion Arbona
- *Digging for Words: José Alberto Gutiérrez and the Library He Built* by Angela Burke Kunkel, illustrated by Paola Escobar

["What's New in Picturebooks?"](#) by Grace Enriquez, Summer Clark, Gilberto Lara, Katie Egan Cunningham, and Erika Thulin Dawes in *Language Arts*, May 2021 (Vol. 98, #5, pp. 289-297); Enriquez can be reached at genriquez@lesley.edu.

[Back to page one](#)

8. Short Items:

a. A Video on Infectious Diseases – This 53-minute [video](#) gives a vivid description of the fight against smallpox and its implications for the Covid-19 pandemic. The Pulitzer Center has [lesson plans](#) to accompany the video.

“Extra Life: A Short History of Living Longer: Vaccines” from PBS, May 11, 2021

[Back to page one](#)

b. Was Online Instruction All Bad? – In this [22-minute video](#), Harvard physics professor Eric Mazur describes the impact of the pandemic on how he taught – and his surprising conclusions.

“Remote Teaching Was a Disaster. Was It?” by Eric Mazur on YouTube, May 2021

[Back to page one](#)

c. The Massachusetts Acceleration Roadmap – Here are suggestions from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for returning to in-person instruction after the pandemic: [School Leader Edition](#) and [Classroom Educator Edition](#).

[Back to page one](#)

d. New Ideas for U.S. History and Civics – This [curriculum framework](#) from the Educating for American Democracy Initiative has been years in the making, with input from scores of educators across the ideological landscape. Here’s a [short video](#) in which the principal authors explain the project’s rationale.

“Educating for American Democracy: Excellence in History and Civics for All Learners” by Danielle Allen et al., the Educating for American Democracy Initiative, March 2, 2021; Allen can be reached at ejscedirectorteam@fas.harvard.edu.

[Back to page one](#)

© Copyright 2021 Marshall Memo LLC, all rights reserved; permission is granted to clip and share individual article summaries with colleagues for educational purposes, being sure to include the author/publication citation and mention that it’s a Marshall Memo summary.

If you have feedback or suggestions,
please e-mail kim.marshall48@gmail.com

About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo is designed to keep principals, teachers, superintendents, and other educators very well-informed on current research and effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 50 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, writer, and consultant lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

To produce the Marshall Memo, Kim subscribes to 60 carefully-chosen publications (see list to the right), sifts through more than a hundred articles each week, and selects 5-10 that have the greatest potential to improve teaching, leadership, and learning. He then writes a brief summary of each article, pulls out several striking quotes, provides e-links to full articles when available, and e-mails the Memo to subscribers every Monday evening (with occasional breaks; there are 50 issues a year). Every week there's a podcast and HTML version as well.

Subscriptions:

Individual subscriptions are \$50 for a year. Rates decline steeply for multiple readers within the same organization. See the website for these rates and how to pay by check, credit card, or purchase order.

Website:

If you go to <http://www.marshallmemo.com> you will find detailed information on:

- How to subscribe or renew
- A detailed rationale for the Marshall Memo
- Publications (with a count of articles from each)
- Article selection criteria
- Topics (with a running count of articles)
- Headlines for all issues
- Reader opinions
- About Kim Marshall (bio, writings, consulting)
- A free sample issue

Subscribers have access to the Members' Area of the website, which has:

- The current issue (in Word and PDF)
- All back issues (Word and PDF) and podcasts
- An easily searchable archive of all articles so far
- The "classic" articles from all 16+ years

Core list of publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

All Things PLC
American Educational Research Journal
American Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
AMLE Magazine
ASCA School Counselor
Cult of Pedagogy
District Management Journal
Ed. Magazine
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Update
Education Week
Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis
Educational Horizons
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
English Journal
Exceptional Children
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Educational Review
Independent School
Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy
Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR)
Kappa Delta Pi Record
Knowledge Quest
Language Arts
Literacy Today (formerly Reading Today)
Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Psychology Today
Reading Research Quarterly
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
School Administrator
School Library Journal
Social Education
Social Studies and the Young Learner
Teachers College Record
Teaching Exceptional Children
Teaching Tolerance
The Atlantic
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The Journal of the Learning Sciences
The Language Educator
The Learning Professional (formerly Journal of Staff Development)
The New York Times
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Time
Urban Education