

# Marshall Memo 1073

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education  
February 3, 2025

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## Quotes of the Week

“Everyone wants a workplace free from favoritism and discrimination, where everyone has the support they need to do their best work and is rewarded fairly for their efforts.”

Lily Zheng (see item #1)

“DEI needs a reset... We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reimagine this work – not only to adapt to a new sociopolitical climate, but to let go of practices that have outlived their usefulness and refocus our efforts on what works.”

Lily Zheng (*ibid.*)

“The latest data show that any one of us, any adult in the U.S., checks their phone 200 times per day. What it means, in concrete terms, is that if you’re a parent or an adult who is interacting with a child, you have 200 potential interruptions in both relationships.”

Emily Tate Sullivan in [“Relationships Are Key to Kids’ Growth – and They’re in Crisis, Expert Says”](#) in *EdSurge*, January 27, 2025

“While children and teenagers are suffering the most from the negative effects of social media and too much screen time; their parents – and frankly, all adults – are as well.”

Catherine Price (see item #2)

“The best parts of life don’t happen on a screen.”

Catherine Price (*ibid.*)

“There’s no getting around it – it takes work to teach students how to write. And it takes work for them to do it.”

Tim Donahue in [“Teacher Voice: We Can’t Outpace AI, but We Can Still Teach Our Students the Value of Writing”](#) in *The Hechinger Report*, February 2, 2025

“Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work.”

Thomas Edison

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## 1. Rethinking DEI

In this *Harvard Business Review* article, author/consultant Lily Zheng says that in the U.S., there's been strong support for building more-inclusive workplaces. One reason is negative experiences people have had on the job: one survey found that 91 percent said they'd experienced discrimination based on race, gender, disability, age, or body size.

But in recent years, there's been pushback on diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives; now only about 52 percent of American workers favor DEI. Zheng, an experienced DEI presenter, believes several weaknesses in existing programs explain why: "jargon-heavy communication, siloed programming reliant on burned-out volunteers, one-off workshops using outdated tactics like blame and shame, and little measurement or accountability."

These and other factors have sparked backlash and undermined support. "People want more-diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplaces," says Zheng, "but the initiatives and approaches common to mainstream DEI" have not been effective.

"DEI needs a reset," she says. "We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reimagine this work – not only to adapt to a new sociopolitical climate, but to let go of practices that have outlived their usefulness and refocus our efforts on what works."

Drawing on research, interviews with colleagues, and her own work, Zheng proposes a new framework with these characteristics:

- Outcome-based – focused on measurable results like pay equity, physical and psychological safety, wellness, and promotion rates – versus one-shot workshops, social media activity, verbal commitment to progress, and virtue signaling.
- Systems focused – working toward healthier workplace policies, processes, practices, and norms – versus asking people to align their individual beliefs with arbitrary standards of "inclusion."
- Coalition-driven – Aimed at engaging everyone who stands to benefit from a healthier and fairer workplace to take responsibility and work together to find solutions that work for everyone – versus blaming a small group of employees for problems.
- Win-win – Stressing the gains for all employees – versus the notion that DEI progress is zero-sum, benefiting some and disadvantaging others.

Zheng's framework is anchored in FAIR outcomes: Fairness, Access, Inclusion, and Representation:

- *Fairness* – "We measure fairness," she says, "by looking at the major touchpoints of a person's interaction with their environment" – pay, promotion, resources, opportunities,

discipline, learning, and feedback. If there are differences that are unfair – for example, people without Ivy League degrees being passed over for promotions – the situation is addressed. “Everyone wants a workplace free from favoritism and discrimination,” says Zheng, “where everyone has the support they need to do their best work and is rewarded fairly for their efforts.”

- *Access* – People have a chance to participate in workplace events, which means sensitivity to the needs of colleagues who have children, observe religious holidays, or use a wheelchair. “Expanding access to those outside the status quo,” says Zheng, “can result in surprising benefits for everyone, even those who may not think of themselves as having access needs, builds more-resilient organizations, and contributes to the independence, dignity, and agency of all people.”

- *Inclusion* – Workplace norms and culture make “all people feel respected, valued, and safe for who they are,” she says. It’s “about engaging thoughtfully with what makes people different – ensuring that given the diversity of people’s identities, experiences, beliefs, and perspectives, all can feel respected, valued, and safe.” This includes colleagues feeling comfortable sharing critical feedback, engaging in productive conflict, and taking risks. Anonymous surveys are the best way to gather reliable data.

- *Representation* – This is “when all people feel their needs are advocated for by those who represent them,” says Zheng, going beyond demographic box-checking and tokenism to a “participatory decision-making process, frequent and transparent communication between leaders and key partners, and high trust in leadership from the many different groups they represent built off a track record of accountability.” Again, anonymous surveys can assess if this trust is truly in place.

Zheng closes with this pep talk for leaders navigating DEI pushback: “Ensure that as your language, initiatives, and strategies evolve, you are grounding them in outcomes rather than intentions, de-biasing systems rather than ‘fixing’ individuals, creating broad coalitions rather than polarized cliques, and communicating the win-win value of this work rather than giving in to zero-sum narratives. Ensure that whatever you call the work, you are building an organization for tomorrow that is better for everyone in it than it is today.”

[“What Comes After DEI?”](#) by Lily Zheng in *Harvard Business Review*, January 23, 2025

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## **2. Breaking Up with Your Cellphone**

In this *After Babel* article, Catherine Price says she agrees with Jonathan Haidt, author of *The Anxious Generation*, in advocating limits on young people’s access to technology and social media – and stressing the importance of “more independence, responsibility, fun, and real-life friendship for our kids.”

But it’s not just kids’ screen time we need to worry about; “it’s the phone-based *life*,” says Price. “While children and teenagers are suffering the most from the negative effects of social media and too much screen time; their parents – and frankly, all adults – are as well.”

She had an epiphany when her infant daughter gazed at her and Price was staring at her phone. “That was not the impression I wanted her to have of a human relationship,” she says, “let alone with her own mother.” At that moment she decided to write a book – *How to Break Up with Your Phone* – and it received lots of affirmation from like-minded adults.

Price recently revised and updated the book, and in this article shares her five-step plan for building a healthier relationship with our phones, supporting others who have the same goal, setting a positive example for kids, and being kind to ourselves on the journey:

- *Step 1: Define what you want.* Setting an arbitrary goal and relying on will power – for example, no more than one hour of phone time a day – won’t work, says Price. The algorithms that drive our devices are scientifically designed to steal our attention, “and that’s a big deal, because ultimately, our lives *are* what we pay attention to... When we allow app-makers to steal our attention, we’re allowing them to rob us of our lives.”

That means the goal has to be deeper than a numerical time limit. “*Why* do you want to change your screen habits?” asks Price. “What *do* you want to spend your time and attention on? What would a *healthy* relationship with your smartphone (and other devices) look like?” After addressing these questions, she suggests calculating how much time you spend with your screens (usually about 25 percent of waking hours) and then writing a “breakup letter” to your phone explaining why it just has to happen.

- *Step 2: Reconnect with real life.* Even people who are incredibly busy, says Price, are not having enough fun and are actually bored and lonely some of the time – which is why they spend so much time on their phones. She suggests brainstorming what nourishes us, what we’re curious about, what feels fun, what makes us feel lighthearted and alive, things we love to do, things we want to do more of, then putting them in our calendars, increasingly displacing screen time.

- *Step 3: Make your phone boring.* Apps trigger our brains’ dopamine systems, says Price. To counteract this, we need to block unnecessary notifications and take steps to make our phones as non-exciting as possible. Retain features that have a tool-like purpose – maps, calendar, camera, the actual phone – and delete or hide those that mainly entertain, entice, and distract – social media, gaming, news, shopping, e-mail. She recommends app blockers like [Freedom](#), [ScreenZen](#), [Opal](#), [Brick](#), and [Unplug Tag](#). “By the end of this process,” says Price, “your home screen should contain only tools, not temptations. Your phone will be less like a slot machine and more like a Swiss army knife.”

- *Step 4: Create phone-free spaces.* Phones have “infiltrated our lives so quickly and so thoroughly,” says Price, “that we never even stopped to think about what we *wanted* our boundaries to be. As a result, it’s nearly impossible to find any space – or gathering – that does not include smartphones.” She recommends creating times – dinnertime, for starters – that are cellphone free and solely for human connection. If meal-time conversations are a challenge, she suggests [Tales, Family Edition](#). And there might be phone-free evenings, even whole days with no screens – a Digital Sabbath.

- *Step 5: Start and end the day on your own terms.* For most people, says Price, their cellphone is the first thing they interact with in the morning (because of the frequently used

alarm clock function) and the last thing they look at before turning in for the night. “If you can get your phone out of your bedroom,” she says, “you will reclaim both of those times – and probably sleep better, too.” That means using a regular alarm clock and having an out-of-bedroom phone charging station for the whole family. Putting a good book on the bedside table where the phone used to be will help break the old habit.

Escaping cellphone addiction won’t be easy, concludes Price, and she recommends staying in touch with a “phone breakup buddy” for mutual support. If you lapse, she says, don’t be too hard on yourself: “Notice what happened and decide how you want to move forward. The mere fact that you *realized* you slipped means that you’re succeeding. Keep it up, and not only will you feel like you’re modeling the behaviors you’re trying to instill in your kids, but eventually you’ll find yourself with a new relationship with your device that reflects what you already know in your heart: the best parts of life don’t happen on a screen.”

[“Are You Struggling with Your Own Screen Time?”](#) by Catherine Price in *After Babel*, January 29, 2025

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### **3. Can AI Tools Foster Student Autonomy and Competence?**

(Originally titled “Deeper Learning, Not Passive Compliance”)

In this *Educational Leadership* article, author/consultant Tony Frontier says most middle- and high-school students have a compliance mentality about schoolwork. For them, AI will be “the ultimate tool for ‘doing’ school”: they’ll prompt chatbots to give short summaries of reading assignments, complete math problems, and write a five-paragraph essay on *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

The research on AI shows that students who take these shortcuts will pay a steep price: mediocre work, missing out on productive struggle, not developing good reading, writing, and thinking skills, and ending up with a stunted sense of agency, curiosity, and how real learning occurs. “Detaching strategy and effort from one’s results,” says Frontier, “eventually leads to learned helplessness.”

A small minority of secondary students don’t take this approach, says Frontier. These “rogue” students have maintained a sense of agency and want to control their learning environment. When they work with an AI chatbot, they question it, argue with it, fine-tune their prompts, engage in a back-and-forth dialogue, and produce much better products and learning. But by middle school, these agentic, rogue learners are in the minority, says Frontier. The eager, omnivorous energy with which students enter kindergarten has been worn down by teachers’ understandable need to manage classrooms.

The good news, Frontier believes, is that AI tools are uniquely positioned to recharge the two key elements in student agency – autonomy and competence:

- Autonomy is a sense of control over one’s actions, which is fostered when students can make intentional decisions about how, what, where, and when they learn. Autonomy is undermined when students feel controlled, dependent, or helpless.

- Competence is students' ability to accomplish challenging, meaningful tasks, which is fostered by a balance of productive struggle, incremental progress, and success. Competence is undermined when tasks are too easy, too difficult, or when students aren't getting enough feedback to refine their efforts.

“Effective teachers strive to balance these competing needs,” says Frontier. “Autonomy without attention to students' needs for competence leaves students overwhelmed. Didactic strategies, where telling is accepted as a proxy for teaching, prevent students from exercising their autonomy to apply strategies that build competence.” And what effective teachers have always done, he believes, is what AI tools can do remarkably well, reaching more students with immediate help than the most skilled and hard-working teachers can possibly manage:

- Generative AI can support students' need for competence when prompted to patiently check for understanding before providing information, not tell the answers until students have attempted them, ask clarifying questions before moving on, and limit the length of responses to make sure they give students the information they need.
- They can support students' need for autonomy by the same individualized fine-tuning of instructional prompts, keeping students in the zone of agency by giving just the right amount of control in the back-and-forth of learning a new skill or solving a problem.

“The conclusion here,” says Frontier, “is not that AI tools can, or should, replace teachers, but that AI tools can support engagement and learning when they are used in agentic rather than superficial ways.” He has several suggestions for teachers to maximize this potential:

- Have students focus on learning goals versus task completion.
- Teach students how to prompt AI tools to support them at their current level of competence – the Goldilocks level of challenge.
- Empower students to monitor their competence by engaging in self-assessment and asking for feedback.
- Teach students how AI tools can increase their autonomy as they navigate productive struggle and ask for help.
- Encourage students to balance their needs for autonomy and competence by advocating for their learning needs – for example, telling the chatbot: *You're going too fast. I told you to go one step at a time and not to overwhelm me with information. Slow down and provide shorter responses.*

[“Deeper Learning, Not Passive Compliance”](#) by Tony Frontier in *Educational Leadership*, February 2025 (Vol. 82, #5, pp. 18-23); Frontier can be reached at [tonyfrontier@gmail.com](mailto:tonyfrontier@gmail.com).

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## 4. Using Generative AI to Boost the Effectiveness of PLCs

(Originally titled “Bringing Artificial Intelligence to the PLC Table”)

In this *Educational Leadership* article, consultant/coach Meghan Hargrave and Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey (San Diego State University) report on their comparison of teacher teams using generative AI and those that did not. In humans-only meetings, there is less

discussion and teachers are hesitant to speak up about disagreements and offer better ideas. “It seems that team members would rather not disrupt the community by challenging ideas presented by their colleagues,” say the authors.

In team meetings using AI, “the results are profoundly different,” they report. “The end products are stronger because the team spends more time refining ideas, engaging with student data, and developing content based on the rich discussions they had.” The chatbot provided neutral information that loosened up and improved teacher discourse. Hargrave, Fisher, and Frey suggest specific ways that AI tools can enhance PCL meetings:

- As a team plans units and lessons, unpacks standards, and thinks about grade-to-grade progressions, AI can answer:

- What prior knowledge and skills do students need?
- What should students know and be able to do?
- How will we measure mastery?
- What would a progression of this skill look like?
- What academic vocabulary should be emphasized?
- What challenges and misconceptions might students have?

Having AI’s instant answers to these questions in front of them will jump-start PLC discussions, say the authors, providing “a richer understanding of the learning objectives and a clearer vision of where to go next.”

- PLCs constantly wrestle with how to take students from where they are to where they should be, using existing strategies and resources, and generating new ideas. This is where the specificity of the prompt to AI makes all the difference. Rather than asking:

*Give me ideas to teach students how to build an argument.*

Better to ask:

*I want students to engage in a formal classroom debate to help them understand what it means to build an argument. Help me think about how I can do this in my 6<sup>th</sup>-grade classroom.*

The second prompt leans on the technology to take instruction to the next level.

- Writing success criteria and learning intentions – Chatbots’ responses improve when the prompt includes the standard and an example.

- Creating proficiency scales and rubrics – Again, detailed prompts are important, including standards, exemplars, and formats.

- Initial analysis of student data – AI can sort student data and make sense of work samples. A possible prompt: *What is this student already doing well, and what should they do next?*

- Adjusting content with student data in mind – A helpful prompt, after feeding in student data and sample responses: *How should this assignment be adjusted based on what we’re seeing so far?*

In a sidebar, Hargrave, Fisher, and Frey offer these guidelines for PLCs using AI tools:

- Stay in control of the content, keeping a human in the loop.
- Analyze output for accuracy.

- Avoid deep dives into unrelated content and jumping from idea to idea.
- Have one person drive the AI to maintain focus and avoid confusion.
- Keep abreast of updates in the technology.
- If you disagree with the output or aren't sure, talk back.

[“Bringing Artificial Intelligence to the PLC Table”](#) by Meghan Hargrave, Douglas Fisher, and Nancy Frey in *Educational Leadership*, February 2025 (Vol. 82, #5, pp. 24-29)

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## 5. Teachers Working Smart with Chatbots

(Originally titled “Smart AI, Smarter Teaching”)

In this article in *Educational Leadership*, Paul Emerich France (Making Teaching Sustainable) suggests teacher questions when deciding to use AI:

- Does it minimize complexity?
- Does it maximize individual power and potential?
- Does it reimagine learning?
- Does it preserve or enhance human connection?

When there's a “resounding yes” to each, France believes, AI will make teachers' work more efficient, effective, and sustainable. Some examples:

- Mapping a scope and sequence – A Minnesota grade 3 teacher team saved planning time by asking Google Gemini to create 4-6 concept-based interdisciplinary units incorporating inquiry in reading, math, and writing skills meeting state standards (which were attached). Within seconds, Gemini created four units that served as an excellent starting point for planning instruction.

- Creating a crash course for new teachers – France asked Gemini to provide 8-10 activities for a novice grade 8 teacher struggling with classroom management, with details on restorative practices and setting clear boundaries. The output was specific and helpful.

- Generating newsletters for families – A high-school teacher asked Gemini for 3-5 practical tips on resources parents could use to increase students' reading fluency and comprehension. The response, citing research from several sources, pointed parents to a number of accessible resources.

- Generating custom texts for specific reading tasks – A first-grade teacher asked Gemini for decodable texts to help students struggling with decoding words with -at, -am, -an, and -ap, and within seconds had a text using high-frequency words with those letter combinations.

[“Smart AI, Smarter Teaching”](#) by Paul Emerich France in *Educational Leadership*, February 2025 (Vol. 82, #5, pp. 14-15)

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## 6. A Parent Wonders About Banning “Rude” Books for a Child

In this *Ethicist* column in *The New York Times Magazine*, Kwame Anthony Appiah responds to a parent concerned about a 6-year-old reading books “that not only really stink but also teach him bad manners and rude phrases like ‘stinky butt,’ ‘total dork,’ and ‘dumb.’” The parent is strongly opposed to book banning, but believes these books are way below the boy’s reading level and will make him “a rude jerk.” The question: “Am I on strong ethical grounds to curtail his personal library?”

“It’s not silly,” Appiah responds, “to ask whether a book is one you would want your children to read. Parents properly supervise the reading of their young children.” And indeed, kids are often drawn to books that feel transgressive and annoy their parents. But building literary discrimination requires reading a variety of material. The real issue, says Appiah, is whether the boy forgets his manners after reading these books. “If you don’t like his talk,” he advises, “by all means show your disapproval. But there’s the basis for a deal here. You’ll let him read about stinky butts if he’ll stop talking about them so much.”

[“The Ethicist”](#) by Kwame Anthony Appiah in *The New York Times Magazine*, January 19, 2025

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## 7. Sixth Graders Articulate Their Rights as Math Learners

In this article in *Theory Into Practice*, Jennifer Wolfe (University of Arizona) and Crystal Picazo (Gallego Primary Fine Arts School) describe how Picazo began the year with her sixth-grade math students generating a set of My Rights as a Learner and My Responsibilities as a Learner (based on the work of Olga Torres, 2021). Here’s the easel sheet that resulted:

- My Rights as a Learner:
  - The right to be confused
  - The right to make a mistake
  - The right to talk and listen to make sense
  - The right to write only what makes sense
  - The right to disagree
  - The right to share and ask questions without judgment
- My Responsibilities as a Learner:
  - To seek clarity
  - To find the mistake and reflect
  - To stay focused on math talk and questions
  - To communicate my ideas in some way and note any questions
  - To stay respectful
  - To let people know all learners have rights

[“Centering Community and Care: Enacting the Torres’ Rights of the Learner to Support Middle Grades Students in Building Collective Responsibility in Learning Mathematics”](#) by

Jennifer Wolfe and Crystal Picazo in *Theory Into Practice*, Winter 2025 (Vol. 64, #1, pp. 31-43); the authors can be reached at [jwolfe628@arizona.edu](mailto:jwolfe628@arizona.edu) and [crystalp@susd12.org](mailto:crystalp@susd12.org).

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# 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 54 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:***

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- The current issue (in Word or PDF)
- All back issues (Word and PDF) and podcasts
- An easily searchable archive of all articles so far
- The "classic" articles from all 20 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  
ASCD SmartBrief  
Cult of Pedagogy  
District Management Journal  
Ed Magazine  
Education Gadfly  
Education Next  
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  
Kappan (Phi Delta Kappan)  
Knowledge Quest  
Language Arts  
Language Magazine  
Learning for Justice (formerly Teaching Tolerance)  
Literacy Today (formerly Reading Today)  
Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12  
Middle School Journal  
Peabody Journal of Education  
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  
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