Marshall Memo 308

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
November 2, 2009

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"Making the lesson fun makes us *want* to come to class. We want to know what cool new thing will happen today. What will the teacher do next? We have to be there to find out. The last thing we want is to skip class and hear the next day how much fun it was."

William Towne, former dropout (see item #6)

"Are we missing possibilities in students who seem like lost causes?"

Jessica Siegel in "Lives on the Boundary, 20 Years Later" in *Education Week*, Oct. 28, 2009 (Vol. 29, #9, p. 25) http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2009/10/28/09siegel.h29.html

"Unless decisions and their intended outcomes are clearly tied to beliefs, leaders can quickly get painted as arbitrary and insincere."

Paula Mirk in "Ethics by Example" in *Principal Leadership*, October 2009 (Vol. 10, #2, p. 18-23), no e-link available

"Loyalty is not backing someone up or saying nothing when he or she does something unethical. That's not being loyal; that's being manipulated."

Rosalind Wiseman (see item #2)

"Adults in the school community can't ask students to do work that they aren't willing to do themselves."

Rosalind Wiseman (*ibid.*)

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1. High Expectations – What Do They Look Like in Schools?

In this provocative *Education Week* article, Portland State University professor (and former principal) Joanne Yatvin says that many educators have a misguided view of what "high expectations" means. It's not all about more rigorous assignments and mandating a longer school day and year for all students, she says. Instead, it's about the interpersonal dynamics between teacher and student, where expectations play out in myriad subtle ways.

The most compelling research on teacher expectations was done more than 40 years ago by Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson, and their conclusions, published in *Pygmalion in the Classroom* (1968) were replicated by other studies and have held up over the years. Rosenthal and Jacobson tested students in a California elementary school and told their teachers that the test was designed to predict which students were going to make dramatic gains in achievement. The researchers then gave teachers the names of students who would have a spurt of learning that year. But the whole thing was a deliberate deception. What the students took was actually a standard I.Q. test, and the names the researchers gave to teachers were randomly selected from class lists. It was the only way Rosenthal and Jacobson would think of to get an accurate measure of the effect of higher expectations on student performance.

It turns out that they made a huge difference. When all students were retested at the end of the school year, and again two years later, a significant number of those identified as "spurters" made unusual intellectual and performance gains and maintained them over time. Those students also got better grades on class work and behavior from their teachers.

What was the mechanism of these gains? "Teachers' expectations of student success, and their unconscious communication of those expectations, made all the difference," says Yatvin. It appears that teachers signaled their faith in students' potential through smiles, nods of approval, more opportunities to ask and answer questions, and a kindly tone of voice. Experimental studies like Rosenthal's and Jacobson's are backed up, says Yatvin, by "countless stories of successful people who were struggling in school and life until some adult – a teacher, a boss, a family friend – saw something special in them and encouraged them to make the most of it."

Of course belief is not enough, she acknowledges. Schools need a strong curriculum, high-quality materials, well-planned instruction, safety-net options for struggling students, and effective use of assessments. But she believes there is a sharp contrast between the work of Rosenthal, Jacobson, and other researchers over the years and that of current education reformers. Researchers focus on "the power of belief to influence the behavior of others," she

says. Advocates of increased rigor in schools focus on "the power of authority to exact compliance from underlings… Rigor, the word so often used by reformers to describe what schools should emphasize, is more properly the companion of harshness, inflexibility, and oppression. It is time to change the current conception of high expectations back to its original meaning."

"Rediscovering the 'Pygmalion Effect' in American Schools" by Joanne Yatvin in *Education Week*, Oct. 28, 2009 (Vol. 29, #9, p. 24-25)
http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2009/10/28/09yatvin.h29.html
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2. Students as Potential Leaders Against Bullying

In this *Principal Leadership* article, author and Empower Program founder Rosalind Wiseman says that students can play a key role in turning around a negative school culture – but only if they are taught some principles of ethical leadership. She uses the example of a high school in which students were able to trot out the ostensible values – tolerance, respect for diversity, proud traditions, caring teachers, school spirit – but also reported incidents of derogatory language (*That's so gay. Skank. Fag. Don't be a pussy*), offensive racial and ethnic jokes, religious intolerance (*If you don't believe in Jesus, you're going straight to hell*), and misogyny (*Shut up, woman!*). In addition, students reported that they didn't fully trust their elected student council members to represent school values and stand up to student bullies.

Wiseman suggests several leadership arguments to help students step up to the plate and begin to change their school's culture:

• *Redefine loyalty*. Wiseman says that students need to get to the place where they see that loyalty means "standing up to someone to whom they are close and respectfully telling that person when he or she is wrong. Loyalty is not backing someone up or saying nothing when he or she does something unethical. That's not being loyal; that's being manipulated."

• *Differentiate between snitching and reporting*. Snitching is trying to get someone in trouble. Reporting is meant to fix a problem that's beyond the capacity of the individual to fix, to right a wrong. Sure, there's the danger that a clueless adult may make the situation worse, but Wiseman says we need to help students find the adult who can be their best advocate in the situation.

• *Practice with real situations*. Students learn best by discussing actual case studies similar to situations they are likely to face. How should they talk to peers in leadership positions who aren't doing their jobs? How can they talk to peers who aren't taking them seriously?

• *Educate adult leaders*. "Adults in the school community can't ask students to do work that they aren't willing to do themselves," says Wiseman. That means exposing them to the same anti-bullying training that students get, and urging them to support students as they take on leadership roles with their peers.

But in the end, concludes Wiseman, kids can do some of the heaviest lifting. "Students have the potential to be leaders in ways that adults in the community can't be," she says. "If

they receive the training, skills, and resources that they need – and if adults are in the background, guiding the student leaders – students have far more power to effect positive change than faculty members ever would."

"The Leadership Dilemma" by Rosalind Wiseman in *Principal Leadership*, October 2009 (Vol. 10, #2, p. 40-43), no e-link available;

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3. Guidelines for Resolving Ethical Dilemmas

In this *Principal Leadership* article, Yeshiva University (NY) professor Jeffrey Glanz shares three case studies and then provides some guidelines to school leaders as they make ethical decisions.

• Scenario #1 – A principal is close friends with the school's football coach. The coach's son, who attends the school, is caught cheating by his 12th-grade history teacher. The normal procedure, which the principal has followed in similar cases, is for the student to be brought before the school's honesty committee. The football coach pleads with the principal not to send his son, because a negative finding would jeopardize his scholarship to a prestigious university in the Midwest. The teacher, the coach, the student, and the principal are the only ones who know about the cheating incident.

• Scenario #2 – In an angry moment, a teacher shoved one of his class's most challenging students and the student fell onto a stairwell banister and now complains of shoulder pain. No other students or faculty members witnessed the incident. The teacher, who is one of the best in the school and often volunteers to take difficult students into his class, privately admits the indiscretion to the principal. A conference with the student's mother is imminent, and the teacher asks the principal to back up his version of the story – that he did not shove the student.

• Scenario #3 – A principal is in charge of a multicultural fair at the school. A subcommittee designed T-shirts that the principal thinks might offend certain ethnic groups, but the subcommittee has already spent $5,000 on them and they have been delivered.

Glanz suggests the following general, commonsense guidelines for ethical decision-making:

- Identify the dilemma or issue precisely.
- Gather as much data as possible from all perspectives; seek to understand the dilemma in all its complexity.
- Clarify the issue in more specific terms.
- Take the time to reflect deeply on the issue, seeking counsel if possible. Think about the consequences of the decision for all concerned and for the school's climate and culture.
- Make the decision decisively.
- Live with the decision – and learn from it.

Glanz then shares three decision-making processes.

• *The Read Model* – Formulated by James Rest, its four stages are designed to help people understand and predict moral behavior and decision-making:

- Moral sensitivity: being aware of a situation's moral dimension (another person's welfare is at stake) and how possible courses of action affect all parties;
- Moral judgment: defining the morally ideal course of action according to moral standards or ideals;
- Moral motivation: deciding what to do after evaluating various courses of action for how they serve moral or other values.
- Moral action: acting and following through with the decision.

• *Five Principles of Ethics* – Designed by Komives, Lucas, and McMahon (1998), these say that ethical leaders:

- Respect autonomy: stakeholders have freedom of choice so they can develop their values and respect the right of others to act independently. This assumes that people have the competence to make rational and informed decisions.
- Do no harm: the environment is free from harm to others, both psychological and physical.
- Benefit others: they act in ways that promote the interests of the school over their personal interests and self-gain.
- Are just: they treat people fairly and equitably.
- Keep promises and are loyal to their teachers and school.

• 12 Questions – Nash (1998) suggests that leaders ask the following 12 questions when addressing ethical dilemmas:

- Have you defined the problem accurately?
- How would you define the problem if you were on the other side?
- How did this situation occur in the first place?
- To whom and to what do you give your loyalty as a person and as a school leader?
- What do you want to happen in making this decision?
- How does this intention compare with the probable results?
- Who could be harmed by your decision?
- Can you discuss the problem with the affected parties before you make your decision?
- Are you confident that your position will be as valid over a long period of time as it seems now?
- Would you have any qualms about disclosing your decision or action to your boss, the school board, your family, and the community?
- What is the symbolic potential of your action if understood? If misunderstood?
- Under what conditions would you allow exceptions to your decision?

Principals wrestle with decisions like the ones above all the time, and many of these questions come into play. In a 2004 survey, secondary-school principals said their decisions challenged them to define their ethical beliefs, show courage, seek the common good, and listen to their gut feelings. Principals also said that they didn't always make the right decision.

"Decisions You Can Live With" by Jeffrey Glanz in *Principal Leadership*, October 2009 (Vol. 10, #2, p. 24-28), no e-link available; Glanz can be reached at jglanz@yu.edu.

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4. Alcohol- and Drug-Related Suspensions from Athletic Events

In this *Principal Leadership* article, high-school principals Alan Bernstein and Mary Helen Moorhead share their suggestions for dealing with students who violate school alcohol and drug policies and need to be suspended from athletic events (other cocurricular activities are included, but the main emphasis in the article is on athletics):

• *The athletic director* – "The first line of defense is the relationship between the principal and the athletic director," say Bernstein and Moorhead. This is true of the director's role in preventing problems before they occur, training coaches and other staff, and investigating and following up when incidents happen.

• *The handbook* – The second line of defense is "an airtight handbook policy," say the authors. Words and definitions matter. "Lawyers and legal advocates seek out ambiguous language to introduce doubt and to show that rules are made unenforceable by dint of unclear language." Take the word "possession": is the handbook clear about exactly what it means?

• *Public relations* – Eligibility guidelines need to be widely disseminated so everyone has access. And mere promulgation is not enough; parent signatures are important, indicating that they have been informed of eligibility guidelines.

• *Coaches* – Principals should work with their athletic director to organize effective training with coaches – and it's also a good idea for the principal to meet with all coaches at the beginning of each year to ensure that they communicate a clear and consistent message to all their players. "Coaches must avoid enabling behaviors," say Bernstein and Moorhead. These include "overhearing party plans but pretending not to or not passing information along; smelling alcohol or marijuana and doing nothing; keeping secrets from assistant coaches; not stressing chemical health throughout the season; minimizing and denying problems that are known to exist; taking the laissez-faire approach that a student athlete's chemical health is someone else's problem, that interventions and alternatives won't work anyway, or that kids will be kids."

• *School resource officers* – Off-campus and summer violations of school policies are usually brought to the attention of the principal by these officials in the form of a police report. Principals may not want to hear them, and parents may object, but consistently following chemical health policies is important, say the authors.

• *Reintegration* – A realistic plan for getting students who are suspended back into the game is vital. Bernstein and Moorhead suggest not completely ostracizing offenders during their suspensions, but allowing them to practice with the team, use the weight room, and attend team meetings.

Finally, Bernstein and Moorhead address the pressure principals get from athletic boosters who think that "academics are not as important as athletics or who feel that

participation in sports is a right and not a privilege" – and parents who believe, rightly or wrongly, that athletic accomplishment is their child's only ticket to a better life. It's vital for the school leaders to extend the rules to all cocurricular activities and explain the rules *and the rationale* for the school's policies to all students in mandatory meetings at the beginning of every year. This is especially important if the school's guidelines are stricter than the state's.

"Not Eligible to Play" by Alan Bernstein and Mary Helen Moorhead in *Principal Leadership*, October 2009 (Vol. 10, #2, p. 30-34), no e-link available; Bernstein is at abernstein@walpole.k12.ma.us and Moorhead at moorhemo@lovelandschools.org.

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5. Heading Off a Suicide Contagion

Suicide is the third-ranking cause of death among adolescents, reports Florida school psychologist Frank Zenere in this *Principal Leadership* article. A recent national survey of high-school students found that close to 15 percent of respondents had seriously considered suicide and 7 percent had actually made a suicide attempt in the previous 12 months. Zenere's article focuses on suicide contagion – the phenomenon of one suicide triggering others among vulnerable youth, accounting for 100-200 deaths a year in the U.S. – and how school personnel can minimize the risk of this happening.

In the aftermath of a suicide, says Zenere, it's important for school leaders, counselors, and teachers to:

• *Support the survivors*. School leaders need to replace rumors with the facts, mobilize a crisis response team, equip teachers with talking points, give staff access to mental health professionals, and speak directly to students in classrooms (not in an assembly). Zenere suggests avoiding unnecessary details about the suicide and conveying these messages: the victim is responsible for his or her actions; suicide is often evidence of mental illness, possibly linked to substance abuse; there are alternatives to suicide; the emotions experienced by survivors are normal; help is available; and prevention is key (mentioning some warning signs).

• *Identify other students who are at risk*. This includes students who have geographical, psychosocial, or social proximity to the student who committed suicide, as well as other students who are psychologically at risk, especially those who have been exposed to a traumatic event and have other risk factors. Warning signs include suicide notes or verbal threats, previous attempts, a sense of helplessness or hopelessness, increased aggression and risk-taking, making final arrangements (such as giving away prized possessions), self-harm, inability to concentrate or think clearly, changes in physical habits and appearance, sudden changes in personality, friends, or behavior, schoolwork themes related to death and suicide, and increased interest in weapons.

• *Monitor these students and connect them to intervention services*. This includes watching attendance patterns and getting high-risk youth to individual or small-group counseling, as well as encouraging parents to accompany their adolescent children when they attend funerals and memorial services.

• *Provide appropriate outlets for grieving*. "Do not create permanent memorials or dedications or hold a service on campus," advises Zenere. With input from the victim's family and friends, "Develop living memorials that will help students cope with emotions and problems – for example, display appropriate prevention-related information resources in the school's media center, make donations to a local crisis center, participate in an event that raises suicide prevention awareness, or create or expand a school counseling program." The community should be engaged, including parents, other schools in the area, and churches, clubs, and athletic organizations.

• *Keep students and staff focused on learning and maintain a healthy school environment*.

If there are signs that a suicide contagion might be developing, Zenere advises the following:

- Consult with administrators, staff, and parents.
- Train faculty, parents, and students on how to recognize warning signs and where to go for help.
- Identify and assess students who are at risk of suicide.
- Notify parents and guardians of any troubling behaviors.
- Recommend community-based mental health services to parents.
- Coordinate with local schools, law enforcement, and community providers.

"Suicide Clusters and Contagion" by Frank Zenere in *Principal Leadership*, October 2009 (Vol. 10, #2, p. 12-16), no e-link available

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6. Advice on Preventing Dropouts – from a Former Dropout

In this *Education Week* article, author William Towne, who dropped out of high school but eventually graduated with honors from the University of Southern California, takes note of the nation's "appalling" dropout rate and faults education reformers for not listening to a very important group: the dropouts themselves. "Until reformers start listening to the students who have dropped out or are currently failing," he says, "their attempts to reform schools also will fail."

Towne says that when he was in school, he believed he would grow up to be a sports hero or rap superstar and school was therefore irrelevant. In addition, he found his classes boring. "After analyzing my own grade-school failures and speaking with dozens of recent dropouts," he says, "it's clear to me that teacher *effectiveness* is the silver bullet. While programs like No Child Left Behind choose to focus on the need for "highly qualified" teachers, the real emphasis should be on creating *highly effective* teachers."

Teachers need to stop lecturing, Towne continues. "Instead, find ways to make the lessons fun, engaging, and, most important, relevant to students' lives… Making the lesson fun makes us *want* to come to class. We want to know what cool new thing will happen today.

What will the teacher do next? We have to be there to find out. The last thing we want is to skip class and hear the next day how much fun it was."

Towne also advocates involving students in making rules and listening to their ideas on creative lesson ideas, including a game-show format. He says that students should be assigned books in their areas of interest ("Forget Shakespeare for now"), and he likes the idea of cooperative learning groups, with grades based on each student's progress.

Summing up, he says, "It's that simple. Maybe it just takes a high-school dropout to see it."

"A Dropout's Guide to Education Reform" by William Towne in *Education Week*, Oct. 21, 2009 (Vol. 29, #8, p. 25) http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2009/10/21/08towne.h29.html

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7. The Characteristics of Idealistic, Contented, and Disheartened Teachers

In this *Education Week* article, Andrew Yarrow reports on a study by Public Agenda and Learning Points Associates, "Teaching for a Living: How Teachers See the Profession Today." According to its analysis, American teachers fall into three categories:

• *Idealists* – About 23 percent of teachers; more than half are 32 or younger; they went into teaching to help disadvantaged students; 54 percent think that all their students can go to college with the right support; they believe their teaching has a positive impact on students' test scores, and say that good teachers can lead all students to learn, even those who don't get as much support at home; 93 percent say their principals give them good support.

• *Contented* – About 37 percent of teachers; they are almost all 33 and over and have more teaching experience; 30 percent believe their students can go to college with the right support; they mostly work in middle- or higher-income schools, report excellent working conditions and principal support, and believe their teaching has a lot of impact on their students' test scores,

• *Disheartened* – About 40 percent of teachers; they are mostly 33 and over; 39 percent believe their students can go to college with the right support; they tend to be concerned about their working conditions, student behavior, and testing, give their principals low ratings for supporting teachers, and are concerned about burnout. Yarrow closes with a question: are some disheartened teachers trapped in dysfunctional schools, and could they be motivated to be effective by a better setting and strong school leadership – or "would it be better for some portion of them and their students if they found another line of work?"

"State of Mind" by Andrew Yarrow in *Education Week*, Oct. 21, 2009 (Vol. 29, #8, p. 21-23) http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2009/10/21/08publicagenda_ep.h29.html - the article has excellent graphs comparing the three groups of teachers.

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8. An Proposal on Merit Pay

In this short review in *Education Gadfly*, Jack Byers summarizes and critiques a new book on teacher performance-based pay by Susan Moore Johnson and John Papay. The authors address three questions:

- How should merit be assessed – by classroom evaluations, students' test scores, or a combination of both?
- Should each teacher's merit be assessed against an objective standard or compared to other teachers?
- Should merit pay be awarded to highly effective individual teachers or to a whole school staff for their school's accomplishments?

Johnson and Papay present their own proposal for a tiered pay-and-career structure, featuring four levels that teachers can choose to progress through over their careers:

- Probationary teachers;
- Teachers with tenure or those who have achieved permanent status (most teachers would not go higher than this level);
- Master teachers and school-based leaders;
- School and district leaders.

Johnson and Papay say this system would give effective teachers a way of earning more through promotion up a career ladder rather than monetary bonuses, and would provide mentoring and support to new teachers. They advocate monetary rewards for improved student achievement given at the school level, not for individual teachers.

Commentary on *Redesigning Teacher Pay: A System for the Next Generation of Educators* by Susan Moore Johnson and John P. Papay (Economic Policy Institute, 2009) by Jack Byers in *Education Gadfly*, Oct. 29, 2009 (Vol. 9, #38)
http://www.edexcellence.net/gadfly/index.cfm?issue=528&edition=N

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9. The Relationship Between a Sense of Efficacy and Job Stress

In this *Education Week* article, University of New Hampshire/Durham professor Thomas Newkirk says it's not true that top executives whose decisions have the greatest impact on others experience the most job stress. Quite the contrary, longitudinal studies have shown that lower-status workers are the most stressed, experiencing a greater incidence of high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, and shortened lifespans than higher-status workers. Researchers believe the reason is that lower-status workers have less control over their work and less sense of efficacy. Many teachers fall into this category because key variables in their work life seem out of their hands and they feel unable to work in creative, individualistic ways.

But is greater professional control for teachers a luxury we can't afford, given the high stakes in schools today? Many top-down reformers think so and impose a plethora of structured, scripted, "research-based" programs on teachers, claiming they will make things easier for teachers and produce higher test scores. In fact, says Newkirk, these programs erode teachers' sense of efficacy and make many of them miserable. And, he says, "don't we all hope

to be taught and cared for by professionals who are happy in their work? Do any of us want the frustrated, hurried doctor who is on the HMO stopwatch, or worse, the angry dentist?"

"Stress, Control, and the Deprofessionalizing of Teaching" by Thomas Newkirk in *Education Week*, Oct. 21, 2009 (Vol. 29, #8, p. 24-25)
http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2009/10/21/08newkirk.h29.html

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10. A California Teacher Surveys Her Students

This article in *Principal Leadership* picks up on a blog by Oakland teacher Elena Aguilar in which she tells about an anonymous survey she does of her students every year. Using a Likert 1-2-3-4-5 disagree/agree scale, she asks questions like:

- I was clear about the goals for the class.
- I felt like the content of this class connected to my life and was meaningful to me.
- I felt like you respected me.
- I felt like you gave me timely and useful feedback on my work.
- I felt like you were fair.
- I felt like you had high expectations for me.

Aguilar also asks open-ended questions, including:

- Tell me about a time in my class when you feel respected.
- Tell me about a time in my class when you felt frustrated.
- What advice can you give me about how to be a better teacher?

"Planning for the End of the Year" by Elena Aguilar in *Principal Leadership*, October 2009 (Vol. 10, #2, p. 7), http://www.edutopia.org/fostering-student-feedback.

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Do you have feedback? Is anything missing?

If you have comments or suggestions, if you saw an article or web item in the last week that you think should have been summarized, or if you would like to suggest additional publications that should be covered by the Marshall Memo, please e-mail: kim.marshall8@verizon.net

About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo is designed to keep principals, teachers, superintendents, and others very well-informed on current research and effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 37 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, and writer, lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

To produce the Marshall Memo, Kim subscribes to 44 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 about 50 issues a year).

Subscriptions:

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- About Kim Marshall (including links to articles)
- A free sample issue

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- The current issue (in PDF or Word format)
- All back issues (also in PDF or Word)
- A database of all articles to date, searchable by topic, title, author, source, level, etc.
- How to change access e-mail or password

Publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

American Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
ASCD, CEC SmartBriefs, Daily EdNews
Catalyst Chicago
Changing Schools (McREL)
Ed. Magazine
EDge
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Week
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
Essential Teacher (TESOL)
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Education Letter
Harvard Educational Review
JESPAR
Journal of Staff Development
Language Learner (NABE)
Middle Ground
Middle School Journal
New York Times
Newsweek
PEN Weekly NewsBlast
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Principal's Research Review
Reading Research Quarterly
Reading Today
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
Teacher Magazine (online)
Teachers College Record
The Atlantic Monthly
The Language Educator
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Tools for Schools/The Learning Principal