

# Marshall Memo 695

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education

July 17, 2017

## In This Issue:

1. [Why don't principals step up to mediocre and ineffective teaching?](#)
2. [Ten things a new leader discovers](#)
3. [Improving students' work by having them write for each other](#)
4. [Confronting myths about transgender youth](#)
5. [A framework for improving equity in school discipline](#)
6. [Tweaking the flipped classroom](#)
7. [A researcher's thoughts on poverty and schools](#)
8. [How bullying affects students with special needs](#)
9. Short items: (a) [How orchestra conductors are like principals](#); (b) [Spotting fake news](#); (c) [Google Earth tools](#); (d) [Drawing the states of the U.S. freehand](#)

## Quotes of the Week

“If you’re going to work with teenagers all day, you need to figure out a way to hack the teenage brain.”

Christina Gill (see item #3)

“We all know cases of children who will push the boundaries with their parents but will exert self-control with their grandparents; or adolescents who will exert self-control in one teacher’s class and act out in another.”

Carol Lee (see item #7)

“Seasoned leaders actually pay attention to the research on employee motivation and know that most of us are inspired by having a strong sense of purpose, a fair amount of autonomy, and the ability to demonstrate our personal strengths on a regular basis. Savvy leaders seek to energize and inspire people, not terrify them.”

Allison Vaillancourt (see item #2)

“If you want work-life balance, make sure everyone else in your organization has it first.”

Allison Vaillancourt (*ibid.*)

“Mixed messages about LGBT students permeate school culture.”

Laura Erickson-Schroth (see item #4)

“The most difficult part of the job is probably to deliver those difficult messages, and not everyone is capable of that.”

A veteran principal on the reluctance to give negative evaluations (see item #1)

---

## 1. Why Don't Principals Step Up to Mediocre and Ineffective Teaching?

In this *Education Week* article, Liana Loewus reports on a new study of 100 principals in Miami-Dade revealing that many are pulling their punches when it comes to giving honest evaluations to less-than-effective teachers. Asked confidentially for an assessment of their teachers, principals gave much more critical ratings than they did in the official process a few weeks later; for the record, almost all teachers were scored Effective or Very Effective. Another study confirmed this pattern, and also found wide variation among the states on the percent of teachers receiving mediocre or unsatisfactory ratings. (Click the link below to see a graph: Hawaii is at one end of the spectrum with almost no teachers receiving negative ratings, New Mexico is at the other end with about a quarter of teachers getting dinged.)

What's going on here? Wasn't there a big push in recent years to tighten up the process of teacher evaluation? True, but there are seven reasons for the persistence of grade inflation:

- *Just too demanding* – “It's very, very time-consuming to document poor performance,” says Marilyn Boerke of the Camas school district in Washington state. “At the end of the year, if you haven't repeatedly gone into the classroom and given the teacher suggestions for improvements, it's not really fair to give a poor evaluation.”

- *Finding the time* – Harried principals find it difficult to carve out the time needed to write up critical evaluations. “We're spread so thin as administrators,” said Boerke. “When all's said and done and it's June and you're responsible for submitting 32 evaluations, you'd err on the side of effective if you don't have the documentation to prove ineffective.”

- *Documentation* – Teaching is complex, and forming a fair and tenable critique based on relatively few classroom visits is challenging.

- *Being merciful* – “Somebody's job is in your hands,” says Jennifer Nauman, a Delaware principal. “The rubric is very subjective.”

- *Keeping the troops happy* – Principals need to maintain positive relationships with their colleagues, and low ratings on performance evaluations can wreak havoc. “We have to take seriously the fact that teacher evaluation is a relational enterprise,” says Allison Gilmour, co-author of the multi-state study.

- *The devil you know...* – If a teacher is dismissed or transfers to another school as a result of a negative rating, the replacement might be even less effective in the classroom.

- *Cowardice* – Many principals find it hard to confront a teacher with negative information. “The most difficult part of the job is probably to deliver those difficult messages,” says a veteran principal, “and not everyone is capable of that.”

“Principals Are Loath to Give Teachers Bad Ratings” by Liana Loewus in *Education Week*, July 13, 2017, <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2017/07/13/principals-are-loath-to-give-teachers-bad.html>

*[Back to page one](#)*

## 2. Ten Things a New Leader Discovers

In this *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, Allison Vaillancourt (University of Arizona) lists some delusions people have when they’ve worked their way up through the ranks and won an administrative position: they’ll have the freedom to set their own direction, make their own plans, surround themselves with people who share their work ethic and point of view, and give orders. Not true – especially in an academic environment. “New leaders are often surprised and disappointed by the realities of administrative life,” says Vaillancourt. “Missteps are easy to make, and you can be assured everyone will be taking notes when you stumble. Your motives will be questioned, your decisions challenged, and your personal integrity called into question – over and over again. If that sounds like something you can handle, you are ready for your new leadership role.” Some things to keep in mind:

- *You may not have been the people’s choice.* More than a few of your colleagues may have supported another candidate and regard you as a disappointing second choice. They may therefore be on the prowl for evidence that the selection committee blew it.

- *A rival candidate may be a direct report.* Outwardly polite, this person may be stewing with resentment. “Watch your back,” advises Vaillancourt, “and by no means take him to coffee to explain that you appreciate the difficulty of the situation – that will just make him feel worse.”

- *You may be lonely.* That old camaraderie will disappear and social contact will cease, or become more formal and guarded. “Your information sources will probably dry up,” says Vaillancourt, “and you will need to find a new support network.”

- *Being the boss doesn’t mean you get to be bossy.* Newbie managers sometimes make this mistake, she says. “Seasoned leaders actually pay attention to the research on employee motivation and know that most of us are inspired by having a strong sense of purpose, a fair amount of autonomy, and the ability to demonstrate our personal strengths on a regular basis. Savvy leaders seek to energize and inspire people, not terrify them.”

- *Your people are probably smarter than you.* Don’t get in their way as they do their work, and don’t try to micromanage them.

- *Give credit where it’s due.* “The minute you take credit for someone else’s idea is the minute you will crush any future demonstrations of creative or intellectual expression,” says Vaillancourt. “Phrases like ‘I have a great team’ are insufficient to demonstrate recognition and appreciation.” People need to hear their names and accomplishments shouted out publicly.

- *Leadership is a series of tough conversations.* Be honest, direct, and timely with critical feedback, Vaillancourt advises, but don’t be ruthless. She recommends three books: *Difficult Conversations*, *Thanks for the Feedback*, and *Radical Candor*.

- *Don't be afraid to demonstrate vulnerability.* Admitting mistakes is a sign of courage and wisdom, not weakness. “If you fumble, own it,” she advises. “It is far easier to forge an emotional connection with someone who is fallible than with someone who is perfect.”

- *Your best people are likely to leave, and that's not a betrayal.* Talented colleagues move on to new opportunities, and it's normal, not a sign of your poor leadership.

- *To be taken seriously, you need to work harder than anyone else.* “If you dare to work less than those who report to you, you will be labeled an entitled slacker,” says Vaillancourt. “If you want work-life balance, make sure everyone else in your organization has it first.”

“Now You're In Charge” by Allison Vaillancourt in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 21, 2017 (Vol. LXIII, #14, p. B16-17), <https://chroniclevitae.com/news/1797-now-you-re-in-charge>; Vaillancourt can be reached at [vaillana@email.arizona.edu](mailto:vaillana@email.arizona.edu).

[Back to page one](#)

### **3. Improving Students' Work By Having Them Write for Each Other**

“If you're going to work with teenagers all day, you need to figure out a way to hack the teenage brain,” says Christina Gill in this *Edutopia* article. A turning point for her came 12 years ago when she included this item in her end-of-year questionnaire: *If I were never to collect and grade your reading logs and you only read them out loud to your class, how would that change the quality of your work?* The unanimous response was that it would make them do a better job on their logs. Gill was a little shocked, but it got her thinking: “Most students want to do well in school and please their teachers. But here's the fact I've taken advantage of since that questionnaire: Teenagers really, really, really care about impressing their peers.” Gill has come up with a number of ways to get students working harder and smarter by writing and creating for their peers:

- *Ironic how-to guides* – Students write on topics like, “How to Thoroughly Annoy Your Classmates,” “How to Procrastinate,” and “Shakespeare's Ten-Step Guide to Gaining and Keeping Power.” They then share drafts, give each other tips, and work to make their essays as funny as possible. “Nothing quite beats the thrill of getting a laugh out of something that you wrote,” says Gill.

- *Reading logs and dice* – Students do a reading assignment for homework, write a one-page reaction, and are assigned a number from one to six. The next day, Gill rolls a die and students who have that number read their essays out loud. She still collects and grades everyone's work, but the random sampling gets everyone thinking harder.

- *Two truths and a lie* – Students write three paragraph-length stories, two of which are true and one untrue. Student volunteers read their stories aloud and the class guesses whether it's true or not – and are then told the answer. The excitement of tricking their classmates gets students cleverly crafting paragraphs full of rich detail.

- *Jigsaw presentations* – When Gill has a lot she wants students to absorb, she divides the content into chunks and assigns them to subgroups of students. They practice their piece of the jigsaw and teach it to their classmates, who are responsible for putting the pieces together and mastering the whole body of information.

Gill has found these strategies are especially helpful for students who are on the introverted side and aren't comfortable sharing their ideas in standard classroom formats. "In my experience, being an introvert doesn't mean that someone has no desire to communicate their ideas to the world," she says. "Ultimately, what I most love about having my students write for each other is that they realize how great their classmates are. They discover that the kid in the back who doesn't talk much can tell a hilarious story, or that the girl who never participates in class discussion has some insightful ideas on the night's homework. And when they see what their peers can do, they set higher standards for themselves."

"Hacking Teens' Desire to Impress Their Peers" by Christina Gill in *Edutopia*, February 24, 2017, <https://www.edutopia.org/article/hacking-teens-desire-to-impress-peers-christina-gill>

[\*Back to page one\*](#)

#### **4. Confronting Myths About Transgender Youth**

"Mixed messages about LGBT students permeate school culture," says psychiatrist Laura Erickson-Schroth in this article in *Education Week*. Lacking clear guidance, many educators "have difficulty knowing how to begin talking with students about gender identity," and may even harbor some common myths and misconceptions about transgender people:

- *Myth #1: All transgender students want to look like Barbie and Ken.* That is, they want to move from one end of the gender continuum to the other. The truth is that a lot of gender nonconforming people describe themselves as "gender fluid" and don't fit easily into stereotypes. Some are interested in taking hormones and having surgery, others are not.
- *Myth #2: It's rude to ask how you should address a transgender person.* "When these questions are asked sincerely and politely," says Erickson-Schroth, "most transgender people are glad to be asked what pronouns to use... rather than having someone assume and get it wrong."
- *Myth #3: Transgender students are trying to trick others.* "In reality, most transgender people are simply trying to live healthy and safe lives" says Erickson-Schroth. "Coming out can be a difficult process and involves decisions about how and when it is safe to do so, since those who do are often targets of harassment."
- *Myth #4: Transgender students are mentally ill, and therapy will change them.* It's true that LGBT youth have a higher incidence of depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation than the general population, but that's because of negative attitudes, harassment, discrimination, and self-doubt. At least nine states have banned "reparative" or "conversion" therapy for minors because it has been shown to be damaging and ineffective.
- *Myth #5: Laws support transgender youth.* "Although transgender identities are becoming a more visible and accepted part of American life," says Erickson-Schroth, "laws are not keeping pace." No federal law forbids discrimination in employment, education, or health care, and local policies (including bathroom access) are uneven to say the least.

As schools fine-tune their sex education and civics curriculum objectives to address these and other misconceptions, it's important that educators take advantage of teachable moments in classrooms, corridors, cafeterias, and playgrounds where students reveal mistaken

beliefs. Stepping up and correcting them can have real impact and play an important part in making schools safe for gender-nonconforming youth.

“Five Myths About Transgender Students Educators Need to Unlearn” by Laura Erickson-Schroth in *Education Week*, July 10, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2titz7v>

[Back to page one](#)

## 5. A Framework for Improving Equity in School Discipline

In this chapter in *Review of Research in Education*, Anne Gregory (Rutgers University), Russell Skiba (Indiana University), and Kavitha Mediratta (Atlantic Philanthropies) offer ten research-based principles to help schools address student behavior challenges in a developmentally appropriate manner and reduce race and gender disparities in consequences:

### • Prevention:

- *Supportive relationships* – Forge authentic connections between and among teachers and students.
- *Bias-aware classrooms and respectful schools* – Establish inclusive, positive classroom and school environments in which students believe they are being treated fairly.
- *Academic rigor* – Promote the potential of all students through high expectations and rich learning opportunities.
- *Culturally relevant and responsive teaching* – Instruction reflects and is respectful of the diversity of today’s classrooms and schools.
- *Opportunities for learning and correcting behavior* – Behavior is approached from a non-punitive mindset, and instruction proactively strengthens student social skills, while providing structured opportunities for behavioral correction within the classroom as necessary.

### • Intervention:

- *Data-based inquiry for equity* – Data are used regularly to identify “hot spots” of disciplinary conflict or differential treatment of particular groups.
- *Problem-solving approaches to discipline* – Solutions aim to uncover sources of behavior or teacher-student conflict and address the identified needs.
- *Inclusion of student and family voice on conflicts’ causes and solutions* – Students’ and families’ participation is integrated into discipline policies, procedures, and practices.
- *Reintegration of students after conflict and absence* – Students are supported in reentering the community of learners after conflict or long-term absence has occurred.

### • Prevention and Intervention:

- *Multi-tiered system of supports* – A tiered framework is used to match increasing levels of intensity of support to students’ differentiated needs.

“Eliminating Disparities in School Discipline: A Framework for Intervention” by Anne Gregory, Russell Skiba, and Kavitha Mediratta in *Review of Research in Education*, March 2017 (Vol. 41, p. 253-278), <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3102/0091732X17690499>; Gregory can be reached at [annegreg@gsapp.rutgers.edu](mailto:annegreg@gsapp.rutgers.edu).

[Back to page one](#)

## 6. Tweaking the Flipped Classroom

In this response to an *Education Week Teacher* article, Daniel Schwartz (Stanford University) lists the reasons “flipped” classrooms started in colleges and universities:

- “All these talented students and experts in the same room, and yet we lectured,” says Schwartz. “It was a waste of a great setting for learning.”
- By getting students to watch videos of lectures for homework, class time could be used to involve all students in active learning: collaboration, questions, just-in-time feedback, clarifying misconceptions and confusions, peer instruction, and more.

“The difficulty,” says Schwartz, “is that lectures are still a numbing way to learn, and flipped instruction expects students to watch lectures at home.” Is that such an improvement? Here’s how he and his colleagues tweaked the idea – they dubbed it “double-flipped” instruction:

- Students get a starter activity for homework that helps them understand the nature of the problem that the lecture will solve.
- In class, the instructor gives a live 10-minute lecture on the problem’s solution.
- During the lecture, students are much more likely to ask questions because they have a strong grasp of the problem and want to know how it’s solved.
- The instructor hands out new problems that relate to the homework and lecture, and students work on them in small groups.
- “This creates an optimal time for group activity,” says Schwartz, “so that students are prepared and eager to learn from the lecture.”
- The instructor circulates, checking in, answering questions, and elaborating.

Schwartz says he and his colleagues use this approach for big ideas, not smaller chunks of their curriculum. “Double-flipped instruction works for many topics and is applicable to elementary, middle, and high-school classrooms alike,” he says. “Double-flipped instruction helps solve the problem of making homework more interesting, and more impressively, making lectures work better.”

“Response: ‘Double Flip’ Your Classroom” by Daniel Schwartz in *Education Week Teacher*, July 5, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2va3oNC>; Schwartz can be reached at [daniel.schwartz@stanford.edu](mailto:daniel.schwartz@stanford.edu).

*[Back to page one](#)*

## 7. A Researcher’s Thoughts on Poverty and Schools

In this chapter in *Review of Research in Education*, Carol Lee (Northwestern University) pushes back on this bleak assessment of the effects of poverty:

Poverty holds a seemingly unbreakable grip on families, neighborhoods, cities, and entire countries. It stretches from one generation to the next, trapping individuals in a socioeconomic pit that is nearly impossible to ascend. Part of the fuel for poverty’s unending cycle is its suppressing effects on individuals’ cognitive development, executive functioning, and attention...  
(*Psychological Science*, September 2015)

Lee goes on to provide a broad overview of recent developments in cognition, human development, and neuroscience that give some hope to educators as they “design for diversity.”

Two brief excerpts:

• Lee lists the unspoken questions a student might have when deciding whether to put forth effort when confronted with an academic challenge:

- What am I being asked to do?
- Am I capable of tackling this task?
- Is this task meaningful to me?
- What supports are available to me to wrestle with it?
- Do I feel safe in attempting to wrestle with it?
- How do I weigh any risks or competing goals?

These questions provide succinct, step-by-step guidance to educators as they plan and scaffold learning experiences for their students.

• Lee’s comment on executive control: “We all know cases of children who will push the boundaries with their parents but will exert self-control with their grandparents; or adolescents who will exert self-control in one teacher’s class and act out in another... While using existing measures, it is likely that many of the bankers whose decision making led to the most recent economic depression would have scored well on measures of executive control, and it is likely there are many areas of their lives where they do/did exert self-control, it is clear professionally they did not.””

“Integrating Research on How People Learn and Learning Across Settings as a Window of Opportunity to Address Inequality in Educational Processes and Outcomes” by Carol Lee in *Review of Research in Education*, March 2017 (Vol. 41, p. 88-111), <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3102/0091732X16689046>; Lee can be reached at [cdlee@northwestern.edu](mailto:cdlee@northwestern.edu).

*[Back to page one](#)*

## **8. How Bullying Affects Students with Special Needs**

“Students with disabilities are disproportionately involved within the bullying dynamic,” say Chad Rose (University of Missouri) and Nicholas Gage (University of Florida) in this article in *Exceptional Children*. Their three-year study of 6,531 students in grades 3-12 revealed that students with special needs were more likely than their regular-education peers to be victims *and perpetrators* of bullying, and this discrepancy was consistent over time. Given these findings, Rose and Gage recommend systematic behavior skills instruction through the grades, and mention PBIS (Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports), Expect Respect, and Stop/Walk/Talk as promising programs. “Perhaps the most effective approach to reducing bullying involvement among youth with disabilities,” they add, “is direct instruction focused on social and communication skill acquisition.”

“Exploring the Involvement of Bullying Among Students with Disabilities Over Time” by Chad Rose and Nicholas Gage in *Exceptional Children*, April 2017 (Vol. 83, #3, p. 298-314), <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0014402916667587>; the authors can be reached at [rosech@missouri.edu](mailto:rosech@missouri.edu) and [gagenicholas@coe.ufl.edu](mailto:gagenicholas@coe.ufl.edu).

*[Back to page one](#)*

## 9. Short Items:

**a. *How orchestra conductors are like principals*** – This TED Talk by Itay Talgam [http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/itay\\_talgam\\_lead\\_like\\_the\\_great\\_conductors.html](http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/itay_talgam_lead_like_the_great_conductors.html) provides a running commentary on the leadership styles of of several well-known symphony conductors in action. There are remarkable parallels to different styles of school leadership.

“Lead Like the Great Conductors,” a TED Talk by Itay Talgam, July 2009

[\*Back to page one\*](#)

**b. *Spotting fake news*** – Have your students play this game from NPR Ed <http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2017/07/03/533676536/test-your-fake-news-judgement-play-this-game> to see how good they are at telling fake from real news.

“To Test Your Fake News Judgment, Play This Game” by Tennessee Watson, National Public Radio Ed, July 2, 3017

[\*Back to page one\*](#)

**c. *Google Earth tools*** – This Google Earth link allows students to explore wonders of the world, see the architecture of Barcelona, and join a Hawaiian ocean canoe circum-navigating the world by the stars and swells: <https://www.google.com/earth/education/>

“Everywhere Is Somewhere” from Google Earth, 2017

[\*Back to page one\*](#)

**d. *Drawing the states of the U.S. freehand*** – This interactive quiz challenges students to draw the shape of each state with a computer cursor. If the shape is close enough, the program pops it onto a U.S. map in the correct spot. Check it out at <http://time.com/states-quiz>.

“Shape of the States” in *Time Magazine*, July 24, 2017

[\*Back to page one\*](#)

© Copyright 2017 Marshall Memo LLC

*If you have feedback or suggestions,  
please e-mail [kim.marshall48@gmail.com](mailto:kim.marshall48@gmail.com)*

# 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 48 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, consultant, and writer, 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).

## ***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)
- Topics (with a count of articles from each)
- Article selection criteria
- Headlines for all issues
- Reader opinions
- About Kim Marshall (including links to articles)
- 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 and podcasts in YouTube and MP3
- An archive of all articles so far, searchable by topic, title, author, source, level, etc.
- A collection of "classic" articles from all issues

## ***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  
District Management Journal  
Ed. Magazine  
Education Digest  
Education Next  
Education Update  
Education Week  
Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis  
Educational Horizons  
Educational Leadership  
Educational Researcher  
Edutopia  
Elementary School Journal  
English Journal  
Essential Teacher  
Exceptional Children  
Go Teach  
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  
Literacy Today  
Mathematics Teaching in the Middle School  
Middle School Journal  
Peabody Journal of Education  
Phi Delta Kappan  
Principal  
Principal Leadership  
Principal's Research Review  
Reading Research Quarterly  
Responsive Classroom Newsletter  
Rethinking Schools  
Review of Educational Research  
School Administrator  
School Library Journal  
Teacher  
Teachers College Record  
Teaching Children Mathematics  
Teaching Exceptional Children  
The Atlantic  
The Chronicle of Higher Education  
The Education Gadfly  
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 Magazine