Marshall Memo 151

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
September 11, 2006

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"There is just no getting around it, to become excellent a school must have a risk-taking, visionary, practical leader."
Joan Lipsitz and Teri West (see item #4)

"When others accuse us of holding prejudicial attitudes, we should interrogate ourselves; when we believe others are treating us unfairly, we should reach out to understand their actions."
Robin Ely, Debra Meyerson, and Martin Davidson (see item #1)

"Outside of work, my teacher friends and I talk about teaching. Watching TV, I get ideas for teaching. Lying in bed, before I fall asleep, I think of different situations in teaching. Even in my dreams, I am succeeding or failing at teaching."
Samantha Cleaver, Washington, D.C. teacher (*Education Week*, Sept. 6, 2006, p. 43)

"Teachers are alone with their students more than 99% of the time. The smart principal's goal is to install a supervisory 'voice' in teachers' heads so they are always monitoring and improving their performance, even when the principal is not around."
Kim Marshall (see item #3)

"Every day, I face a choice between staying caught up on e-mail or being present in the halls, dropping in on classes, and attending athletic events."
Matt Glendinning, New Jersey school administrator (see item #2)

"I don't believe in bad kids. There are usually good reasons for bad behavior."
John Silva, Cambridge, MA high-school safety director (see item #5)

"A company selling an orange-colored beverage under the label 'orange juice' can get into legal trouble if the beverage contains little or no actual juice. There are no consequences, however, for giving credit for Algebra 2 to students who have learned little algebra."
Chrys Dougherty, Lynn Mellor, & Shuling Jian (*Education Week*, Sept. 6, 2006, p. 42)

1. Getting Past "Walking on Eggshells" on Race, Gender, Etc.

This article from the September *Harvard Business Review* shows once again that the corporate world has much to offer K-12 educators. Robin Ely, Debra Meyerson, and Martin Davidson, three business school professors, say that despite laudable progress in workplace diversity, the reduction of overt prejudice and discrimination, and increased sensitivity to issues of race, religion, and gender, "identity abrasions" occur every day. Some examples:

• *A white person confuses the names of two Asian-American co-workers.*

• *An African-American executive is addressed less formally than her white male counterparts.*

• *A woman's idea is misattributed to a male colleague.*

"Repeated experiences of this kind can diminish people's sense of how much others value and respect them," write the authors.

Identity abrasions can also occur on the other side – when majority-group members are accused of being prejudiced or treating others unfairly. "Because they often have meant no harm," say Ely, Meyerson, and Davidson, "they tend to respond defensively, upset by any suggestion that their moral goodness is being questioned."

The usual institutional response to such incidents is sensitivity training and zero-tolerance policies. These send a clear message about what's unacceptable and impart some useful cultural knowledge – but can also create a restrictive and fearful atmosphere. "We have found that political correctness does not only pose problems for those in the 'majority,'" write the authors. "When majority members cannot speak candidly, *members of underrepresented groups also suffer*: 'Minorities' can't discuss their concerns about fairness and fears about feeding into negative stereotypes, and that adds to an atmosphere in which people tiptoe around the issues and one another. These dynamics breed misunderstanding, conflict, and mistrust, corroding both managerial and team effectiveness." Some actual examples:

• *A white manager fears she will be perceived as racist if she gives critical feedback to her Latino subordinate.*

• *A black engineer is passed over for promotion and wonders whether his race has anything to do with it, but he's reluctant to raise this concern lest he be seen as "playing the race card."*

• *A woman who wants to make partner in an accounting firm resists seeking coaching on her leadership style; she worries that doing so would confirm the notion that women don't have what it takes to make partner.*

• *A white manager refrains from sharing critical feedback with a young Latina associate who is competent, energetic, and well liked but isn't generating enough business. He fears that if he is frank with her, she will conclude that the company isn't ready to promote a woman of color. Sensing her boss's reticence, the associate wonders what she has done to alienate him.*

• *A black associate in a consulting firm gets mediocre ratings from his white clients and asks his boss if she thinks these stem from racial bias. She disagrees, but the associate isn't convinced. He goes looking for evidence to bolster his claim, and when he doesn't find it, he becomes increasingly angry, resentful, and hopeless about his prospects for promotion. In his next review, his boss says he has a "bad attitude."*

"In each of these cases," write Ely, Meyerson, and Davidson, "people's judgments – and their fears of others' judgments – drive the negative dynamic. When we feel judged, it cuts to the core of our self-image as being good, competent, and worthy. To counter such identity abrasions, we deny our experiences, avoid difficult conversations, react angrily, and seek advice only to confirm our innocence. These behaviors have only one goal: self-protection. When self-protection becomes more important than the work, the group's mission, or relationships with others, people lose their connection to one another, making it difficult to take risks, learn, and solve problems creatively together… Resentments build, relationships fray, and performance suffers."

What is to be done? Based on fifteen years of research and consulting, the authors offer five principles designed to short-circuit these emotional reactions and deal constructively with identity abrasions when they occur. It isn't easy, they say, but "when people replace their need to defend themselves with a desire to learn, the possibilities for constructive cross-cultural interactions increase enormously. Learning requires people to acknowledge their limitations and to suspend their need to be right or to prove their competence. In so doing, they make themselves vulnerable to others' judgments so that they can perform their jobs more effectively." For those who feel they are targets of insensitive behavior and for those who are accused of being insensitive, the authors offer these suggestions:

• *Principle 1: Pause and reflect.* Anger is a common reaction to a threat to our identity. "We react by casting blame and judgment, which most often incites defensiveness in others," write the authors. "Taking time – even a few moments – to identify our feelings and consider our responses will help us to respond more effectively."

• *Principle 2: Connect with others.* "When we experience an identity abrasion," write Ely, Meyerson, and Davidson, "our impulse is to focus inward, to justify, explain, and defend ourselves." Instead, they suggest, we should focus outward, "on goals that are larger than we are, such as advancing broad social ideals, contributing to a task, or striving to achieve an organization's mission. Goals such as these connect us with others by infusing our lives with meaning. Meaningful goals remind us of what is at stake in a given situation, giving us a reason to engage with others even if we feel threatened."

• *Principle 3: Question yourself.* This is the most difficult step, especially for women and people of color whose concerns have so often been dismissed or trivialized. But it's still

important to ask, "What am I missing in the way I'm seeing this situation? How might my desire to be proven right or innocent be distorting my view of reality or of the other person?" The authors stress that they aren't suggesting that people question their experiences. "On the contrary," they say, "feeling offended or threatened in an interaction provides an important signal that invites inquiry. Instead, we are suggesting that people question their interpretation of their experiences, their beliefs about what has happened, who is right, and so forth. Interpretation is not the same as truth. Questioning oneself means letting go of one's protective scripts, identifying what images of self feel threatened, being open to perspectives that may be difficult to hear, and seeing what can be learned."

• *Principle 4: Get genuine support*. "Unfortunately," write the authors, "most of us seek help from the wrong people, seeing those who challenge our point of view as threats and those who reinforce it as allies. Receiving reinforcement may be comforting, but it often doesn't confer much learning." Support is not necessarily validation that we are right, they continue. "Although that kind of backing can feel good in the moment, it provides the opposite of what we really need. What we need is the counsel of trusted colleagues who can help us identify choices we make about how to behave or what to believe, as well as what alternatives are available… Giving genuine support means challenging the person seeking it; receiving that support means not reacting defensively."

• *Principle 5: Shift your mind-set*. "We have found that people who are able to turn identify abrasions into opportunities have the capacity to radically shift their way of thinking – about themselves, their situations, and other people," write the authors. "Such people tend to be highly self-aware, but they were not born with self-awareness; they continuously develop it as they systematically reflect on and analyze the behavioral patterns that underlie dissatisfaction in their lives. Through self-reflection, people break out of negative patterns. The fundamental shift is away from a mind-set that says, "You need to change," to one that asks, "What can I change?"

What can leaders do to get people to use these five principles? Ely, Meyerson, and Davidson say they need to "put aside the PC rule book and instead model and encourage risk taking in service of building the organization's capacity to foster high-quality relationships." This involves:

- *Creating a safe environment*. "People in the organization need to feel that, in questioning themselves or making themselves vulnerable, they will not be judged or punished," they write. Of course unacceptable actions, such as hate e-mails, should be dealt with severely, but "zero tolerance does not mean zero discussion." An incident of this kind requires a full-staff discussion and/or a systematic inquiry into the conditions that made it possible.

- *Assiduously modeling self-questioning*. This is difficult, since it runs counter to the image of the confident, decisive leader. "As it turns out, however," say Ely, Meyerson, and Davidson, "leaders who question themselves and learn from others in the service of clear goals do not bespeak a lack of confidence; rather they demonstrate humility, clarity, and strength. Indeed, the leaders we have observed who exemplify this principle generate fierce respect and loyalty from their followers."

- *Seek out others' experience*. Leaders need to build close relationships with employees representing diverse populations within the organization so they can understand their point of view and anticipate problems that might occur.

- *Link a learning orientation to organizational success*. Leaders should take every opportunity to put out the word that the five principles are directly linked to achieving the organization's mission.

Implementing the principles is not easy, concede the authors. "They entail taking risks and opening up when we feel most vulnerable and in need of self-protection. When others accuse us of holding prejudicial attitudes, we should interrogate ourselves; when we believe others are treating us unfairly, we should reach out to understand their actions. These prescriptions do not sell easily; self-righteousness feels more satisfying. But self-righteousness can also lead to divisive conflict, alienation, and ultimately, poor performance. When people treat their cultural differences – and the conflicts and tensions that arise from them – as opportunities to seek a more accurate view of themselves, each other, and the situation, trust builds and relationships become stronger."

"Rethinking Political Correctness" by Robin Ely, Debra Meyerson, and Martin Davidson in *Harvard Business Review*, September 2006 (Vol. 84, #9, p. 78-87) no e-link available

2. E-Mail: How to Keep It Under Control

During the 2004-05 school year, New Jersey school administrator Matt Glendinning received 17,500 e-mails and sent 12,500, spending about 2½ hours a day in the process. In this article in the September *Kappan*, he acknowledges the benefits of e-mail – swift and efficient communication, better-informed decision-making through improved consultation with stakeholders, avoiding time-consuming meetings, having a dynamic to-do list at his finger-tips, and effortlessly saving all correspondence – and wonders how a school could function without it.

Yet Glendinning is acutely aware of e-mail's downsides and the problems it raises for users:

• The mistakes that are all too easy to make, for example, sending a message to the wrong person or hitting "Reply to All" when you only want to reply to one person;

• E-mail's inability to convey tone, stress, or nuance;

• The way e-mail gobbles up time: "Every day," says Glendinning, "I face a choice between staying caught up on e-mail or being present in the halls, dropping in on classes, and attending athletic events."

• The fact that e-mailing is a solitary and isolating act: "I fear that, the more we come to rely on e-mail, the less we will value interpersonal skills and direct talk, the less interest we will have in others, and the freer we will be to ignore them," says Glendinning. "This dehumanizing tendency is troubling in general and particularly alarming for schools, where the quality of individual relationships is so critical to their mission and its success."

• The way e-mail makes it easier to raise problems because there's no awkward face-to-face conversation;

• The staccato back-and-forth rhythm of e-mail that constantly interrupts us, making sustained thought, reading, or conversation difficult;

• The advantage e-mail gives to those who are fast typists and can think and type simultaneously, which can distort decision-making;

• Finally, the way a build-up of e-mail tempts us to make quick, thoughtless decisions ("I agree") just to get through the pile.

"Maybe this explains why I feel so wiped out at the end of the day," says Glendinning. "Try as I may to resist looking immediately at new messages, the truth of the matter is that many of them turn out to be responses to important questions from earlier in the day, and I want to get them settled." We can't tell which messages are important, and by the time we've looked, we've been interrupted. This constant process of having to get back into whatever we were doing is exhausting and stressful, and is not conducive to focused, effective work.

What is to be done? Glendinning concludes with some thoughtful tips for managing e-mail:

- Turn off the audible tone that tells you about each incoming e-mail. It's not a phone!

- Limit e-mail to two chunks of time – perhaps the beginning and the end of each work day.

- Resist writing long e-mail responses. "Messages requiring a complex answer merit a face-to-face conversation," says Glendinning.

- "Be cautious about making organizational policy via e-mail," he says. "It matters who hasn't joined in the conversation." Again, a face-to-face meeting is better.

- With group e-mails, distinguish between those that require a response and those that don't.

- Seriously question whether you want to use a handheld (BlackBerry or Treo) for e-mail. "The good thing is that you're reachable by e-mail at all times; the bad thing is that you're reachable by e-mail at all times."

- Encourage your colleagues to use the calendar feature built into most e-mail programs, which allows a group to see immediately when they are all free to engage in a "live" exchange.

- Recognize that e-mail is "auto-catalyzing" – that is, the number of messages you get is a product of others' sense of whether you will reply. "The more efficient you are in responding," says Glendinning, "the more colleagues will come to feel that e-mail is the best way to reach you. Thus you will receive even more messages. Recognize that you are partly in control of this cycle."

"E-mail: Boon or Bane for School Leaders" by Matt Glendinning in *Phi Delta Kappan*, September 2006 (Vol. 88, #1, p. 83-86), no e-link available

3. The Case for Using Rubrics to Evaluate Teachers

In this article in the fall issue of *EDge*, Phi Delta Kappa's new magazine, former Boston administrator Kim Marshall describes the moment he lost faith in the lengthy teacher evaluation forms he was required to fill out as a principal. "I'm faking it," he remembers saying out loud as he typed his umpteenth write-up on his home computer late one evening. Here was the logic behind his lament:

- Principals often write evaluations based on incomplete information on classrooms.
- Most evaluations are therefore superficial and miss the target.
- Teachers know this and usually don't take their evaluations too seriously.
- They accept them with a shrug and rarely make changes in their teaching.
- Once in a blue moon a principal will use an evaluation to make the case for firing a chronically ineffective teacher; then, evaluations really matter.
- But most of the time evaluations have virtually no impact on student learning.
- *Therefore*, spending hundreds of hours on written evaluations is not a good use of principals' time.

"That evening I became a cynic about teacher evaluation," says Marshall, "and in my remaining years as a principal I did my write-ups as quickly and as close to the deadline as possible, sometimes with the help of a good, stiff drink."

But Marshall was never comfortable with this cynical mode and kept looking for a better approach to teacher evaluation. Finally he found it: rubrics. Inspired by Charlotte Danielson's work, a small number of districts and charter schools had begun using rubrics, which address several of the problems of conventional instruments:

• Rubrics cut to the chase, giving teachers clearer feedback on where they stand on a scale of proficiency.

• Rubrics explicitly state the characteristics of each level of performance, giving mediocre and unsatisfactory teachers a clear road map for improving their performance.

• Rubrics are much less time-consuming for principals to complete because lengthy narratives and lesson descriptions are not required.

• Rubrics therefore allow a principal to devote more time and energy to the heart of the matter – what's being taught, whether students are learning, and how the instructional program can be improved every day.

However, as Marshall looked at various rubrics from around the country, he found that they were either too lengthy and detailed to be practical for day-to-day use in schools, they were organized illogically, or they had gaps in their analysis of pedagogy. So he decided to take a crack at designing a new set of rubrics without these disadvantages. Here are the steps he followed:

• *Deciding on the domains*: After looking at a number of different ways of organizing the basic areas of teaching (from Danielson, Saphier and Gower, North Star Academy, Boston Public Schools, San Francisco Public Schools, Aspire Charter Schools, and others), Marshall decided on this synthesis:

A. Planning and Preparation for Learning
B. Classroom Management
C. Delivery of Instruction
D. Monitoring, Assessment, and Follow-up
E. Family and Community Outreach
F. Professional Responsibilities

• *Deciding on the rating scale and labels*: Historically, rating scales have ranged from two-point (Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory) to 10-point, but there is an emerging consensus on a 4-3-2-1 scale that clearly differentiates between proficient and less-than-proficient performance (no hiding in the middle, which is possible with odd-numbered scales). Marshall looked at a number of possibilities and decided on:

4 – Expert
3 – Proficient
2 – Needs Improvement
1 – Does Not Meet Standards

• *Writing criteria in each domain*: The most challenging part of designing rubrics is sorting through the thousands of descriptions of good teaching that have been compiled through the years and writing them in clear, succinct prose. Marshall began with the Proficient level, anchoring it as a solid, praise-worthy level of performance, and compiled ten descriptors in each of the domains of teaching. Here's a sample from the second domain:

B. Classroom Management

The teacher:

- Clearly communicates and consistently enforces high standards for student behavior.
- Is fair and respectful toward students and builds positive relationships.
- Commands respect and refuses to tolerate disruption.
- Fosters positive interactions among students and teaches useful social skills.
- Teaches routines and has students maintain them all year.
- Develops students' self-discipline and teaches them to take responsibility for their own actions.
- Has a repertoire of discipline "moves" and can capture and maintain students' attention.
- Maximizes academic learning time through coherence, lesson momentum, and smooth transitions.
- Is a confident, dynamic "presence" and nips most discipline problems in the bud.
- Uses incentives wisely to encourage and reinforce student cooperation.

• *Creating the rubrics*: The final step was teasing the Proficient-level criteria out to the Expert, Needs Improvement, and Does Not Meet Standards levels. In a way, this is the easiest part of constructing rubrics, but the key is creating distinct language at each level, not just replicating the same wording with "Always," "Sometimes," "Seldom," and "Never." Marshall's philosophy was that the Expert level should be a high bar, reserved for truly

exemplary teachers. Here is a sample rubric for the fourth domain, Monitoring, Assessment, and Follow-Up, with a hypothetical teacher's performance highlighted in yellow:

The teacher:

4 - Expert
a. Posts the criteria for proficient work, including rubrics and exemplars, and students internalize them. b. Uses a variety of first-rate assessments to pre-diagnose and continuously monitor students' learning. c. Continuously checks for understanding, unscrambles confusion, and gives specific, helpful feedback. d. Has students set ambitious goals, self-assess and -monitor, and take responsibility for their progress. e. Frequently posts students' work with rubrics and commentary and uses it to motivate and direct effort. f. Immediately uses interim assessment data to fine-tune teaching, re-teach, and help struggling students. g. Relentlessly follows up with struggling students with time and support to reach proficiency. h. Makes sure that students who need specialized diagnosis and help receive appropriate services ASAP. i. Charts and analyzes assessment data, draws action conclusions, and shares them with others. j. Constantly reflects on the effectiveness of teaching and works every day to improve.
3 - Proficient
a. Posts clear criteria for proficiency, including rubrics and exemplars of student work. b. Diagnoses students' knowledge and skills up front and uses a variety of assessments during each unit. c. Frequently checks for understanding and gives students helpful feedback if they seem confused. d. Has students set goals, self-assess, and know where they stand academically at all times. e. Regularly posts students' work to make visible and celebrate their progress with respect to standards. f. Uses data from interim assessments to adjust teaching, re-teach, and follow up with failing students. g. Takes responsibility for students who are not succeeding and tenaciously gives them extra help. h. When necessary, refers students for specialized diagnosis and extra help. **i. Analyzes data from summative assessments, draws conclusions, and shares them appropriately.** j. Reflects on the effectiveness of lessons and units and continuously works to improve them.
2 – Needs Improvement
a. Tells students some of the qualities that their finished work should exhibit. b. Uses pencil-and-paper quizzes and tests with some open-ended questions to assess student learning. c. Asks questions to see if students understand. d. Urges students to look over their tests, see where they had trouble, and aim to improve those areas. e. Posts some 'A' student work as an example others. f. Looks over students' tests to see if there is anything that needs to be re-taught. g. Offers students who fail tests some additional time to study and do re-takes. h. Sometimes doesn't refer students promptly for special help, or refers students who don't need it. i. Records students' grades and notices some general patterns for future reference. j. At the end of a teaching unit or semester, thinks about what might have been done better.
1 - Does Not Meet Standards
a. Expects students to know (or figure out) what it takes to get good grades. b. Uses only multiple-choice and short-answer pencil-and-paper tests to assess student learning. c. Rarely takes time to check for understanding. d. Urges students to work harder and be more careful on future tests. e. Posts only a few samples of 'A' work. f. Looks over unit and final tests to see if there are any lessons for the future. g. Tells students that if they fail a test, that's it; the class has to move on to cover the curriculum. h. Either fails to refer students for special education or refers students who do not need it. i. Records students' grades and moves on with the curriculum. j. When a teaching unit or lesson doesn't go well, chalks it up to experience.

Overall rating: ___ Comments:

Marshall goes on to make several suggestions on the best ways to use teacher evaluation rubrics:

First, the rubrics cover every aspect of a teacher's professional work and are designed for summative, end-of-the-year evaluation, not as a daily checklist.

Second, to fill out the rubrics knowledgeably, principals need to gather a great deal of information. Marshall believes the best way to do this is making frequent classroom mini-observations (three to five teachers a day, 5-15 minutes each) with face-to-face follow-up conversations. These give teachers a chance to fill in missing information and get feedback from the principal throughout the year.

Third, another way for a principal to fill in gaps in his or her knowledge about teachers is to ask them to fill out the rubrics themselves just before the evaluation process, using a highlighter to swipe the whole line that best describes their performance. The principal also uses a highlighter on his or her own copy and then, during the conference, teacher and principal compare ratings page by page and debate the evidence (with the principal, of course, making the final call). Evaluations will be fairer and more credible, says Marshall, if teachers have substantive input – and the principal really listens.

Fourth, if a teacher's performance shows signs of being unsatisfactory, the principal should follow district policy, completing several interim rubric evaluations during the year with clear direction to the teacher for remedial action and time to improve before the next evaluation.

Why are student achievement gains not included in these rubrics? Marshall gives five reasons why the teacher evaluation process is not the best place for administrators to address student learning results:

• Summative student achievement data, including standardized test scores, are rarely available in May, which is when final teacher evaluations typically have to be turned in.

• Even if test scores were available, assessment experts agree that standardized test scores are not a fair way to measure an individual teacher's effectiveness in single year.

• Assessments of student learning are almost always administered by the teacher in question. "Most teachers act professionally," says Marshall, "but when the stakes are high, it's inevitable that some (especially those with the most to lose) will distort the data."

• Teachers of art, music, physical education, and some other areas would be hard pressed to produce objective evidence of student learning, so how would they be evaluated?

• "Making student learning part of teacher evaluations," argues Marshall, "is likely to undermine the kind of collegiality and open dialogue within teacher teams and between teachers and administrators that is vital to producing gains in achievement. If student results are part of the evaluation process, teachers are likely to tense up and refrain from taking risks and sharing ideas with their colleagues – and would therefore teach less effectively."

The best way to include student learning, argues Marshall, is to create a "professional learning community," holding teachers accountable for the key processes needed to make that happen. "Principals have the power to orchestrate and monitor a dynamic wherein teacher teams work toward common curriculum goals, give frequent interim assessments (perhaps

every nine weeks), and use the data continuously to improve their teaching and help struggling students," he writes. "Research strongly suggests that this process is the engine that improves student achievement and narrows racial and economic gaps. I believe the engine will run most smoothly and powerfully in a low-stakes environment, with teacher teams acting as the main drivers of the data-driven improvement process."

"Teachers are alone with their students more than 99% of the time," concludes Marshall. "The smart principal's goal is to install a supervisory 'voice' in teachers' heads so they are always monitoring and improving their performance, even when the principal is not around. The best way to accomplish this is for the principal to visit classrooms frequently, confer with teachers and teacher teams about interim learning results, provide support, encouragement, and occasional redirection – and pay particular attention to the rubric criteria that relate to professional learning community."

"The Why's and How's of Teacher Evaluation Rubrics" by Kim Marshall in *EDge*, September/October 2006 (Vol. 2, #1, p. 1-19); the article is available at http://www.marshallmemo.com: click on About Kim Marshall and scroll down.

4. Keys to Successful Middle Schools

In this article in the September *Kappan*, middle-school experts Joan Lipsitz and Teri West report on their experience with the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform, spelling out criteria for excellence in four areas: academic excellence, developmental responsiveness, social equity, and organizational structures and processes.

Throughout the article, Lipsitz and West emphasize the key role of the principal. "There is just no getting around it," they write, "to become excellent, a school must have a risk-taking, visionary, practical leader." In their school visits, they found that principals enjoyed answering one particular question: If you were moving to another school, what would be the 3-5 things you would do? They liked it because it challenged them to evaluate their work to date and fantasize about starting over. One principal came up with the following list (quoted verbatim):

• Communicate a vision for student success very early on, continuously articulate the vision throughout the year, and have a plan for realizing it. Staff members need to see very early on how high the bar is raised, what the expectations are, and what needs to be done to get there.

• Look at how the school collects data, in which areas, and how the data are used for planning. What guides schoolwide initiatives? It is extremely important to collect data, formally and informally, to support the school's goals. There is no other way to be able to assess accurately the school's strengths and weaknesses.

• Look at how each schoolwide initiative is tied into the school improvement plan. It is easy to get off track quickly. Before you know it, there is so much going on at the school that things can quickly become disconnected.

• Continually encourage the staff in the great things they are already doing and give them the latitude and flexibility to try something new and different.

• Open the school and its classrooms to external critical friends. We constantly talk about the need for accountability as well as the need for continuous school improvement. What a great way to achieve both by having professionals in the field with specific expertise come into the school to observe our teaching practices in the classroom and review our supports for students and provide feedback."

"What Makes a Good School? Identifying Excellent Middle Schools" by Joan Lipsitz and Teri West in *Phi Delta Kappan*, September 2006 (Vol. 88, #1, p. 57-66), no e-link available

5. School Safety in a Cambridge, Massachusetts High School

This article in the September *Edutopia* praises 1,800-student Cambridge Rindge and Latin School in Cambridge, Mass. for its positive student climate. John Silva, the school's director of safety and security, joined the staff 25 years ago, shortly after a student was stabbed to death, and has slowly built a climate that has resulted in a significant drop in the number of fights and incidents (a 75 percent reduction in physical altercations in the last 15 years).

Silva's basic approach is finding and treating reasons for bad behavior. "I don't believe in bad kids," he says. "There are usually good reasons for bad behavior." Silva and his multicultural, multilingual staff build positive relationships with students, advocate for them, and make aggressive use of social service referrals. The relationships are vital: students often give school officials a heads-up when trouble is brewing, as do youth centers and the city's police officers. "We never ignore warnings," says Silva, "ever." Staff are trained in conducting mediations and were doing as many as 200 a year, but recently the need has declined.

Fairness is another tenet of Silva's work. There is no flexibility on the most important school rules – zero tolerance for drugs, alcohol, weapons, unprovoked assaults, and threats to teachers. "We expel the kid dealing pot who has Harvard lawyers for parents and no prior record the same way we expel the teen with a police record and no one at home," says Silva.

But students are never expelled to the street. "Our students always get placed in court settings, hospitals, a variety of special education and alternative schools, even a high-priced small school for one truant with social phobia," says Silva. Students who are expelled can petition to return after six months, and 85 percent of expelled students have been readmitted and made the transition successfully.

The school recently surveyed students on their attitudes toward the academic program, teachers, extracurricular activities, safety, and social morale and found no differences among different racial groups. School safety received the highest positive rating in the survey.

"Mediation, Not Metal Detectors" by Colleen Gillard in *Edutopia*, September 2006 (Vol. 2, #6, p. 56-58) http://www.edutopia.org/magazine/ed1article.php?id=art_1617&issue=sep_06

6. Short Items:

a. What about science and social studies? – In this brief paper, "The Hidden Costs of

Curriculum Narrowing," Craig Jerald says that recent reports that science and social studies are disappearing in the scramble to meet NCLB reading and math requirements are somewhat exaggerated. But he warns that narrowing the elementary curriculum has serious long-term costs. He agrees with E. D. Hirsch that it's counterproductive for schools to postpone content until middle school, since learning content and vocabulary is vital to learning how to read. Jerald's six-page study is available at:
http://www.centerforcsri.org/files/CenterIssueBriefAug06.pdf

Spotted in *Education Gadfly* Sept. 7, 2006

b. Online literacy resources – In this article in *Principal Leadership*, two researchers highly recommend a new website from the Education Development Center in Massachusetts: http://www.literacymatters.org. The site has abundant materials in:

- Online professional development
- Adolescent literature
- Content literature
- Technology
- Student activities
- Lesson plans
- Programs
- Links

The site also has a section for parents and for kids 18 and under.

The authors also recommend two other websites that have extensive online literacy resources:

- Knowledge Loom: http://knowledgeloom.org
- Read-Write-Think: http://readwritethink.org

"Fishing for Information: Finding Online Resources" by Judith Zorfass and Jennifer Minotti in *Principal Leadership* (Middle Level Edition), September 2006 (Vol. 7, #1, p. 28-29), no e-link available

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 36 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 scores of 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 (with occasional breaks; there were 50 issues in 2004-05).

Subscriptions:

Individual subscriptions are $50 for the school year. Rates decline steeply for multiple readers within the same organization. See the website for these rates and information on paying by check or credit card.

Website:

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

- How to subscribe or renew
- Why the Marshall Memo?
- Focus topics
- Headlines for all issues
- What readers say
- About Kim Marshall (including links to articles)
- A free sample issue

Marshall Memo subscribers have access to the Members' Area of the website, which has:

- 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 School Board Journal
ASCD SmartBrief
Atlantic Monthly
Boston Globe
CommonWealth Magazine
District Administration
Ed. Magazine
EDge
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Update
Education Week
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Education Letter
Harvard Educational Review
JESPAR
Jimmy Kilpatrick
Journal of Staff Development
Language Learner
Middle Ground
Middle School Journal
NASSP Bulletin
New York Times
New Yorker
Newsweek
PEN Weekly NewsBlast
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership (Middle Level Edition)
Principal's Research Review
Reading Research Quarterly
Reading Today
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
Teacher Magazine
Teachers College Record
Theory Into Practice
Times Educational Supplement