

Marshall Memo 893

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
June 28, 2021

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Quotes of the Week

“We can try to return to the pre-pandemic *status quo*, or we can decide to do better. Let's choose wisely.”

Kevin Gannon (see item #4)

“What we've seen is that when we try to meet kids where they are, we never build a bridge to where they should be. We just stay where they are forever.”

Bailey Cato Czupryk (quoted in item #2)

“Until we reach the day when intrinsic motivation is enough to get most kids and teenagers to prioritize their schoolwork (in other words, never), or when we've transitioned to a system focused on mastery, we're going to need grades to get kids to put in the necessary effort.”

Michael Petrilli (see item #1)

“You can't assess the brain without first passing through the heart of a student.”

Laura Chang (quoted in item #3)

“Administrators who have made the most meaningful organizational changes have the greatest potential to upset people.”

Jeffrey Ratje (see item #5)

“The person who does a few quick things before beginning an important thing spends their best energy on low-impact activities.”

Dan Rockwell (see item #7)

1. Michael Petrilli on Covid-Time Ideas We Need to Kiss Goodbye

In this *Education Gadfly* article, Michael Petrilli says the pandemic we've just experienced "can accelerate changes that were already underway but otherwise would have taken root much more slowly," including:

- Parent conferences and PTA meetings via Zoom – a boon for working parents;
- Using online curriculum materials instead of hard-copy textbooks;
- Highly effective teachers recording lessons that can be used in multiple classes, freeing up teachers to provide support and one-on-one instruction.

But some K-12 Covid developments should be dumped, says Petrilli. Here are his top nominees:

- *Simultaneous roomies and zoomies* – Teaching half a class in person and the other half remotely is not "humanly possible," said AFT president Randi Weingarten. Petrilli agrees, saying hybrid instruction meant huge amounts of stress for teachers and less-than-ideal learning for students. Petrilli does think it's workable for a few students to watch a class remotely if they need to be home or are doing an in-school suspension in another part of the school – as long as it's clear that the teacher is not expected to actively engage them. Longer term, interactive remote teaching may also be feasible for medically fragile students, and to replace snow days, but the key is that remote classes have the full attention of their teachers.

- *Waiving seat-time requirements* – Petrilli likes the idea of competency-based education, with students demonstrating mastery of content versus putting in a certain number of hours in classrooms. But he says *not so fast* to continuing pandemic-era seat-time waivers without putting good summative assessments in place and guaranteeing that students are having robust learning experiences.

- *Asynchronous days* – During the pandemic, the Maryland district that Petrilli's two sons attend made every Wednesday an asynchronous day, with custodians doing deep cleaning and all students at home working independently (or getting remote one-on-one help from teachers). "I don't think I'm ratting out my sons by reporting... that very little independent work was happening on Wednesdays," he says, "beyond some regular homework that would and should be expected any day of the week." Petrilli likes the idea of innovative scheduling at the high-school level, with time for rigorous project-based work and internships, but he cites a recent report on lower student achievement in districts with four-day weeks [see Memo 890]. "There is no reason to keep asynchronous learning days once the pandemic is over," he concludes.

- *Grade inflation* – When schools first shut down in March 2020, many districts decided it would be unfair to apply normal grading standards, and used students’ previous grades or shifted to pass/fail. This was a necessary emergency measure, says Petrilli, but when it was continued over time, kids got the message that they weren’t accountable for paying attention and doing the work. Petrilli’s conclusion: “Until we reach the day when intrinsic motivation is enough to get most kids and teenagers to prioritize their schoolwork (in other words, never), or when we’ve transitioned to a system focused on mastery, we’re going to need grades to get kids to put in the necessary effort.”

- *Graduation standards* – Petrilli is deeply concerned that many districts have graduated thousands of students from high school – and boasted about high graduation rates – without those students passing key courses or exit exams. Waiving requirements during the pandemic was understandable, he says, and of course, “helping more students graduate high school is an urgent goal. But it is also urgently important to make sure they graduate well prepared for what’s ahead.” In other words, a high-school diploma must signify real competence in reading, writing, math, and other key areas.

[“Five Pandemic-Era Education Practices That Deserve to Be Dumped in the Dustbin”](#) by Michael Petrilli in *Education Gadfly*, June 24, 2021

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2. How Will Acceleration Work This Fall?

In this *Education Week* article, Stephen Sawchuk and Liana Loewus report that many schools are planning to deal with students’ unfinished learning by teaching on-grade material while providing “just in time” supports and scaffolds to help students catch up. “But what about an entering 1st grader who’s only learned phonics lessons on a computer screen, or in-person through masks?” ask Sawchuk and Loewus. “Or a student navigating the rocks and shoals of freshman-year Algebra I who still has difficulties plotting points on a graph?” Or a class of English learners who are at many different proficiency levels?

In a three-part report, *Education Week* picked those three examples because they represent points in the K-12 continuum where acceleration is especially challenging. Time-honored advice to teachers is to meet students where they are, but that won’t work with those who have missed large chunks of instruction. “What we’ve seen,” says Bailey Cato Czupryk of TNTTP, “is that when we try to meet kids where they are, we never build a bridge to where they should be. We just stay where they are forever.”

The summary just below addresses the challenge for first graders. Next week’s Memo will cover what can be done for ninth graders learning Algebra I and English learners.

[“Understanding Learning ‘Acceleration’: Going Slow to Go Fast”](#) by Stephen Sawchuk and Liana Loewus in *Education Week*, June 22, 2021

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3. The Daunting Challenge Awaiting Next Year's First-Grade Teachers

In this *Education Week* article, Madeline Will says many students entering first grade this fall will have significant learning deficits. "Kindergarten is typically where 5- and 6-year-olds learn how to be students," says Will. "They learn how to regulate their own behavior and their emotions; how to raise their hands and listen to the teacher's instructions; and how to take turns, share, and work together with their classmates." They also acquire important knowledge and skills in reading, math, and other subjects.

Remote instruction was more challenging for kindergarten teachers than other grades, says Will, because most kids that age aren't schooled in paying attention, working independently, or using a keyboard. Teaching through a digital keyhole was especially difficult because it lacked the kinds of hands-on, over-the-shoulder work that builds reading and writing skills. On top of that, kindergarten enrollment was down in many schools, meaning that a fair number of students who are old enough for first grade won't have had the kindergarten experience at all.

All this means first-grade teachers will be dealing with a wider-than-usual variation in students' academic and social skills, including:

- Children whose parents kept them from interacting with children outside the home;
- Children who had poor Internet connectivity and missed a lot of instruction;
- Children whose parents worked with them throughout the school day;
- Children who had the advantage of being in a learning pod with other families;
- Children who lost family members to Covid-19 or dealt with illness;
- Children whose families experienced economic hardship, perhaps violence;
- Children who sat out kindergarten.

"The hardest part will be the variability," says Deborah Stipek of Stanford University. "Some of the kids will be gung-ho and ready for 1st-grade curriculum as planned, and others, both academically and socially, are going to be clueless."

Drawing on interviews with almost a dozen experts, Will summarizes their advice for first-grade teachers:

- *Make sure students feel safe and supported.* A foundation of strong teacher-student relationships will be essential to academic learning. "You can't assess the brain without first passing through the heart of a student," says Michigan educator Laura Chang.

- *Spend time building interpersonal and non-academic skills.* This includes getting children accustomed to not having a parent at their elbow and learning to share, work in groups, take turns, raise hands, use manipulatives, hold a pencil, and handle scissors.

- *Find out what students know and don't know.* This includes quick assessments of decoding skills, number sense, recognizing quantities and numerals. Teachers may be pleasantly surprised by unexpected strengths. "Students might have done more cooking with their parents this year," says Will, "and learned about numbers that way. They might have learned about the world around them through family walks or outside play. Or they might have learned vocabulary or other skills from watching educational TV programs like *Sesame Street*."

- *Create dual-purpose lessons.* Building science and social studies knowledge and vocabulary can go along with standard reading and math lessons. In addition, lessons should include as much social interaction with classmates as possible. That’s especially important for English learners, who might have heard less English during remote schooling.

- *Monitor for disabilities.* Learning problems may have gone undetected during remote kindergarten instruction (or with children who were out of school), says Will. The challenge is distinguishing a genuine disability from trauma, undeveloped social skills, behavior problems, or gaps in learning.

- *Don’t forget joy.* Students won’t thrive in a humorless, driven classroom. One Chicago parent said she was looking forward to her son getting away from passively looking at his laptop screen. “I’m looking forward to him having a little more joy in his learning,” she said, “and not being so stuck with the limitations he’s been under.”

- *Surround first-grade teachers with other supports.* This includes robust summer school programming, intensive tutoring, professional development, time for team collaboration, and, if possible, smaller class sizes.

[“The Tough Task Ahead for 1st-Grade Teachers”](#) by Madeline Will in *Education Week*, June 22, 2021

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4. Rethinking Instructor Evaluation in the Wake of the Pandemic

In this *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, Kevin Gannon (Grand View University) explores the implications of Covid disruption on faculty evaluation. Some universities are pausing the “tenure clock” (the countdown for a tenure decision) to compensate for the impact of the pandemic on instructors’ productivity. But there’s been pushback on equity grounds: did the disruption disproportionately affect those who shouldered child care and had to supervise children receiving remote instruction?

“Lack of consensus on how to evaluate faculty work during this unprecedented year, however, should not mean inaction,” says Gannon. “The challenge for institutions and their decision makers is to discern varied and flexible solutions that benefit *individual* candidates for contract renewal, tenure, and promotion as well as *institutional* well-being.” Here are his suggestions for evaluating faculty work during and after the pandemic:

- *Acknowledge that the past 14 months have been difficult for many colleagues.* “As seductive as ‘back to normal’ sounds,” says Gannon, “we cannot pretend that trauma isn’t part of the institutional landscape that we all now occupy. That recognition should inform all of our post-pandemic practices.”

- *Leverage that awareness to evaluate existing policies and practices.* Gannon suggests this might be the time to put more emphasis on advising and mentoring colleagues and students, which has often been undervalued as “women’s labor” in the past.

- *Understand that “equality” and “equity” are related but not synonymous.* A single mother is simply not operating on the same playing field as an instructor who lives alone, says Gannon. “The goal of our contract and tenure processes is a fair evaluation of a faculty

member's performance and future contributions to the institution. To accomplish that goal, we cannot apply the same criteria to both of those hypothetical cases after a year of Covid."

- *Be as flexible with junior colleagues as you've been with students.* "Compassion," "empathy," and "grace" were the watchwords as students struggled in the early weeks of the pandemic. "We need to recognize that what happened to our students this past year also happened to us, collectively," says Gannon – and much more acutely to some.

- *Evaluating flexibly and compassionately doesn't mean weakening standards and accommodating the less deserving.* Faculty evaluation still needs to be rigorous so that all students will receive effective instruction, says Gannon. But he believes we should use this "hinge moment" to apply what we've learned during a year of profound disruption – flexibility, empathy, innovation, and experimentation – to reshape how educators are supervised, coached, and evaluated. "We can try to return to the pre-pandemic *status quo*, or we can decide to do better," says Gannon. "Let's choose wisely."

["Faculty Evaluation After the Pandemic"](#) by Kevin Gannon in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 25, 2021 (Vol. 67, #21, pp. 42-43)

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5. Getting the Most Out of a Comprehensive Performance Review

In this *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, Jeffrey Ratje (University of Arizona) says that an administrator's evaluation often involves a written self-assessment shared with a number of colleagues; an anonymous 360-degree survey of leadership given to the same people; a committee reviewing responses and submitting a report; and an "after-action review" with the administrator. Having recently gone through a process like this, Ratje has several observations:

- *The committee chair* – Having a chair who is fair and thorough is key to getting helpful, accurate feedback on your temperament, humility, communication skills, equity efforts, and results.

- *The self-assessment* – Ratje suggests taking this exercise seriously and communicating the full scope and complexity of your job. "The people reading your self-assessment need to know that big picture," he says. "They want to see how you defined a problem and found its solution; how you led change and what was the outcome; what you honestly think worked and didn't work, and how you view your personal growth as a leader."

- *Positive feedback* – There's a tendency to dwell on criticism and become defensive, says Ratje. "Instead, plan to celebrate the praise and recognize the positive impact you've had and the strengths you possess... If 15 percent of the comments were negative, don't give them 90 percent of your attention."

- *Sharply critical comments* – "Administrators who have made the most meaningful organizational changes have the greatest potential to upset people," says Ratje. That might be a reason to take hurtful criticism with a grain of salt. But the nastiest comments might also point to important shortcomings. In a recent evaluation, Ratje was accused of being aloof and not connecting with colleagues, which he took to heart as he rethought his approach to leadership.

- *Supervisors and mentors* – These are the best people to help a leader process criticism on unpopular but necessary decisions and focus on what’s been accomplished. They are also best positioned to hold the leader’s feet to the fire in cases involving serious errors or misconduct.

[“Getting and Surviving an ‘Administrator Review’”](#) by Jeffrey Ratje in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 25, 2021 (Vol. 67, #21, pp. 46-47); Ratje can be reached at jmratje@email.arizona.edu.

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6. Using Music to Explore Three Kinds of Patriotism

In this article in *Social Education*, Sarah Nielsen, Karen Washburn, and Andrea Hawkman (Utah State University) suggest a secondary-school lesson plan that uses the C3 Inquiry Arc and music to teach about three kinds of patriotism. Some key questions:

- What does it mean to be patriotic?
- How does music help us understand American patriotism?
- How have displays of patriotism changed through U.S. history?

Students start by exploring what they know about patriotism, sharing examples from their own experience, current events, and the past – for example, flying an American flag in one’s yard, family members voting in local and national elections, taking part in a city council meeting, Colin Kaepernick kneeling during the national anthem.

Drawing on this discussion, the teacher defines three types of patriotism – authoritarian, democratic, and critical – and has students work in groups to research slogans and descriptions for each. Some possibilities:

- *Authoritarian patriotism* – Slogans: My country, right or wrong. America, love it or leave it. Ideology: the superiority of one’s country; unquestioning loyalty; allegiance to land, birthright, and legal citizenship; unconditional support of leaders; uncritical of shortcomings; dissent seen as dangerous and destabilizing.

- *Democratic patriotism* – Slogans: Dissent is patriotic. You have the right to not remain silent. Ideology: the nation’s democratic principles are worthy of admiration and respect; condemning the nation’s shortcomings; respectful of dissent.

- *Critical patriotism* – Slogans: Dissent is an essential part of the nation’s history. Ideology: Deepening one’s understanding of history; critiquing discriminatory systems and working to change them; resisting injustices; loyalty to equality and justice over the status quo; commitment to egalitarianism.

Students then choose a historic era (e.g., Reconstruction, post-World War II, Civil Rights, Vietnam, post-9/11) and use the Internet (including the Library of Congress’s “Thinking About Song Lyrics” worksheet) to identify two songs that exemplify different types of patriotism. Some possibilities:

- *My Country ’tis of Thee* by Samuel Francis Smith – authoritarian
- *Ragged Old Flag* by Johnny Cash – authoritarian
- *America the Beautiful* by Homeboy Sandman – democratic

- *A Change Is Gonna Come* by Sam Cooke – democratic
- *The Land of the Free* by the Killers – critical
- *Americans* by Janelle Monáe – critical

Students read the lyrics and analyze the songs’ historical, social, and political context and the role they played in that time period.

Finally, groups present to the whole class what they learned about patriotism from the songs and the era they studied.

[“Patriotism in Music Across Eras: Building Critical Media Literacy in U.S. History”](#) by Sarah Nielsen, Karen Washburn, and Andrea Hawkman in *Social Education*, May/June 2021 (Vol. 85, #3, pp. 148-154); Hawkman can be reached at andrea.hawkman@usu.edu.

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7. Dealing with Procrastination

In this *Leadership Freak* article, Dan Rockwell has these pointers on the perennial challenge of procrastination:

- *Do the hard things first.* “The person who does a few quick things before beginning an important thing spends their best energy on low-impact activities,” says Rockwell. “It takes courage to stop doing the next thing so you can focus on important things.” In the words of Brian Tracy, *Eat the frog.*

- *Don’t let perfectionism keep you from starting.* “Something done imperfectly is better than something not done at all,” says Rockwell. “You can always improve something after you do it imperfectly.”

- *Use your calendar.* “The ability to manage your calendar is the ability to manage your life,” says Rockwell. Schedule important items a week ahead to keep lower priority items from filling up the time. And block out free time. “The procrastinator in you loves to see free time on your calendar.”

- *Make it easy to do the things you tend to put off.* Rockwell has a set of dumbbells near the door of his office and is reminded to use them regularly.

- *Don’t waste energy on guilt.* “Don’t beat yourself up for procrastinating,” says Rockwell. “You’re less likely to solve a problem when guilt and shame dominate your thinking.”

[“How to Procrastinate Successfully and Defeat Pointless Procrastination”](#) by Dan Rockwell in *Leadership Freak*, June 24, 2021; Rockwell can be reached at dan@leadershipfreak.com.

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8. Recommended Elementary and Secondary Books on Race Relations

This *Social Education* feature spotlights the Carter G. Woodson awards for 2021 – books that explore and uncover issues related to racially minoritized groups and race relations. Elementary winner and honoree:

- *William Still and His Freedom Stories: The Father of the Underground Railroad* by Don Tate
- *The Power of Her Pen: The Story of Groundbreaking Journalist Ethel L. Payne* by Lesa Cline-Ransome, illustrated by John Parra

Middle level winner and honoree:

- *Black Heroes of the Wild West* by James Otis Smith, introduction by Kadir Nelson
- *Dream Builder: The Story of Architect Philip Freelon* by Kelly Starling Lyons

Secondary level winner and honoree:

- *Lifting As We Climb: Black Women's Battle for the Ballot Box* by Evette Dionne
- *Dragon Hoops*, a graphic novel by Gene Luen Yang, color by Lark Pien

[“The Carter G. Woodson Book Award, 2021”](#) by The Carter G. Woodson Committee in *Social Education*, May/June 2021 (Vol. 85, #3, pp. 159-162)

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9. Recommended Elementary and Secondary Books on Women in History

This *Social Education* feature announces the Septima Clark awards for 2021 – books that describe women’s experience through history. Click the link below for cover images and short reviews.

Elementary winner and honoree:

- *The Only Woman in the Photo: Frances Perkins & Her New Deal for America* by Kathleen Krull
- *Shirley Chisholm Is a Verb!* by Veronica Chambers, illustrations by Rachelle Baker

Middle level winner and honoree:

- *Finish the Fight: The Brave and Revolutionary Women Who Fought for the Right to Vote* by Veronica Chambers and the Staff of the *New York Times*
- *Breaking Through: How Female Athletes Shattered Stereotypes in the Roaring Twenties* by Sue Macy, foreword by Muffet McGraw

Secondary level winner and honoree:

- *Jane Against the World: Roe v. Wade and the Fight for Reproductive Rights* by Karen Blumenthal
- *Astronauts: Women on the Final Frontier* by Jim Ottaviani and Maris Wicks

[“Septima Clark Book Award, 2021”](#) by The Septima Clark Committee in *Social Education*, May/June 2021 (Vol. 85, #3, pp. 163-166)

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10. Short Items:

a. Rating States’ Civics and U.S. History Standards – [This report](#) from the Thomas B. Fordham Institute provides an evaluation of each state’s (and D.C.’s) curriculum standards for U.S. history and civics. Five were rated “exemplary” in both subjects: Alabama, California, Massachusetts, Tennessee, and the District of Columbia. Ten states were “good” in both

subjects. Fifteen were deemed “mediocre” in at least one subject, and 20 states were “inadequate” in civics and U.S. history.

“The State of State Standards for Civics and U.S. History in 2021” by Jeremy Stern, Alison Brody, Jose Gregory, Stephen Griffin, and Jonathan Pulvers, Thomas B. Fordham Institute, June 23, 2021

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b. Fractions Assessment Questions – This [EDC website](#) has sample probes for one-on-one interviews with students to assess their understanding of fractions. The website includes number-line graphics and two videos of students talking through their answers with a teacher.

“Formative Assessment Probes” from the Education Development Center, 2020, spotted in “The Power of Interviewing Students” by Theresa MacVicar, Amy Brodesky, and Emily Fagan in *Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12*, June 2021 (Vol. 114, #6, pp. 436-444); MacVicar can be reached at tmacvicar@edc.org.

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About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

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

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

Subscriptions:

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

Website:

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- About Kim Marshall (bio, writings, consulting)
- A free sample issue

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

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

Core list of publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

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