

Marshall Memo 265

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
December 22, 2008

In This Issue:

1. [How changeable are people's personalities over time?](#)
2. [The long-term impact of an elementary student intervention](#)
3. [Should elementary schools think in terms of college readiness?](#)
4. [The two sides of teacher burnout: demands and resources](#)
5. [Are scripted reading programs the solution?](#)
6. [An Indiana school hangs 45 art masterpieces in the hallways](#)
7. [Best practices at four high-performing high schools](#)
8. Short item: [Museum websites](#)

Quotes of the Week

“The life we lead and experiences we have reach deep into our double helix.”

Sharon Begley (see item #1)

“Because we lack the ability to truly predict the future, we have no choice but to believe in every student's potential to experience higher education.”

Damen Lopez, San Diego elementary school principal (see item #3)

“Understand that there is no simple solution, no panacea, or miracle cure for reading. The range of ways to solve reading achievement challenges is as broad as the range of student profiles.”

Deborah Duncan-Owens (see item #5)

“So when the lesson doesn't go badly and you get back exit tickets that only show fifty percent mastery, well what are you going to do the next day to re-teach it? As opposed to waiting two weeks down the line, giving a test and finding out that they still don't know what you did two weeks ago.”

A science teacher at North Star Academy, Newark, NJ (see item #7)

1. How Changeable Are People's Personalities Over Time?

In this thought-provoking *Newsweek* column, Sharon Begley attacks the widespread belief that people's dispositions are genetically programmed and don't change. True, people seem to retain the same basic temperament from childhood. And true, research has shown that certain traits (neuroticism, risk-taking, resilience, ruthlessness, and social awkwardness) are linked to genes. But this doesn't mean personality *can't* be changed. "Just because it seems stable over the years doesn't mean it's immutable," says Begley. "Instead, maybe we just haven't identified what changes it."

She offers a medical analogy: habitually sedentary people's blood pressure, heart rate, weight, and other body indicators are very stable over time. "The numbers hardly change," she says, "so you conclude that they're unchangeable. Unfortunately, you neglected to test whether a little thing called aerobic exercise might change them." And of course, it does.

In a recent study at Yale, a group of students took a brief course on social skills and fitting in. Compared to the control group, they became more resilient and motivated and more likely to reach out to professors and take part in campus life. "Something that seems like a small intervention can have cascading effects on things we think of as stable or fixed," comments Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck. "... More and more research is suggesting that, far from being simply encoded in the genes, much of personality is a flexible and dynamic thing that changes over the life span and is shaped by experience." This includes how we perceive ourselves and others and how we act in everyday situations.

Research on animals is making clear that "DNA is not an inert set of blueprints," says Begley. "It responds to life experiences. In baby rats who are licked and groomed by their mothers, brain genes linked to neuroticism and fear of the unknown are turned off. In zebra finches, hearing the song of a strange male increases the expression of a brain gene that triggers defending its territory from the interloper."

But erroneously believing that personality traits are unchangeable can be a self-fulfilling prophecy. For example, if a girl's parents believe her shyness will never change, she will probably remain shy for life. But if her parents gently encourage her to get into the sandbox and play with other children, she is more likely to outgrow her shyness by the age of twelve.

The same is true of beliefs about intelligence. In a study conducted by Carol Dweck, junior-high-students were taught that intelligence was malleable and that the brain makes new connections throughout life and grows in response to intellectual challenge. These students were significantly more conscientious and diligent than students who didn't hear this message.

“Beliefs about yourself play a causal role in how likely you are to seek out challenges and in how resilient you are,” says Dweck.

“No one claims that genes play no role in shaping personality,” concludes Begley. “But it’s time to junk the old idea that only the part of a trait under environmental, not genetic control is malleable: the life we lead and experiences we have reach deep into our double helix.”

“When DNA Is Not Destiny” by Sharon Begley in *Newsweek*, Dec. 1, 2008 (p. 14)
<http://www.newsweek.com/id/170381>

[Back to page one](#)

2. The Long-Term Impact of an Elementary Student Intervention

Echoing the message of the article just above, this *Science Daily* article reports on the effects of a program for Seattle public elementary-school students as they grew up. Some of the students in the study received a systematic grade 1-6 program on impulse control, how to get what they wanted without aggressive behavior, how to recognize the feelings of other people, and how to stay out of trouble and still have a good time. Some of the students received a trimmed-down version of the program, and some students weren’t exposed to it at all. Teachers were given training in classroom management and strategies for instruction, and parents were taught family management skills, how to involve children in setting family rules, how to use positive reinforcement, and how to better monitor their children.

As time passed, the students who had received the full dose had the most favorable results; those who got the partial treatment had somewhat less pronounced effects, and those who weren’t in the program had very few effects. For the full-program children, here were the effects:

- As teenagers, they had lower rates of violence, sexual activity, and dropping out, and less heavy alcohol use.
- By age 21, more of them had completed high school and had jobs, they had had fewer sexual partners, and they used condoms more consistently.
- By age 24-27, they had higher levels of educational attainment and income, had more responsibility at work, and were more involved in their communities; they had fewer problems with anxiety, social phobia, post-traumatic stress disorder, and major depressions; and they had lower levels of lifetime sexually transmitted diseases.

“Elementary School Intervention Increases Mental, Sexual Health, Economic Status” in *Science Daily*, Dec. 1, 2008, <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/12/081201162026.htm>. The original study: “Effects of Social Development Intervention in Childhood 15 Years Later” by David Hawkins, Rick Kosterman, Richard Catalano, Karl Hill, and Robert Abbott, is in the *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, 2008 (Vol. 162, #12, p. 1133-1141).

[Back to page one](#)

3. Should Elementary Schools Think in Terms of College Readiness?

In this impassioned article in *Principal*, San Diego principal Damen Lopez describes how a woman interrupted his conference keynote address on promoting college readiness in elementary schools, shouting from the back of the audience, “Aren’t you disenfranchising our kids? Many students without U.S. citizenship will finish high school just to find out they are not allowed to attend public universities. Poor students will do the same and realize they don’t have the funds to go to college. What about them?” After 30 seconds of stunned silence, Lopez asked, “What’s the alternative?”

This interchange made him reflect on why he believes so strongly that schools should focus on college readiness from the very early grades. His epiphany came as he watched Aquileo, a new student arriving for his first day of school one August. The boy’s mother accompanied him, a tiny baby bundled on her back as is the custom in their Mixteco culture. The principal noticed that Aquileo was carrying his school supplies in a plastic butcher’s bag – his family’s best approximation of a backpack. “Just as my heart began to sink for this little guy,” says Lopez, “I watched him stand next to his peers and give every bit of his attention to his new teacher. His eyes were wide open with anticipation and the smile on his face was a clear indication that he valued this experience. It was as if he knew that his future was beginning at that very moment.”

Lopez goes on to analyze why some people are so resistant to the idea of college orientation in elementary schools, so ready to assume that low-income and language-minority children are unable to meet that challenge:

- *They misunderstand the concept of “college readiness.”* It doesn’t mean that every student will necessarily go to college, he says; it means that “every student deserves the *opportunity* to be educated in a way that prepares him or her for college.”
- *They believe in “perfection before participation.”* In other words, they will only take part in initiatives they believe are perfect in every way, eagerly finding flaws in new programs and giving themselves a reason not to take part.
- *They do not embrace “value-added.”* Taking an all-or-nothing approach, they look for a sweeping initiative to improve their school, rather than acknowledging that many little things can add value to the educational experience of individual students. “No matter the long-term outcome,” says Lopez, “a student who is taught with a college-readiness focus is better equipped academically than one who has not been given that same preparation.”
- *They behave like fortunetellers.* Assuming the worst about some students based on their family background, they conclude that it would be better not to offer false hope to children by orienting them toward college. “By doing so,” says Lopez, “they behave like unsolicited fortunetellers, predicting the future of a 5-year-old based on the color of his or her skin, socioeconomic level, or native language. Because we lack the ability to truly predict the future, we have no choice but to believe in every student’s potential to experience higher education.”

Lopez concludes by acknowledging that the business of promoting college readiness is not a perfect science. “True, we may not be able to remove all the roadblocks on the path to

college for our most needy children,” he says, “but there’s no evidence that our efforts would hinder their academic potential. Our students depend on us to make the dream of college a reality. What’s the alternative? For little Aquileo, and those like him, there is none.”

“College Readiness for All: What’s the Alternative?” by Damen Lopez in *Principal*, January/February 2009 (Vol. 88, #3, p. 50-51), no e-link available; the author is the founder of the No Excuses University concept and can be reached at damen@turnaroundschools.com.

[Back to page one](#)

4. The Two Sides of Teacher Burnout: Demands and Resources

In this *Elementary School Journal* article, professors Christopher McCarthy, Richard Lambert, Megan O’Donnell, and Lauren Melendres explore the question of why some teachers thrive in challenging jobs while others in similar environments experience burnout symptoms like these:

- Loss of idealism;
- No longer finding significance in work;
- Loss of enthusiasm for work;
- Feelings of powerlessness;
- Physical and mental exhaustion;
- Negative changes in attitudes and effort;
- A decline in performance;
- In some cases, leaving the profession.

It turns out that there is a widely used instrument for measuring burnout, the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), that measures three factors:

- Emotional exhaustion – A depletion of emotional resources, feeling less able to cope with external demands;
- Depersonalization – Distancing oneself from others, especially co-workers and students; developing a negative, unfeeling, callous, and cynical attitude toward students and the school environment. Because teachers spend so much of their work-day isolated from other adults, depersonalization is easy to fall into;
- Reduced personal efficacy – Lower feelings of competence and accomplishment, and devaluing one’s work with others.

The authors say that burnout is the “perfect storm” of all three, and it’s the principal’s job to strategically address each of these areas to prevent teachers from burning out.

But how? Previous studies have focused on workplace conditions as the main reason for burnout – schoolwide discipline problems, ineffective administrators, poor communication, layoffs, etc. But McCarthy, Lambert, O’Donnell, and Melendres wonder if intra- and interpersonal factors might play an equally important role. They studied 451 teachers in 13 urban and suburban elementary schools in the Southeast to test an alternative theory: that stress and burnout occur when teachers face challenges that appear to be beyond their capabilities – in other words, situations where there is “a poor fit between the demands of the classroom and teachers’ resources for coping with these demands.”

The authors explored the resources side of the equation – the coping mechanisms used by teachers who did not burn out. Using a tool named the Classroom Appraisal of Resources and Demands (CARD), they identified a number of resources:

- The ability to self-disclose;
- Using relaxation techniques to lower emotional arousal;
- Using preventive strategies to avoid stress-producing experiences before they occur;
- Reflecting and developing a strategy to solve a problem;
- Restraining oneself from acting impulsively, waiting for the right moment to cope with stress.

The same inventory found some ineffective coping strategies, including avoidance and using humor as a primary coping mechanism.

The authors' study found that there was very little difference in burnout symptoms among the 13 *schools* – but lots of variation among the *teachers*. This suggests that the objective realities of the schools were much less important than individual teachers' perceptions of an imbalance between the demands of their jobs and the resources they needed to be successful. And it wasn't just new teachers who experienced an imbalance; in fact, the study found that the longer a teacher had been at a school, the greater the chance of burnout. This suggests, say the authors, that "teachers' tenure in a school contributes to their perceptions of more demands, fewer resources, or both." They speculate that more experienced teachers tend to be assigned more non-classroom responsibilities and more challenging students.

Principals need to look at both sides of the equation, say McCarthy, Lambert, O'Donnell, and Melendres, with an eye to reducing emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and loss of efficacy among their teachers. Their suggestions:

- Assigning a manageable number of high-need students to each teacher, based on a thoughtful analysis of each teacher's ability to cope;
- Providing adult classroom assistants as needed;
- Providing grade-level teacher teams the time to collaborate;
- Arranging mentor/mentee relationships among teachers;
- Assigning out-of-classroom duties equitably;
- Getting teachers out of the building for helpful professional development;
- Giving teachers the tools to be successful with their students.

"Hopefully," conclude the authors, "a better understanding of elementary teachers' burnout symptoms will slow or halt the exodus of experienced teachers from the field."

"The Relation of Elementary Teachers' Experience, Stress, and Coping Resources to Burnout Symptoms" by Christopher McCarthy, Richard Lambert, Megan O'Donnell, and Lauren Melendres in *Elementary School Journal*, January 2009 (Vol. 109, #3, p. 282-300), no e-link

[Back to page one](#)

5. Are Scripted Reading Programs the Solution?

In this thoughtful article in *Principal*, Arkansas State University professor Deborah Duncan-Owens takes a critical look at scripted reading programs. She acknowledges that such

programs might appear to solve the immediate problem of supporting inexperienced or ineffective teachers. But she believes that scripted programs have some significant disadvantages. Here are her pros and cons:

Pros:

- A pre-set standardized curriculum makes lessons easier for teachers to plan and for supervisors to monitor.
- Scripted programs ensure consistency across classrooms.
- Program developers can provide teacher training.
- Many programs advertise their use of “scientifically based” reading research and alignment with Reading First guidelines.

Cons:

- Scripted programs can marginalize teachers by not allowing them to make decisions about how to teach their students.
- Such programs can “de-skill” teachers, relegating them to the role of middle managers.
- Teachers can become alienated from instruction and begin treating the teaching of reading as simply following commercial materials.
- Teachers will feel pressured by administrators to continue with a program even if their students aren’t making progress.

In short, this is an exemplar of the Chinese proverb: *Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day. Teach a man to fish and he will eat for the rest of his life.*

Do scripted programs work? Duncan-Owens is suspicious of glowing research reports, since many of them were commissioned by the companies that produced the programs and focus mostly on sub-skills (e.g., phoneme segmentation), not children’s long-term literacy achievement. The companies that produce scripted reading programs stress the need for “fidelity” when implementing their materials. But studies have shown that 11 out of 12 teachers make what they believe are common-sense alterations to scripted programs to meet the needs of their students, despite fidelity mandates from their principals and central office administrators. [This is one more piece of evidence that schools are “loosely-coupled” organizations in which top-down mandates are quite often ignored or tweaked at the classroom level.] Duncan-Owens cites research to make four additional points:

- Well-designed reading materials are helpful, but the critical factor in successful reading instruction is the quality of each teacher, not the curriculum program.
- No program, however scripted and “teacher-proof”, can make an ineffective teacher into a good teacher. New teachers, and those who are having difficulty, need one-on-one mentoring and coaching to help them become effective.
- Allowing teachers to make some decisions on literature and materials selection and teaching methods yields higher student achievement.
- No program can meet the needs of all students, and teachers need to be trained and empowered to make decisions that will tune instruction to individual needs.

Duncan-Owens concludes with the following advice for principals as they consider the kind of reading program to adopt:

- Commercial reading programs are not the only way to teach reading well.
- If you are going to purchase a commercial program, include teachers in the selection process.
- Decide on a program or an approach based on your students' needs.
- A reading program is only the first step; it needs to be followed up with on-going training, information, materials, and the ability to tweak components to differentiate for individual students.
- Encourage teachers to collaborate to solve problems and identify the best methods and materials to help struggling students.
- Partner with other schools to exchange ideas, share successful practices, and solve problems.
- "Understand that there is no simple solution, no panacea, or miracle cure for reading," concludes the author. "The range of ways to solve reading achievement challenges is as broad as the range of student profiles."

"Scripted Reading Programs: Fishing for Success" by Deborah Duncan-Owens in *Principal*, January/February 2009 (Vol. 88, #3, p. 26-29), no e-link available; the author can be reached at dowens@astate.edu.

[Back to page one](#)

6. An Indiana School Hangs 45 Art Masterpieces in the Hallways

In this *Principal* article, Indiana principal Philip Downs and art teacher Erin Patton-McFarren describe how they decorated the halls of their new Fort Wayne elementary school with a wide selection of great paintings. To raise money for the initiative, they shrewdly solicited \$200 donations for each painting (the cost of a print, plus glass, mounting, and hangers), promising to mount a small plaque acknowledging the donor underneath it. Within six months, they had donations for 45 masterpieces. Here are the paintings they chose:

- Andy Warhol: *One Hundred Cans*
- Stuart Davis: *Hot Still-Scape for Six Colors*
- Richard Diebenkorn: *Seawall*
- Jasper Johns: *Three Flags*
- Mark Rothko: *Blue, Green and Brown*
- Jackson Pollock: *Convergence*
- Romare Bearden: *Jammin' at the Savoy*
- Jacob Lawrence: *Barber Shop*
- Diego Rivera: *The Flower Seller*
- Frida Kahlo: *Self-Portrait Dedicated to Leon Trotsky*
- Georgia O'Keeffe: *Oriental Poppies*
- Berthe Morisot: *Reading*
- John Singer Sargent: *Out-of-Doors Study*
- William Merritt Chase: *The Beach*
- Winslow Homer: *On the Beach*

- Mary Cassatt: *Children Playing on the Beach*
- Andrew Wyeth: *Christina's World*
- Charles Demuth: *From the Garden of the Chateau*
- Grant Wood: *American Gothic*
- Frederic Church: *Rainy Season in the Tropics*
- John Copley: *Henry Pelham*
- Rene Magritte: *Golconde*
- Salvador Dali: *The Persistence of Memory*
- M.C. Escher: *Relativity*
- Piet Mondrian: *Broadway Boogie Woogie*
- Joan Miro: *The Hunter*
- Wasily Kandinsky: *Yellow, Red, Blue*
- Edvard Munch: *The Scream*
- Odilon Redon: *Vase of Flowers, 1914*
- Marc Chagall: *I and the Village*
- Pablo Picasso: *Three Musicians*
- Henri Matisse: *Icarus*
- Georges Seurat: *Bathers at Asnieres*
- Henri Rousseau: *The Sleeping Gypsy*
- Vincent Van Gogh: *Starry Night*
- Paul Cezanne: *Hillside in Provence*
- Pierre Renoir: *Luncheon at the Boating Party*
- Jan Vermeer: *Girl with a Pearl Earring*
- Katschusika Hokusai: *Great Wave off Kanagawa*
- Michelangelo Caravaggio: *The Cardsharps*
- Raphael: *The School of Athens*
- Hubert Van Eyck: *The Arnolfini Portrait*
- Leonardo Da Vinci: *Mona Lisa*
- John Trumbull: *The Battle of Bunker Hill*

The hallways immediately became part of an ongoing, cross-curriculum conversation about the power and meaning of art. The art teacher introduced the paintings one by one in her classes, teaching students about the artist's life, why the work was significant when it was painted, how the artist accomplished something no one had thought of before, and related art concepts and vocabulary. The art teacher also sent an e-mail about each lesson to her colleagues, along with links to an online museum with other paintings by the artist. Whenever possible, classroom teachers integrated themes in their math, history, science, and literature lessons.

"The students' enthusiasm for the masterpieces on our walls has been insightful and exhilarating," write Downs and Patton-McFarren. "Stories trickle down from classroom teachers about students recognizing paintings in textbooks or books from the library, or making

connections in their math class. The exciting aspect of introducing great art to our students is not only what they are capable of absorbing, but how they make connections and apply that information in multiple contexts. Isn't that what education is supposed to do?"

"Masterpieces in the Hallways" by Philip Downs and Erin Patton-McFarren in *Principal*, January/February 2009 (Vol. 88, #3, p. 22-25), no e-link available; the authors can be reached at philip.downs@nacs.k12.in.us and erin.mcfarren@nacs.k12.in.us.

[Back to page one](#)

7. Best Practices at Four High-Performing High Schools

Acting on Data is a new report, rich in specific ideas and materials, written by Amanda Datnow, Vicki Park, and Brianna Kennedy (commissioned by the New Schools Venture Fund). The authors profile gathered and analyzed best practices from four high-performing high schools:

- Bolsa Grande High School, Garden Grove, California
- Washington High School, Phoenix, Arizona
- YES Prep, Southeast Campus, Houston, Texas
- North Star Academy High School, Newark, New Jersey

I highly recommend looking through the full study. Here are a few highlights:

- A North Star Academy science teacher's thoughts on using exit slips to inform her daily instructional planning (page 67): "What it tells me is that at the end of the day if I've gotten that lesson across then I can move on to the next skill. However, if not, then I know that the next day I need to figure out a different way to re-teach that material. So anything that was a little bit challenging today I need to go home tonight and revamp and figure out if there is another way that makes it easier or if I can narrow it down to a step by step. So I kind of hone my lesson from the previous day into something more concrete the next day. So when the lesson doesn't go badly and you get back exit tickets that only show fifty percent mastery, well what are you going to do the next day to re-teach it? As opposed to waiting two weeks down the line, giving a test and finding out that they still don't know what you did two weeks ago. So it's kind of a more immediate help in terms of planning day to day and in terms of knowing where you're going long term."

- North Star Academy's lesson plan format (page 45-46);
- North Star Academy's Data Discussion Consultancy Protocol (page 89);
- Bolsa Grande's Benchmark Reflection Protocol (page 85-86);
- YES Prep's 1st-Quarter Data-Based Action Plan (page 87-88);
- Washington High's use of math assessments to inform instruction, including several sample problems (page 71-73);
- YES Prep's Campus Visitor Feedback Form (page 52-53);
- YES Prep's one-page "Snapshot" observation tool (page 60) for short classroom visits, which is comprehensive and user-friendly, and its more comprehensive classroom evaluation rubric (page 63-64);

- YES Prep’s “Big Hairy Audacious Goals” (page 21), which were arrived at collaboratively and are posted throughout the school. The schoolwide goals for 2007-08:
 - 100% of students will feel important, cared for, recognized, and respected by their fellow students and the YES Prep staff as reported in My Voice and student surveys.
 - Within three years, 70% of graduating seniors will score a 3 or better on at least two Advanced Placement exams, and 100% will score a 3 or better on at least one AP exam.
 - In core academic courses, each department will show 10% growth in passing scores on AP exams.
 - We will retain at least 90% of our staff each year.
 - 80% of students will report that their classes help them “understand what is happening in the everyday world” on a My Voice survey by May 2008.

Each teacher has his or her own Big Hairy Audacious Goals. Here are sample goals from an 11th-grade English teacher:

- All students will achieve a 3 or 4 on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills writing exam.
- All English II students will achieve a 2-level increase on AP style essays, graded on the 6-point pre-AP rubric.

“Acting on Data: How Urban High Schools Use Data to Improve Instruction” by Amanda Datnow, Vicki Park, and Brianna Kennedy, Center on Educational Governance, University of Southern California, Rossier School of Education; commissioned by the New Schools Venture Fund. For the full report, go to <http://www.newschools.org/files/ActingonData.pdf>. Spotted in *The Education Gadfly*, Dec. 18, 2008

[*Back to page one*](#)

8. Short Item:

Museum websites – The National Gallery of Art has a website with extensive art resources for teachers and students: <http://www.nga.gov/education/classroom>. New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art’s website features a wonderful world map that displays artwork by location in each different era <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hm/02/hm02.htm>.

Spotted in “Masterpieces in the Hallways” by Philip Downs and Erin Patton-McFarren in *Principal*, January/February 2009 (Vol. 88, #3, p. 25)

[*Back to page one*](#)

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Do you have feedback? Is anything missing?

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

About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

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

To produce the Marshall Memo, Kim subscribes to 44 carefully-chosen publications (see list to the right), sifts through more than a hundred articles each week, and selects 5-10 that have the greatest potential to improve teaching, leadership, and learning. He then writes a brief summary of each article, pulls out several striking quotes, provides e-links to full articles when available, and e-mails the Memo to subscribers every Monday evening (with occasional breaks; there are about 50 issues a year).

Subscriptions:

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.

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Publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

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