

# *Marshall Memo 65*

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education  
December 6, 2004

## **In This Issue:**

1. A top-down/bottom-up process for reinventing core values
2. What should principals do about parents giving gifts to teachers?
3. Detention – can we do better?
4. Better search tools for students' Internet searches
5. The impact of obesity on student learning
6. Short items: (a) Understanding by Design curriculum standards; (b) Overdoing test prep in Rhode Island; (c) Catching up in high school

## **Quotes of the Week**

"When he was in kindergarten and misbehaved at home, his mother would threaten to call his teacher."

Caitlin Flanagan on Korean parents' reverence for teachers (see item #2)

"The Web by its structure encourages discovery and exploration, but there are no landmarks."

Dalia Bilal (see item #4)

"I don't need an Hermes wallet, and if I did I'd buy one myself."

John Wellington, L.A. counselor, on refusing lavish parent gifts (see item #2)

"America's young people are fat."

John Allegrante (see item #5)

"I just foresee it causing situations in the long run where students believe you can no longer be disciplined. I hope not."

Michael Hooks, Memphis, Tenn. school board member on why he voted against the recent ban on paddling students (*Newsweek*, Dec. 6, 2004, p. 21)

"We must stop trying to control children and start teaching them to control themselves. We must model the behavior we want to see, and respect children until they learn to respect themselves. We must teach children that choosing to behave is a better option. That should be our goal – creating an environment where children choose to behave."

LouAnne Johnson (see item #3)

"If you devote your life to seeking revenge, first dig two graves."

Confucius, quoted by Hallowell (*Newsweek*, Sept. 27, 2004, p. 52)

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## 1. A Top-Down/Bottom-Up Process for Reinventing Core Values

In this highly instructive interview, Samuel Palmisano, who took over as CEO of IBM in 2002, describes how he went about revising the core values of the giant computer company. The process suggests ways that schools might cut to the chase on endless process of drafting mission and values statements.

When Thomas Watson, Sr. founded International Business Machines in 1914, he promulgated three “Basic Beliefs:”

- Respect for the individual
- The best customer service
- The pursuit of excellence

There was no democratic process for coming up with these values; Watson wrote them and everyone in the company was expected to memorize and follow them. For most of the twentieth century, the Basic Beliefs drove the company and were an important part of its remarkable success.

But in the 1990’s, IBM drifted away from its values and almost went under due to arrogance and a sense of entitlement. Brilliant leadership by Louis Gerstner rescued the company, and when Palmisano took over in 2002, business was good.

Nevertheless, the new CEO thought it was important to “reinvent” the company’s core values and try to get IBM working in a more integrated fashion. He called together his top managers and presented four “concepts,” three of which were based on Watson’s original beliefs:

- Respect
- Customer
- Excellence
- Innovation

These concepts were “test-marketed” in surveys and focus groups, and several changes were made in response to feedback from more than a thousand IBM employees. “Respect” was thrown out because it reminded people too much of the discredited values of the past, and the one-word concepts were teased out into three proposed values:

- Commitment to the customer
- Excellence through innovation
- Integrity that earns trust

These were posted on a special intranet site and every IBM employee worldwide was invited to post reactions in a 72-hour on-line “ValuesJam.” More than 50,000 responses flooded in, and Palmisano received hundreds of personal e-mails. Many employees used strong language to describe areas where IBM’s operations didn’t live up to the three ideals, and it was clear IBM was in the middle of a heated debate about the company’s heart and soul. One top executive was so unnerved by the heat of the discourse that he suggested shutting the process down before things got out of hand. But Palmisano insisted that it continue. “Some of the comments were painful to read,” he said, “But, again, they exhibited something every leader should welcome: People here aren’t complacent about the company’s future. And the comments were, by and large, extremely thoughtful.”

When the jam was over, IBM analysts crunched a million-plus words that had been posted, looking for themes and ideas. Many employees said that a “silo mentality” pitted business units against each other and worked to the detriment of the whole company. Others called this a trust issue, but criticized the proposed value “integrity that earns trust” as too vague and not explicitly addressing how employees should behave with each other and with customers and suppliers.

Based on the ValuesJam, the results of the pre- and post-jam surveys, and a full reading of the raw transcripts, Palmisano and a small team drafted the final set of corporate values:

- Dedication to every client’s success
- Innovation that matters – for our company and for the world
- Trust and personal responsibility in all relationships

These were published on the company intranet in November 2003 and now drive all interactions in IBM.

[What intrigues me about this process is the back-and-forth between top-down and bottom up: (a) leaders put forward their best thinking; (b) a limited number of employees are asked to give their reactions; (c) the values are redrafted based on the feedback; (d) everyone in the entire organization is asked for input and management really *listens*; and (e) the final values are drafted by a small management team. A school or school district could emulate this process, getting the best ideas from leaders and the field and avoiding the mush that comes from trying to please everyone and letting committees write final documents.

It’s also interesting that many schools have the problem of a “silo mentality” (teachers working in isolation in their classrooms).

Finally, if we tweaked the first and third IBM values, we might get two excellent ideas for school mission and values statements:

- Dedication to every student's success
- Trust and personal responsibility in our relationships with students, colleagues, and parents.]

"Leading Change When Business Is Good" An interview with Samuel Palmisano by Paul Hemp and Thomas Stewart in *Harvard Business Review*, December 2004 (p. 60-70)

## **2. What Should Principals Do About Parents Giving Gifts to Teachers?**

In this *New Yorker* article, reporter Caitlin Flanagan examines the annual dilemmas posed by parents giving holiday gifts to their children's teachers. Although most of Flanagan's interviews were in Los Angeles private schools, she touches on several issues that apply to all types of schools.

Some of the teachers and principals who were interviewed said they received "incredibly thoughtful and incredibly thoughtless gifts," including large gift certificates to Barnes and Noble, a bottle of Veuve Clicquot, a spa gift certificate, a cashmere blanket, an iPod (this year's hot gift), courtside seats for a Lakers game, second-row seats for a Prince concert – as well as a weighted vase from the gift shop at Forest Lawn cemetery and six pairs of panty hose in a shade called "nude." High-school counselors receive especially generous gifts around the time they write college recommendations; the standard gift for L.A. private-school counselors is a \$75-\$100 gift certificate, and the average counselor takes home about \$2,000 every Christmas. Many educators say they are touched by parents' generosity: "[W]e work really hard, so an appropriately lavish thing is wonderful, lovely. We're giddy to get it."

But gifts have a dark side. They can create unseemly competition among parents and damage staff collegiality by sowing seeds of envy among teachers. And gift-giving introduces "the specter of influence peddling to the classroom," says Flanagan, quoting one father, a former attorney, as saying "It compromises the fiduciary nature of the teacher-student relationship." Can gifts color a teacher's judgment about students' performance? One teacher says that she remembers gifts (somewhat uncomfortably) as she fills out her grade sheets, and another confesses that a good gift will get a child a "courtesy upgrade."

So should principals ban parental gifts in the interests of fairness, equity, and staff morale? Not many of the school leaders Flanagan interviewed had been willing to take that "politically disastrous" step, and Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger

hardly helped them in that direction when he repealed a strict “no gifts” policy that had been in effect under former Governor Gray Davis (much to the delight of the state’s civil servants).

But there are some brave souls. Reveta Bowers, principal of an L.A. primary school, feels strongly about gifts. “Ours is a profession that is under siege all the time,” she said, “When we allow ourselves to be tipped – brought to the level of service workers – we invite people to view us as less than professional.” Pointing to a beautifully wrapped gift sitting unopened in her office, she declared, “That’s going back. I don’t accept anything.”

John Wellington, a former college counselor at Harvard-Westlake School, took a different approach. He told his advisees that if their parents wanted to give him anything more than a plate of cookies or a greeting card, they had only one option: a donation to a college fund he set up for a needy teenager. “I don’t need an Hermes wallet,” he said, “and if I did I’d buy one myself.” He taped a manila envelope to his office door and it was soon stuffed with enough checks to help send a student to Wesleyan.

And Michael Pratt, principal of Brentwood School, asked parents to contribute to a school fund in lieu of giving gifts to teachers. “It helps the school and the teachers to do good work,” he said. “The old system was inherently divisive.” Has his policy made a difference? It’s apparently raised some money for the school fund, but one teacher said there had been no reduction in the number or quality of gifts. “The parents ignore absolutely everything you tell them,” she said.

“What Teachers Want” by Caitlin Flanagan in *The New Yorker*, Dec. 6, 2004 (p. 64-68)

### **3. Detention – Can We Do Better?**

North Carolina discipline consultant LouAnne Johnson thinks detention, the most frequently-used punishment for misbehaving students, is “outdated, expensive, time-consuming, and generally ineffective.” She says many schools use detention as a one-size-fits-all consequence for a wide variety of infractions. “We don’t expect one pill to cure colds, bronchitis, broken bones, gallstones, ulcers, headaches, heart attacks, and cancer,” she says, “yet schools assign detention for tardiness, fighting, daydreaming, forgetfulness, laziness, defiance, profanity, truancy, over-exuberance, drunkenness, stealing, cheating, lying, or being the object of a physical assault.”

Johnson believes that detention only works for “good” students, most of whom decide to mind their manners after one experience with a punishment. For marginal

students, especially those who are not good readers, detention usually makes things worse. By depriving them of valuable instructional time, it makes them fall further behind in their work, which creates a desire to get kicked out of class to avoid the humiliating experience of being a slow, underperforming student in front of peers. By junior high school, Johnson says, students who do not read well “often believe they are stupid, lazy, unteachable, genetically predisposed to bad behavior, and destined to failure... Sadly, many poor readers believe their only choices are to be labeled ‘bad’ or ‘dumb.’” For these students (unless they are physically violent), Johnson feels it’s far smarter to work on boosting their skills rather than sending them to detention.

The proof that detention doesn’t work, says Johnson, is that detention rooms are overflowing. If detention were really effective, it would reduce the need for more detention! She recommends a radically different approach. “Instead of looking at our children, shaking our heads, and asking, ‘What is wrong with these children?’” says Johnson, “we must look to ourselves and ask, ‘What are we not teaching them?’ Threats and punishments may make short-term changes, but for long-term behavior change, we must include an instructional aspect. If we expect children to behave in school, we must teach them to take responsibility for their behavior; but we must also teach them how to make better choices, how to develop personal ethics, and how to solve problems.”

To make this happen, Johnson believes there must be an “adult attitude adjustment. We must stop trying to control children and start teaching them to control themselves. We must model the behavior we want to see, and respect children until they learn to respect themselves. We must teach children that choosing to behave is a better option. That should be our goal – creating an environment where children choose to behave.”

What worries Johnson most is where struggling, over-punished students will wind up. She quotes U.S. Department of Education and Bureau of Justice figures showing that 70 percent of adult prison inmates are functionally illiterate and 85 percent of juvenile offenders have serious reading problems. “I believe that if we continue to use ineffective, expensive, illogical punitive discipline programs,” she says, “we will continue to see rising numbers of juveniles entering detention facilities. Perhaps we should try teaching our wayward students to read instead of sending them to detention – because if we continue to treat our children as though they were incarcerated criminals, we should not be surprised if they act as though they are.”

“Down With Detention!” by LouAnne Johnson in *Education Week*, Dec. 1, 2004 (Vol. 24, #14, p. 39-40) <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2004/12/01/14johnson.h24.html>

#### 4. Better Search Tools for Student Internet Research

As students search the Internet, Googling their way through school projects, they are often overwhelmed by a flood of information and don't have the tools to deal with it. “The major problem kids have on the Internet is judging quality,” says David Loertscher, a San Diego State University professor. “They don't understand the difference between data smog, or advertising, or whatever.” Students are often boggled by endless lists of Web hits and waste valuable school time finding nothing of any use. Even search engines designed specifically for children (among them Yahoo!igans! and KidsClick!) have limitations:

- Most do not have an online thesaurus to suggest alternative search words when the original word the child is using is not producing results.
- Some don't suggest alternative spellings of words the child may have misspelled.
- Some are organized in adult-like categories that confuse students.

The result is that many kids, even when they find good sites, get lost within them or when they move from site to site. “The Web by its structure encourages discovery and exploration,” says Dania Bilal, a researcher who studies how children find information on computers, “but there are no landmarks.”

However, a new generation of search tools is much better at solving these problems by presorting results using simple, visual formats. Here are two of the best:

- *Grokker2*, designed for students from fourth grade through high school, resides on the user's computer hard drive (it costs \$49). Grokker2 simplifies searches by channeling information from Google and other engines into a simple visual map of circles, each representing a group of Web pages that have qualities in common. Using a mouse, a student can focus on any of the circles and look at circles within circles. Key words and basic information about each Web page appear as the user's mouse arrow passes over each circle. More information and a free trial of Grokker2 are available at [http://www.groxis.com/service/grok/g\\_products.html](http://www.groxis.com/service/grok/g_products.html)

- *The International Children's Digital Library* is a free online collection of fiction for 3- to 13-year olds. In this site's “simple search,” children click on illustrated buttons for real or imaginary animals, reality vs. make-believe, fairy tales, different feelings, colors, etc. and are led to a selection of online books. Students can also pick

books from different areas of the world by pointing to the desired area on a globe.

This site is at <http://www.icdlbooks.org/>

“Web Searches Often Overwhelm Young Researchers” by Andrew Trotter in *Education Week*, Dec. 1, 2004 (Vol. 24, #14, p. 8)

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2004/12/01/14websearch.h24.html>

## 5. The Impact of Obesity on Student Learning

“America’s young people are fat,” declares Columbia health education professor John Allegrante in this *Education Week* article. “We now have 9 million overweight children in the United States, or about 15 percent of the nation’s children and teenagers, triple the total in 1980.” This trend is causing an epidemic of diabetes, now the nation’s fifth leading cause of death. Even more alarming is the emergence of Type 2 diabetes, which usually hits people at mid-life, among young people. This is the direct result of guzzling high-fat, super-sized fast-food meals and soft drinks with high sugar content, watching television for large chunks of time, and being physically inactive. By 2010, experts predict that obesity will surpass tobacco as the nation’s leading cause of preventable death.

But it’s not just about health problems and early mortality, says Allegrante: “Simply put, health and fitness *influence learning*. Physical activity boosts self-discipline, reduces stress, strengthens peer relationships, enhances self-confidence and self-esteem, and improves mental alertness.” In a California study, physically-fit students got significantly higher scores on math and reading tests, and those who met minimum fitness levels in three or more areas showed the greatest achievement gains.

What’s the mechanism for this? Brain research has shown that between the ages of 2 and 10, the synaptic connections between the brain’s neurons reach maximum density, and the number of synapses is influenced how much is coming in from the five senses and by the child’s physical activity. Aerobic activity also increases the number of capillaries in the brain and therefore the amount of oxygen that reaches the brain and how efficiently carbon dioxide and other waste products are removed. The cerebellum, once thought to control only motor skills, is now believed to have a role in spatial learning, associative skills, and processing language. Physical activity may reinforce these cognitive areas.

In light of all this, Allegrante bemoans the current decline in physical activity in many schools and pleads with schools to get students exercising on a *regular* basis.

“Unfit to Learn” by John Allegrante in *Education Week*, Dec. 1, 2004 (Vol. 24, #14, p. 38)  
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2004/12/01/14allegrante.h24.html>

## 6. Short Items:

*a. Understanding by Design curriculum standards* – Two recently-updated websites contain a gold mine of well-written curriculum standards presented as “Big Ideas” and “Essential Questions” – the format recommended by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe in their *Understanding by Design* materials:

- Connecticut science standards:

<http://www.state.ct.us/sde/dtl/curriculum/currsci.htm>

- Weston Public Schools (Massachusetts) K-12 standards:

<http://www.westonschools.org/admin/curr/tableofcontents.html>

*b. Overdoing test prep in Rhode Island* – School leaders in Providence, Rhode Island were devastated when a state report showed their middle schools getting *worse* in state rankings. Providence middle schools did so poorly that every single one fell under one or more sanctions under the No Child Left Behind law. One reason for this nose-dive might be that Providence district leaders required schools to spend two and a half months using test-prep materials. The policy seems to have been a major cause of declining scores, burning students out from the tediousness and routine of constantly practicing for the test.

“Teaching to the Test Not Working in Rhode Island” by James D’Ambra in *The Providence Journal*, Dec. 1, 2004 (p. C20), no free e-link available, spotted in *PEN Weekly NewsBlast*, Dec. 2, 2004

*c. Catching up in high school* – This study of low-SES students in Baltimore and Philadelphia high schools by three Johns Hopkins and Temple researchers found that the Talent Development High Schools (TDHS) program for ninth graders produced significant gains for students who entered high school behind grade level. The key recommendations are: (a) thorough diagnostic testing for entering ninth graders; (b) vigorous implementation of a reputable intervention program (such as TDHS) to “accelerate student learning so that students can quickly fill in any missing skill and knowledge gaps and fully partake in a rigorous sequence of high school courses;

(c) customizing the program to the needs of students (i.e., if there are only a few below-level students, use tutors; if there is a large number, create during-the-day courses for remedial students; (d) avoiding a confusing confluence of courses (for example, students being required to take catch-up math and algebra in the same semester); and (e) recognizing that one year will probably not be enough and special programming should be continued into the upper grades of high school for students who still need it.

“Catching Up: Effect of the Talent Development Ninth-Grade Instructional Interventions in Reading and Mathematics in High-Poverty Schools” by Robert Balfanz, Nettie Legters, and Will Jordan in *NASSP Bulletin*, December 2004 (Vol. 88, #641, p. 3-30), no e-link available

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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](mailto:kim.marshall8@verizon.net)*

# About the Marshall Memo

## ***Mission and focus:***

This weekly memo aims to keep busy principals and other educators very well-informed on important research and ideas in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 35 years of experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, coach of principals, and writer, acts as “designated reader.” Kim searches through 39 publications the week they come out, chooses the articles that are most relevant and useful to improving teaching and learning, and summarizes them in a brief e-mail. Some ideas will be familiar, reinforcing what readers already know; others will be new and genuinely thought-provoking.

## ***Subscriptions:***

The Marshall Memo is sent every Monday (with occasional breaks). Individual subscriptions are \$50 for the school year; rates decline steeply for multiple readers within the same organization. See the website for information on paying by check or credit card.

## ***Website:***

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- How to subscribe or renew
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- What readers say
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- The current issue (in PDF or Word format)
- Back issues (also in PDF or Word)
- A database of all articles to date, searchable by topic, article headline, source, article title, author, and level
- How to change access e-mail or password

## ***Publications covered:***

(those read this week are underlined)

American Education Research Journal  
American Educator  
American School Board Journal  
ASCD SmartBrief  
Atlantic Monthly  
Bay State Banner  
Boston Globe  
CommonWealth Magazine  
Curriculum Update (ASCD)  
Ed. Magazine (Harvard School of Education)  
Education Digest  
Education Gadfly  
Education Next  
Education Update (ASCD)  
Education Week  
Educational Leadership  
Educational Researcher  
Elementary School Journal  
Harper’s  
Harvard Business Review  
Harvard Education Letter  
Harvard Education Review  
Journal of Staff Development  
Middle School Journal  
NASSP Bulletin  
New York Times  
New Yorker  
Newsweek  
PEN Weekly NewsBlast  
Phi Delta Kappan  
Principal Magazine  
Principal Leadership  
Psychology Today  
Reading Research Quarterly  
Reading Today  
Rethinking Schools  
Review of Educational Research  
Teachers College Record  
Teacher Magazine

E-links will be provided whenever possible.