Marshall Memo 1095

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
July 7, 2025

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"As AI is getting smarter, young college grads are getting dumber. They can regurgitate information and ideas but struggle to come up with novel insights or analyze issues from different directions. They don't learn how to think through, express, or defend ideas. Nor how to construct arguments and anticipate the rebuttals. They offload these cognitive challenges to AI. The brain continues to develop and mature into one's mid-20s, but like a muscle it needs to be exercised, stimulated, and challenged to grow stronger. Technology and especially AI can stunt this development."

Allysia Finley in "AI's Biggest Threat: Young People Who Can't Think" in *The Wall Street Journal*, June 22, 2025

"AI tools, while valuable for supporting performance, may unintentionally hinder deep cognitive processing, retention, and authentic engagement with written material. If users rely heavily on AI tools, they may achieve superficial fluency but fail to internalize the knowledge or feel a sense of ownership over it."

Natalyia Kosmyna et al. (see item #6)

"Has there ever been a time in human history when writing was so important to the average person?... The way we write shapes our thinking. We process the world through the composition of text dozens of times a day… It's possible that the ability to write original and interesting sentences will become only more important in a future where everyone has access to the same AI assistants."

Hua Hsu in "What Happens After A.I. Destroys College Writing?" in *The New Yorker*, June 30, 2025

"I'm generally optimistic about all the ways artificial intelligence is going to make life better – scientific research, medical diagnoses, tutoring, and my favorite current use, vacation planning. But it also offers a malevolent seduction: excellence without effort. It gives people the illusion that they can be good at thinking without hard work, and I'm sorry, but that's not possible… If you want to be strong, you have to go to the gym. If you want to possess good judgment, you have to read and write on your own."

David Brooks in "Junk Food for the Mind" in *The New York Times*, July 5, 2025; Brooks was commenting on the study summarized in item #6.

"It was an almost religious experience. Ever since then, I've been entranced by this idea that there is an invisible world of mathematics that is secretly structuring the world."

Steven Strogatz (Cornell University) describing how at 13 he plotted the swings of a pendulum in a classroom experiment and drew a parabola, quoted in "Can a Series Make You Fall in Love with Math?" by Alex Ocampo in *The New York Times*, July 1, 2025; Strogatz is writing a *Times* series titled *Math, Revealed*. Here are a couple of episodes: Taxicab Geometry and Golden Ratio.

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1. Humility 101

"Most cultures and religions define humility as a virtue," says psychotherapist/author/consultant Paul Dunion in *Psychology Today*. But that makes it unattractive for leaders who don't want to come across as holy, boring, or overly modest, denying their strengths and talents. "In a highly extroverted society, almost everything of value happens externally between people," says Dunion. "Humility mostly happens internally, in how we relate to ourselves, and hence, is not deemed important."

We need to take another look at humility, he believes, seeing it as "a psychological task that can invigorate and bring leaders closer to themselves." Embracing humility involves being fully honest and accepting about who we are, which means acquiring several skills:

• Getting comfortable with our limits – This goes along with knowing our strengths and identifying colleagues who have skills and knowledge that we don't.

• Accepting our imperfections – This includes letting go of shame as well as aggrandized expectations of achievement.

• Radical accountability – For leaders, says Dunion, this "is gratitude for all the support they received from their ancestors, family, friends, teachers, colleagues, and mentors." Another form is acknowledging mistakes and not blaming others.

• A heartfelt commitment to be rightsized – "Leaders run the risk of inflating themselves in order to meet the evolving demands and expectations of the roles they play,"

says Dunion. “They may also get undersized to avoid being scrutinized. The middle ground is being *rightsized* – a true balance of competencies, shortcomings, and true achievements.

• Appreciating and acknowledging the strengths and accomplishments of others. “When leaders are right with themselves,” he says, “they are able to recognize the value others bring, without diminishing themselves.”

Embracing humility has several key benefits, says Dunion, all part of being more “internally referenced” as a leader:

- Shifting from focusing on achievement to inclusivity, empathy, and inspiration;
- Experiencing security by welcoming our limits and mistakes;
- Colleagues don’t expect to be dominated or face a barrage of defensive maneuvers;
- Being less competitive with colleagues and more able to appreciate their strengths;
- Replacing secrets with open disclosure;
- Fostering a workplace climate of psychological safety;
- Replacing fear with boldness that honors risk-taking;
- Replacing the desire to look good with authenticity.

“Humility As a Psychological Task for Leaders” by Paul Dunion in *Psychology Today*, June 9, 2025

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2. A Novel Way for Teachers to Get to Know Students

“Positive student-teacher relationships are the foundation of meaningful school experiences,” say Carolyn Sattin-Bajaj, Lupita Romo-Gonzalez, and Damhee Dee Dee Hong (University of California/Santa Barbara) in this *Elementary School Journal* article. They describe how a small predominantly Mexican-American school district in California gave families in grades 4-6 a Fujimax Polaroid camera, film for 20 photographs, a small photo album, step-by-step instructions on how to use the camera, and information on the ethics of taking pictures and getting permission from subjects. Students were asked to take photos of their lives outside of school, including family members and how they spent their time, and consider sharing albums with their teachers and talking them through the photos.

Students were enthusiastic about the project; for many, it was the first time they had taken physical, non-digital photos. They appreciated being able to decide what to photograph and who would be allowed to see their albums. Kids snapped photos of family members, friends, stuffed animals, snow globes, gems from Mexico, computer games, piggy banks, decorations, religious artifacts, decorations for Muslim holidays, pets, favorite foods, books, and themselves as they engaged in various activities.

“With 20 photographs to capture their lives,” say the authors, “the students in our study had to make choices about what to include and what to leave out. Although many students disliked the limitations on the number of photographs they could take and named people, places, or things that were missing from their albums, by and large, they felt well represented by the photographs they took.” In interviews, students said they loved the opportunity to do a show-and-tell for teachers about their homes, families, interests, and culture. One sixth grader

had photos showing his interest in paleontology and hoped his teacher would make a curriculum connection.

"Educators and school leaders can take these results as a starting point from which to design and launch their own context-specific initiatives," say the authors, "– using photographs, videos, drawings, or other means of personal expression – to increase teacher understanding of students in ways that center student agency."

"Building Classroom Relationships Through Photovoice" by Carolyn Sattin-Bajaj, Lupita Romo-Gonzalez, and Damhee Dee Dee Hong in *Elementary School Journal*, June 2025 (Vol. 125, #4, pp. 675-700); Sattin-Bajaj can be reached at carolynsattin-bajaj@ucsb.edu.

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3. Fifth Graders Use a Hackathon to Tackle a Real-Life Environmental Issue

In this *Elementary School Journal* article, Adiv Gal (Kibbutzim College of Education, Technology, and the Arts) describes how fifth graders in a rural school in northern Israel studied the interaction of two species of birds competing for nesting space in the roofs of school buildings. Starting in 2015, one species, the lesser kestrel, which had lived in the area for decades, was being displaced by another, the common myna, which is one of the world's most invasive species (myna were introduced to Israel in the 1990s as pets and then established a population in the wild).

As part of an ecology curriculum unit, students took notes on a burgeoning conflict between the two species:

- Mynas displaced kestrels from their nesting boxes, reducing available spaces to nest.
- Mynas stole food from kestrels during chick-rearing time, decreasing chicks' supply.
- Mynas attacked kestrels midflight, preventing them from reaching their nests.
- Mynas knocked down kestrel chicks as they waited for food.
- Mynas sometimes killed and fed on kestrel chicks.

The result was a marked decline in the kestrel population around the school.

As students observed this interaction and drew on what they had learned about ecology, they began to ask ethically related questions: Should the school get involved in the conflict between these two species? Was it right to take the side of the kestrels? After all, the myna did not choose to be an invasive species. Was there a way for the two species to coexist peacefully?

Teachers seized the opportunity to help students go beyond the standard ecology curriculum and explore real-life science that was unfolding right before their eyes. Teachers decided to implement an 8-hour hackathon as the culminating activity, using 21st-century technology to address the age-old question of survival. Students worked in small teams in their classrooms, equipped with laptops and internet access, with ornithology experts on hand to help. Teams did online research, thought through effective approaches to the myna/kestrel conflict, and built models of their proposed solutions. Teams then presented their findings and

recommendations in a plenary meeting, followed by a gala dinner, with outside experts there to comment on the solutions.

Teams came up with four possible technological solutions to the problem, each making use of a camera that could distinguish between the myna and kestrels:

- Water is sprayed on myna when they approach nesting boxes.
- The sounds of a hawk are played when myna approach.
- The mynas' nesting box entrances are closed.
- A dummy of a hawk will jump out of a small hiding place when mynas approach.

Gal says the hackathon was a great success, engaging students and building a number of skills: creativity and innovation, flexibility and adaptability, initiative and self-direction, social and interdisciplinary skills, productivity and accountability, leadership and responsibility, critical thinking and problem solving, ethical reasoning, collaboration and communication, media and information literacy, use of technology, and science knowledge.

"The teachers also benefited from this innovative approach," Gal concludes. "They were able to move beyond traditional pedagogical techniques and explore new teaching methods that engage students more deeply. The hackathon required them to facilitate learning rather than simply deliver information, guiding students through complex problem-solving processes."

"Holistic Education Through Hackathon" by Adiv Gal in *Elementary School Journal*, June 2025 (Vol. 125, #4, pp. 549-575); Gal can be reached at adiv.gal@smkb.ac.il. See Memo 813 for related ecology activity involving birds flying into a school's windows.

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4. Teaching with an Understanding of the Bilingual Brain

In this article in *The Reading Teacher*, Ana Taboada Barber (University of Maryland/ College Park) says it was once commonly believed that being bilingual put people at a cognitive disadvantage. This was based on a zero-sum concept of the brain – that it could only hold so much. "Following this logic," says Barber, "learning more than one language means some other information, ability, or language gets lost." Research in the 1920s said there were detrimental effects of bilingualism, and a study in the 1930s introduced the term "language handicap" in school for students juggling two languages, stigmatizing them as less able.

But then in the 1960s, researchers found that bilingual children could outperform monolingual students on intelligence tests, and in 1979 Jim Cummins proposed the "threshold hypothesis" – that cognitive benefits kick in when a certain level of proficiency in both languages is attained. Researchers in the 1980s found that skills and *metalinguistic awareness* co-mingle across the two languages, and most educators and families shifted from *zero-sum* to *positive-sum* beliefs about bilingualism.

But for emerging bilingual students, current brain research tells us there's a lot for teachers, students, and families to keep in mind. Barber shares her big takeaways:

• Emerging bilinguals' first language is always active. "This does not necessarily mean

that they are constantly translating in their minds what they read, learn, or hear from their teachers," says Barber. "Instead, it means that both languages are functioning in their brains, which might explain their less-developed lexicons compared to those of English monolinguals. However, the vocabulary *across both* languages is rich."

• Explicitly teach foundational skills in first and second languages. This includes phonological, morphological, orthographic awareness and word decoding skills, while being aware that these are more straightforward in some languages (Spanish, for example) than in English.

• Two languages should be used for text-based oral discussions. Because two languages are active in emerging bilinguals' brains, teachers can leverage their bilingualism by forming first-language student groups for quick discussions, then shifting to mixed-language groups to create text- or discussion-based interactions or graphic organizers – in English.

• Executive control is a key skill. Emerging bilinguals need to pay attention to multiple dimensions of a task while suppressing and ignoring distractions. This means teachers must be sensitive to cognitive overload and constantly nurture executive function skills. The brains of emerging bilinguals simply need to work harder than those of other students.

• In dual language schools, maximize collaboration. First and second language teachers should aim to complement or bridge language components, including syntax, grammar, writing, vocabulary, and content.

• Build knowledge across languages. Students should be reading informational texts in first and second languages, learning content and reading skills from illustrations and text features such as headings, diagrams, and bullets.

• Use AI tools. Barber suggests that teachers encourage families to use tech tools for searching materials to build foundational knowledge on specific topics taught in schools. This can scaffold content and vocabulary for emerging bilinguals – for example using visual displays for abstract nouns like *generosity* and *envy*.

• Think of self-regulating skills as part of a broader system of self-regulated learning. This includes skills like holding information in mind (to deal with cognitive overload when ideas are unclear) and "fix-it" strategies when meaning breaks down.

"Reading Science for Emergent Bilinguals: Lessons from Bilingualism and Cognitive Research" by Ana Taboada Barber in *The Reading Teacher*, September/October 2025 (Vol. 79, #2, pp. 1-31); Barber can be reached at ataboada@umd.edu.

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5. Key Precursors to Success in Algebra I

"Too many young people come to Algebra I with significant learning gaps due to inconsistencies and interruptions in their mathematics instruction over several years," says this 26-page report from TNTP. According to the 2024 NAEP assessment, only 28 percent of U.S. students are proficient in 8th-grade math. "Since nearly all algebra content draws on knowledge from prior grades," the report continues, "most students enter Algebra I with a lot of ground to

make up."

The instructional incoherence that most students are experiencing "isn't intentional," says the report. "Often, it's the result of well-intentioned people trying to do too many things or working within real constraints. But the costs of incoherence are real. Success in school, and in Algebra I specifically, has a long-lasting impact on the lives of young people."

Working with data from more than 2,000 students who used the *Teach to One Roadmaps* learning platform, TNTP found that almost half of students started the course knowing just one-third of the algebra-related concepts and skills from prior grades. Facing an overwhelming amount of material to catch up, the researchers tried three different remedial approaches:

- Starting at the bottom – Focusing on the skills and knowledge missed in earlier grades;
- Grade-level-only – Working with Algebra I content and scaffolding in Tier 2 classes;
- Individualized – Tailoring Tier 2 support with the predecessor skills and knowledge that each student is ready to learn – closely tied to what's being taught during Tier 1.

The individualized approach turned out to be the most successful – provided that Tier 1 curriculum was solid and there was tight coordination between Tier I and Tier 2 teachers. Here were some key insights from the experiment:

- Algebra proficiency improves when students learn new algebra-related concepts and skills, including those from previous grades.
- This needs to take place in an overall system of *instructional coherence*, where curriculum expectations, materials, timely assessments, and interventions work together.
- Learning new algebra-related concepts and skills requires applying certain predecessor concepts and skills.
- The sweet spot is rigorous, grade-level Tier I instruction supplemented by Tier 2 instruction that supports students in filling their gaps.
- Students don't need to learn every concept and skill they missed, just the most important ones.
- Tier 2 support can meaningfully accelerate learning in Algebra I and is most effective when students build on what they know.

"That said," says the report, "teachers and students can't do this alone. They need support from leaders at the school, district, and state level. The education system must ensure a high-quality shared curriculum, holistic planning for Tier I and Tier 2 instruction, and mechanisms for consistent communication and collaboration between educators."

The key is an "algebra ladder" that teases out the precursor skills in a logical and sequential hierarchy. Here is the Teach to One Roadmaps list of math skills from grade 3 to 9. The more of these skills students learn, say the researchers, the better they do in Algebra I.

"Unlocking Algebra: What the Data Tells Us About Helping Students Catch Up" by Bailey Cato Czupryk, Adam Maier, Mary Pittman, Crystal Harmon, and Mahnaz Charania at TNTP, 2025

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6. Comparing Student Essays Written With and Without AI Support

In this MIT paper, Natalyia Kosmyna (MIT Media Lab) and seven colleagues report on their study of 54 college students who were asked to write essays under three different conditions: (a) using their brains only, (b) with the help of online searches, and (c) with help from ChatGPT and other generative AI tools. The researchers analyzed the essays, questioned students about what they had written, and had them don EEG headsets to detect different kinds of brain activity. The differences were striking:

• *With AI assistance* – Students' papers made more references to specific names, places, years, and definitions, but the writing style was homogeneous and after they finished, students had difficulty quoting their own work and had less of a sense of authorship and ownership. EEG scans revealed the lowest levels of cognitive activity.

• *Brain only* – These papers had fewer references to specifics but a wider variety of arguments. Students were better able to remember and quote specific information from their papers and had a greater sense of authorship and ownership of what they had written. EEG scans showed the strongest and widest range of cognitive activity of the three groups.

• *Using online searches* – Students in this group were in between the other two in terms of style, facility citing their own papers, sense of authorship, and brain activity.

The researchers followed up by asking each group to write essays using a different approach. Students in the brain-only group made effective use of AI, enhancing the depth and thoughtfulness of their writing. Students who initially used AI did significantly worse when they had to write and cite evidence without that support.

The striking differences between the three groups, the authors conclude, "highlights an important educational concern. AI tools, while valuable for supporting performance, may unintentionally hinder deep cognitive processing, retention, and authentic engagement with written material. If users rely heavily on AI tools, they may achieve superficial fluency but fail to internalize the knowledge or feel a sense of ownership over it.

"Taken together, these findings support an educational model that delays AI integration until learners have engaged in sufficient self-driven cognitive effort. Such an approach may promote both immediate tool efficacy and lasting cognitive autonomy."

"Your Brain on ChatGPT: Accumulation of Cognitive Debt When Using an AI Assistant for Essay Writing Task" by Natalyia Kosmyna, Eugene Hauptmann, Ye Tong Yuan, Jessica Situ, Xian-Hao Liao, Ashly Vivian Beresnitzky, Iris Braunstein, and Pattie Maes, Cornell University, June 10, 2025 (pp. 1-206); Kosmyna can be reached at nkosmyna@mit.edu.

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7. College Admission Essays – What Makes a Difference

In this article in *Educational Researcher*, Sugene Cho-Baker and four colleagues at Educational Testing Service say that in recent years, colleges have paid more attention to applicants' essays than to test scores. "This movement," say the researchers, "has been in part

propelled by a long history of rising class inequality in higher education and the utmost emphasis placed on academic qualifications devices that were more readily available to privileged families and youths."

The 2023 Supreme Court decision banning affirmative action in college admissions has made essays even more important for disadvantaged applicants, giving them an opportunity to tell about their personal history, character, and ability to contribute to the life of the campus.

Cho-Baker et al. analyzed 128,317 admission essays (2018-2020) to a flagship state university that admitted 23 percent of applicants. The researchers used sophisticated software to rate the essays on the quality of writing, then looked at two outcomes: was the student admitted, and if they were, their grade point average in their first semester in college. Here's what they found:

- The writing quality of admission essays varied by students' SES and underrepresented minority status, with advantaged students, who tend to have greater access to advanced writing instruction, more likely to submit well-written essays.
- The writing quality of admission essays was a significant predictor of being admitted and doing well academically in the first semester in college.
- High-school grades and SAT/ACT scores were even better predictors of college admission and first-semester GPA.
- "College admissions decision-makers," say the researchers, "tend to be more sensitive to technical writing skills than personal narratives in judging applicants' academic strengths."
- Thus, disadvantaged applicants who submitted well-written essays had a leg up for admission and first-semester success; the opposite was true if they submitted poorly-written essays.

The clear implication for low-income and minority students applying to college: tell your story in the essay, but put a lot of time and effort into how well it is written – as well as high-school grades and standardized test scores.

"Academic Writing Skills in College Admissions Essays: Exploring Their Implications for Admissions Decisions and First-Semester Grade Point Average" by Sugene Cho-Baker, Brent Bridgeman, Guangming Ling, Michael Flor, and Vinetha Belur in *Educational Researcher*, June/July 2025 (Vol. 54, #5, pp. 272-282); Ling can be reached at gling@ets.org.

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8. Award-Winning Children's Books

This *Social Education* feature lists award-winning books for 2025 (click the link below for cover images and brief summaries):

Carter G. Woodson elementary winner and honor:

- *The Rock in My Throat* by Kao Kalie Yang, illustrated by Jiemei Lin
- *A Map for Falasteen: A Palestinian Child's Search for Home* by Maysa Odeh, illustrated by Aliaa Betawi

Middle level winner and honor:

- *The Doll Test: Choosing Equality* by Carole Boston Weatherford, illustrated by David Elmo Cooper
- *We Sing from the Heart: How the Slants Took Their Fight for Free Speech to the Supreme Court* by Mia Wenjen, illustrated by Victor Bizar Gómez

Secondary winner:

- *Stealing Little Moon: The Legacy of the American Indian Boarding Schools* by Dan SaSuWeh Jones

Septima P. Clark Women in Literature elementary winner and honor:

- *Swinging Into History: Toni Stone: Big-League Baseball's First Woman Player* by Karen Swanson, illustrated by Laura Freeman
- *Introducing Sandwina: The Strongest Woman in the World!* by Viki Conrad, illustrated by Jeremy Holmes

Middle level winner and honor:

- *Go Forth and Tell: The Life of Augusta Baker, Librarian and Master Storyteller* by Breanna McDaniel, illustrated by April Harrison
- *Miles of Style: Eunice Johnson and the Ebony Fashion Fair* by Lisa Brathwaite, illustrated by Lynn Gaines

Secondary winner:

- *Marnie Phipps Clark: Champion for Children* by Lynette Mawhinney, illustrated by Neil Evans

Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray Book Award elementary winner:

- *Guts for Glory: The Story of Civil War Soldier Rosetta Wakeman* by Joanna Lapati

Middle level winner and honor:

- *Glenn Burke, Game Changer: The Man Who Invented the High Five* by Phil Bildner, illustrated by Daniel O'Brien
- *Queer and Fearless: Poems Celebrating the Lives of LGBTQ+ Heroes* by Rob Sanders, illustrated by Harry Woodgate

Secondary winner and honor:

- *Flamboyants: The Queer Harlem Renaissance I Wish I'd Known* by George Johnson, illustrated by Charly Palmer
- *Bless the Blood: A Cancer Memoir* by Walela Nehanda
- *Black Girl You Are Atlas* by Renée Watson, art by Ekua Holmes

"Carter G. Woodson Book Awards, 2025", "Septima P. Clark Women in Literature Book Award, 2025," and "Rev. Dr Pauli Murray Book Awards, 2025" in *Social Education*, May/June 2025 (Vol. 89, #3, pp. 161-168)

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9. Short Item:

Social Studies Trade Books for Young People – This supplement in *Social Education* has an extensive list of biographies, books on contemporary concerns, environment/ energy/ecology, geography/peoples/places, global connections, history/life and culture in the Americas, social interactions/relationships, and world history and culture. There is a brief summary for each book and a number of cover images.

"2025 Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People," a supplement in *Social Education*, May/June 2025 (Vol. 89, #3, pp. 1-20)

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If you have feedback or suggestions, please e-mail kim.marshall48@gmail.com

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 54 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 early Tuesday (there are 50 issues a year). Every week there's a podcast and HTMI version. Artificial intelligence is not used.

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- The current issue (in Word or PDF)
- All back issues (Word and PDF) and podcasts
- An easily searchable archive of all articles so far
- The "classic" articles from all 20 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
ASCD SmartBrief
Cult of Pedagogy
District Management Journal
Ed Magazine
Education Gadfly
Education Next
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
Kappan (Phi Delta Kappan)
Knowledge Quest
Language Arts
Language Magazine
Learning for Justice (formerly Teaching Tolerance)
Literacy Today (formerly Reading Today)
Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
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
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