

# *Marshall Memo 72*

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education  
January 31, 2005

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## **Quotes of the Week**

"Why are principals not sophisticated data gluttons?"  
Chester Finn (see item #1)

"Damn it, they need to be prepared for [college] because most of them will either go or need the same level of skills to have any chance to succeed in this economy."  
Kati Haycock of the Education Trust (*Education Week*, Jan. 26, 2005, p. 18)

"I think there's nothing more important than for an adolescent to be known by mature, thoughtful, intelligent, kind, respectful adults."  
Rona Wilensky, Principal of New Vista High School, Boulder, Colorado  
(*Education Week*, Jan. 26, 2005, p. 18)

"For African American and Latino kids, having a positive, encouraging relationship with adults in the school is absolutely critical. But it can't just be encouraging – it also has to be a demanding relationship. When teachers don't demand things of students, they say that's a sign that 'the teacher doesn't care about us.'"  
Carolyn Ash (see item #2)

"Effective teachers know the inefficiency of teaching students what they already know and what they are not yet able to learn."  
Michael Kamil and Herbert Walberg (*Education Week*, Jan. 26, 2005, p. 40)

"Remember that you are not being paid to type or collate papers, you are being paid to lead. Let your secretary do it!"  
Jody Capelluti and Key Nye (see item #11)

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## 1. The Principal As CEO

In last week's *Gadfly*, Chester Finn rhapsodizes over a *Wall Street Journal* article (December 30, 2004) by 95-year-old business guru Peter Druker. Finn says that much of what Druker says about the modern American CEO applies to school principals.

Both are responsible for:

- Deciding what results the institution must pursue;
- Determining what information is vital for success;
- Shaping the organization's priorities;
- Deploying people in key positions.

Finn wonders, "How many U.S. public school principals see their role thusly? How many have the leeway, the authority, the personal capacity and drive to define and play such a role vis-à-vis their school?"

Finn bemoans the fact that principals don't have more autonomy and notes that the best principals often succeed by "bending rules, exploiting relationships, and utilizing every loophole in the system." But he thinks principals could do more with the information that is currently available. "Why are principals not sophisticated data gluttons?" he wants to know.

"CEOs and Principals" by Chester Finn in *The Education Gadfly*, January 27, 2005 (Vol. 5, #4, p. 1-2) <http://www.edexcellence.net/foundation/gadfly/index.cfm>

## 2. Fostering High Achievement Among Students of Color

In this round-up of recent thinking on closing the achievement gap, *Harvard Education Letter* makes several points:

- *Relationships and challenge are key.* Regardless of how much (or how little) encouragement students of color receive at home, positive relationships with teachers, counselors, administrators, and coaches are critical to academic success. "For African American and Latino kids," says Carolyn Ash, former project director of the Minority Student Achievement Network, "having a positive, encouraging relationship with adults in the school is absolutely critical. But it can't just be encouraging – it also has to be a demanding relationship. When teachers don't demand things of students, they say that's a sign that 'the teacher doesn't care about us.'"

- *Early identification helps.* Students who were designated as “gifted” or “advanced” in elementary school seemed to have a better chance of staying in accelerated classes in middle and high schools. One study speculated that there may be an “anointment effect” that becomes self-fulfilling – along with exposure to a more challenging curriculum.

- *“Acting white” anti-achievement pressure is not universal.* Researchers in North Carolina found that not all high-achieving students seemed to be intimidated by (or even aware of) the widely-reported pressure to associate academic achievement with racial disloyalty. Other studies show high-achieving students of color maintaining a strong work ethic and high popularity among their peers. As long as African-American and Latino youngsters are represented in advanced classes, these classes are not seen as the exclusive province of white students. But where there is little or no minority representation in advanced classes, this can occur.

- *Peer networks help.* A Johns Hopkins study found that informal peer networks can create “a space for the affirmation of racial identity” and help dispel notions that achievement is not cool.

- *Cross-age peer tutoring helps.* Programs that recruit high-school students of color to work with elementary and middle school students can have a very positive effect on both older and younger students.

- *Maintain a problem-solving attitude.* Researchers report that some students are a little uneasy about all the talk about the achievement gap and feel stereotyped and even blamed. There’s no getting away from the problem, but the trick is to confront the data and focus on solving the problem with specific initiatives.

“Beyond the Gap” by Michael Sadowski in *Harvard Education Letter*, Jan. / Feb. 2005 (Vol. 21, #1, p. 1-4), no e-link available

### **3. Alternatives to Keeping Students Back**

This article in *Principal Leadership* recaps the research on grade retention (temporary gains followed by negative long-term effects on achievement, adjustment, and staying in school) and makes the case for “Promotion Plus” – doing everything possible to prevent retention and promoting most students with extra services.

In terms of long-term interventions that reduce the need for retention, the authors point to evidence for the following:

- *Parent involvement* – Continuous, culturally-appropriate contact with parents about learning activities that promote achievement.

- *Classroom strategies* – Age-appropriate, culturally-sensitive classroom approaches to accelerate learning, including tutoring and individual enrichment.
- *Formative assessments* – Continuous monitoring of students’ progress and use of the data to modify instruction.
- *Targeted reading help* – Developmentally-appropriate, intensive, direct instruction for students who are having difficulty with reading.
- *Social service support* – School-based mental health programs that promote social and emotional adjustment.
- *Student support teams* – Regular meetings of professionals to identify learning and behavior problems, craft interventions, and monitor their effectiveness.
- *Behavior management* – Schoolwide programs to reduce classroom discipline problems.
- *After-school and summer school programs* to provide extra time for struggling students.
- *Schoolwide collaboration* – Integration of regular, remedial, and special education services into a seamless web.
- *Outreach across levels* – Elementary, middle, and high schools should collaborate on preventing school failure.

“Alternatives to Grade Retention” by Shane Jimerson, Sarah Pletcher, and Mariellen Kerr in *Principal Leadership*, February 2005 (Vol. 5, #6, p. 11-15), no e-link available

#### **4. Summer Schools That Close the Achievement Gap**

Every summer, millions of students lose about a month of what they learned during the school year. In math it’s closer to 2.6 months, with spelling not far behind (these two subjects seem to get the least practice in July and August). In reading, there’s a pronounced social-class gap: middle-class children tend to gain ground over the summer, but less-advantaged students fall behind because they have less access to books at home and in local libraries. Reading expert Richard Allington estimates that by the time low-income students enter middle school, their cumulative summer reading losses add up to a two-year achievement gap.

Summer school is an increasingly common response in school districts across the country, but not all summer schools are created equal. This article in *American School Board Journal* reports on research pinpointing factors that make some middle and high-school summer programs more effective than others:

- High-quality teachers

- Innovative and creative teaching
- Emphasis on reading and math
- Program evaluation focusing on student achievement
- Scheduling summer school for part of each day for a big chunk of the

summer; stretching summer school out reduces the gaps between the regular school year and provides more continuity and less slippage in learning.

- Adequate and reliable funding

The summer school program in Johnston County, North Carolina, has many of these attributes. In addition, the district requires teachers who teach failing students during the regular school year to list the teaching strategies that were successful with these students and pass them along to their summer school colleagues so they can tailor instruction to each student.

“What Did You Learn Last Summer” by Susan Black in *American School Board Journal*, February 2005 (Vol. 192, #2, p. 38-40) <http://www.asbj.com/researcharchive/>

## 5. A Reading/Writing Strategy for Middle-School

A group of literacy specialists at EDC (Education Development Center) in Massachusetts developed Supported Literacy, a strategy to help young adolescents understand literary texts. The strategy has been used in a number of school districts, including Meridian, Mississippi, and has reportedly had very positive results.

Supported literacy leads students through six steps with each reading passage:

- *Engage* – The teacher poses a question or prompt to guide students’ reading of a passage.
- *Read* – Students read the passage individually, in small groups, or as a whole class.
- *Respond* – Students then write a journal entry, re-reading the text as they do so.
- *Elaborate* – In groups of 4-5, students share their individual responses, look for connections among them, and compose a response that reflects the thinking of all the members of the group. (The teacher structures the interaction of each group by appointing a recorder, facilitator, timekeeper, and reporters.)
- *Revisit* – The reporter from each group then shares the group’s interpretation with the whole class. The teacher helps students make connections and comparisons among the responses they hear.

- *Represent* – Finally, students show their deeper understanding of the passage by writing a more structured essay.

“Making Meaning” by Amy Aparicio Clark in *Principal Leadership*, February 2005 (Vol. 5, #6, p. 28-32), no e-link available

## 6. Strategies to Help Students with Content-Rich Reading

Noting the drastic shift in reading material that takes place in the upper elementary grades (from stories to non-fiction), Alabama literacy professor Mary Spor recommends several strategies to help students get a handle on the challenging, content-rich texts they encounter in the middle grades:

- *Anticipation guide* – Before they read a passage, students are asked to respond (individually or in small groups) to a series of true-false statements about the content. After they read the passage, students answer the same questions again, cementing what they have learned.

- *Quick writes* – Before reading, students are given 3-5 minutes to quickly jot down what they know about the topic. This activates prior knowledge and sends students into the passage with more interest and curiosity. Students repeat the exercise after reading.

- *Text impressions* – The teacher picks several key words from the passage and writes them in sequence (for example, if students are about to read *Macbeth*, the words might be: king -> war -> honor ->witches). Students then work individually, in small groups, or as class to write a paragraph using the words and any knowledge they already have about the subject. Then they read the passage, focusing on verifying or correcting their predictions. Afterwards, they re-write their paragraphs integrating what they learned.

- *Graphic organizers* – Students put the main topic in a bubble in the middle of a blank piece of paper and add new topics and ideas in branching webs as they read the passage. Graphic maps like this help students see connections and get a visual grasp of the overall meaning.

“Reading to Learn” by Mary Spor in *Principal Leadership*, February 2005 (Vol. 5, #6, p. 16-21), no e-link available

## 7. Questions to Guide Civics Discussions

In this article, two Massachusetts educators suggest guiding questions to help students make sense of civics-related events from history, in the news, in the curriculum, in the school, or in their community:

- *What are the facts?* Strip away rumors, hearsay, and sound bites and find out what really happened.
- *Says who?* Double-check sources, skeptically weigh competing claims, and examine reliability.
- *What do you think?* Reach out to others to get differing opinions and perspectives (students might work in pairs exchanging ideas).
- *So what?* Consider relevance and value and think about the importance of the issue in the greater scheme of things.
- *Is it fair?* Think about fairness and equity, one's own rights and the rights of others, and work on developing what Deborah Meier calls "informed empathy."
- *How can I help?* Think about how one might contribute time, effort, moral support, and/or resources to improve the situation or support others. "The question," the authors say, "underlines that we are members of an interdependent whole and that our contributions to the common good are needed and can make a difference."

"An Inquiring Mind: Placing Questioning at the Center of Civics Education" by Mark Piechota and Patricia Evans in *Perspectives* (from the Massachusetts Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development) Nov./Dec. 2004, no e-link available

## 8. Online Surveys of Teachers, Parents, and Students

When I was a Boston elementary school principal, I spent countless hours hand-tabulating the results of annual staff and parent surveys. Nowadays, there are amazing online survey tools that make this kind of work a whole lot easier. In addition, online surveys assure staff, students, and parents of confidentiality and make it possible to get much higher response rates. An article in the current *Education Week* describes several of them, including Zoomerang (<http://info.zoomerang.com/>) and WebSurveyor (<http://www.websurveyor.com/>). [There's also Survey Monkey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com/>), which I recently saw in action in a Brooklyn school's staff survey and in an organization-wide survey done by New Leaders for New Schools.]

Online survey companies allow a school to create its own customized

questionnaires, including Yes/No questions, single or multiple-choice items, 5-4-3-2-1 scales for degree of agreement/disagreement, and open-ended written answers. The Greenville, South Carolina school district recently conducted an online survey of parents' "customer satisfaction" with the school district and garnered much valuable information. And Lakeville Middle School in Watsonville, California used an online survey to tap student opinions about various issues (sample questions included "I am well prepared in reading" (5-4-3-2-1 strongly agree/strongly disagree scale); "I am well prepared in writing; I am well prepared in spelling" etc.).

Three things to think about with online surveys are: (a) cost, which varies widely; (b) parents who may not have Internet access; and (c) security measures that might be needed with community surveys to ensure that interlopers can't get access to a survey. But on balance, these new tools are well worth checking out.

"Online Surveys Give School Districts Quick Feedback" by Andrew Trotter in *Education Week*, January 26, 2005 (Vol. 24, #20, p. 8)  
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2005/01/26/20tech.h24.html>

## **9. A Middle-School Academics and Enrichment Period**

In this article, a Wisconsin middle-school principal describes how she worked with teachers to implement a flexible 50-minute contact period (dubbed Academics and Enrichment) in which students work with their house's core subject teachers (it's a fifth teaching period for these math, language arts, science, and social studies teachers) and receive a variety of services every day. The school reports remarkable learning gains from the program, including a 50-75 percent reduction in core-subject failures, a 57-75 percent improvement among failing math students at all three grade levels, a 99 percent decrease in failures in language arts for the grade 6-7 cohorts, and a 4-17 percent increase in A's and B's for the grade 6-7 cohorts. In addition, surveys showed strong student, parent, and staff support for the program.

A&E is not a separate curriculum from the rest of the day; its content is driven by common assessments, students' learning progress, and individual students' needs, all with respect to state standards. A&E assignments are flexible, with students rotating in and out of the block every 4½ weeks (twice a quarter). Sample A&E units include:

- Problem-Solving Strategies
- Science Labs With an Emphasis on Inquiry and Writing
- Book Publishing

- Data Collection
- Graphing
- Demographics.

To get more individual attention during the A&E block, the school brings in parent volunteers, college pre-service teachers, and learning support assistants hired with Title I funds.

Core teachers in each house meet to decide on regrouping students for A&E every three weeks. There is also a half-day meeting every quarter (teachers are freed up by substitutes) for long-term curriculum planning. In their regular meetings, teachers look at the units they are teaching, classroom assessment results, and individual students' needs and ask themselves these guiding questions:

- What are the strengths of our learners?
- Who needs special help right now?
- What questions do students still have on this unit?
- What will be difficult in the upcoming instruction?
- In what areas are students ready for enrichment?

“Improving Literacy in Lean Financial Times” by Robyn Martino and Patricia Herdrich in *Principal Leadership*, February 2005 (Vol. 5, #6, p. 33-36), no e-link available

## **10. So What's the Deal with Block Scheduling?**

In answer to a question from a principal who is under pressure from teachers to give up 90-minute blocks and return to traditional 45-minute periods, *Principal Leadership* magazine says bluntly that there is research on both sides of this debate. On one hand, a *Kappan* article by Allen Queen (November 2000) cited important advantages of bigger blocks of instructional time, including a less fragmented schedule, opportunities for acceleration and enrichment, a wide variety of elective courses, fewer disciplinary referrals, improved class attendance, increased numbers of students competing AP courses, advanced mastery of subject matter, and improved course grades.

But a study done for Education Policy Analysis Archives (Vol. 7, #29) found no significant advantage to either type of schedule in terms of student achievement on state-mandated tests – except for better performance in math computation under traditional scheduling. An article by Cheryl Thomas in *NASSP Bulletin* (Vol. 85, #628) said, “Giving students more time in a single day to learn material but reducing the

amount of time to one semester... does not translate to escaping the prison of time. Instead, it merely changes the type of prison.”

All this suggests that a hybrid schedule might be best. “A one-size-fits-all approach to scheduling may not be the ideal model,” says Donald Hackman, an Iowa State professor who has studied school schedules. “Some disciplines may be better suited for larger instructional blocks, while learning in other subjects... may be better facilitated through some type of year-long approach.”

“Asked and Answered” in *Principal Leadership*, February 2005 (Vol. 5, #6, p. 10), no e-link available

## 11. Four Time Management Tips for Principals

Jody Capelluti and Ken Nye, two retired Maine principals, offer the following advice to new principals for managing their time and making the job more doable:

- *Let your secretary be the secretary.* New principals can feel intimidated by their secretaries’ power and knowledge of the building. “[D]on’t be afraid to be the boss and ask your secretary to do things that he or she might not want to do,” say Capelluti and Nye. “Remember that you are not being paid to type or collate papers, you are being paid to lead. Let your secretary do it!”

- *Carve out time each week for yourself.* One trick is to schedule meetings with yourself to block out 30-60 minutes of protected time when you can reflect, catch your breath, or walk around the building.

- *Say no to non-essential events.* “It is much easier to say yes than no,” is Capelluti and Nye’s comment on requests to serve on committees or attend conferences. “Saying no takes energy and tenacity.” Nonetheless, it’s vital to your sanity to push back on requests that are not central to your school’s mission and that you just don’t have time for. Nicely but firmly, just say no.

- *Throw it away unless it’s essential.* Capelluti and Nye confess that when they were newbie principals, they kept stacks of professional journals that they “absolutely had to read” (they never did) and tried to file every piece of paper just in case they might need it some day (on those rare occasions when they *did* need to put their hands on some ancient document, they couldn’t find it anyway). Over time, they became more draconian, filing only a few essential documents and throwing away most of the mail. “Other than a bank check,” they say, “we discovered there wasn’t much in the mail that couldn’t go directly from our desks to the waste-basket.”

“Let’s Be Reasonable” by Jody Capelluti and Ken Nye in *Principal Leadership*, February 2005 (Vol. 5, #6, p. 8), no e-link available

## 12. Short Items:

*a. Promoting middle-school literacy in the library* – A New York librarian offers these ways for school librarians to promote literacy among middle-school students:

- *Offer books that teenagers want to read.* This includes fiction, non-fiction, and poetry that appeals to students in the school.

- *Promote reading for pleasure.* One device is a teen online book club (<http://www.DearReader.com>) that sends students a brief excerpt from a well-received young adult book for five days (the librarian can create a corresponding display of books in the library). A lunchtime Teen Read Week book club can allow students to listen to books on tape and discuss them with peers.

- *Recommend related reading to teachers in content areas:* physical education, art, science, math, driving, etc.

- *Collaborate with teachers to incorporate literacy and technology into the curriculum.* The librarian can train and co-teach with classroom teachers to get them up to speed using computer databases and online sources.

- *Offer online resources to foster literacy components in the curriculum.* Social studies, health, photography, and other courses can all draw on extensive online resources.

- *Write grants that involve teachers and students in literacy-related activities.* For example, how about going for funding for a teacher-student book club, an interdisciplinary unit incorporating art with children’s literature, and the school’s math team using essays and student collaboration to take part in contents?

- *Develop social events and displays tied to reading.* Popular movie releases can be tied to book and author promotions, audio books can be displayed and promoted before vacations, and current events can be made into hooks for reading.

- *Model lifelong learning and reading for pleasure in every way possible.* “It’s vital for the librarian to be welcoming and happy to talk with students and staff members any time,” writes the author. This includes showing enthusiasm for one’s own reading and genuine interest in what others are reading.

“Eight Ways Your Librarian Can Help Promote Literacy” by Jane Fenn in *Principal Leadership*, February 2005 (Vol. 5, #6, p. 49-51), no e-link available

*b. Advice for literacy coaches* – Within a longer article on literacy initiatives, the executive director of secondary schools in Pittsburgh has the following suggestions for literacy coaches:

- Assume the role of a resource person who knows the research, the programs, the strategies, and the assessments.
- Assume the role of a facilitator who provides assistance and guidance as teachers develop a repertoire of literacy strategies.
- Assume the role of a presenter who explains and demonstrates strategies and programs.
- Assume the role of an advisory who gives recommendations to school staff members.
- Assume the role of a mentor who demonstrates the ability to share knowledge and experience with colleagues effectively and to promote peer collaboration.

“Comprehensive Approach to Adolescent Literacy” by Cassandra Richardson Kemp in *Principal Leadership*, February 2005 (Vol. 5, #6, p. 22-27), no e-link available

*c. Civil Rights quiz online* – Two nonprofit organizations, Teaching for Change and Poverty and Race Research Action Council, have joined forces to create a thought-provoking quiz on the Civil Rights Movement. This website also has teaching resources for Black History Month. <http://www.civilrightsteaching.org/>

Spotted in *PEN Weekly NewsBlast*, January 27, 2005

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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:***

If you go to <http://www.marshallmemo.com> you can get information on:

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- Headlines for issues 1-51
- What readers say
- About Kim Marshall
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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 Educational Research Journal  
American Educator  
American School Board Journal  
ASCD SmartBrief  
Atlantic Monthly  
Bay State Banner  
Boston Globe  
CommonWealth Magazine  
District Administrator  
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 Educational 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.