

# *Marshall Memo 60*

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education  
November 1, 2004

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## **Quotes of the Week**

"When someone begins a diet but doesn't give up chocolate and fried foods, he can't blame the mirror when he keeps gaining weight. The mirror – like testing – only reflects the whole, true picture."

David Driscoll, Mass. Commissioner of Education (see item 7)

"Dealing with difficult staff members is not fun."

Jody Capelluti and Ken Nye (see item #5)

"About the only way we can avoid stress is to do nothing, engage no one, and think no new ideas."

Zach Kelehear (see item #8b)

"One thing I've learned as an administrator is that if I want to remember to take care of something, I need to write it down."

Wayne Gerke, Alaska assistant principal (see item #4)

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## 1. A Boston High School Compares Itself to the Red Sox

Here how the MATCH School, a Grade 9-12 charter school in Boston, compares itself to the victorious Boston Red Sox:

1. *Courage* – Curt Schilling somehow overcame a career-threatening ankle injury to win Game 6... When many Boston peers tease our students about their 5pm dismissal, their required weekends and summer school, MATCH students must show courage to stay the course.

2. *Discipline* – David Ortiz is a supremely disciplined hitter, waiting for his pitch... MATCH students must be disciplined not just to master basic algebra, geometry, and writing as measured by MCAS, but to take on courses like Advanced Placement biology, calculus, English, and American history as juniors and seniors.

3. *Perseverance* – After struggling through 6 games against the Yankees, Johnny Damon finally came through in Game 7... Our students, often under-challenged in Grades K-8 in their various elementary and middle schools, must persevere to graduate from the hardest-grading high school in Boston.

4. *Preparation* – Jason Varitek is the heart of the Sox, not for bat or glove, but because of his exhaustive preparation and work ethic... MATCH teachers succeed not just because of their talent, but because of their relentless day-by-day efforts to arrive to each class prepared to demand excellent work of students and of themselves.

5. *New Talent* – Orlando Cabrera, Dave Roberts, Keith Foulke, and Curt Schilling all were critical to knocking off the Yankees... In 2004-05, new staff Megan McDonough, Gavin Moses, Chris Dupuis, Jason Marshall, Sandy Little, Sarah Moon, Kamala Saxton, and 45 unbelievable MATCH Corps are taking MATCH to new heights.

6. *Data-Driven* – Unlike Grady Little, who managed by "hunch," Terry Francona and the Red Sox brass exhaustively analyze the tendencies of opposing teams based on their statistical performance... Principal Charlie Sposato, Executive Director Alan Safran, and the MATCH trustees gather and analyze all sorts of test and survey data in the never-ending pursuit of MATCH's college success mission.

7. *Intimate Building, Strong Culture* – Fenway Park has both one of the smallest ballparks in the nation and the best fans... MATCH School, with just 185 students, leverages its small size to make sure everyone knows one another, creating a safe,

warm family-style atmosphere focused on college success.

From an e-mail from the MATCH School to its supporters, October 26, 2004. You can contact executive director Alan Safran at [alan.safran@matchschool.org](mailto:alan.safran@matchschool.org) or visit the school's website at <http://www.matchschool.org>

## 2. Suggestions for Dealing with Asperger Syndrome

In this thorough article in *Principal Leadership*, a Missouri special educator gives a detailed description of Asperger Syndrome (AS), a developmental disability at the high-functioning end of the autism spectrum. Asperger Syndrome, which affects about 0.5 percent of the population, seems to have biological and genetic roots (it's not an emotional disturbance and is not caused by bad parenting). AS usually isn't diagnosed until middle or high school, sometimes after a number of incorrect diagnoses in earlier years. Many students who have AS feel discouraged by years of academic and social failures and have low self-esteem and a sense of learned helplessness – which may explain higher levels of depression and suicide when they are adolescents and adults. Educators who are not familiar with the symptoms of AS may think that students with the syndrome are odd and troublesome – and may add to students' sense of isolation, ostracism, and victimization by treating them punitively. Here are the major symptoms and suggestions for addressing them:

- *Theory of mind* – Children with AS have difficulty inferring other people's thoughts, beliefs, emotions, perspective, intentions, and behavior; predicting others' behavior or emotional state; understanding others' perspective and how their own behavior affects others; applying social conventions (e.g., taking turns and being polite); and telling fact from fiction. All this can make students with AS seem rude or manipulative and can result in others bullying them or taking advantage of their naiveté.

*Suggested strategies:* These students need direct instruction on how to understand the thoughts of others and use problem-solving strategies. It is *not* helpful to ask students with AS why they behave the way they do; it's more helpful to invite them to examine effects of their behavior.

- *Social skills* – Children with AS tend not to understand the unwritten rules of communication and social behavior and have difficulty forming and keeping friendships and adjusting to the norms of the classroom and the workplace.

*Suggested strategies:* These students need supervised activities at school that protect them from bullying and teasing; direct instruction in social skills such as

“reading” and responding to social cues, making friends, and dealing with frustrations; visual reminders to prompt social skills; and time alone at certain points in the day to relax and regroup.

- *Verbal and non-verbal communication skills* – Although many children with AS seem verbally sophisticated, they often have trouble using language for social purposes, especially everyday chit-chat. They can speak endlessly about something that interests them and not realize that others are bored and not responding. They may also misunderstand words with multiple meanings and take things literally. They may have limited facial expressions and a peculiar gaze, awkward body language, and stand too close to others.

*Suggested strategies:* These students need to be explicitly taught appropriate tone of voice, facial expressions, body language, respecting personal space, and how to begin, maintain, and end conversations, along with the multiple meanings of commonly-used words. When making requests and explaining things, it’s a good idea to be brief, simple, and concrete; get the student’s attention before giving instructions, allow time for the student to process the information, and check for understanding (they may parrot back without getting it).

- *Behavior and mental health* – Students with AS tend to have restrictive or repetitive patterns of behavior that can include rituals, routines, and an intense interest in *one* subject (e.g., washing machines, bus timetables, subway maps). Students with AS may also be ADHD and have difficulty coping with the demands of the classroom. They are often not in touch with their own emotions and sometimes bottle up their frustrations, which can escalate to a point of crisis before others notice the problem.

*Suggested strategies:* Provide a predictable and safe environment and try to avoid things that could trigger a meltdown, including contact with antagonistic peers; have consistent routines with clear expectations and give a heads-up before transitions; limit opportunities for obsessive talk by having a specific time of day for this, and try to broaden the student’s repertoire of interests; when extinguishing an inappropriate behavior, always teach an appropriate replacement behavior; use humor to diffuse tension; teach anger-control skills; teach cause-and-effect concepts; use distracters (e.g., going on an errand) to remove the student non-punitively when trouble is brewing; create a safe place for the student to go when he or she needs to regain control.

- *Academic skills* – Although most students with AS have average or above-average intelligence and good rote memory skills, they may lack higher-level thinking and comprehension skills and not be able to problem-solve.

*Suggested strategies:* Use students' exceptional memory skills to show off factual knowledge in class; link their obsessive subject to what's being studied in class; shorten or modify their written assignments and let them word process on a computer.

"Asperger Syndrome: A Guide for Secondary School Principals" by Gena Barnhill in *Principal Leadership*, November 2004 (Vol. 5, #3, p.11-15), no e-link available

### **3. Infusing Language Arts Into Elementary School Math**

Mary Wright, a third-grade teacher in Holyoke, Mass., knew that her students were having problems with the new, inquiry-based math curriculum, and math time was always a troubled part of each day. "If someone was having a bad day," said Wright, "it'll show up in math. I know I'm going to get more bathroom requests, more fights, and more tears than any other time of the day." Wright herself was stressed out about math because Holyoke faced a possible state takeover due to low scores on the MCAS (the Massachusetts high-takes test).

Remembering that most of her students didn't hadn't even attempted the open-ended math word problems on the MCAS in previous years, Wright decided to try a different approach: integrating language arts into her math classes. She coaxed her students into looking at the open-ended MCAS math questions as a game and challenged them to find ways to spot them and respond. "Third graders love games," she said, "and can relate to the idea that if you know the rules, you can win."

Wright taught her students a step-by-step approach to complex word problems: (a) read the math word problem; (b) draw a picture showing the elements of the problem; (c) describe in writing how they are going to solve the problem; (d) write down the corresponding math formula; and finally, (e) solve the equation correctly. She then applied language arts methods to a subject area she's always associated only with numbers and symbols. These were the changes she made in her math curriculum:

- *Grouping students heterogeneously* – This encouraged students to share expertise and support each other in learning math concepts and the language of math.

- *Using oral language to support reading and writing* – She had students “talk and draw” their way through complex math problems, using their home language, before they started to write down solutions.

- *Modeling and providing explicit instruction in math language* – Wright taught her students specific action words and phrases that help unlock math problems and make the thought process explicit (e.g., label, number, describe, explain, list, draw, and give evidence).

- *Creating a math “word wall”* – Wright had students keep lists of important words and phrases (e.g., numerator, denominator, digit, sum, divided by, divided into) and posted these words on an alphabetic word wall that students could see as they did their work.

- *Using the writing process* – Wright had her students go through the same multi-draft writing process they used in language arts: writing an initial draft; sharing drafts; responding to each others’ ideas using guides and graphic organizers; making revisions; and proofreading.

Wright found this approach highly successful. Students began to *own* the language of math, and Marisol, a student who previously had declared her hatred of math, began to ask for extra math homework.

“The Language Game of Math” by Meg Gebhard, Andrew Habana Hafner, and Mary Wright in *Harvard Education Letter*, November/December 2004 (Vol. 20, #6, p. 5-7), no e-link available

#### **4. Stretching the Role of Assistant Principal**

Wayne Gerke, who has served as an assistant principal in two Alaska secondary schools, offers the following advice on how APs can go beyond the traditional disciplinarian role:

- *Sharing professional articles* – Gerke keeps clippings from a variety of sources and gives them to teachers when they come to him with a related question.

- *Sitting in on professional development* – Gerke makes a point of taking part in workshops with teachers.

- *Front-loading classroom visits* – Gerke finds it much more difficult to get into classrooms after the first quarter of each year, so he makes frequent visits in the beginning part of the year, following up with a structured note to teachers after each visit.

- *Getting involved in classrooms* – When he is in classrooms, Gerke joins in class discussions, asks questions, and, if a play being read, takes a part. He says that this opens the door for teachers to ask him for advice on teaching strategies.

- *Reaching out to students* – Gerke meets with newly-enrolled students, takes a photograph of each student, and posts the pictures on a special bulletin board. He also has a monthly pizza lunch with groups of 8-10 students and engages them in open discussions about their concerns and interests.

- *Following up* – “One of the things I’ve learned as an administrator,” Gerke writes, “is that if I want to remember to take care of something, I need to write it down.” He makes a point of keeping a daily to-do list and fighting to get through it despite the bombardment of new items coming over the transom every day.

- *Reaching out to support staff* – Gerke asks all staff for advice on how to improve school operations – and listens.

- *Banking ideas for next year* – Each year, Gerke pops bright ideas into a file on his desk labeled “Ideas for the Next Year.”

“More Than a Disciplinarian” by Wayne Gerke in *Principal Leadership*, November 2004 (Vol. 5, #3, p. 39-41), no e-link available

## 5. Difficult Conversations with Difficult Colleagues

“Dealing with difficult staff members,” write two former principals from Maine, “is not fun. It can make you unpopular with staff members, students, and community members – especially if the staff member is well respected. It can also be very stressful on the principal.” They acknowledge a strong tendency to *avoid* such confrontations, but say that if avoidance continues, it can erode a principal’s credibility. They suggest a list of questions that school leaders can use to frame the issue with a problem employee and prepare for a “talk:”

- What, specifically, is the conduct or attitude that’s bothering you?
- What harm is caused by it?
- Is it worth your time and energy to address the issue?
- What would happen if you did nothing to address the issue?
- Is the person aware of your concern?
- Is this a recent issue or an old and ongoing issue?
- Is this an isolated incident or a pattern of behavior?
- Was prior help provided to remediate this problem? Any success?

- Is this a private issue or situation, or does it have broader implications for the school or the community?
- What do you think is the person's motivation for acting this way?
- Is there some situation or context that excuses the individual?
- How would you describe it to the person so he or she will understand you?
- What will you suggest to the person for an alternative course of action?
- How will you recognize and reward the new behavior?

"Dealing with Difficult Staff Members" by Jody Capelluti and Ken Nye in *Principal Leadership*, November 2004 (Vol. 5, #3, p. 8), no e-link available

## 6. Ideas for a Monthly Principals' Retreat

In this article, a Lincoln, Nebraska principal describes her district's monthly off-site leadership development meetings. Each full-day retreat has a structured agenda including these components:

- *Reconnect* – First thing in the morning and after lunch, principals sit in a circle and go around answering a single question (e.g., Who are your mentors and why? What is causing you the most stress right now?).

- *Read it, liked it* – Principals share a synopsis of an article or book they particularly liked and how they are applying it.

- *Leadership learnings* – The group focuses on a major topic (e.g., addressing racism, building professional learning communities, Peter Senge's systems thinking in *The Fifth Dimension*).

- *Dialogue* – In this segment, principals have exploratory discussions around topics such as, What would our district look like if I cared as much about your school as I care about my school?

- *Professional sharing* – Principals describe effective practices – ideas ranging from the practical (e.g., how to deliver office messages without interrupting instruction) to philosophical (e.g., how to reinforce school values).

- *Closure* – Each session ends with discussion of the next month's agenda, a summary of the day's learnings, and a roundtable discussion of what ideas participants will put to work in their own schools (for example, after one session that focused on the ladder of inference, many principals committed to being more aware of not jumping to conclusions based on perceptions).

"Developing Thoughtful Leaders" by Bess Sullivan Scott in *Principal Leadership*, November 2004 (Vol. 5, #3, p. 22-25), no e-link available

## 7. The Role of Testing in Joyless Classrooms

In a letter to *Education Week* last week, David Driscoll, Massachusetts Education Commissioner, said that, for once, he agrees with Alfie Kohn – or at least with this point made by Kohn in an earlier *Ed. Week* article: the pressure of high-stakes testing is pushing too many educators into joyless, scripted test-prep lessons.

But Driscoll goes on to say that many teachers avoid this trap: “Instead, these teachers view testing as what it is: a measure of what students learn at a particular point in time. These teachers take the time to incorporate the standards into their lesson planning, and usually find that they were already there. These teachers teach in a way that motivates their students to learn: they make connections to real-life situations and get children actively involved in their own education. These teachers don’t worry about results making them look bad; rather, they focus on the bigger picture – improving student achievement.”

Driscoll disagrees with Kohn on the root cause of joyless classrooms: “When someone begins a diet but doesn’t give up chocolate and fried foods, he can’t blame the mirror when he keeps gaining weight. The mirror – like testing – only reflects the whole, true picture.”

“Mass. Schools Chief Offers ‘Feel-Bad Education’ Cure” – Letter to *Education Week*, October 27, 2004 (Vol. 24, #9, p. 43)

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2004/10/27/09letter-3.24.html>

## 8. Short Items:

*a. What makes some charter schools effective* – The lead article in the new *Harvard Education Letter* covers the recent controversy on the effectiveness of charter schools and lists what researchers think are the key elements in successful charter [and other] schools:

- Effective and stable school leadership;
- First-rate teachers who share the school’s mission;
- Frequent and thoughtful student assessment;
- Use of data (from assessments and other sources) to plan programs and inform change.

“Telling Tales Out of Charter School” by Robert Rothman in *Harvard Education Letter*, November/December 2004 (Vol. 20, #6, p. 1-4), no e-link available

**b. Keys to high staff morale** – An article on reducing stress among school administrators quotes the research of Buckingham and Coffman (1999) on twelve correlates of high staff morale in schools:

- Staff members know what is expected of them.
- They have the materials and equipment they need.
- They are able to do what they do best every day.
- In the last seven days, they've been recognized or praised for good work.
- Their supervisor (or someone at work) seems to care about them as a person.
- Someone at work supports them and encourages their development.
- Their opinion seems to count.
- The mission of the school makes them feel their work is important.
- Their coworkers are committed to doing quality work.
- They have a best friend at work.
- In the last six months they have talked to someone about their progress.
- They have had opportunities to learn and grow.

“Controlling Stress” by Zack Kelehear in *Principal Leadership*, November 2004 (Vol. 5, #3, p. 30-33), no e-link available

**c. Improving working conditions for teachers** – A website developed by the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality catalogues ways in which the following working conditions undermine teachers' effectiveness with students: isolation, lack of basic materials, being inundated with work, lack of input into the design and organization of schools, weak professional development, and gloomy prospects for career advancement. The resources in this website are organized around five recommendations based on the Center's research.

“Teacher Working Conditions Are Student Learning Conditions” in PEN Weekly NewsBlast, Oct. 28, 2004, <http://www.teacherworkingconditions.org/index.html>

**d. Kindergarten blues** – An article in last week's *Washington Post* reports that 98 percent of U.S. children now attend kindergarten (60 percent are in full-day programs) and a lot of the joy of the original “children's garden” atmosphere is gone in all too many schools. The academic curriculum once saved for first grade is pushed down to kindergarten, including math drills, worksheets, and daily homework, and time for music, art, games, and recess has been cut back in many schools. Some educators feel

that this academic press is not leaving enough time for social and emotional development – time to just be kids.

Spotted in *PEN Weekly NewsBlast*, October 28, 2004: Washington Post, October 25, 2004: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A62371-2004Oct25.html> (free registration)

*e. Getting all students ready for college* – The Pathways to College program has a website with resources to help schools prepare students for postsecondary education. The toolbox helps educators:

- Learn about what works from research and examples;
- Assess their present situation and plan change;
- Access resources for implementing their plans;
- Monitor progress toward achieving their goal of college-ready high-school graduates.

“College Readiness for All: A Practitioner’s Toolbox” in *PEN Weekly NewsBlast*, Oct. 28, 2004 <http://www.pathwaystocollege.net/collegereadiness/toolbox/index.htm>

*f. Memories of sentence diagramming in a parochial school* – In an evocative article in *Education Week*, a New Jersey business executive recalls an incident in her sixth-grade classroom many years ago involving an intense lesson from Sister Eleanor on sentence diagramming and a note being passed (to her?!) by the cutest boy in the class. I can’t begin to capture the nuances of this story; if you’re intrigued, go to the link.

“Everything I Felt Was an Adjective” by Margaret Van Dagens in *Education Week*, October 27, 2004 (Vol. 24, #9, p. 41) <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2004/10/27/09vandagens.h24.html>

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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:

- How to subscribe or renew
- Why the Marshall Memo?
- Focus topics
- Headlines for issues 1-51
- What readers say
- About Kim Marshall
- A free sample issue

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

- 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.