

Marshall Memo 67

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
December 20, 2004

In This Issue:

1. Good teachers' impact on different students
2. A radical proposal for reorganizing elementary schools
3. Designing standards-based report cards that communicate well with parents
4. Why learn math?
5. What grade should a student get for not handing in work?
6. Four types of teacher "voice" in schools
7. Good high-school counseling matters
8. Remembering Mr. Witt
9. Answers to last week's quiz on gay and lesbian student issues
10. Short items: (a) Touch-typing ideas; (b) Pushing back on Ted Sizer quote

Quotes of the Week

"Everyone wants to get to heaven, but not everyone wants to work to get there."
Mary Grant, Washington, D.C. principal, quoted by Cheryl Riggins-Newby
(*Principal Magazine*, January/February 2005, Vol. 84, #3, p. 7)

"The toughest math I tackle now is calculating a tip in a moving taxi."
Douglas McNeil (see item #4)

"[K]ids don't study poetry just because they're going to grow up to be poets. It's about a habit of mind. Your mind doesn't think abstractly unless it's asked to – and it needs to be asked to from a relatively young age."
Miss Collins, New York teacher (see item #4)

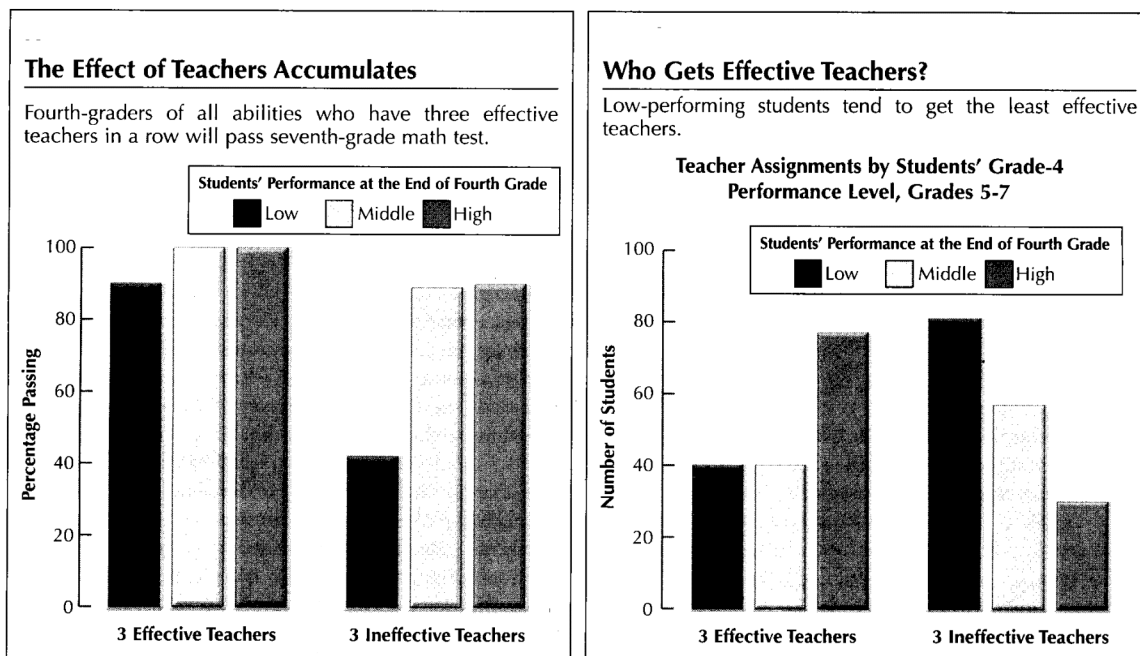
"The price of freedom is proficiency and students are motivated not by threats of failure but by the opportunity to earn greater freedom and discretion by completing work accurately and on time."
Doug Reeves (see item #5)

"Do we ever stop craving the approval of our teachers?"
Sam Swope (see item #8)

1. Good Teachers' Impact on Different Students

In his research column in this month's *Kappan*, Gerald Bracey shares two troubling graphs, which I am including with the permission of *Kappan's* editor. The first shows that among students who were fortunate enough to have three effective teachers in a row, seventh graders who struggled with math did almost as well as high-achieving peers on a state test (90% passed). Among unlucky students who had had three ineffective teachers in a row, the scores of higher-achieving students dropped very little (to 89 and 90% passing), but the scores of struggling students plummeted (to 42% passing). This tells us that teacher quality makes a much bigger difference for struggling students than it does for those who are more proficient.

The logical implication is to match low-achieving students with the best teachers. But the opposite seems to be occurring; the second graph shows that low-achieving students are much more likely to have the least effective teachers.



Source: Adapted from Kevin Carey, "The Real Value of Teachers," *Thinking K-16*, Winter 2004, p. 9. Original source: Sitha Babu and Robert Mendro, "Teacher Accountability: HLM-Based Teacher Effectiveness Indices," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, April 2003.

"Value-Added Assessment Findings: Poor Kids Get Poor Teachers" by Gerald Bracey in *Phi Delta Kappan*, December 2004 (Vol. 86, #4, p. 331-333), no e-link available

2. A Radical Proposal for Reorganizing Elementary Schools

"What makes anyone believe that talking louder makes a deaf man hear?" asks Sarah Butzin, a Florida consultant. "Yet that is what I see happening in elementary schools today. In response to high-stakes testing and higher standards... they push

more papers in front of kids, keep them off the playground, and take away music and art.”

Butzin has developed a program that she claims can “lay a foundation for solid academic skills without killing childhood.” What most needs changing, she says, is the craziness of one teacher working alone with one group of students for one year. The 180 days in the year rapidly dwindle to 100 once the teacher gets to know the kids, plays catch-up with from the previous grade, and loses all the non-instructional time. Butzin rejects conventional solutions to this problem (adding days to the school year, reducing class size, buying more computers and textbooks, paying after-school tutors, and summer reading camps); these don’t work, she says, and besides, they’re expensive. What she proposes instead is “triangulated learning” – a series of structural changes in the elementary school whose common denominator happens to be the number three:

- *Three core subjects* – Reading, writing, and math are the primary focus of the program. Science, social studies, and the arts are important, but should be integrated with the primary subjects.

- *Three-teacher expert teams* – Each teacher becomes an expert in one subject; Butzin feels that it’s almost impossible for an elementary teacher to be effective as an all-round generalist nowadays.

- *Three-grade clusters* – Each team of three teachers works across three grade levels: K-2 and 3-5 (the school can be organized in multi-age groups or grade-specific classes). Teachers have access to a three-grade range of methods and materials and can break away from arbitrary grade-level confinements; for example, a third-grade teacher can use fifth-grade materials and jump ahead to fifth grade without fearing the wrath of the fifth-grade teacher.

- *Three-classroom rotations* – Students move to their cluster’s reading, writing, and math classrooms for three 60- to 90-minute periods a day. One classroom is their cluster homeroom, and the homeroom teacher is responsible for science and social studies for homeroom students. Students go to art, music, physical education, etc. specialists as they do in traditional schools.

- *Three + three learning stations* – Within each classroom, teachers present a brief mini-lesson to the whole class and then students move through six learning stations that provide self-paced practice that applies the new concept or skill through different learning modes. The six stations are:

- A teacher station for small-group tutorials or enrichment;

- A computer station for integrated instructional software and Internet explorations;
- A textbook station for written work;
- A challenge station for learning activities in a game format;
- An imagination station for artistic and creative expression;
- A construction station for hands-on learning.

In addition to these stations, some schools add stations for science and social studies; this works best in schools that are using 90-minute periods.

- *Three years of continuous progress* – Students have the same team of three teachers for three years (although they have a different homeroom teacher each year). For example, a student entering kindergarten would have the same team of reading, writing, and math teachers for three years, but would have the reading teacher as a homeroom teacher one year, the math teacher as homeroom the second year, and the writing teacher in the third.

- *Three learning modes* – Students learn through (a) technology, providing motivation, individual self-paced learning, and immediate feedback; (b) hands-on experiences, providing developmentally appropriate tasks as children mature into the abstract phase of learning; and (c) paper-and-pencil activities as a link to more traditional activities.

Shifting a school to the triangulated learning approach is not easy, Butzin acknowledges. It requires leadership from the principal and real commitment and effort on the part teachers as they make the shift from the Lone Ranger mode to more collegial work. Teachers also need:

- Appropriate training and on-going coaching;
- Effective software for the computer stations;
- Effective materials for the hands-on stations;
- Support in functioning as part of a team and communicating with colleagues;
- Standards-based curriculum planning guides to align topics across all three grades in their cluster;
- Classroom management techniques so students can self-regulate during the learning station time.

Does the triangulated learning system work? Butzin has been working with schools using the system for 15 years and says that numerous independent studies have found that students do better in triangulated schools than students in traditional self-contained classrooms – and maintain their gains into middle school. She also says

that students are highly engaged, look forward to coming to school, and feel good about their accomplishments.

“Stop the Insanity! It Takes a Team to Leave No Child Behind” by Sarah Butzin in *Phi Delta Kappan*, Dec. 2004 (Vol. 86, #4, p. 307-309)

<http://www.ifs.org/Butzin%20Article%20PDK.pdf>

For more information about triangulated learning, check out the website at <http://www.ifs.org>; for research, check <http://www.ifs.org/research.htm>, or contact Butzin at sbutzin@ifs.org.

3. Designing Standards-Based Report Cards That Communicate Well

Thomas Guskey, a Kentucky education professor, says that the main challenge in designing a standards-based report card is communicating effectively with parents. Guskey says that we need to use labels that convey “honest meaningful, and useful information” so that parents understand what we expect their children to learn and how they are doing. He says that if parents don’t understand a report card, it’s not their fault – it’s ours for failing to communicate.

Guskey and his colleagues worked with focus groups of parents and tried out different labels and report card language. They found that parents generally interpreted labels based on their own personal experience with grading and report cards – mostly norm-referenced A-B-C-D-F letter grades. Once the researchers explained to parents that new report cards are supposed to show students’ progress on specific learning goals (not compared to classmates), parents had strong opinions on which labels were most helpful – and their responses were amazingly consistent. Parents were baffled by the labels “Pre-Emergent” and “Emerging” (one parent said the latter conjured up images of a slimy creature coming out of a swamp; another said that if “Emerging” means “Beginning,” why not just say “Beginning”!). Parents were also negative about “Exceeds Standard,” finding it vague and imprecise. They found “Advanced,” “Exemplary,” “Distinguished,” and “Outstanding” more helpful.

Here is Guskey’s advice for those charged with designing or tweaking standards-based report cards:

- *Avoid comparative language.* The challenge for parents is shifting their thinking from “How is my child doing compared to other students in the class?” to “How is my child doing with regard to the learning expectations for this level?” It throws parents off when we use labels like “Below Average,” “Average,” or “Superior.” All labels should clearly relate students’ performance to specific learning expectations (e.g., “Below Basic,” “Basic,” “Proficient,” and “Advanced”).

- *Provide examples of student work.* When parents see samples of student work at the different performance levels, it really helps them make the shift to standards-based grading. Exemplars also help parents support their children in improving their work. To get good exemplars of student work, teachers need time to talk about what is meant by “Proficient” and to locate good sample papers.

- *Distinguish between “Levels of Understanding” and “Frequency of Display.”* It confuses parents when educators confound *what* students are able to do (quality) with *how often* they do it (rate of occurrence). Guskey feels that frequency labels (e.g., “Rarely,” “Occasionally,” “Frequently,” and “Consistently”) should be reserved for students’ work habits, study skills, or behavior and not used for knowledge and skills.

- *Be consistent.* It confuses the heck out of parents when there is one set of labels in elementary report cards, another in middle and high school report cards, another on state assessments, and another on standardized test reports. Reducing the number of labels to the absolute minimum is very helpful.

“The Communication Challenge of Standards-Based Reporting” by Thomas Guskey in *Phi Delta Kappan*, December 2004 (Vol. 86, #4, p. 326-329), no e-link available

4. Why Learn Math?

“The toughest math I tackle now is calculating a tip in a moving taxi,” writes Douglas McNeil in this amusing and thoughtful *New York Times* article on the question asked by countless bored math students through the ages: “Why are we doing this? *So what?*” Nowadays these questions are more challenging than ever for teachers to answer because the need for math seems to have atrophied. We have calculators at our fingertips, electronic scales can instantly price 4.15 pounds of chicken at \$3.79 a pound, computers calculate a car’s miles per gallon, spreadsheets allow architects and accountants to compute everything from wind stress to foreign tax shelters, and some restaurant bills come with helpful hints on what a 15%, 18%, and 20% tip might be. So do kids really need to learn math?

McNeil quotes Bob Moses, developer of the Algebra Project, on algebra’s role as a gatekeeper to higher-level courses. “No one is going to pay you because you can do division,” says Moses, but without a grasp of math concepts students will be “serfs in the new information age,” stuck in dead-end jobs as surely as illiterate Europeans were forced to the bottom of the job heap during the Industrial Revolution. Math and science act as a filter to screen out those who don’t know how to work hard and develop their minds. And this process must start early.

With Google and spell-checking at our disposal, the “So what?” question could be asked of virtually any school subject. But here’s the response from Miss Collins, who teaches math to McNeil’s daughter in an elite all-girls school. “What we do isn’t exactly what mathematicians do. And I know more alums here become artists than become mathematicians. But kids don’t study poetry just because they’re going to grow up to be poets. It’s about a habit of mind. Your mind doesn’t think abstractly unless it’s asked to – and it needs to be asked to from a relatively young age. The rigor and logic that goes into math is a good way for your brain to be trained.”

“The Last Time You Used Algebra Was...” by Douglas McNeil, Jr. in *New York Times*, December 12, 2004

5. What Grade Should a Student Get for Not Handing in Work?

In this article, Doug Reeves acknowledges the strong urge many educators feel to give students a big fat ZERO when they don’t turn in an assignment – “the punishment they richly deserve. No work, no credit – end of story.” But Reeves points out the very significant difference between giving a zero on a 100-point grading scale and giving a zero on a 4-3-2-1 scale.

- *Giving a zero on a 100-point grading scale* – This “defies logic and mathematical accuracy,” he writes. The interval between grades on this scale is usually 10 points (A is 90-100, B is 80-89, C is 70 -79, D is 60-69). But when a zero is used as an F grade, the interval between the D and F is not 10 points but 60 points. “To insist on the use of a zero on a 100-point scale,” argues Reeves, “is to assert that work that is not turned in deserves a penalty that is many times more severe than that assessed for work that is done wretchedly and is worth a D.” It’s way off in terms of the ratios – the equivalent of giving a *minus 6* on a 4-3-2-1 scale.

The impact of a zero on a student’s course grade is huge: just two or three zeros can result in failure for the entire semester “and just a few course failures,” says Reeves, “can lead a student to drop out of high school, incurring a lifetime of personal and social consequences.”

Reeves argues that more appropriate grade for undone work would be a 50. That’s 10 points below a D and in proportion on the scale. Although this is undeniably logical, Reeves has given up arguing for a 50 for undone work because it gets such a negative reaction from teachers: they feel that it’s “giving” a student 50 points for doing nothing.

The best consequence when students don't complete their work, if we can get over our urge to punish, is having to complete the work – and losing privileges (free time, unstructured class time, study hall time, etc.) until the assignment is done. “The price of freedom is proficiency,” says Reeves, “and students are motivated not by threats of failure but by the opportunity to earn greater freedom and discretion by completing work accurately and on time.”

- *A zero on a 4-3-2-1-0 scale* – If we *must* give a zero for undone work (perhaps because students have exhausted all their second chances and the grading period is drawing to an end), it makes much more sense on a 4-point numerical scale. On this scale, the zero is in proportion to the other grades and isn't fiercely punitive. On this scale, A = 4, B = 3, C = 2, D = 1, and an F is 0, one point below a D. If teachers need more precision, they can always use decimals.

“The Case Against Zero” by Douglas Reeves in *Phi Delta Kappan*, December 2004 (Vol. 86, #4, p. 324-325), no e-link available

6. Four Kinds of Teacher “Voice” in Schools

“When teachers talk among themselves or participate in committees and task forces that don't have any real influence on what ultimately happens, they are taking part in a sham,” says Georgia educator Lew Allen in the December *Kappan*. He then lays out four ways that teachers can have a genuine influence on the running of their schools. All four are important, says Allen, but he feels the fourth is most powerful in terms of impact on teachers and their classroom practices.

- *A voting voice* – This type of teacher participation in decision-making can be significant if the issue matters to teachers and the result of the vote is honored by the principal. But Allen feels that voting requires very little time, responsibility, or risk (especially when secret ballots are used) and “has little effect on teachers' beliefs, understandings, or ways of thinking about teaching and learning.” Voting is fine on certain issues, but it's not sufficient.

- *An advisory voice* – In this case, teachers are involved in making decisions whose outcome is not a foregone conclusion and their contributions matter. This type of participation requires more time, responsibility, and risk for teachers; they need to attend meetings and publicly express their views.

- *A delegated voice* – In this case, teachers serve as representatives on a leadership team that has the power to make decisions; in addition to the time and risks involved, they have some responsibility for the final decisions. But Allen feels

that this kind of participation still doesn't have the power to transform teachers' beliefs and behavior.

- *A dialogical voice* – This is when teachers are part of a decision-making group [for example, a grade-level or departmental team] with high levels of collegial interaction. This kind of participation (what Paulo Freire calls a cycle of “action and reflection”) requires the deepest commitment from teachers and brings the greatest levels of risk: teachers need to “devote the necessary time, publicly express their opinions, consider the ideas of others, and then, along with the rest of the group, take responsibility and act on the group’s decisions.”

Allen feels dialogical voice stands the greatest chance of transforming teachers' beliefs and practices because participants are part of a group “in which everyone is a valued member; there is a free exchange of thoughts, opinions, and beliefs; and all are deeply involved in carrying out its decisions... Teachers expressing this type of voice often find themselves hearing different perspectives, learning new ways of thinking, and, as a result, making changes in their instructional practices.”

“From Votes to Dialogues: Clarifying the Role of Teachers' Voices in School Renewal” by Lew Allen in *Phi Delta Kappan*, December 2004 (Vol. 86, #4, p. 318-321), no e-link available

7. Good High-School Counseling Matters

Counselors are crucial for high-school students' future, but staffing levels in many high schools are sub-par and not all counseling departments work smart. The Fayette, Kentucky Public Schools seem to be an exception. Each incoming ninth grader is required to develop a comprehensive Individual Graduation Plan and works with the same counselor over four years to plan the required courses and electives with career and college goals in mind. Jacqueline Bowman, a counselor in one Fayette high school, says that lots of students want to be engineers because they hear the job pays well, but don't get the grades they need to meet their goal. “I'll never tell a child that he can't be an engineer,” she says, “But if he's making *Ds* and *Fs* in math, it may be hard for him to make it in calculus – which he needs for engineering.” So she urges these students to pull up their grades and points them to related careers using the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Outlook Handbook (<http://bls.gov/oco>).

During sophomore year, Fayette counselors stress the importance of keeping up grades through senior year, and have students explore the Kentucky Education Services Plan, which allows them to earn tuition from the state's colleges. Counselors

also work on students who think they don't have the skills, grades, or finances to tackle college, trying to get them to raise their sights.

During junior year, students get a book called *Planning for the Future* that tells them how to prepare for a two- or four-year college, the workforce, or the military, including tips for college visits, resume writing, and interviews. Counselors meet with each of their 425 students and review their transcripts and interests, asking, "Where do you want to be ten years from now?" Counselors involve parents and try not to be too pushy with students: instead of saying "You need to do this," they say, "Why don't you look into this." During junior year students also visit a number of colleges.

Senior year, counselors shepherd students through the college application process and zero in on scholarships and financial aid, telling them not to worry about finances because schools have money to help them.

"In the Real World... Counselors Help Students Prepare for the Future" by Rick Allen in *Education Update*, December 2004 (Vol. 46, #8, p. 1, 3, 8), no e-link available

8. Remembering Mr. Witt

In a touching "My Turn" column in last week's *Newsweek*, New York teacher/writer Sam Swope fondly recalls Mr. Witt, his high-school English teacher, wearing a light blue cardigan, sitting on a high stool reading aloud Shelley's 1818 sonnet "Ozymandias":

*I met a traveler from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert... Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed:
And on the pedestal these words appear:
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,
The lone and level sands stretch far away.*

Thirty-four years later, Swope remembers how the classroom got very quiet as Mr. Witt said, "This isn't a poem I can think about when I'm shaving."

Swope recently got back in touch with Mr. Witt and was tickled that his former teacher remembered him ("Can that be *my* Sam Swope?"). "Do we ever stop craving the approval of our teachers?" Swope wonders. He told Mr. Witt that he thought of

him every time he taught or thought about “Ozymandias,” and reminded him of the comment about shaving, which his former teacher didn’t recall. “Mr. Witt appears to have made his peace with Shelley’s sonnet, and seemed content with a lesser form of immortality,” concludes Swope. “The torch has been passed – from his teachers to him, from him to me, from me to my students...”

“A Lesser Form of Immortality? It’ll Do” by Sam Swope in *Newsweek*, “My Turn”, Dec. 20, 2004 (Vol. CXLIV, #25, p. 18)
<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6693989/site/newsweek/>

9. Answers to the Quiz on Gay and Lesbian Student Issues

Here are the answers to the questions posed in last week’s Marshall Memo on legal issues around gay and lesbian students. If you have any questions in this arena, you should consult your school district’s legal counsel.

a. *Some students in my high school want to form a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA). What are my legal responsibilities?* Public secondary schools that receive federal money must treat such groups the same as other student groups provided that (a) students initiate the GSA, and (b) the school has a “limited open forum” recognizing other non-curriculum related student groups.

b. *I have students and parents who object to the formation of any student clubs that address gay issues. How am I supposed to handle this situation?* The GSA still has the right to meet. The unpopularity of a particular group is not a justification for preventing student speech. If opponents of the group are disruptive, they need to be dealt with.

c. *How do I handle staff or outsiders wanting to be part of the GSA?* Student clubs must be student initiated, and outside community members “may not direct, conduct, control, or regularly attend activities of student groups,” although they may attend occasionally, if invited by students (unless the district has a policy prohibiting “non-school persons” from attending student group meetings). Staff members may attend.

d. *I have been approached by some parents and members of the community who object that the Boy Scouts meet at the school. They feel the Boy Scouts discriminate against gay people, and the school should not condone this. What do I do?* The No Child Left Behind Act says that the Boy Scouts must be allowed to meet in public school facilities, as long as the district makes school facilities available to other outside groups.

e. *Some parents object to military recruiters being allowed on the school campus, claiming the military discriminates against gays and lesbians and should not be allowed at school. What do I do?* NCLB says that if a secondary school allows colleges, college

recruiters, and employment recruiters on campus, then military recruiters must be allowed as well.

f. *I have students with both pro-gay and anti-gay messages on their T-shirts and am getting complaints from all sides. What am I supposed to do?* Students' right to free speech and free expression must be balanced against a school's interest in maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Schools can prohibit lewd, vulgar, indecent, or clearly offensive words, symbols, artwork, or pictures on student clothing. Unless the T-shirt messages are against the values of the school (such as civility, human dignity, and self-respect), the only way a school can ban them is if it can show that they substantially disrupt or interfere with the work of the school or the rights of other students.

g. *Some transgender students complain about prom, yearbook, and graduation dress codes; they say separate dress requirements for girls and boys unfairly restrict their "gender identify" or "gender expression." How do I handle this?* Once again, the issue is the likelihood of substantial disruption. Schools are permitted to have reasonable sex-specific dress codes, but might consider making a narrow exception for transgender students who are biologically one gender but psychologically identify with the other.

h. *Some parents complain of what they see as "pro-homosexual" content in some classroom materials. They demand more control of class content or the removal of their child from the class. What is the best response?* The courts have generally rejected attempts by individual parents to dictate or alter the curriculum and remove their children from classes they find objectionable. School districts are wise to have a curriculum review / challenge policy and make all parents aware of it. Some states have specific statutes to let parents opt their children out of classes or assemblies covering controversial material (e.g., sexuality, HIV, abortion, or death). Four states (Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah) require written parental consent before students can participate in classes where sex, sexuality, AIDS, etc. are discussed. But parental consent is not required if teachers will be discussing content such as harassment or discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identify. It's important to know your state's laws.

i. *Some students want to participate in or have the school sponsor events like "Diversity Days" or a "Day of Silence." What are the school's obligations and limitations?* If the activity is initiated by students, the school must accommodate students' constitutional rights – but may restrict speech that is lewd, vulgar, indecent, or clearly offensive or that substantially interferes with the work of the school or the rights of

other students. A typical Diversity Day or Day of Silence would not raise these concerns. If the activity is initiated by the school, it falls under curriculum guidelines and the criterion would be whether it appropriately conveys the educational mission.

j. *Some students have religious or moral objections to homosexuality and want a chance to provide a public counterpoint to what they see as problematic “gay-positive” viewpoints in such events. Should I allow it?* A school is free to implement a course of study or sponsor an official school assembly promoting tolerance of gay and lesbian students and nondiscrimination, and in general, others have no right to present an opposing view within these official school activities. If, however, the school has created a “limited public forum” that is not school-sponsored speech and where open discussion is allowed, the school may not clamp down on certain views because it is uncomfortable with them. It’s best to seek legal advice when setting up such forums.

k. *A same-sex couple wants to attend a school dance. What is the proper course of action?* To bar a couple from the dance based on their sex and (actual or perceived) sexual orientation would invite a legal challenge. Any restrictions must be reasonably related to a legitimate educational objective (e.g., age or being a student in the school).

l. *Our school’s anti-bullying policy lets us discipline students for harassing students over their sexual orientation. Some students say this violates their freedom of speech. How do you strike the balance?* There is no constitutional right to bully or intimidate other students. Speech or conduct giving rise to a well-founded fear of disrupting school operation or interfering with other students’ right may be prohibited. And a school or school district can be held liable if it doesn’t take reasonable steps to stop bullying.

m. *I’ve just been told harassment based on sexual orientation is occurring at my school. What am I supposed to do?* Complaints of this kind should be handled like any other harassment complaints – thoroughly and promptly, by a trained investigator. No allegations should be ignored because the charge seems improbable or because the behavior seems unlikely to recur or is perceived as a harmless rite of passage.

“Legal Protections Gay Students Must Receive” by Julie Underwood from *Dealing with Legal Matters Surrounding Students’ Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity*, November 2004, National School Boards Association et al. Julie Underwood’s e-mail address is junderwood@nsba.org.

10. Short Items:

a. *Touch-typing ideas* – In response to my query a couple of weeks ago, a number of Marshall Memo readers contributed ideas and insights on touch typing. There was strong support for teaching students to touch-type and getting them to a

level of automaticity by middle school before hunt-and-peck habits become too ingrained. There's some disagreement about how young to start; there are issues of manual dexterity and children's hand size vis-à-vis the standard keyboard when students start in lower elementary grades, but a counterargument is that if a child can play a regular-size piano, he or she can learn to touch type.

People's definition of "proficiency" in typing also varied: possible targets are 20 words per minute (with errors corrected) in elementary grades, 40 words per minute by sixth grade, and 60 words per minute by eighth grade.

To become proficient, students need a series of focused lessons using good typing software and getting encouragement and modeling from a teacher. One school has students do 20 minute lessons three times a week for six weeks; another has students work 35 minutes a day for four weeks.

The most frequently mentioned software packages were: Mavis Beacon, Ultra Key, Master Key, and Typing Tutor.

b. Pushing back on Ted Sizer quote – Michael Goldstein, founder of Boston's MATCH School, had this to say about the Ted Sizer quote in Marshall Memo 66 ("For me, the ultimate test of a school is the willingness of any student to display his or her ignorance, because the riskiest thing you can do in a school, whatever your age, is to say, 'I don't know' or 'I don't understand.'").

"I strongly disagree," wrote Goldstein. In many schools with a negative culture about learning, "the riskiest thing a kid can do is correctly answer more than one question when no one else is participating. I just visited some classes at other high schools where almost ALL I heard was murmured 'I don't knows' when called upon by the teachers. Kids paid no social penalty. In each class, there were (only) one or two kids who'd clearly done the reading and knew the answers. They gave one or two answers and then stopped so they didn't get the crap beat out of them after school. The social penalty for the wrong answer is much smaller."

Any comments from other Marshall Memo readers?

© Copyright 2004 Kim Marshall

Do you have feedback? Is anything missing?

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

About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo 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.