

Marshall Memo 14

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
November 24, 2003

In this Issue:

1. What can high schools do to recognize teen depression and prevent suicides?
2. A seasoned principal's suggestions for cafeteria and playground management
3. Short items:
 - Closing the Latino achievement gap
 - A new database on effective urban schools
 - On-line resources for teacher training
 - Should during-the-year report card grades be pegged to June standards?
 - Are small schools necessarily better?
 - What are the characteristics of "star" teachers' classroom management?
 - Action research paves the way for a better Algebra I curriculum

Quotes of the Week

"Only in this profession do we assign our least qualified staff to the area with the greatest need."

Paul Ruiz, Education Trust (see item 3b)

"The greatest loss to American education was the disappearance from the classroom of the Irish spinster schoolteacher... Sharp of eye and ear she was, her senses growing more acute with age. From the front of the room, she could hear the click of a mouse's tooth against a grain of rice in the coat closet at the rear. Coiffed, perfumed, and beautifully dressed, she was an eternal mystery... Miss Feerick had a way of looking out the window while you were reciting, then saying, "Thank you" in a manner that let you know you'd performed abominably... Miss Vaughan, long after she'd gone stone deaf, continued to call out "Silence!" from time to time, out of sheer habit... Miss McInerney...had a way of lengthening her nose when she wished to express disapproval and could cause her bosom to swell to alarming proportions at the least lapse of decorum. Miss McInerney's method of teaching was to waft small puffs of temperament over the class."

"The Spinsters of Eld" by Richard Selzer, *West Branch*, Spring 2003 (excerpts in *Harper's Magazine*, December 2003 (Vol. 307, #1843, p. 17-21). No e-link.)

"I can read research reports until the cows come home, but until the gap is bridged between research and practice – between data and something specific that I can change in my classroom – there's a real disconnect... Give me something I can sink my teeth into and my practice will change."

Warren Wolfe, Evanston, Illinois teacher. *Harvard Education Letter* Nov./Dec. 03

"Depression is not a personal weakness, a character flaw, or the result of poor parenting. It is a mental illness that affects the entire person, changing how they feel, think, and act."

Ralph Cash (see item 1)

1. Dealing with Teen Depression and Preventing Suicides

Depression is the most common mental illness among adolescents. In a school of 1,000, as many as 100 students may be experiencing depression or mood swings serious enough to need a psychiatric diagnosis. About 13 of those students will attempt suicide in a given year, and although most will not succeed, 15 of those 100 depressed students are likely to kill themselves eventually. Post-pubescent girls are twice as likely to suffer from depression as boys; gay, bisexual, and American Indian youth also have higher rates of depression.

How can educators and parents tell whether troublesome adolescent behaviors are clinical depression, not just normal teenage angst? School staff should become concerned when the signs listed below (a) are new or more intense or frequent; (b) continue more than two weeks; (c) interfere with the student's social and academic life; (d) cause disruptive or uncontrolled behavior; (e) reflect thoughts of hurting oneself or others:

- change in appetite, weight gain or loss, change in hygiene;
- excessive sleeping, disruption of sleep patterns;
- increased or diminished activity level; lethargy or chronic boredom;
- unexplained physical complaints;
- lack of attention in class, impaired concentration, cutting classes;
- poor concentration or inability to make decisions;
- an unexplained drop in grades;
- increase of risky behaviors (e.g., sex, alcohol, drugs, reckless driving);
- defiant and oppositional behavior;
- irritability, agitation, fighting with friends;
- lack of pleasure in daily activities;
- self-blame, guilt, and failure to recognize one's successes;
- depressed mood; negative thoughts about oneself, the world, and the future;
- sullenness, sadness, crying, withdrawal from friends and activities;
- suicidal ideation (including notes, threats, references to suicide, obsession with death, efforts to hurt oneself, making final arrangements, and specific plans).

Almost all teenagers who kill themselves had a treatable disorder, but only about 70% of depressed teens ever see a mental health professional. Of those who do, two-thirds are referred by their school, and in low-income communities, the role of the school in providing life-saving intervention is even bigger. Virtually every student

who gets proper, timely intervention can be helped. Without help, even if the student doesn't commit suicide there is an increased risk of school failure, social isolation, unsafe sexual behavior, drug and alcohol abuse, and long-term life problems.

How can schools help? Here are eight suggestions:

1. *De-stigmatize and shed light on the illness* – This means educating staff, students, and parents about the nature of depression and ways to tell clinical depression from normal ups and downs (see above).
2. *Train staff members, students, and parents* – This includes reaching out to teens with troubling symptoms and getting them to trained clinicians as soon as possible – and telling teachers and other staff that they are not trained to counsel depressed students and must report troubling behavior immediately.
3. *Create a caring, supportive school environment* – This includes working toward a welcoming, humane atmosphere, preventing bullying, and ensuring that each student has at least one adult who takes a special interest in him or her.
4. *Develop a suicide prevention and intervention program* – This includes educating everyone about warning signs and making sure that every staff member and student knows what to do if they think a student is suicidal (in almost all cases, students who attempt suicide tell someone beforehand).
5. *Keep an eye on at-risk students* – During high-stress periods (e.g., exams, death of a family member, a suicide in the community, or a 9/11-type incident) students who are at risk should be watched closely.
6. *Use school mental health professionals* – This includes awareness training as well as intervention and counseling.
7. *Provide students with appropriate supports* – This may include individual or group counseling, observation, academic accommodations, opportunities for creative expression, medication, and self-monitoring strategies and steps for seeking help.
8. *Encourage cooperation with parents* – This may include coordinating with the student's private clinician.

“When Depression Brings Teens Down” by Ralph Cash, *Principal Leadership*, October 2003, p. 11-15 (reprinted in *Education Digest* November 2003 p. 35-42). No e-link.

Lest we think Japanese schools are immune to issues of bullying and depression, here is one of a number of suicide notes left by Japanese youngsters aged ten to fifteen:

“When I was in seventh grade, I was always bullied. Now in eighth grade, the bullying has become worse. They make fun of me, throw things at me, kick me, hit me, and do other violent things. It was a waste of time complaining to the teacher when I couldn’t tolerate it. They’d throw my textbooks at me and harass me for telling the teacher. I have no friends who sympathize with me in class. My close friends in clubs outside school have learned to hate me, too. I’m too tired to hold out any longer. The world’s not right for me.”

This 14-year-old hung himself. From “All the Necessary Tools” in *Harper’s Magazine*, December 2003 (Vol. 307, #1843, p. 30-31). Translated by Patrick Luhan.

2. Cafeteria and Playground Ideas

Michael Dubrovich, a seasoned Colorado principal, has the following suggestions for running an effective cafeteria and playground operation:

1. *Have a few simple rules* – Two or three rules are plenty (e.g., “Be Caring and Careful!” or “Work hard. Be kind. Help others.”)
2. *Ask, don’t demand* – It’s better to say “Would you do an old man a favor and pick up that piece of paper for me?” than ordering the student to do it (which will typically elicit this response: “I didn’t put it there!”).
3. *Don’t yell* – This trains students not to listen to a normal tone of voice.
4. *Know tattling from reporting* – (and teach students the difference). Smile at tattlers and ask, “So what are you going to do about that?” But follow up on reports of genuine problems. “Students who report real problems aren’t looking to get anyone in trouble,” says Dubrovich. “They really need your help.”
5. *Use the reminding trick* – For example, wait until a student who left a mess on a cafeteria table until they are almost out the door before reminding them to clean it up, causing them the inconvenience of coming all the way back.
6. *Don’t allow staff to buck all problems to you* – They need to take responsibility for dealing with most infractions to maintain their authority.
7. *Know the purposes of student misbehavior* – Rudolf Dreikurs nailed these: (a) to get attention or get someone to perform a service; (b) to prove to others that they can do as they please; (c) to hurt someone they feel hurt them first; (d) to display inadequacy after giving up on themselves, believing they are stupid and setting out to prove it to others. If you can psyche out the reasons students are misbehaving, you can help them get out of patterns that will otherwise

continue to disrupt your cafeteria and playground – and will follow them into their adult lives.

8. *Don't ask why* – If you see a student misbehaving and ask “Why did you do that?” you are giving the student an opening to make excuses or blame someone else. Instead, ask the student what they thought they were going to achieve by doing what they did.
9. *Catch kids being good* – This reinforces good behavior and is a lot more fun (and productive) than constantly trying to catch kids doing something bad.
10. *More action, less talk* – If a child makes a mistake, is held accountable, and is genuinely sorry, case closed. Don't spoil the effect with a long lecture.

Finally, keep your sense of humor! “Children can put a bright spot in your day if you let them,” says Dubrovich.

“10 Rules for Cafeteria and Playground” by Michael Dubrovich, *Principal Magazine*, May/June 2003 p. 52-54 (reprinted in *Education Digest*, November 2003 p. 48-50)

3. Brief Items:

- *Closing the Latino achievement gap* – There is a troubling gap between the achievement of Latino students and their white and Asian peers. On the latest National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 57 percent of Latinos scored below the basic reading level in fourth grade and 60 percent of Latino eighth graders scored below basic in math. Weak preparation and low achievement K-12 result in low college enrollment and completion rates. If current trends continue, only 11 out of every 100 Latino current kindergarten students will get a bachelor's degree.

However, some schools and districts are making progress closing the gap. The Education Trust in Washington studied high-poverty, high-minority districts where students were achieving at high levels. Researchers identified several characteristics in the successful schools, including:

- Providing clear and public standards for what all students should learn;
- Offering students challenging, standards-based curricula;
- Providing extra instruction to students who need extra support to succeed in rigorous courses;
- Ensuring that teachers are well-prepared to teach their subjects;
- Closing funding gaps – making sure there is adequate financial support.

“Latino Achievement: How to Close the Gap” by Reino Makkonen, *Harvard Education Letter*, November/December 2003 (Vol. 19, #6, p. 5). The study is available at www2.edtrust.org/edtrust/latino+achievement+in+america

- ***A database on effective urban schools*** – The Education Trust in Washington, D.C. has launched a searchable database containing information on exceptionally effective urban schools. “The key to closing the achievement gap is to learn from the places that are making the most progress doing it,” said Craig Jerald, a principal partner at Ed. Trust. The High Performing Schools and Districts Initiative, which should be fully operational by the end of this week, contains school-level test scores, broken down by race and poverty level, for 29 states. More states will be added as they disaggregate data.

“Group Launches Database on High-Scoring Schools” by Catherine Gewertz, *Education Week*, November 19, 2003 (Vol. XXIII, #12, p. 9). The database is available at <http://66.43.154.40:8001/projects/edtrust/index.html>

- ***On-line resources for teacher training*** – No Child Left Behind has created a greater sense of urgency about delivering more effective staff development. One-shot workshops will not do, says David Gordon, editor of the *Harvard Education Letter*. “Teachers need richer sources of professional sustenance that are easy to access and offered over the course of their school years and their careers.” Gordon believes that one of the most hopeful sources of professional development and collegial support occurs when teachers watch videotaped lessons and react thoughtfully to them, either in groups within their school, in collegial groups between school sites, and individually. A number of online courses, informal support groups, and other network support resources have sprung up in recent years, with the potential to deliver high-quality training to teachers. Here are a few:

- California Learning Interchange, a service created by the University of California–Irvine, Apple Computer, and the Orange county Public Schools has tips and web links, videos of master teachers, and instructional videos:

www.gse.uci.edu/cli.

- The George Lucas Educational Foundation offers best-practice videos: www.glef.org

- James Stigler, co-author of *The Teaching Gap*, founded LessonLab, a for-profit service that has a digital library with videos of teachers in Japan, Hong Kong, Switzerland, etc. and high-performing U.S. schools: www.lessonlab.com

- TeachFirst also has online videos of teachers: www.teachfirst.com

“Linking Teachers with Technology” by David Gordon, *Harvard Education Letter*, November/December 2003 (Vol. 19, #6, p. 8, 6, 7)

- *Should interim report card grades be pegged to June standards?* – Doug Reeves recently responded to a teacher’s question on basing students’ during-the-year report card grades on end-of-the-year expectations. Reeves is in favor of using an end-of-the-year definition of “proficient” to grade students throughout the year. He realizes that this will mean that the vast majority of students will be less than proficient in the early part of the year because they haven’t yet received the instruction or don’t yet have the background knowledge to hit the target. He gives three reasons for this approach (while conceding that reasonable people may differ):

- “The price of progress in the spring is honesty in the fall.” Students and parents need to know that in October of fourth grade (for example), the standard has not yet been met. Students “need to work, read, write, do math, and learn. If we want to motivate students and teachers, we must show steady progress.” A teacher might say, “Only 18 percent of our students were proficient in October, but that percentage rose to 40 percent in December and we’re on track to be at 100 percent in May.”
- We need to challenge students who are already at the proficient level at the beginning of the year. The danger is that they may become complacent and they need to be urged to go for Level 4! “For these students, standards are a floor, not a ceiling,” says Reeves. The message might be: “You’re really doing fine – in fact, you are proficient far earlier than you need to be – but you are NOT yet exemplary and you’ve got some work to do.”
- Faculty motivation is a third reason. If proficiency is defined as where you think students should be at each point of the year, then it is difficult if not impossible to show progress during the year. The percentage of students meeting expectations will be quite similar all year long. If, on the other hand, your interim reports show the percent of students meeting the June standard, then you can show steady and significant progress throughout the year.

Doug Reeves: “Questions and Answers from the Real World” in the Center for Performance Assessment Monthly E-Mail Newsletter, November 2003 (Center@makingstandardwork.com)

• *Are small schools necessarily better?* – A new study by Toni Terling Watt in last month's *Sociology of Education* raises the possibility that schools with 400 or fewer students may be harmful to the emotional health of some students. Watt's study found that male students in very small schools were more likely to be depressed and were four times more likely to attempt suicide than boys in larger schools. Ms. Watt theorizes that students who are on the margins of their peer group may feel more alienated in small schools because they have fewer friendship choices and are under more pressure to conform. In larger schools, it may be easier for the "geeks" and "skaters" to find like-minded peers. Watt says that much of the research on small schools has focused on academic achievement: "I'm just pointing out maybe we should take a look at why, for some youth, these schools aren't ideal environments."

"Small Schools" by Debra Viadero, *Education Week*, November 19, 2003 (Vol. XXIII, #12, p. 13). No e-link to the original article.

• *Martin Haberman's classroom management criteria* – The Haberman Foundation in Houston, Texas has zeroed in on the following characteristics of student discipline used by "star" urban teachers:

- *With-it-ness* – a heightened awareness of everything all the children in the classroom are doing at any moment in time;
- *Multi-tasking* – an increased ability to think about resolving several children's problems simultaneously;
- *Responding to individual needs* – tailoring responses to particular student needs;
- *Using a wide repertoire* – practicing 50 positive teacher responses;
- *Avoiding escalating problems* – extinguishing knee-jerk teacher responses that feed into and aggravate situations;
- *Professionalizing teacher behavior* – learning to act in response to children's needs rather than responding to teacher needs;
- *Acting decisively* – learning to act quickly and staying in control of the situation.

The Haberman Foundation has developed an assessment (couched in a computer game) to measure teachers' skill in these areas.

From *The Haberman Newsletter*, Fall 2003 (Vol. 8, #1). To see the Star Classroom Management Protocol, call 1-800-667-6185 or go to www.habermanfoundation.org

• *Action research on Algebra I* – How to sell teachers on a really good new Algebra I curriculum? Pat Morgan, math coordinator in a small Oklahoma district, definitely wanted to implement a new curriculum (it had positive reviews from the U.S. Department of Education), but she knew that teachers needed more than a recommendation from Washington to get on board. So she conducted an experiment. One set of 224 students were taught the new curriculum while 220 other students continued with traditional Algebra I using the standard textbook. All participating Algebra I teachers taught both types of curriculum, which prevented differences in teaching style and quality from affecting the results. At the end of the course, all teachers gave the same standardized Educational Testing Service Algebra I post-test. Students who had been taught the new curriculum did significantly better. Now all Algebra I teachers are enthusiastically teaching the new curriculum (except honors sections, which were already succeeding under the original curriculum).

“Can Educators and Researchers Really Work Together to Improve Learning?” by Michael Sadowski, *Harvard Education Letter*, November/December 2003 (Vol. 19, #6, p. 1-5).

© Copyright 2003 Kim Marshall

Do you have feedback? Is anything missing?

*If you have comments or suggestions, or if you saw an article or web item
in the last week that you think should be covered,
please e-mail: kim.marshall8@verizon.net*

About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo aims to keep busy principals, teachers, and other educators very well-informed on important research, ideas, and developments in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, a former Boston teacher and administrator, is your “designated reader,” searching through a wide range of publications the week they come out, zeroing in on the articles that are most relevant and useful to improving teaching and learning at the school level, and summarizing them in a brief e-mail. Target topics include the following:

- *School leadership* – Building a professional learning community; effective teamwork; effective schools practices; supervision and evaluation of teachers; time management.
- *Effective teaching* – Key variables associated with high student achievement; professional development of teachers; teacher leadership and career ladders; multiple intelligences and brain research.
- *Curriculum* – Alignment and planning with the end in sight; teaching for understanding; new ideas in reading, writing, and math.
- *Assessment* – Aligned formative and summative assessments; using data and student work for continuous improvement; graphic display of student achievement data; standardized testing and the debate on standards.
- *Closing the gap* – Effective strategies to close the racial/economic achievement gap; the innate-ability/intelligence/effective effort debate; safety-net programs.
- *Positive school culture* – Student discipline; social-emotional learning; moral development; parent involvement and community partnerships.
- *And...* – New areas of research; upcoming television and radio programs on education.

Publications covered:

(those read this week are underlined)

American Education Research Journal
American Educator
Atlantic Monthly
Bay State Banner
Boston Globe
Commonwealth Magazine
Curriculum Update (ASCD)
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Week
Educational Leadership
Elementary School Journal
Harpers
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Education Letter
Harvard Education Review
Harvard School of Education Ed. Magazine
New York Times
New Yorker
PEN Weekly NewsBlast
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal Magazine
Psychology Today
Reading Research Quarterly
Reading Today
Review of Educational Research
Rethinking Schools
Teachers College Record
Teacher Magazine
and occasional books, lectures, and websites.

If one of the summaries is of particular interest, subscribers are encouraged to read the full article. E-links will be provided whenever possible. If you would like to suggest additional publications, please be in touch.

Subscriptions:

The Marshall Memo is published weekly (with occasional breaks), usually on Monday. Major support from Research for Better Teaching and New Leaders for New Schools makes it possible to offer individual subscriptions at \$50 a year. To subscribe, please contact Kim Marshall at kim.marshall8@verizon.net or at 222 Clark Road, Brookline, MA 02445 (617-566-4353).