

AASA
THE SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS ASSOCIATION

School Administrator

FEBRUARY 2016

ESSENTIAL INSIGHTS AND COMMENTARY FOR SCHOOL SYSTEM LEADERS

Engagement's Enigma

Leading through
a maze of mistrust
among public education's
key constituencies

PLUS

Legal Brief: Transgender Students, p9

AASA Collaborative, p30

Ethics: Board Vote Reconsidered, p8

Profile: Alton Frailey, p51

NON-PROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
BOLINGBROOK, IL
PERMIT NO. 1144

“Increasingly, Americans realize that 30 years of so-called ‘efficiency reforms’ have produced unimpressive and often discouraging results.” PAGE 12

FRONTLINE

6 STARTING POINT

Not yet written

What does a “connected educator” look like in 2016?

6 STATE OF THE SUPERINTENDENCY

Age at 1st Superintendency

Disparities between men and women on when they land the top job.

7 BEST OF THE BLOGS

Five excerpts from the most thoughtful blogs maintained by superintendents.

8 ETHICAL EDUCATOR

The Late Night Reconsideration

Panelists assess a school board member’s request to the superintendent to rescind her earlier vote over a personnel appointment.



8

9 LEGAL BRIEF

Where There’s No Disagreement on Transgender Students

BY NANCY F. KRENT

While some areas, such as locker room use, remain controversial, educators ought to be well-versed in the federal legal protections afforded students.

10 BOARD-SAVVY SUPERINTENDENT

Doing Small Things To Improve Governance

BY CHRIS KENNEDY

Attentiveness to process is a defining quality of the high-functioning organization, says the superintendent in West Vancouver, B.C.

11 MY VIEW

Reconnecting Practitioner and Policymaker

BY MICHAEL V. MCGILL

If the new federal education act is to offer a pathway for meaningful school improvement, it must forge a real partnership between state education agencies and local leaders.

14 OUR VIEW

Misunderstanding Critical Thinking

BY REBECCA STOBAUGH AND SANDRA LOVE

Five common misconceptions about this requisite 21st-century skill in the eyes of two former principals.

16 OUR VIEW

Believing in Miracles and the Value of Cohesiveness

BY MARVIN FAIRMAN AND TIM JACKSON

The difference between success and failure rests on the ability of leaders to unify interdependent colleagues.

RESOURCES

42 BOOK REVIEWS

- ▶ *Coherence: The Right Drivers in Action for Schools, Districts, and Systems*
- ▶ *Race to the Bottom: Corporate School Reform and the Future of Public Education*
- ▶ *What Connected Educators Do Differently*

Also, AASA member **James H. VanSciver** on writing *Generalities of Distinction: Leadership, Learning, Limitations*

43 ABSTRACT

Ethical Leadership

A recent dissertation studies whether views of ethical practices vary by demographics.

AASA INSIGHT

45 PRESIDENT’S CORNER

Positioning the AASA of Tomorrow

BY DAVID R. SCHULER

Our association is positioning to be a significant resource for its members.

46 EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE

The Various Networking Options at AASA

BY DANIEL A. DOMENECH

The new AASA is all about member engagement, a place for collegial problem solving.

50 PEOPLE WATCH

Recent appointments in the superintendency as well as retirements.

51 PROFILE

Alton L. Frailey

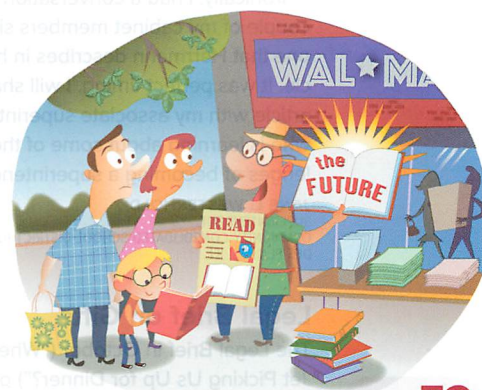
BY KRISTIN C. HUBING

AASA’s next president calls himself a “country boy at heart.”

PLUS

4 READER REPLY

52 LEADERSHIP LITE



52

School Administrator (ISSN 0036-6439) is a benefit of membership in AASA, The School Superintendents Association, 1615 Duke St., Alexandria, VA 22314. Telephone: 703-875-0772. Fax: 703-841-1543. Annual membership dues in the association are \$447 (active members), of which \$110 covers a subscription to *School Administrator*. *School Administrator* is published monthly except July. Send address changes to AASA, Membership Division, 1615 Duke St., Alexandria, VA 22314. Copyright 2016 by AASA. All rights reserved. Printed in USA.

Believing in Miracles and the Value of Cohesiveness

LOOK UP ANY list of the greatest moments in American sports history and you'll find the 1980 Olympic U.S. men's ice hockey team's win over the Soviets at or near the top. The U.S. victory at Lake Placid instantly became known as "The Miracle on Ice."

The secret of the U.S. team's success that year was not talent, ability, innovation, creativity or even a perfect game plan flawlessly executed. The difference between success and failure rested on the coach's leadership ability to transform a collection of independent rivals mired in conflict into a unit of interdependent teammates.

The cohesiveness factor is something overlooked in favor of shinier, trendier promises of improved performance in education. We'd rather believe a clever strategy, a fresh executive or a new building will create energized, cohesive teams. While it's true those things can add value, they also can distract from resolving conflict within the organization. And any delay in resolving conflict is a delay in building a cohesive team. The cost of avoiding conflict is high.

► **Conflict is guaranteed. Cohesiveness is a process.**

Conflict is not always a sign of problems in an organization. In fact, conflict is present even in the healthiest organizations. Unresolved conflict, on the other hand, is an indication that the health of a team or organization is compromised. Also, the nature of a given conflict is indicative of health or the lack thereof.

If team members are having turf wars over petty issues, it's a safe bet there's a systemic issue with conflict in the school or administrative unit. However, if team members are engaged in healthy debate over the best way to accomplish agreed-upon goals, that's an organization capitalizing on conflict and headed for greatness.

Immature leaders will avoid dealing with conflict or will allow it to fuel immature, irresponsible responses. Mature leaders see conflict as a natural part of a growing organization. Leaders who hold this mindset will model healthy ways to resolve conflict. Over time, conflict resolved correctly will strengthen a team rather than weaken it.

"Immature leaders will avoid dealing with conflict or will allow it to FUEL IMMATURE, IRRESPONSIBLE RESPONSES."

The data tying cohesiveness directly to student performance is so compelling that building cohesiveness should be a high priority for all leadership development strategies. At Organizational Health, our Leadership Belief Statement No. 4 says: "We believe we have an obligation to establish and maintain cohesive interdependent teams that have a high commitment to the organization's mission and goals." Obligation is a strong word but it is the right word. A lack of cohesiveness will make even the smartest, most talented teams ineffective.

► **Conflict is the breakfast of champions.**

The cohesiveness of any athletic team is going to affect its win/loss record. Likewise, in public schools the leadership of the head principal directly affects the cohesiveness of the school. Regardless of their circumstances or the quality of their teams, principals have an obligation to help create, establish and maintain a compelling winning vision, goals and a "can do" win/win culture.

With more than 30 years of research data and experience in school districts, we can tell you that schools and districts that consistently win (by achieving or exceeding student performance goals) are ones that have learned how to deal constructively with conflict.

The converse is also true. The data and experience demonstrate that schools can have good talent, great plans and adequate funding, but if they are not cohesive, they will not meet their goals. Student performance suffers when leaders mishandle conflict or do not have systems in place for addressing conflict.

► **Cohesiveness makes everything look miraculous.**

Spectators can be quick to assign the term "miracle" to the unexpected victory or an incredible goal achieved. Spectators in the stands are apt to be swept up in the romantic notion that luck or fate played a hand in the results before them. Participants — those who actually play the game — know better. Team members know it's not the outcome that's miraculous. It's the process. The real miracle is the hard work, honesty and humility it takes to achieve team cohesiveness.

Effective leaders choose to have courageous conversations rather than skirt conflict. They lead their teams from a win/win perspective and make decisions based on reliable data. The results that come from that kind of leadership often are mistaken for miracles. Call the results whatever you wish, just be sure of this: Cohesiveness is essential for sustained success.

MARVIN FAIRMAN is president of Organizational Health Diagnostic and Development Corp. in Flower Mound, Texas. E-mail: mfairman@organizationalhealth.com. **TIM JACKSON** is a writer/producer in the film and television industry in Little Rock, Ark., and Los Angeles.