

KENTUCKY

SCHOOL LEADER

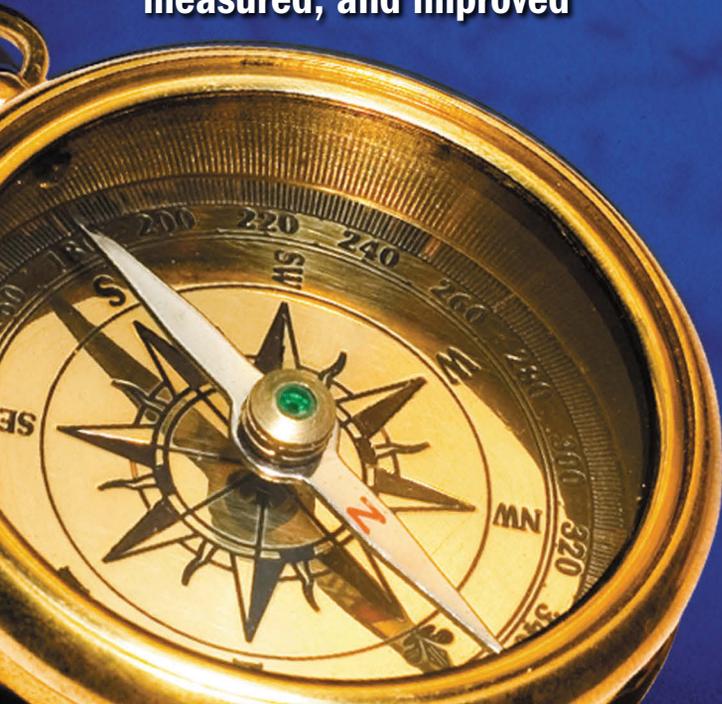
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KASA
KENTUCKY ASSOCIATION OF
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WINTER 2014

Kentucky Education North Star Community Guides Process Improvement and Performance Excellence

Doing More with Less — Focusing
on how work is done, managed,
measured, and improved



Focusing on Learning,
Communication
Improves Boone County
Schools & Community

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for a Proactive, Not
Reactive Strategy

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KENTUCKY ASSOCIATION OF
SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

AND THE CENTER FOR EDUCATION LEADERSHIP

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KASA Editor

Wanda Darland, MBA

**Kentucky Association of
School Administrators**

87 C. Michael Davenport Blvd.

Frankfort, KY 40601

Phone | (502) 875-3411

Toll Free | (800) 928-KASA

Fax | (502) 875-4634

Web: www.kasa.org

Officers:

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Gainesville, FL 32607

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Toll Free | (352) 332-1252

Fax | (352) 331-3525

Web: www.naylor.com

Publisher | Jack Eller

Editor | Lashonda Stinson Curry

Project Manager | Amanda Goodwin

Marketing | Kent Agramonte

Advertising Director | Brian Agnes

**Advertising Sales | Steven Faulkner,
Nicole Hudson, Nicholas Manis, John O'Neil,
Alyse Smith, Bryan Zeig**

Layout & Design | Sunny Goel

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EDITOR'S NOTE



Dear Readers,

It's hard to believe this school year is half-way complete. I hope that each of you have had a great semester and are able to get plenty of rest during winter break. As we begin a new semester of school, budgets are on the minds of most everyone. It seems everywhere we turn we are faced with decisions that ultimately come down to money. This edition of *the Kentucky School Leader* is dedicated to helping school districts do more with less. Through a partnership with Kentucky North Star Project, KASA is dedicated to assisting school districts with Process Improvement and Performance Excellence (PIPE). This program helps districts focus on how work is done, managed, measured, and improved.

The PIPE program takes a look at how processes are currently being managed. Typically, we are most concerned with the outcome – student success. But how do we get there? What is the process? And, is that process efficient? When we stop for a moment and focus on how the work is being done, we can better streamline the process, essentially saving thousands of dollars. That is exactly what PIPE was created to do. As you turn the pages of this edition, you will learn more about the PIPE program and see first-hand how it has already benefited several districts.

More information about this program can be found by visiting the North Star Community at connect.kasa.org.

Sincerely,

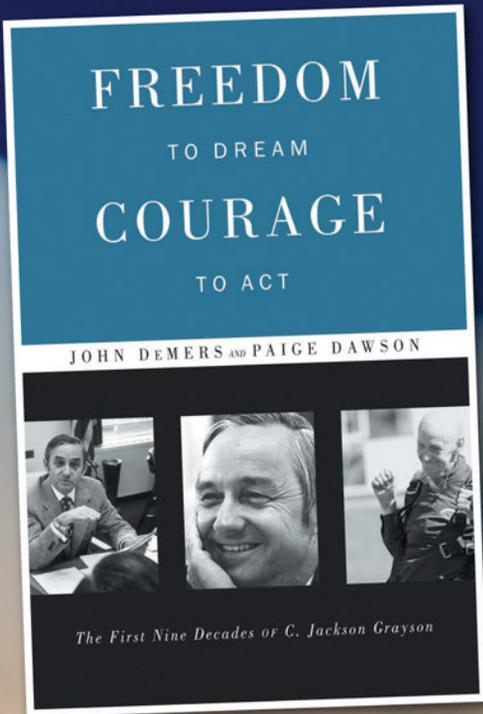
Wanda Darland

Wanda Darland, MBA

Communications & Marketing Coordinator



Kentucky North Star Project: The Dream of Transforming Education



The Kentucky North Star Project helps educational leaders improve processes and continue their mission to prepare our kids for college, a career and being part of our ever-changing communities.

C. Jackson Grayson, Executive Chairman and Founder, American Productivity & Quality Center

PPM provides a level of professional development needed by our nation's educators that is not provided in their own education or certification.

In the past, when I thought of the state of Kentucky, I thought of race horses — particularly Secretariat — and Churchill Downs, bourbon, and blue grass music. Granted, those are all wonderful things, but now I also think of the state as one of the nation's leaders in K-12 education improvement.

Let me tell you a story about how that happened.

Back in 2009, I was chairman of the 35-year-old nonprofit American Productivity & Quality Center (APQC) in Houston. Our sole purpose was to help business, healthcare, the military and government improve by using a methodology called Process and Performance Management (PPM). Simply put, we focused on how work is done, managed, measured and improved.

However, the one sector that was obviously missing was education. My personal background as professor and dean of business schools, and my passion for education made this gap all the more obvious to me.

So, I had a dream: Why not add education? But just having a dream doesn't change anything; you must also have the courage to act.

My dream was to transform all of public education in the United States by helping K-12 educational organizations (school districts, state departments and regional service centers) around the nation improve by focusing not just on outcomes like test scores or graduation rates, but also by focusing on the processes that created the outcomes — thus, both process and outcomes.

To achieve the dream I brought together ten school districts from around the country and helped them learn PPM. These districts ranged in size and geography, but all had common goals; to improve teaching and learning. I called the project North Star because, since childhood, I've always seen the bright North Star as an inspiration for reaching higher and going farther.

One of the districts was Iredell-Statesville in North Carolina whose superintendent at the time was Terry Holliday. He impressed me by how quickly he not only understood the potential of the methodology, but also by how he saw that it was critical to involve not only himself but his staff: Curriculum and Instruction, Administration and Operations. It worked so well and so fast he became a national "Secretariat" of education, and was sought by the state of Kentucky. In his pursuit of educational excellence, he engaged KASA

and people like Rhonda Caldwell and Wayne Young to implement PPM throughout the state.

Using state funding, 15 school districts were involved in 2014, participating in training, process leadership studies and process improvement activities.

Six districts had process improvement projects focused on saving money (which can be applied back to the instructional processes) and improving the environment for students. Some of the projects for improvements include Strategic Planning, Online Payment Systems, Work Order Processes, Transportation, Enrollment, Student Information Data Accuracy, Purchasing, Construction and Renovation.

Nine of the districts participated in a Process Leadership Study that helped district leaders identify best practices as well as opportunities for continuous improvement.

"Doing more with less" has become a common mantra for education, but without the skills and tools to understand processes and process data, it can be very overwhelming to follow through. PPM provides a level of professional development needed by our nation's educators that is not provided in their own education or certification. In transforming education, we must first transform how we do the work, and how we view that work cross-functionally. The Kentucky North Star Project helps educational leaders improve processes and continue their mission to prepare our kids for college, a career and being part of our ever-changing communities. 🍷

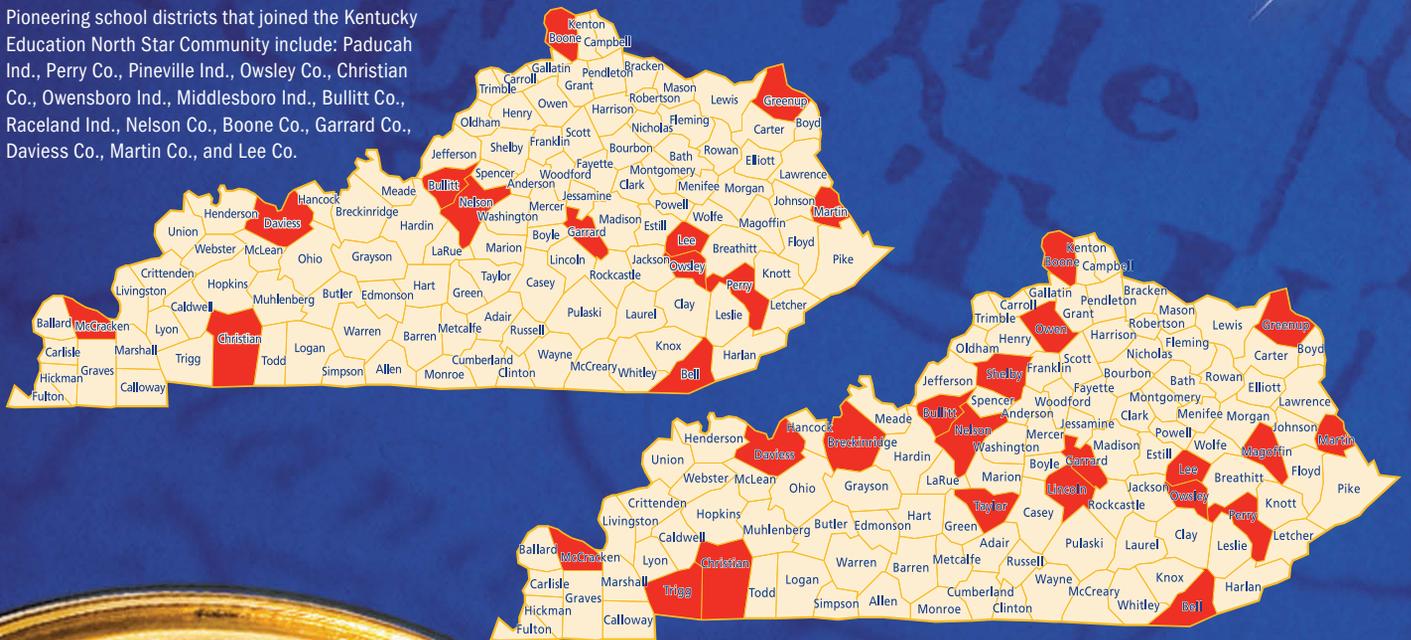


*C. Jackson Grayson, executive chairman and founder of the American Productivity & Quality Center, has a bachelor's degree from Tulane University, an MBA from the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania, and a doctorate in business from the Harvard Business School. His academic career has included professorships at Harvard, Stanford, Tulane, and SMU, and he has taught in business schools in France and Switzerland. He has also been a Dean of two business schools — at Tulane University and at SMU — where he became known for instituting innovations in business education. Grayson is an author of about 50 articles in magazines and newspapers and also is an author of four books, the latest with Carla O'Dell, *If Only We Knew What We Know*, a book about knowledge management.*

Kentucky Education North Star Community Guides Districts to Manage Resources More Efficiently

Rhonda Caldwell, CAE

Pioneering school districts that joined the Kentucky Education North Star Community include: Paducah Ind., Perry Co., Pineville Ind., Owsley Co., Christian Co., Owensboro Ind., Middlesboro Ind., Bullitt Co., Raceland Ind., Nelson Co., Boone Co., Garrard Co., Daviess Co., Martin Co., and Lee Co.



North Star community expands to 23 school districts. New districts include Breckinridge, Magoffin, Owen, Shelby, Trigg, Greenup, Lincoln, and Taylor counties.

*"Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference."
— Robert Frost*

"Make a difference" is the underlying theme and goal of the Kentucky Association of School Administrators' (KASA) Process Improvement Performance Excellence (PIPE) work.

The Kentucky Education North Star Community is the umbrella for the work which is singly focused on helping school districts set direction for sustainable change by reallocating cost savings back to classrooms. The community is modeled after the American Productivity and Quality Center's (APQC) Education North Star Project.

Through the Community, KASA, in partnership with the Kentucky Department of Education, provided grants aimed at helping school districts understand PIPE and embed it into school and district operations. The process provides cost savings, greater efficiency of resources and reallocation of funds back to classrooms.

Fifteen districts joined the Kentucky Education North Star Community in 2013-14. Nine finished the work with clear direction for navigating PIPE, and six districts, while still implementing their work, will enjoy more than \$700,000 in cost savings this school year.

In addition, nine school districts with populations ranging from 509 to 13,000 students participated in a two-day Process Leadership Study. The study determines the district's greatest priorities for aligning their work to ensure the best possible return on investment. Each district received a detailed report outlining best practice(s) already occurring in their districts and recommendations for continuous improvement. The Process Leadership Studies showed common denominators that will shape the work ahead:

- Districts have clear direction and measurement for academics, but need an active strategic plan to provide direction for the future
- Understanding operating costs versus net savings for improvement is needed
- Processes are horizontal, but organizations operate from vertical organization

charts – districts need to avoid operating in silos

- Comprehensive plans to document processes and implement best practices is needed

Six districts with populations from 1,000 to 21,000 students committed to a six month Comprehensive Improvement Effort. Boone, Daviess, Garrard, Lee, Martin, and Nelson counties identified and focused on specific issues within their school and district operations to drive student achievement and identify cost savings. A few examples where district leaders applied PIPE include:

- Bus route efficiency and field trip requests
- Candidate screening and hiring process
- Certified evaluation plan update
- Gifted/Talented program procedures
- New construction projects
- Online payment system
- Preschool enrollment/eligibility process
- Position control

With training and coaching, these school districts implemented new process approaches, and rewards came. The results are remarkable.

At this writing, the districts are wrapping up their work, but one district alone will save \$340,000 annually.

PIPE makes a difference. The big picture goal is to embed PIPE in all of Kentucky's 173 school districts. The work is ongoing. Savings are occurring. The word is spreading and 11 new districts joined the community this year and are beginning their work.

While PIPE is new to most school district leaders, it has the potential to change the way schools do business. We are grateful to the 23 school districts who have chosen the "road less traveled" to learn more and embrace PIPE in their school districts.

If you'd like to learn more about PIPE, visit the KY Education North Star Community at connect.kasa.org and see the storyboards of the project work completed by Boone, Daviess, Garrard, Lee, Martin and Nelson counties. 📎



Rhonda Caldwell, CAE, is KASA's deputy director and executive director for The Center for Education Leadership.

*At this writing,
the districts
are wrapping
up their work,
but one district
alone will
save \$340,000
annually.*



V. Wayne Young,
KASA Executive Director/General Counsel

Numerous districts have used PIPE to develop and implement efficiencies of time, resources, and energy.

“PIPE” Dreams

We all have some memory, I suspect, of being involved in playground activities at school when teams or sides were chosen. Being the one doing the choosing was, of course, the most coveted role. But if not doing the choosing, the next best role was to be among the first participants selected. Even better — **the** first!

Such an honor meant instant status. It meant you were the fastest, biggest, or most agile; the one who could catch or throw the best. The skills or characteristics desired often hinged on the nature of the activity at hand, but it was a singular honor.

But always, always, there was that one kid (no childhood scars here!) who simply waved his hand and urged, “Pick me, pick me!” He had visions of possessing the characteristics above, but his self-perception was not reality-based. We would accurately refer to it as a “pipe dream” — a hope or wish that is impossible to achieve.

But KASA offers an opportunity to participate in a “PIPE” dream that is wholly attainable. Our version is **P**rocess **I**mprovement and **P**erformance **E**xcellence. School districts that have begun implementing it in Kentucky have realized everything from hundreds of thousands of dollars in savings, to first-ever strategic plans, to streamlining internal operations from taking weeks to only days. Numerous districts have used **PIPE** to develop and implement efficiencies of time, resources, and energy.

These efficiencies, in turn, have allowed those districts to redirect resources into their instructional programs, providing more and better services to students. You will read about several of these success stories in this magazine. I hope you will conclude that your district can replicate that success.

As KASA moves forward with helping local districts implement **PIPE** in future years, we would be excited about the opportunity to pick you. Just raise your hand! 🙋





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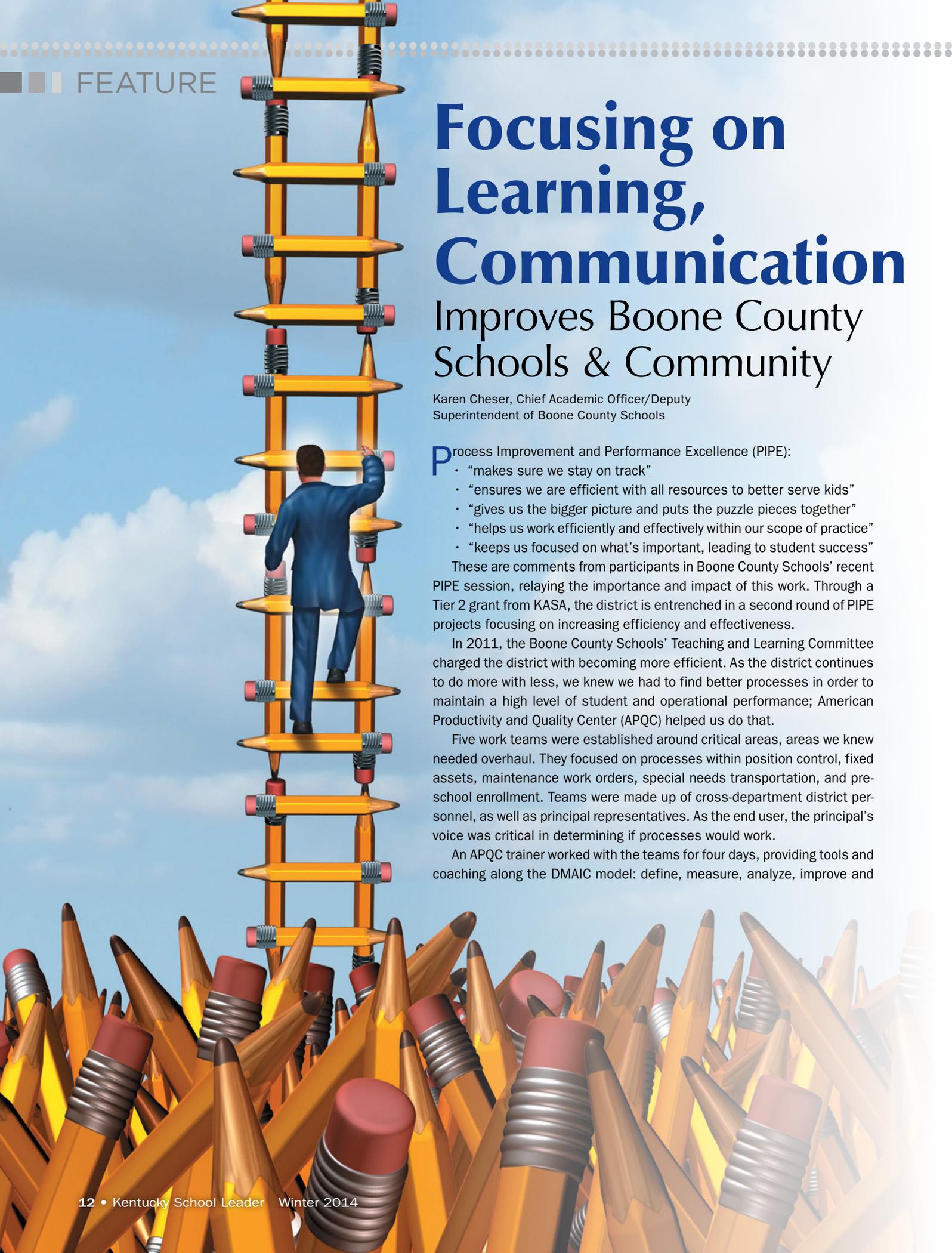
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Focusing on Learning, Communication

Improves Boone County Schools & Community

Karen Cheser, Chief Academic Officer/Deputy Superintendent of Boone County Schools

Process Improvement and Performance Excellence (PIPE):

- “makes sure we stay on track”
- “ensures we are efficient with all resources to better serve kids”
- “gives us the bigger picture and puts the puzzle pieces together”
- “helps us work efficiently and effectively within our scope of practice”
- “keeps us focused on what’s important, leading to student success”

These are comments from participants in Boone County Schools’ recent PIPE session, relaying the importance and impact of this work. Through a Tier 2 grant from KASA, the district is entrenched in a second round of PIPE projects focusing on increasing efficiency and effectiveness.

In 2011, the Boone County Schools’ Teaching and Learning Committee charged the district with becoming more efficient. As the district continues to do more with less, we knew we had to find better processes in order to maintain a high level of student and operational performance; American Productivity and Quality Center (APQC) helped us do that.

Five work teams were established around critical areas, areas we knew needed overhaul. They focused on processes within position control, fixed assets, maintenance work orders, special needs transportation, and pre-school enrollment. Teams were made up of cross-department district personnel, as well as principal representatives. As the end user, the principal’s voice was critical in determining if processes would work.

An APQC trainer worked with the teams for four days, providing tools and coaching along the DMAIC model: define, measure, analyze, improve and

control. From swim lanes to SIPOC charts to elevator speeches to business cases, the teams worked through the DMAIC structure to develop new, more efficient, processes. Through this first round of projects preschool enrollment is faster, maintenance work orders are processed more quickly, fixed asset processes are in place, and special needs transportation eliminated dead-head routes. In addition, the position control team has moved to online applications, electronic forms, and enhanced screening processes.

When KASA offered grants to begin or enhance PIPE in districts, Boone County Schools jumped at the chance to address additional areas of need. Since June, five new teams are working diligently on strategic planning processes, fleet service performance, new construction, enrollment and next steps with position control. As a result of these two rounds of projects, and the use of DMAIC tools, the district has saved almost \$1 million, as more than 60 district and school leaders have engaged in in-depth PIPE work. Beyond cost savings, the PIPE work is having a strong positive impact on students. The



district's strategic planning process is more intentionally focused on teaching and learning and communication with our community; enrollment is less costly and burdensome on parents; and new construction will more clearly address instructional needs of students.

Matt Rigg, assistant director of human resources, advises, "Many times, when asked about current processes in a district, people say, 'that's the way things have always been done.' PIPE is a way

to get away from that. Instead it focuses district staff on working together to be very clear on processes or, if needed, to reinvent processes."

Next steps for the district include finalizing and communicating current projects to the board and the larger community. The teams will work to capture their new learning and ensure control of the processes. Because of KASA's support, the district is now strongly committed to PIPE. We know that these principles will transcend all the work in the district, not just those areas we are formally addressing. Our commitment to increasing efficiency and effectiveness will guarantee we have the resources needed to ensure every student is college, career and life ready. 📝

An Example of PIPE's Positive Impact Through Transportation

Process Improvement and Performance Excellence is important to Boone County Schools because of the end product- improved student achievement.

The use of this tool provides a way for every department of a school system to positively impact the process for creating college, career, and life ready students. An example is how transportation, and all of the pieces that go into providing safe transportation to and from school, impacts students.

Bus drivers have always been visible and important to school leadership, but this process helped uncover issues that are not normally recognized as part of the puzzle to prepare students for the future. For example, the ability of buses to start in the cold, the purchase or rotation of buses, and hiring qualified drivers are just a couple of the areas that aren't always considered.

The structure of the program gives all components of our school system an ownership and accountability towards the goal. The information gathered, analyzed, and refined through process/performance management systems, provides specific information and focus about the structure and systems of the county and brings an awareness of how the puzzle pieces fit together.

Process Improvement and Performance Excellence provides valuable insight into the functions necessary for a successful outcome, however the power isn't in the outcome, but in the processes needed to create that outcome. This type of information helps eliminate roadblocks, inform biases, and involve the voice of all stakeholders. It is a proactive process that identifies problems, highlights areas of success, and provides a streamlined system awareness that will help lead to higher achieving students.



Karen Cheser is chief academic officer/ deputy superintendent of Boone County Schools in Florence, a 20,000-plus, student diverse school district. Prior to working in Kentucky education as a teacher, coach, literacy and math specialist, principal, distinguished educator and district administrator, she worked for Procter & Gamble Inc. in sales and brand management. She has been a leader in the state and region, guiding educational initiatives and directing organizations, such as the NKY Education Council's Action Team for College and Career Readiness, Greater Cincinnati STEM Collaborative's Advisory Council and Leadership NKY's Steering Committee.

Daviess County Strives for a **PROACTIVE, NOT REACTIVE STRATEGY**

Matt Robbins, Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations, Daviess County Schools

Daviess County Schools was one of six Kentucky school districts to be awarded a \$40,000 grant to pilot a program designed to one day save millions for school systems spread throughout the commonwealth. The KASA grant allowed DCPS to identify projects in which to implement Process Improvement and Performance Excellence (PIPE) curriculum.

The American Productivity and Quality Center (APQC) training tools are designed to equip our staff with industry tools to analyze and improve existing processes already in place and manage new processes introduced for the first time.

Those projects are:

- 1) On-line parent payment system
- 2) Electronic records system
- 3) New certified evaluation system
- 4) Data analysis tools

The overall goal is to enable leaders to better manage their areas of responsibility in a structured, cross-functional manner in order to improve overall performance and meet the needs of customers and stakeholders. The training teaches various methods and tools leaders can choose from to accomplish better front-end analysis, to achieve desirable implementation results.

Oftentimes, we focus on immediately trying to solve the problem, without ever correctly identifying the problem and the root causes. We learned some strategic ways this can be accomplished.

DCPS Superintendent Owens Saylor said, "We believe these Process Improvement and Performance Excellence techniques provide processes that will help us improve student achievement. We are

committed to taking well-informed strategic actions rather than simply implementing formulaic programs with no track record of success. We are also very excited about the potential that quality controls and measures developed through PIPE protocols will help us achieve what we call 'Great Expectations' academic and operational goals."

The Kentucky Association of School Administrators is partnering with the APQC — one of the world's leading proponents of benchmarking, best practices and knowledge management research — to train and implement process improvement and performance excellence techniques among six school districts. Funding for the grant is made possible by the Kentucky Department of Education.

The level of participation was divided into two tiers, selected by applicants. In addition to the six top tier winners, nine more school districts have been awarded \$10,000 for an audit of their current leadership processes to determine how best to improve performance in all processes.

The overall concept being supported by KASA and KDE is to promote the more effective and efficient use of current resources at the local level, especially in areas such as administration and operations, and to leverage any net savings towards improving instruction in the classroom. The action was set in motion through a grant competition to select an initial set of school districts to pilot the project.

APQC has documented more than \$120 million in savings over the past 10 years among school districts with which it has worked.

This grant provides DCPS with a training and development opportunity that



Dr. Bill Stieber (APQC), standing, listens as Caleb York, principal, Audubon Elementary School; Marcia Carpenter, college and career readiness coordinator; Robin Bush, special education director and Owens Saylor, superintendent trade ideas as part of the Data Analysis Tools team during a recent PIPE training session.



Matt Robbins, assistant superintendent for finance and operations, diagrams roles and responsibilities for the district's four areas of emphasis in developing effective process improvement and performance excellence.



DCPS Maintenance Director David Humphrey, Director of Transportation Wayne Wright, and Computer Operations Manager Steve Burton explore options about development of an electronic records system as part of PIPE training.

APQC has documented more than \$120 million in savings over the past 10 years among school districts with which it has worked.

otherwise we could not financially consider on our own. We believe this will result in many efficiencies gained throughout DCPS, and ultimately this is an investment that will reap benefits for many years. We strive for continuous improvement to positively impact student achievement. The ability to work within teams and across teams is an increasing and dominant factor to resolve problems. I believe most problems are a result of a flawed process. This training will teach us how to work together to not only solve problems more efficiently, but to also prevent problems from occurring. APQC has been successful in business and industry to equip others on how to install quality measures and problem-solving techniques. We are excited to learn as much as we can about how to do this more effectively.



Matt Robbins is the assistant superintendent for finance and operations for Daviess County Schools.

DCPS has implemented significant achievements and improvements in his areas of leadership. He was named KASBO Outstanding Business Official in 2013.



Hiring Process, Transportation Needs Improve and Pre- School/GT Redefined for Garrard County Schools



Paul Mullins, Superintendent,
Garrard County Schools

Prior to Process Improvement and Performance Excellence (PIPE), the Garrard County School System had identified many processes that needed to be refined, but we were not sure where to start. Our leadership team had *discussed* the time it took to onboard a certified employee, but we had never calculated the time in terms of *wait time* and *work time*. We had discussed the fact that our transportation system was wrought with opportunities to improve efficiency in terms of time and money. Other areas that always seemed to elicit questions about the eligibility process were gifted and talented education and pre-school education. In both cases, we needed to heighten the awareness of all stakeholders of exactly how student's eligibility is determined.

In the fall of 2013 when we received the PIPE grant, we convened our leadership team to set dates for training, review our needs and make sure we had correctly identified the areas of improvement. The three processes we selected for our work were those mentioned (Onboarding Certified Personnel, Transportation and Eligibility Criteria for Preschool Program/Gifted and Talented). Teams, made up of school administrators and at least one board member per teams, were chosen for each of the projects. Our board members were active participants in the training as well as the solution phase of the project.

The training was challenging, presenting a methodical protocol for identifying process inputs, outputs, voice of customer, savings in terms of monetary results, time results, and other measures of efficiency. Training took place over the course of four

We know from our completed storyboards that we have some positive results to report with each of the areas investigated through the APQC grant.

days — one day to introduce the process and three days with the guidance of an APQC trainer to refine each process.

Presently, we are collecting data to verify that the PIPE training did what we thought it would do — lead to increased savings in both staff time, customer satisfaction and monetary costs. We know from our completed storyboards that we have some positive results to report with each of the areas investigated through the APQC grant. Those include the following:

- **Onboarding Certified Employees**
 - Increased customer satisfaction as reported by new hires in 2014
 - Greater efficiency with the application process
 - Identification of a software program that will train and provide information to new hires
 - Greater district HR team satisfaction as the time needed to onboard employees is improved
- **Transportation**
 - Increased satisfaction from the middle school leaders as the time it takes to release students in the afternoon has been decreased
 - Improved customer service to students, parents, teachers and other staff
 - Monetary savings due to shorter routes in the afternoon
 - Safety improved due to a period of 30 of traffic-free campus
- **Pre-School/GT Eligibility**
 - Guidelines have been determined and communicated
 - Eligibility being defined and written has caused more uniformity across

all schools in the district leading to greater customer satisfaction

- Guidelines are written, increasing the likelihood they will be sustained and followed in subsequent years

Next steps for our district include the following:

- Finalizing the cost analysis
- Communicating the successes of the projects undertaken in 2013-14
- Identifying other processes that can be similarly streamlined toward more nimble organizational effectiveness
- Training others in the district in the APQC process management system
- Replicate the team approach to refine other processes as needed

In closing, it is certain that PIPE has helped us to hone our growth mindset as district leaders. We are truly excited to see how many processes we can improve as we move toward our goal of 90 to 100 percent of all school and district processes written and recorded. 📎



Paul Mullins is currently in his second year as superintendent of Garrard County Schools. His career in education has

been rich and diverse and includes teaching social studies, coaching, administration at multiple school levels and now at the district level. He has been very active as a leader and member of several professional organizations and is currently the immediate past president of KASA. He resides in Garrard County with his wife, Tonda. They have three sons, Matthew, Dylan and Christian.

Transportation Process Goes Paperless:

Saves Time and Hopefully Costs for Lee County

Sharron Adams, District Human Resources Director and Board Treasurer, Lee County Schools



In a time of budget shortfalls and ever increasing unfunded mandates, our district needed to become more innovative in our methods to reduce cost without reducing services. We decided to focus on alignment of our current systems and processes with the expectation that by doing so we could create significant cost savings. The Process Improvement and Performance Excellence (PIPE) training gave us the tools necessary to accomplish this. We are now able to evaluate and realign our systems and processes and if needed, to develop new processes entirely. PIPE has enabled us to become more efficient and keep dollars in the classroom for our kids. Our leadership team now values the importance of the work, and we plan to apply the training to other systems district-wide.

Our district concentrated on personnel and transportation as an initial focus. The personnel hiring process is critical to student success. We must employ the most qualified candidates available in a timely manner to best serve our kids and schools. In our analysis of the hiring process we found inconsistencies among departments during each step of the process. A lack of communication and accountability for not correctly following the hiring process led to wasted time, as HR was required to backtrack to ensure all necessary paperwork and certification requirements were complete. We found a similar problem when

reviewing the transportation trip request process. Again, there were inconsistencies among departments during each step of the trip approval process. Transportation staff was required to backtrack through the process to obtain required signatures, funding source approval, chaperones, etc. Through review of both the hiring process and transportation trip approval process we found that staff was not being utilized in the most efficient manner.

To address these issues, we completely redesigned our personnel hiring process, and have gone paperless in transportation through implementation of Travel Tracker trip request software. These changes have already created a time savings, allowing staff to be more efficient in both areas. Upon communication to all staff and full implementation of both processes, the cost benefit to the district will be analyzed and measured by: quality of staff and services; increased productivity of HR and transportation staff; decreased liability; and reduction in delay time of services. Efficiency is our goal; one that will allow us to reduce costs and keep dollars in the classrooms for kids. The new processes we are implementing in personnel and transportation will streamline both processes.

Our entire central office leadership team has been trained in PIPE. During our first focus utilizing PIPE, we organized meetings with all central office departments and

identified key roles that each person was responsible for in each department's processes. We wanted to ensure that everyone responsible knew their role in the process. Communication and accountability is critical within all processes and systems. Always involve key players and stakeholders.

Next steps for our district will include utilization of PIPE to evaluate the finance, technology, and maintenance processes within the central office. From there, we plan to move forward with other departments throughout the district. Our ultimate goal is to have efficient and productive processes and systems in place district-wide. We've started with our central office staff within each department. It's a different way of thinking and provides accountability by holding each of us responsible for pieces within the system. Everyone knows who is responsible for each piece. 📌



Sharron Adams' role as the administrative assistant to Dr. James Evans Jr., superintendent of Lee County Schools, requires her to apply her

problem-solving ability, interpersonal and critical thinking skills and 23-plus years of experience to successfully provide multi-layered support. She also serves as the district human resources director and board treasurer for the Lee County Schools.



In Praise of Assistant Principals

Lu S. Young, Ed.D., Director, Fayette County Schools

As I continue my journey to highlight school and district leaders in a variety of important and interconnected roles, I want to shine the light this month on perhaps the *most* unsung of unsung heroes — assistant principals. Whether they are called vice principals, associate, or assistant principals, this group of school administrators is perhaps the most misunderstood, underappreciated, and often mistreated of all the members of a school's leadership team. I should know — I was one — once!

In the fall of 1997, I had the unique, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be on the leadership team of a brand new high school in my home district. The

superintendent appointed the principal who, in turn, selected me and a fellow teacher to be his assistant principals. I will never forget the excitement that built around the opening of that very special place. We approached every aspect of the “birth” of the new school as an opportunity for students to engage with us as partners and co-creators of our school. We met with teams of students and adults to agree upon a set of guiding principles about learning, student engagement, decision making, and so on. It was one of the most professionally challenging, yet stimulating experiences of my career, and I thought I would be an assistant principal forever. I loved that job!

As often happens, fate intervened and I left that school-level position to become a district administrator the next year, but I garnered a lifetime of fond memories during my short time as an assistant principal. It was in that position that I had the most direct and perhaps the most impactful influence on some of the district's neediest students and their families. I also had the opportunity to spend time in teachers' classrooms, to learn how the whole system worked, and to spread my leadership wings. I wish that assistant principals everywhere could have the same great principal-in-training experience I had.

Simply put, schools across the nation operate more smoothly every day of the year thanks to the selfless back-seat leadership of assistant principals. In addition to ever-increasing expectations to be instructional leaders, these administrators juggle the demands of student discipline, parent meetings, school safety, asset inventory, facilities management, bus and lunch supervision, oversight of athletics and extracurricular activities — and the list goes on. They work long hours, build strong relationships with students and families, and support the principal at every turn, standing in for him/her when out of the building. Assistant principals are truly leadership “jacks of all trades.”

Many assistant principals intentionally work their way into the principalship while others make the conscientious decision to spend their careers in the number-two role. Whatever the professional career path they choose, we should all take the opportunity this year to recognize and thank our dedicated, hard-working assistant principals for their invaluable contribution to the overall success of our schools and our students. As always, choose joy! 🍷

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