



**SUPERINTENDENT**

Tom Meyer  
Phone: 563.872.4001 ext. 260  
Fax: 563.872.3216

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1601 State St. | Bellevue, IA 52031 | 563.872.4001 | www.bellevue.k12.ia.us

**BELLEVUE COMETS**  
COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

**Board Notes**  
**January 4, 2018**

January 12	End of 1st Semester
January 15	No School - Teacher Professional Development/Work Day
January 30	IASB Day on the Hill (contact me if want to attend)
February 5	Multipurpose Room/West Gym Floor work to begin
February 15-19	No School (19th is President's Day)
March 7 & 8	Parent-Teacher Conferences
March 9	No School
March 12	No School - Teacher Professional Development
March 23	End of 3rd Quarter
April 7-9	National School Boards Convention (Depart on April
6...will	work on travel in January and February)

**Notes from the January 8, 2018 Board of Education Meeting**

Consent Agenda

Approve Resignations

Approved

The following are all in conjunction with the Early Retirement Program:

- Brent Chambers - HS Science
- Sally Grutz - 3rd Grade
- Chris Iosbaker - 3rd Grade
- Joannie Kilburg - Instructional Coach and HS English (ENG105, Print Comm, NHS Sponsor)
- Wanda Kingery - Elementary Special Education

The five of these are all very good teachers, and will be missed for their perspectives, high-quality work with students, and dedication to the students at the Bellevue Community Schools.

Approve Recommendations to Hire

Carli LaCoursiere - Bellevue Elementary Associate

- Mrs. Hartung-Schroeder and two teachers interviewed five candidates for an elementary associate position on Wednesday. Carli has been a sub in the

elementary. As I mentioned in the past, we have been fortunate for this position and the MS/HS position to have extremely well-qualified candidates. We have had current substitutes and employees in the district apply, along with individuals with degrees and other qualifications.

### Facilities Discussion

#### Bellevue Elementary

Legat is coming to Bellevue on January 10 to meet with a "core team" of community members, a couple board members, and myself to discuss the next steps. Some of this will focus on a summary of the information gathered and a version of the next steps.

It was clear from my perspective that people believe something needs to be done with the current elementary building. While those who spoke at the meeting were in favor of a new building at a different location, I am not sure if that is quite as clear as those who spoke. But, we will have this conversation and discuss next steps.

A few things to be aware of and/or consider:

1. The Core Team will likely present to the Board at the February Board meeting.
2. The earliest we could have a referendum (vote) is in September of 2018.
3. We do not have to have a specific location of where a building will be built at that time. It is simply a "general statement" to approve funds to make the improvements.
4. I have had conversations with the attorney for the land adjacent to the Bellevue MS/HS campus. They are likely willing to sell, but would need an offer from the district to act upon. This could be contingent on the passing of the referendum. When is the right time to do this? I believe likely after the Core Team makes their presentation.
5. Being listed on the National Historic Register does NOT limit a "private" person from making "insensitive" changes or demolition. In order for the school to do either of these, the school would need to deal with the State Historical Society of Iowa, and they are a "preservation group". They would likely be very difficult to convince destroying it is the right approach...especially since it is still in operation, standing, and not ready to "fall down".
6. What kind of building do we want? I believe one that will serve our students and community for the next 30-50 years...not only for today's students. This may also include some new energy uses (Net-Zero for energy costs). This may be getting ahead of the process, but we also need to start/continue the discussion.
7. Legat will work with us on the next steps, at an additional cost. I recommend we work with them in regard to marketing any plan, analyzing survey information that we can do ourselves, and ultimately develop a step-by-step plan for this process that meets the needs of the Bellevue community as a whole (each district and community is different). We need

to find out the questions of the community (and the answers or responses), what the community will support, etc.

8. Are we willing to go forward with a referendum? Will each of us support it in public in an honest manner? Ultimately, do you believe in it?!?!?!?

A lot of great potential and ideas to discuss at the January meeting, and then at the February Board meeting specifically for ALL of the Board members.

Board members discussed their thoughts on moving forward and looking toward a new elementary school at a site yet to be determined. A few of the perspectives for these thoughts were based on:

- Our kids deserve a better building than they are currently in for their learning, and expansion of their already great learning.
- Better for the community
- Safety
- Accessibility
- Prepare for the future

Meyer shared that Matt Gillespie is available to come to an upcoming meeting again to speak about referendums in general. The Board indicated a potential visit at the March or April Board meeting.

The Board discussed having Legat continue working with the Board and the district/community in the future based on need, for specific prices. Meyer will find out more about this in the future and share with the Board officially at the February Board meeting. Part of the reason for this is for marketing for the referendum and finding out what our community believes and wants.

Meyer also shared the following:

### **National Historic Register Implications**

#### Public Entity

- *Protects the exterior and main parts inside (large public spaces, historic woodwork, etc.)*
- *To update and modernize*
  - *Must contact the Secretary of the Interior from the National Parks Service (State Historic Officer)*
  - *The State Historic Officer will review for compliance of work - what being proposed, materials used to make improvements (Industrial standard materials for masonry, windows, plaster repair, etc.)*
    - *The condition of the building and historic parts in the building to rehabilitate are of emphasis.*
  - *Entrance into a Section 106 of the National Preservation Act - Make sure there is no negative impact*
  - *Can negotiate with this group on what could be done*

#### Private Entity (if using public funds)

- *Using state/federal tax credits - Leads to a Section 106 meeting*

Strictly Private Funding

*Less restraints*

*State Historic Officer will only get involved if triggered to due to public outcry, etc.*

*Many times additions are demolished, and then new construction is built onto the original construction on the National Historic Register*

**Capital Improvement Projects**

Meyer reviewed the information below with the Board...Potential decisions at the March and April Board meetings (and beyond).

Below and on the following pages is information in regard to some potential improvements and/or purchases (alphabetically by general term/area) for the Summer of 2018 or sooner as we prepare for the 2018-2019 school year. These are only some of the things likely, but it gives a general overview. I do not anticipate any action on this until our February or March Board meetings, but wanted to let you know of some items being discussed, etc. This is a great time to let me and the other board members know of any of your thoughts for priorities (not all are possible at this time!). In addition, I also want to "hold off" on some of the elementary items possibly (as noted in the notes) until the district (and its voters potentially) assist us in making some decisions.

Facilities/Vehicles

- MS/HS Multipurpose - West Gym **Total: \$29,502.04** Currently approved by the Board

Overall cost to the district after insurance

*Breakdown:*

<i>Cost of Floor</i>	<i>\$64,755.00</i>
<i>Insurance Money</i>	<i><u>\$35,252.96</u></i>
	<i>\$29,502.04</i>

- **Flooring:** HS Hallway replacement/Lights **Total: \$20,000-\$25,000**

HS hallway with LED Lighting - \$3000

Ceiling tile - \$10,000

Flooring

"Trowel stained floor like Hall of Pride is likely around \$9500;  
"Stained" cement (if possible), would likely be around \$7000;  
Tile floor is about \$8000;

Epoxy floor is around \$7500.

Benefits to any over other?

*The floor that takes the most work and chemicals to clean, etc is the tile floor; The floor that is most long-lasting and less labor and no chemicals (besides basic soap) is the stained or "troweled" floor; The epoxy floor is also less chemicals, but will show scratches and scrapes more often*

- **Flooring:** 5th Grade Carpet

**Estimated Total: \$10,000**

This carpet needs to be replaced...sooner than later in many ways. Its time has come.

- **Furniture:** Classroom Collaborative Furniture

**\$5000-\$10,000 yearly**

Attempting to make some updates yearly For classrooms in both buildings; Last year we did some changes in 4th grade, with the other room yet to do.

- **Lights:** Industrial Tech Building

**Total: \$5000-\$7000**

- **Lockerrooms:** MS Lockerrooms (Boys & Girls)

**Estimated Total: \$60,000 per room (\$120,000 total);**

*I have hopes of cutting this amount dramatically working with some local service people*

We need to update our shower rooms Specifically; They are not acceptable or meet equity visit requirements. It is one big shower room in the girl's lockerroom, and two in the boy's lockerroom. Creating "stalls" for showers allows privacy for students.

\*This is an equity visit concern as well.

- **Parking Lot:** MS/HS Parking Lot Repairs

**Estimated Total: \$70,000-\$100,000**

(Dependent on the impact of this winter)

We did some work on the west side of the parking lot three years ago. We need to make some improvements on some other parts based on pot holes, cracking, etc next summer.

- **Restrooms:** MS/HS Restrooms

**Estimated Total: \$20,000-\$40,000**

*(depends on what we would do for improvements...)*

These are not handicapped accessible, And we may need to do something to make General improvements as a whole. These are our main restrooms during activities, And the appearance and usefulness needs some potential updating.

- **Sidewalk:** Concrete north side of MS/HS

**Estimated Total: \$10,000**

Sidewalk that is used is cracked and needs repairs at some time

- **Transportation:** Bus

**Estimated Total: \$80,000-\$90,000**

We are due for a new bus, but we may be able to hold off one more year. I will keep you posted. Tim Roth does a great job of keeping our buses in great shape, and this has delayed some purchases in the past.

- **Transportation:** Bus Barn Hoist (used?)

**Estimated Total: \$2500-\$7500**

Ease/capability of doing repairs

Likely 1+ years away for purchase

- Suburban

Estimated Total: \$50,000

May need one of these in the future, but likely a year away - \$50,000

- Lunch Van/Truck/Snow Truck

**Estimated Total: \$10,000-\$30,000**

*(depending on purchasing a new/used vehicle)*

Eventually the replacement of our van used for lunch, along with our snow plow truck...Unknown when...It could be in a few months or a few years (age & mileage) Truck is 1992; Van is 1998; Likely Combine trucks into one vehicle sometime (could be several years from now)

- Family and Consumer Science Room Update

**Estimated Total: \$10,000-\$50,000**

*Cost is dependent on actions*

This room has been the same for quite

Some time, and is in need of some updates in sink, cook and prep areas, along with some stoves.

We did purchase a new refrigerator last year as the other one quit, and we bought two stoves several years ago.

There are currently 6 stations for students, but this could likely be reduced to 4 or 5 stations.

### Technology & Instructional Items

- **Printers/Copiers:** Updates

**Estimated Total: \$7500** *Currently Approved by the Board...Installation in January*

*Cost-Saving steps on more efficient*

- **Macbooks:** (MacAir) for students for

**Estimated Total: \$52,500-\$105,000**

~~\$950~~ \$700 X 70 students= \$49,000 (Summer '18) OR..

\$750 X 140 students= \$105,000 (Summer '19);

*This rate could go up as a year passes and pricing likely increases*

One grade at a time or both grades.  
Online courses - Juniors/Seniors

*We utilize Macs due to their capability For online courses, as Chromebooks are not efficient or sufficient for this use at this time. This could potentially come from PPEL, but there are some limitations to this approach when we charge fees for computers.*

- **Chromebooks:** 6th Grade Annual Rotation

**Estimated Total: \$200 X 45 = \$9,000**

Buying yearly for one grade (6th Grade)

- **Promethean Boards:** Elementary

**Estimated Total: \$8,000**

We need to start updating these in the next few years annually. Each board is approximately \$3500/\$4000. We've moved some from the MS/HS building to the

Elementary in the past, along with purchasing two recently...one a replacement for Mrs. Hoffman in 5th grade and the other was for Mrs. Reeg in 1st grade who did not have a board before...these are both boards on carts that allow for the "front of the room" to be anywhere, instead of mounting a board into the wall...I believe this is better, but I will get feedback from these teachers in the next month after they have used it for awhile.

- iPads: Elementary

**Estimated Total: \$7500**

One section of 2nd grade; With 1st grade to follow in the next year(s)

Summer 2019

- Teacher Computers (Mac Air)

**Estimated Total: \$900 X 50 = \$45,000**

- Chromebooks (Gr. 6)

**Estimated Total: \$200 X 50 = \$10,000**

Elementary Needs (Likely wait on these until decisions about building made)

- Elementary Cafeteria Updates (Windows/Tables) \$50,000-\$75,000  
Depends on future of building overall
- Elementary Playground Equipment
- Green Space
- Windows
- Room Lighting (both buildings) More cost efficient lighting, and  
Brighter lighting possibly
- Elementary Roof (likely needed in 5 or less years)
- Boiler???

**Student Conferences**

Approved \$7373 for FBLA.

In June 2017 we discussed assisting the 19 FBLA (Future Business Leaders of America) members with their expenses for their trip to Nationals in Anaheim where they were competing. This was a more expensive trip than usual due to



airfare for the number of students and four chaperones (which makes this much different than nearly all other conferences for students). Students fundraised quite a bit for this event, but can also only meet so much of the financial need (they also received a \$3000 donation from a local business person).

We did not have a formal motion for the district's contribution for the FBLA trip, but in the past had given them up to \$5000. We had said at that time we would give them this much (with no formal motion), but wanted to evaluate needs overall before doing so (from my memory and notes). The expenses not covered were approximately \$7373 without any contribution from the school. Do we want to go forward with only the \$5000, or would we like to contribute a little more to help them (or cover completely) the costs? It is a worthwhile learning trip for the students, and they also pay a significant amount to go as well. I will have this on the January agenda as a motion item for all student conferences in general. Let me know your thoughts, but I would recommend we meet the needs of \$7373 total.

At the same time, how do we fund other events? I think it is difficult to have a distinct policy for each trip based on the number of students, location of the conference they are presenting at specifically (which presenting and qualifying are keys for any funding in my opinion). Our FFA group qualified as well, but they are also fundraising, and the cost is less due to driving to Denver, cheaper lodging, and a shorter time frame. I do not anticipate any funding needed from the school for this, as it is not a 100% school-related event.

My estimation is that we must evaluate each "trip" accordingly and decide based on this. \$5000 is a realistic amount most years for FBLA, but this past year it was not quite enough due to the issues mentioned.

Meyer also shared the following from the FFA fundraising for the trip to Denver for competition:

**FFA Donors (Denver, Colorado Competition)**

<i>Bellevue Sand &amp; Gravel</i>	<i>\$250</i>
<i>Jackson County Beef Producers</i>	<i>\$250</i>
<i>Farm Bureau</i>	<i>\$300 (not received yet)</i>
<i>Roeder's</i>	<i>\$100</i>
<i>Scheckel Construction</i>	<i>\$100</i>
<i>Countryside Feed</i>	<i>\$50</i>
<i>Marquette Students</i>	<i>\$316</i>
<i>State 4H</i>	<i>\$300 (not received yet)</i>
<i>Local 4H</i>	<i>\$300 (not received yet)</i>
<i>Bellevue State Bank</i>	<i><u>\$150</u></i>
<i>Total</i>	<i>\$2116</i>

**Bellevue CSD Graduate Skills**

Meyer shared some samples of student work from 6th graders for the Bellevue CSD Graduate Skills that we discussed at our November meeting. Jacob Till (student Board representative) is going to work on some other samples for the Board to look at during the February 2018 Board meeting. These will be displayed in buildings throughout the district.

**Iowa Post-Secondary Readiness Report and Iowa School Report Card**

Discussion on these two reports...

Post-Secondary Readiness

The state released information recently on the amount of students from the graduating classes of 2013-2015 who attended college, and who also needed a remedial class in college in math or english based on their lack of basic skills. Below is some of this information for Bellevue, and other schools in the conference and the area. Thoughts?

It is also important to recognize that last year's graduating class had over 90% indicating they were going to attend college, and to our knowledge that is still accurate. We have made significant strides in the last several years in having students attend some type of training after high school...from a 6-month/1-year credential, to a 2-year degree, to a 4-year degree. A "credential" of some type is important in many ways for our students, and the college courses in high school are assisting in this process as a whole as well.

*Percent of graduates enrolled in a college/university within one year of high school graduation  
(Average of 2013, 2014, 2015 cohorts)*

*Percent of graduates who took at least one remedial math or English course within 1-year of graduation  
(Avg of 2013, 2014, 2015 cohorts)*

Bellevue	63.7	23.0
Anamosa	63.2	31.8
Cal-Wheat	67.0	28.1
Camanche	57.0	38.2
Cascade	79.0	15.4
Dubuque Hempstead	67.2	31.1
Dubuque Senior	69.4	32.1
Durant	78.4	23.1
Easton Valley	59.1	25.6
Maquoketa	52.7	27.8
Midland	55.2	42.8
Mid-Prairie	66.2	24.3

Monticello	72.4	23.3
North Cedar	70.9	17.6
Northeast	70.4	21.8
Tipton	71.0	18.6
West Branch	78.7	20.5
Western Dubuque	73.7	22.8
West Liberty	69.2	28.8
Wilton	66.7	35.2

### Iowa School Report Card

Another "measuring" tool the State of Iowa is utilizing is the Iowa School Report Card, which I sent an email about on December 14. This is one measure of our district and schools, and their overall "effectiveness" with educating youth. It is difficult for me personally, along with many other school administrators and others across the state, to clearly understand how determinations are made and how data is collected.

One aspect is the results on Iowa Assessments, and growth overall. This is somewhat clear, but other measures are not very clear to nearly anyone involved.

This is also only one "report" about our district, but it rates our middle/high school as "Commendable" and our elementary as "Acceptable." They were reversed last year, and I cannot communicate effectively how they changed this year or why! It is undeterminable to many people like me! (A clarification of the rating levels is in the attachment)

But, I will go on to clarify that ratings are based on the following:

- Iowa Assessments Proficiency and Growth
- College and Career Readiness and Growth
- Graduation Rate
- Attendance
- Staff Retention (FYI...early retirement will hurt our numbers for next year!)
- Parent Involvement Teacher Survey and Involvement

As I state often...we must continually work to provide RELEVANT AND ENGAGING learning opportunities for our students at all grade levels each and every day. **This is more than a worksheet, a teacher talking, or doing the same thing every day so simply "meet standards" (which are not met often when we only focus on the standard and not the interests and engagement of the students in relation to the learning goals).** We must allow for student choice and voice, know student interests, and how to engage them in their learning. I know this is much easier said than done at times, but it is imperative.

I do not put a lot of emphasis on this rating (even if we were at the "Exceptional" level). We must continually look at what we are doing and if we

are seeing learning by our students based on internal data and student learning opportunities.

The site for the Iowa School Report Card is the following if you want to look at Bellevue beyond the basic handout attached, and other districts across the state.

<http://reports.educateiowa.gov/schoolreportcard>

Below are some key points from my perspective from an article in the Des Moines Register today....which I believe must be related to student engagement in their learning in schools...

The percentage of schools that received an exceptional, high-performing or commendable ranking fell from 43 percent in 2016 to 37 percent in 2017

Third grade achievement fell in both reading and math when comparing state test data for the 2015-16 and 2016-17 school years.

Last school year, 75.4 percent of third graders were reading on grade level, down from 76.9 percent the previous school year.

In addition, 77.9 percent were performing at grade level in math, down from 79.8 percent previously.

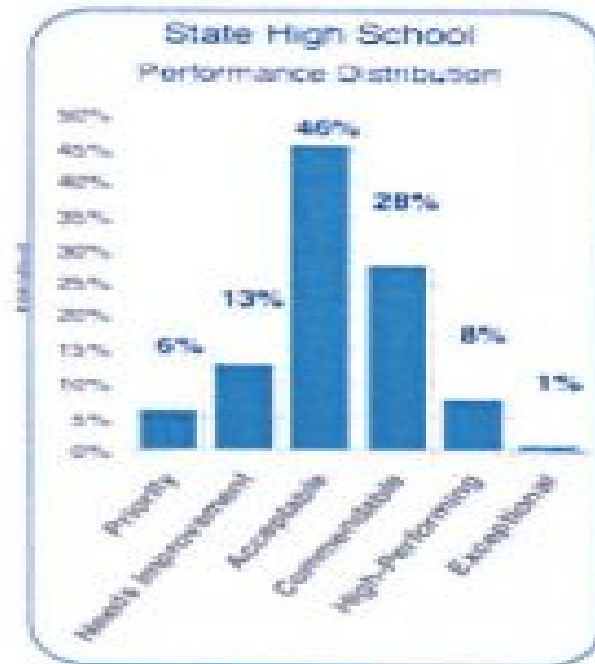
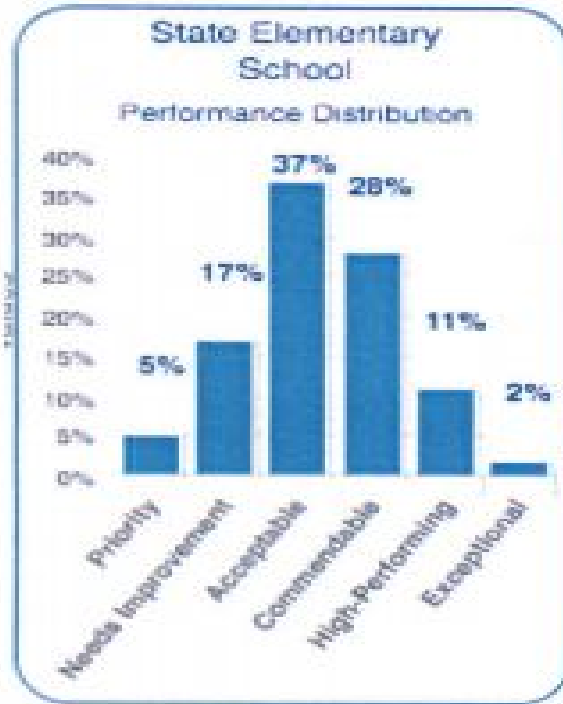
*Schools can earn one of six ratings: Exceptional, High-Performing, Commendable, Acceptable, Needs Improvement, and Priority.*

Below are area schools and schools in our conference and their "rating" on the report card:

	<b>Elementary</b>	<b>MS Only</b>	<b>MS/HS (or HS only if a District has a separate MS Ranking)</b>
Bellevue	Acceptable		Commendable
Anamosa	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Cal-Wheat	Acceptable		Acceptable
Camanche	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Cascade	Commendable		Commendable
Durant	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Maquoketa	Needs Improve.	Acceptable	Acceptable
Midland	Needs Improve.		Needs Improve.
Mid-Prairie(3 elem)	Comm/Acc/Except	Acceptable	Acceptable
Monticello	Acceptable	Acceptable	Commendable
North Cedar (2 elem.)	Comm/Acceptable		Needs Improve.
Northeast	Commendable	Commendable	Commendable
Tipton	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
West Branch	Commendable	Acceptable	Acceptable
West Liberty	Needs Improve.	Acceptable	Acceptable
Wilton	Acceptable		Acceptable

Dubuque Elementaries 4 Priority/3 Needs Improve/5 Acceptable/1 Commendable  
 Dubuque Middle Schools 1 Priority/1 Needs Improve/1 Commendable  
 Dubuque Hempstead HS Acceptable  
 Dubuque Senior HS Acceptable

Total Percentage of Schools in each category statewide...



### Comet School Finance and Legislative Information

Meyer updated the Board on reported legislative priorities, with one being on school funding. One aspect is the likely increase being less than 2%, and more likely 0-1%. Meyer also discussed the extension of the SAVE (1-cent funds for facilities) for beyond 2029, as this is a key for schools to maintain infrastructure for students and the community. Finally, Meyer also discussed the proposed discussions about extending tax breaks for private school families and funding, which has already increased from \$2.5 million dollars in 2005 to \$12 million dollars currently. Enrollment across the state in private schools has not increased, but tax breaks for the families have increased while public school funding has not kept up with the increase in costs in comparison.

### Comet Curriculum/Comet Reading and Reflection (combined this month)

After the specific meeting notes are an excerpt from a book called The Innovator's Mindset. Meyer believes this is a quality piece of writing allowing us to recognize where we are as a district. The Board shared their thoughts.

### Wellness Policy

Our district has a Food Nutrition State Visit/Audit on January 17 & 18, and added the following policy to our other policies adopted in the Summer.

Code No. 507.9

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#### WELLNESS POLICY

*The Bellevue Community School District Board of Education is committed to the optimal development of every student. The board believes for students to have the opportunity to achieve personal, academic, developmental, and social success, there needs to be a positive, safe, and health-promoting learning environment at every level, in every setting.*

*The school district provides a comprehensive learning environment for developing and practicing lifelong wellness behaviors. The entire school environment, not just the classroom, shall be aligned with healthy school district goals to positively influence a student's understanding, beliefs and habits as they relate to good nutrition and regular physical activity. In accordance with law and this belief, the board commits to the following:*

The school district will identify at least one goal in each of the following areas:

- **Nutrition Education and Promotion:** Schools will provide nutrition education and engage in nutrition promotion that helps students develop lifelong healthy eating behaviors.
- **Physical Activity:** Schools will provide students with age and grade appropriate opportunities to engage in physical activity that meet the Iowa Healthy Kids Act.
- **Other School Based Activities that Promote Wellness:** As appropriate, schools will support students, staff, and parents' efforts to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

The following nutritional guidelines for food available on school campuses will be adhered to:

- Meals served through the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Program will be appealing and meet, at a minimum, nutrition requirements established by state and federal law;
- Schools providing access to healthy foods outside the reimbursable meal programs before school, during school and thirty minutes after school shall meet the United States Department of Agriculture ("USDA") Smart Snacks in Schools nutrition standards, at a minimum. This includes such items as those sold through a la carte lines, vending machines, student run stores, and fundraising activities;
- Snacks provided to students during the school day without charge (e.g., class parties) will meet standards set by the district in accordance law. The district will provide parents a list of foods and beverages that meet nutrition standards for classroom snacks and celebrations; and
- Schools will only allow marketing and advertising of foods and beverages that meet the Smart Snacks in school nutritional standards on campus during the school day.

The superintendent or superintendent's designee shall implement and ensure compliance with the policy by:

- Reviewing the policy at least every three years and recommending updates as appropriate for board approval;
- Implementing a process for permitting parents, students, representatives of the school food authority, teachers of physical education, school health professionals, the school board, administrators and the public to participate in the development, implementation, and periodic review and update of the policy;
- Making the policy and updated assessment of the implementation available to the public (e.g., posting on the website, newsletters, etc). This information shall include the extent to which the schools are in compliance with policy and a description of the progress being made in attaining the goals of the policy; and
- Developing administrative regulations, which shall include specific wellness goals and indicators for measurement of progress consistent with law and district policy.

## Information Items

### Extracurricular Update

- Update on the extracurricular activities upcoming this Winter time, and entering into Spring. I have also advertised for an assistant high school coach/middle school baseball coach.

### Day on the Hill

- Meyer invited Board members to the IASB Legislative Day on the Hill on January 30, as he will be out there that day along with meeting with the legislature on January 31.

### Comments from Building Principals, Superintendent, Board Members

Jeanette discussed the new "Backpack Program" that our elementary will be involved with this semester. This program is in collaboration with the St. Stephen's Food Bank in Dubuque, and provides non-perishable food to family's in a student's backpack for a weekend or vacation time. Its goal is to ultimately alleviate childhood hunger. The school's role is to help identify children in the school (families) on free-reduced lunch who would benefit from this by communicating to them in advance and finding out their interest. We can provide for up to 18 families, and we store the food in our school. Food is distributed in a confidential manner.

It was also mentioned that the English 105 students will be having their educational forum on Tuesday, January 9 in the library at 6:00 PM. All are invited to attend.

### Adjourn

Next meeting is February 12, 2018 @ 6:30 PM







## CHAPTER 2

# THE INNOVATOR'S MINDSET

We need to move beyond the idea that an education is something that is provided for us and toward the idea that an education is something that we create for ourselves.

-Stephen Downes (2010)<sup>1</sup>

In a powerful scene from the television reality series *Educating Yorkshire*,<sup>2</sup> a teacher working with a student who has a stammer tries a technique he saw in *The King's Speech*. In the movie, King George VI (played by Colin Firth) used music to help ease his stammer. The teacher suggests that his student, Musharaf Asghar, listen to music while trying to read a poem aloud. It works! Both the teacher and student are amazed by the quick results. Later, Asghar, who is described as a student who had been bullied and wanted to leave school because he "didn't have a voice," reads a speech to his entire class. His fellow students and teachers are blown away and visibly moved by his ability to speak. Teachers are crying. Students are

crying. Mr. Burton, the teacher who cared so much about his students that he was willing to try something new and provide a different path to success, beams with pride as the assembly erupts with applause.

Overcoming his stammer gave Musharaf a profound sense of confidence—and the opportunity to host a documentary about stuttering and speech therapy.<sup>3</sup> And it happened because his teacher embraced the *innovator's mindset*.

## ADOPT AN INNOVATOR'S MINDSET

Carol Dweck, a Stanford psychologist and author of the powerful book *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, encourages educators to introduce students to the concept of a growth mindset. She explains

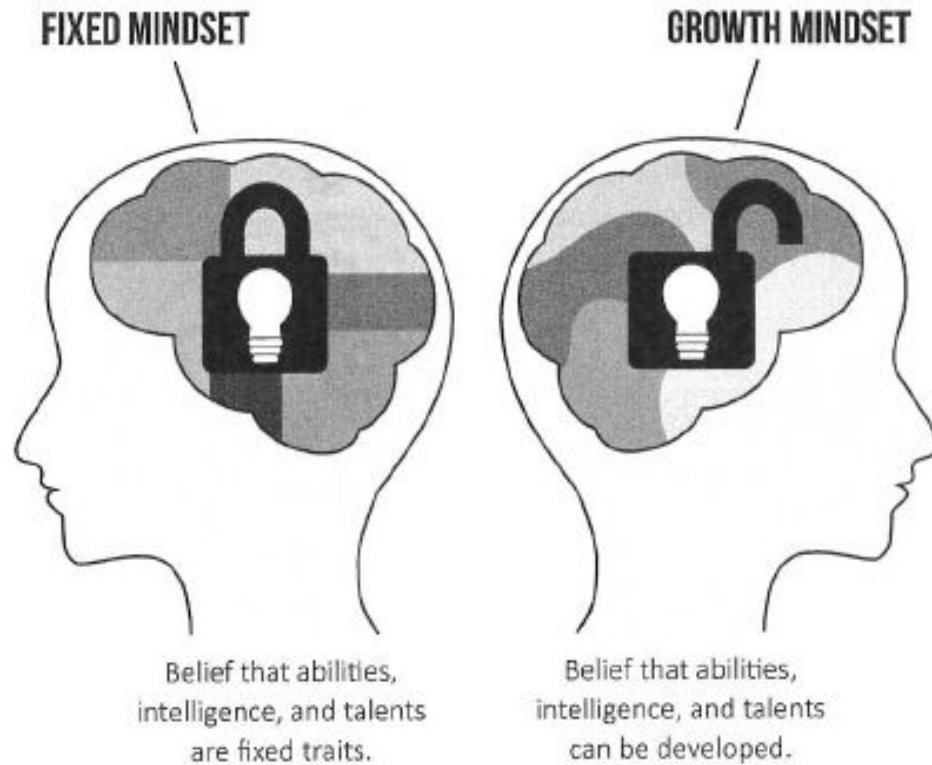


**THE ABILITY TO INNOVATE—TO CREATE  
SOMETHING NEW AND BETTER—IS A SKILL THAT  
ORGANIZATIONS WORLDWIDE ARE LOOKING  
FOR TODAY.**

#InnovatorsMindset

that teaching children the difference between a “fixed” and “growth” mindset empowers them. They learn that trying new things, even if they initially fail, stretches and strengthens their minds.

*In a fixed mindset, students believe their basic abilities, their intelligence, their talents, are just fixed traits. They have a certain amount and that's that, and then their goal becomes to look smart all the time and never look dumb. In a growth mindset, students understand that their talents and abilities can be developed through effort, good teaching, and persistence. They don't necessarily think everyone's the same or anyone can be Einstein, but they believe everyone can get smarter if they work at it.<sup>4</sup>*



Let's take the simple example of playing the piano to compare the two ideas. With a *fixed mindset*, the learner doesn't believe he or she has the ability to play the piano. With a *growth mindset*, the learner believes that, with hard work and practice, the opportunity to play the piano is within the realm of his or her ability. That belief leads the learner to *try* and, ultimately, *grow*.<sup>5</sup>

The *innovator's mindset* takes the growth mindset a step further by focusing on using one's ability to learn to play the piano to *create* music. The innovator's mindset can be defined as *the belief that the abilities, intelligence, and talents are developed so that they lead to the creation of new and better ideas*.

The growth mindset is crucial in one's openness to learning. But to change education and prepare students for their futures, we need to adopt an innovator's mindset for ourselves and instill this mindset in our students. We must focus on *creating* something with the knowledge that's been acquired.<sup>6</sup>

## THE INNOVATOR'S MINDSET

Belief that abilities, intelligence, and talents are developed so that they lead to the creation of new and better ideas.



The ability to innovate—to create something new and better—is a skill that organizations worldwide are looking for today. Thomas Friedman notes in his *New York Times* piece, “How to Get a Job at Google,” that translating knowledge into action is perhaps even more important than acquiring information.

*Google attracts so much talent it can afford to look beyond traditional metrics, like G.P.A. For most young people, though, going to college and doing well is still the best way to master the tools needed for many careers... Beware. Your degree is not a proxy for your ability to do any job. **The world only cares about—and pays off on—what you can do with what you know (and it doesn't care how you learned it).***<sup>7</sup>

Let's go back to the example of the young man with the stammer. The teacher watched *The King's Speech* and used what he learned (not from a university class, professional learning day, or any other type of formal learning opportunity) to create a new opportunity for his

student. Although they used technology (a smart phone and headphones), it was very simple. Listening to music through a personal device is something we've done since the invention of the Walkman in 1979. The technology was not innovative, but the use of it was.

Learning to recognize and create new and better opportunities for our students is what matters. In fact, it's essential.

## SHOULD EVERY EDUCATOR HAVE AN INNOVATOR'S MINDSET?

The short answer to the question above is *yes*.

Why? Because all teachers have worked with students who couldn't seem to "get" the lesson or master a new skill despite numerous attempts and various teaching methods. When the approaches you've used with other students don't work, do you give up on the struggling student? No! At least, I hope not. My hope is that you'll see the challenge as an



**INNOVATION IS NOT ABOUT THE *STUFF*;  
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opportunity to take what you know, find out what you need to know, and try to figure out a new way to teach the material or skill—one that works for that specific student.

Similarly, almost all administrators face budget constraints and work within a system that expects more and better results with less funding. Thankfully, innovation is not about the *stuff*; it is a way of thinking. Our challenge as leaders is to think of new ways to do things so we can move forward. We live in a complex world that needs us to look for new and better ways to solve problems and help those we serve.

## INNOVATION INSIDE THE BOX

Brad Gustafson (@gustafsonbrad), a forward-thinking principal in Minnesota, is a prime example of a leader who successfully works within those budget constraints. I distinctly remember being on a panel at the Michigan Association for Computer Users in Learning (MACUL) conference with Brad as he talked about some of the amazing initiatives and innovation in his school. Someone in the audience asked, "Where do you find the money to do this?"

His answer was both simple and brilliant: "We made a budget line titled 'innovation,' and we moved money from one spot to another." Brad didn't look to some outside source for money that would enable his school to focus on innovative ideas. He took what he had and used it to meet the needs of his school.

Let's not kid ourselves. In education, especially the public sector, schools are not overloaded with funding. Innovating in our schools requires a different type of thinking, one that doesn't focus on ideas that are "outside of the box" but those that allow us to be innovative despite budgetary constraints. In other words, we need to learn to innovate inside the box. Like Brad, we need to look at the realities of our situations and create something new. And it's crucial that educators see this "inside the box innovation" modeled by administrators.

## WHAT PART OF FAILURE DO WE EMBRACE?

A mantra that's often repeated when we talk about innovation in education is that *failure is an important part of the process*. In some respects, it's true. Unfortunately, this line of thinking can place a focus on the wrong aspect of the process. Those who stress the importance of failure as part of the innovation process tend to focus on failure. They'll point to stories about inventors like James Dyson, the inventor of the



Dyson vacuum. Dyson “spent fifteen years creating 5,126 versions that failed before he made one that worked.”<sup>8</sup> Trying, failing, and trying again were definitely part of his process. But the reality of his story is that no one would even mention James Dyson if he hadn’t succeeded in the end. How many other vacuum inventors can you name? Maybe one or two. But how many vacuum inventors can you name who never successfully got a vacuum on the market? *Zero*.

Having the freedom to fail *is* important to innovation. But even more important to the process are the traits of *resiliency* and *grit*. *Resiliency* is the ability to come back after a defeat or unsuccessful attempt. *Grit* is resolve or strength of character. These two characteristics need to be continuously developed as we look for new and better ways to serve our students.

For example, I was recently talking to a learning coach who shared her frustration about working with another teacher who basically tried one process with a student. The process didn’t work, and when her



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learning coach asked her whether she tried anything else, the teacher had admitted she hadn’t. The learning coach was obviously frustrated that this was a “one and done” situation. Later, our group conversation turned to focus on the notion of failure and how it is important that educators “embrace” and be okay with it. I immediately jumped in and asked the learning coach, “Do you consider the process you described earlier as a failure?” When she replied, “Yes,” I asked, “Were you okay with that?”

“NO!” she emphatically replied.

And that’s the point. Trying different things and figuring out

alternative options for our students are all part of the innovator's mindset. But accepting failure as a final outcome, especially when it comes to our kids, is not something we should ever embrace.

When I first started teaching, I remember thinking that students should learn the way I taught; they should adjust to me. I could not have been more wrong. A great teacher adjusts to the learner, not the other way around. This is where *resiliency* and *grit* are necessary. Understanding failure happens but also not accepting failure as a result is paramount in serving our students. What works for one might not work for another. As leaders, we need to develop a culture that focuses on doing whatever it takes to ensure that we are successful in serving all of our students.

Imagine you took a large chunk of your money, gave it to an investor, they lost it all, and they said, "Failure is just part of the process." Although there might be some truth to that statement, it still probably wouldn't sit well with you. When it comes to our kids, we have a lot more to lose than money. Go back to the teacher and the student with the stammer. Part of Mr. Burton's mindset was that he was open to trying something that might



**INNOVATION STARTS NOT BY PROVIDING ANSWERS  
BUT BY ASKING QUESTIONS.**

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not work. What he cared about *most* was finding something that *would* work—a technique that empowered his student to succeed. That is the innovator's mindset exemplified: Try, fail, and try something else until you find or create a solution that works.

Innovation, though, starts not by providing answers but by asking questions. To be innovative, these questions focus on having empathy for those we serve. What is often misunderstood is that the higher up

any one person is in any organization, the more people they serve, not the other way around. In education, as in any other organization, to be truly innovative, the process will be driven by asking questions, as each community and individual we serve is unique. The questions below mean to provide a starting point.

## CRITICAL QUESTIONS FOR THE INNOVATIVE EDUCATOR

### *Would I want to be a learner in my own classroom?*

In my experience creating professional learning opportunities, I've found that it can be challenging to meet the needs and expectations of educators. They have high expectations for their own learning experiences, not only because they are expected to create those same environments for their own classrooms but also because their time is limited. Educators rarely have enough time to take care of their myriad of responsibilities. If professional learning doesn't provide relevant experiences and skills to help them make a greater impact on the students they serve, many educators will disengage.

For example, if worksheets were handed out as professional learning, some teachers would be bored to tears, yet, in many cases, we do the same thing to our students. That type of learning is not about what is better for kids but what is easy or because it's the way it has always been done. Consider your students' learning experience from their point of view. Do your students have opportunities to learn in ways that connect to their lives and make an impact on how they engage with the others? Do the learning experiences you create mimic the type of learning you expect to engage in? Think about the classroom experience from your students' perspective; establish a higher expectation for learning opportunities.

### *What is best for this student?*

It is important to not only think about the perspective of your class as a whole but to also know each student and what works for him or

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her. Because each individual learns differently, it's important to ask, "How does this student learn best?" and "What are some ways students can demonstrate their knowledge?" For example, for students who are trying to share their understanding of any curriculum objective, is writing it down every time the only way they can show what they understand? Could they create a video, share a podcast, create a visual, or do something else?

***What is this student's passion?***

When I was in school, I remember being required to read novel after novel, even though I was not interested in the assigned books. I was never once asked to read non-fiction in school, even though that is what interested me most. It was nearly impossible to get me to read a novel, but, at any point in a day, I would head off to the library and read every *Sports Illustrated* that I could get my hands on. That passion could and *should* have been tapped into in my school experience.

One of the best experiences I have ever had as an educator was "Identity Day." On that day, the kids shared about the things they loved outside of school in a type of display or presentation. There was such an enthusiasm to share their interests. As educators, we can create better experiences for our students by tapping into their passions. To do so, we need to be intentional about learning more about our students and what they love.

***What are some ways we can create a true learning community?***

I remember hearing someone once ask, "Why is it that when kids leave school, they have a ton of energy and teachers are tired? Why isn't it the other way around?" The reality is that the experiences we create often make students dependent upon the teacher for learning. What would be beneficial for our students and ourselves is to have them tap into one another's expertise, not just the teacher's knowledge. Things such as blogging, Edmodo, Google apps, and using Twitter hashtags in the classroom provide opportunities for our students to learn from each other. By embracing the idea that *everyone* in the classroom is a

teacher and a learner, we can create a community that learns from and teaches one another.

### ***How did this work for our students?***

Early in my teaching career, I always asked for feedback from my students at the end of the year. Doing so helped me improve my teaching for the next set of students, but that feedback did nothing to help the kids who had been in my classroom that year. A better approach is to get feedback throughout the year, not just in the form of grades but through conversations. Additionally, allowing for anonymous comments ensures that students feel comfortable sharing their thoughts. Regular feedback helps us reflect on how we are serving our current students.

## **MOVING FORWARD**

Success for our students—and for ourselves— isn't about how much we know, how efficient our systems are, or even the scores our students earn. It is, as Friedman wrote, about “what you can do with what you know.” Information is abundant; it's common. What's uncommon, and desperately needed in today's education systems, is the *innovator's mindset*.



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The innovator's mindset starts with empathy for our students (which is why the questions above are so crucial). Equally important is the desire to create something better. If we are going to help our

students thrive, we have to move past “the way we have always done it,” and create better learning experiences for our students than we had ourselves. This does not mean replacing everything we do, but we must be willing to look with fresh eyes at what we do and ask, “Is there a better way?” We would expect the same mindset from our students, and, as educators, that question is the first step on the path to a better future for education.

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## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are some examples of innovation that you have seen within constraints, both inside and outside of schools?
2. What questions do you think are vital to understanding those who we serve in education?
3. If you were to start a school from scratch, what would it look like?
4. How do we take what we currently have to create a better education system for our entire community?