



BELLEVUE COMETS
COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

SUPERINTENDENT

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Comet Highlights - September 14, 2021

September 15	2-Hour Early Dismissal - Teacher Professional Learning
September 20	School Improvement Advisory Council Meeting - 6:30
September 24	Pep Rally - PK-12 at the MS/HS; Tentative Time of 9:30 AM Homecoming Parade - 2:45; Board Members please let me know if you are interested in riding in the parade at the September 13 Board Meeting
October 6 & 7	Parent-Teacher Conferences - 2-Hour Early Dismissal
October 6	AEA Board-Administrator Banquet - 6:30
October 8	No School
October 15	DATE & LOCATION CHANGE - "Cow Pie Bingo" athletic fundraiser at Bellevue High School (Before and During the Football Game vs Clayton Ridge)
October 19	HS Music Concert - 7:00
October 20	2-Hour Early Dismissal - Teacher Professional Learning
November 18	Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB) Convention

To have a calendar of events see the following link:

<https://www.rivervalleyconference.org/public/genie/628/school/1/>

Notes for the Board Meeting on September 13, 2021

APPROVED - Consent Agenda

Open Enrollment Requests

- Damonte' Evans - 8th Grade - Dubuque to Bellevue - This is a new family moving to the St. Donatus area.
- Katrina Marie Tjaden - 9th Grade - This is as a result of a move from the East Sac Schools into the Bellevue/Dubuque area with a parent

Approve Resignations

- Dennis "Bud" Schroeder - MS Softball Coach - This is a result of a change in work schedule and duties, and he is interested in coaching again in the future, but cannot continue at this time.
- Matt Wedeking - Assistant High School Girls Basketball Coach; Matt is potentially looking to assist as a volunteer assistant coach in some other area(s).

- Allison Ernst - Elementary Associate; Allison has not worked this year at the school and I received a resignation letter after our last board meeting.

Recommendations to Hire

- Dan Sturm - Substitute Custodian - Cleaning after events at the MS/HS. This is a cost-saving measure to avoid overtime hours, along with not "overdoing" it with our custodial staff who already put in 40+ hours/week. We have done this the last couple of years as well.

Recognize any Visitors

- Duane Van Hemert - Community Member; Former Facilities Director/Manager in the Iowa City CSD and Des Moines CSD
- Gary Schulte - FEH Engineering

"Comet Curriculum" Presentation

Meyer provided an overview of enrollment numbers (following pages).

Additionally, Meyer provided an update on the impact of COVID-19 in our district (no cases at this time impacting school during the school year). Meyer also shared that the mask mandate restriction has been lifted (at least temporarily) by the courts. Another appeal is expected. Meyer shared that the Des Moines Schools are going to require masks. Little discussion was held on this topic, and a mandate to require masks is not being planned at this time for the Bellevue CSD.

Enrollment

The following are two charts with enrollment information. Some key observations initially are the following (one of these is recognizing these are tentative numbers and may vary by the actual "count date" on October 1):

- Enrollment is up since last school year.
- Enrollment TK-12 is the largest enrollment on the chart (dating back to the 2010-2011 school year).
- Overall enrollment with PK we are at the third highest level since the 2010-2011 school year (only 7 students away from the highest enrollment).
- The three sections in grades K-3 are needed, and a question is what will next year bring in regard to needed sections for K-4
- 3-year old preschool to 4-year old preschool this year increased by 16. Percentage-wise this is one of our largest increases over the years from 3- to 4-year old preschool.

Total Enrollment Trend

<u>District Enrollment</u>	<u>PK (3- & 4yr old)</u>	<u>Elementary (TK-5)</u>	<u>MS/HS</u>
2010-11	66	262	352
2011-12	67	265	362
2012-13	60	262	362
2013-14	71	248	383
2014-15	71	250	374
2015-16	55	259	364
2016-17	67	264	367
2017-18	75	256	388
2018-19	88	276	395
2019-20	92	289	384
2020-21	77	306	360
2021-22	79	320	363

Comet School Finance Review

Meyer provided some information on our school finances, as Penny nears the completion of the state-required CAR (Certified Annual Report). A cash report overview was provided by Penny Medinger, Business Manager.

Meyer shared that the district has spent about \$275,000 of COVID funds in the last fiscal year, and our balance within our general fund is up by nearly \$250,000 since the prior fiscal year. We have also added more staff this school year which will likely impact our Unspent Budget Authority that is high overall in comparison to other districts in the state (between 20-25%). This is a good issue to have...having an excess of funds, but this can change in a second with unexpected situations and excessive costs that are being predicted. One of these was spending over \$6000 on a new cooling unit for the walk-in freezer this week.

Facilities Update

Meyer had four quotes/proposals in regard to completing an assessment for the Bellevue Elementary building. Meyer shared these at the meeting, along with discussions that Duane Van Hermert (identified in the visitor section) had with Brett and me earlier this week.

It is time to choose which engineering group to move forward with IF we are going to complete the assessment. Ultimately the assessment needs to serve as information for our board and the community in regard to plans for the current elementary building or other future sites. We need the information from a "fresh set of eyes" to move forward in an appropriate direction for our students, community, and beyond. The group also needs to be able to stand by their report and justify their cost estimates when asked to explain in-depth. Additionally, it needs to be able to be read and understood in a very simplistic manner.

Some specifics of the work to be included in the proposal include the following:

1. Discover the cost of what it would take to bring the building up to requirements for the following (to name a few):
 - a. ADA
 - b. Fire Systems
 - c. Windows
 - d. Electrical
 - e. Heating and Cooling (Energy Use)
 - f. Air Quality
 - g. Mechanical (in general)
 - h. Classroom Space
 - i. Outside Space and Safety (Playground, etc.)
 - j. Walls
 - k. Asbestos

Some key points to potentially keep in mind as we progress through the process:

If the estimate is more than 50% cost of a new building to remodel, a new building is likely the best route. If it is ½ the cost of a new building, there is not a reason to renovate the building as a whole (no doubt). A new building may mean connected to the current building or a separate building.

APPROVED - MODUS Engineering and OPM Engineers were approved to complete a facilities assessment of Bellevue Elementary in the upcoming months. Meyer will contact them to set up a timeline as they work with board representatives, etc. Other groups considered were FEH, Neumann Monson, and RTM

Financial Options for Construction

General Obligation (GO) Bond Funds with a 60%+1 vote:

- \$2.70 GO Bond \$12.5 million
- \$4.05 GO Bond \$19 million

PPEL with board approval, and no vote or public hearing needed

- \$1.34 PPEL \$3.5 million

SAVE with board approval and a public hearing

- 20 Years \$4.2 million

Some scenarios include the following:

- GO \$2.70 vote and SAVE \$16.7 million
- GO \$2.70 vote with PPEL \$16 million

Recognize the following:

- These are estimates (our enrollment also impacts the SAVE...higher enrollment = more funds)
- We also have other needs that we use SAVE and PPEL for, including roofs, building needs, and future building needs (Ag/STEM building, upgrades to current buildings and facilities overall)

Facilities - Some other general information to consider:

- Primarily
 - What do our students need to assist them to learn effectively for both the present and the future?
 - Do we have the facilities and staff to accomplish this?
 - What needs to be done to make us the most effective as possible

River Valley Conference

The conference Board of Control will discuss the topic of expansion at an upcoming meeting on September 24 (it will take two votes for admission into the conference).

River Valley Conference Information - Beckman and Maquoketa CSD school boards have both indicated an official interest in joining the River Valley Conference for the 2022-2023 school year, and will be making official applications for approval.

- a. While Maquoketa is larger than Bellevue obviously, Beckman's enrollment is very similar (see the information below for grades 9-11, which is what is utilized by the state for classifications for sports). The size is still considered a concern by some board members, along with participation levels (that many districts are also being confronted with).
- b. This addition would dramatically reduce our travel (which is one of the most significant complaints in our community about games and travel), and would also allow for several more contests with local schools outside of our conference as we would only have 14 conference games...right now we have about 18 conference games. This reduction is based on splitting the conference into divisions likely with their potential addition.
- c. Likely divisional play in the RVC with additions of Maquoketa and Beckman (along with enrollments last year in grades 9-11):
 1.

<u>North</u>	<u>South</u>
Bellevue (157)	Mid-Prairie (252)
Northeast (222)	West Liberty (298)
Camanche (220)	Durant (170)
Anamosa (309)	Wilton (189)
Cascade (172)	West Branch (169)
Monticello (282)	Tipton (242)
Maquoketa (370)	Regina (Iowa City) (171)
Beckman (Dyersville) (196)	

*Recognize our number in two years will be approximately 170 or so likely; The classification for us in basketball and baseball nearly all years is a solid 2A team, which is what most of the schools in our conference are in boys (girls have 5 classes, and boys have 4 classes in basketball, volleyball, softball, baseball, and similar sports - wrestling has three classes)

Maquoketa is a 3A team traditionally, and Monticello has jumped up some years with Anamosa to 3A as well.

Other nearby BEDS Numbers

Alburnett	157
Cal-Wheat	96
Central City	100
Clayton Ridge	152
Easton Valley	117
Edgewood Colesburg	109
Lisbon	134

Maquoketa Valley (Delhi)	142
Marquette (Bellevue)	40
Midland	112
North Cedar	157 (left the RVC this year; declining enrollment)
North Linn	136
Prince of Peace	40

Overall, the Board was in favor of this potential move from conversations.

IASB Conference and Delegate

Meyer shared some information in regard to the Iowa Association of School Boards Conference in Des Moines in November. Meyer encouraged Board members to attend if they could, and for them to select a delegate. The district will provide lodging (if going out the night before) and transportation if needed. Meyer will be going out with the delegate on the Wednesday, and the convention is on Thursday (note the workshops offered on Wednesday as well for anyone interested).

The delegate has typically been the school board President.

APPROVED - Mike Reed (Board President) to be delegate for the Bellevue CSD.

CONVENTION KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



Brandon P. Fleming

Assistant Debate Coach at Harvard University & Founder/CEO of the [Harvard Diversity Project](#)

Learn more about the [Opening General Session](#), read [Brandon's official biography](#) and [watch an interview](#) between Brandon and Lou Ann Gvist.



Yong Zhao

Foundation Distinguished Professor & Expert on Globalization and Education

Learn more about the [Second General Session](#) and read [Yong's official biography](#).



Andrew Frishman

Co-Executive Director at Big Picture Learning

Learn more about the [Closing Capstone](#), read [Andrew's official biography](#) and [watch an interview](#) between Andrew and Lou Ann Gvist.

PRE-CONVENTION WORKSHOPS

NEW BOARD MEMBER ACADEMY WORKSHOP SERIES

READY, SET, GOVERN! NEW BOARD MEMBER ONBOARDING WORKSHOP

9 a.m.–11:30 OR 1–3:30 p.m. (repeat offerings)

Take advantage of the Ready, Set, Govern! series—all three workshops will set you on the road to success and include critical topics to focus on as a new board member. The first workshop will be in person at Convention, followed by a digital workshop in January on personnel matters and budgeting, and a digital workshop in February on student learning and superintendent evaluation. [Learn more](#) about the New Board Member Academy workshop series.

BONUS! All attendees will receive a complimentary hard copy of the 2021–22 *School Board Member Handbook!*

DIVISION, DISCOURSE AND DECISION-MAKING—THE BOARD'S ROLE IN ADAPTIVE TIMES



9 a.m.–11:30 OR 1–3:30 p.m. (repeat offerings)

Bill de la Cruz, *Belonging and Inclusion Facilitator, De La Cruz Solutions*

In a society that's more polarized than ever, is civil discourse a lost art? Is it possible to find commonalities and connections in a divisive environment? What are the conversation schools board should be having? Skilled facilitator Bill de la Cruz will help uncover answers to these provocative questions and more. This interactive workshop is designed to help board members explore the impacts of division in discussion and decision making. Together, Bill and participants will define division, talk about purposeful conversations, and explore strategies to move through conflict. This session will deepen your thinking, model elements of relational leadership – and equip you with techniques and practices designed to help foster a culture of belonging and inclusion.

RIPE INNOVATIONS: WHAT'S THE LOW-HANGING FRUIT?



1–3:30 p.m.

Andrew Frishman, *Co-Executive Director, Big Picture Learning*

Students, families, and communities' expectations of schools continue to expand. In this session, we'll delve into why specific innovations focused on Relationships, Interests, Practice, and Equity (RIPE) help prepare students for a dynamic and turbulent world. Join Andrew and graduates from Big Picture Learning schools to learn what has been most impactful for them. We'll explore the ways to create the conditions to support sustainable innovation that benefits students, families, educators, and communities. Most importantly, we'll discuss how school boards can lead with policy and culture that scales these opportunities to support student success throughout their districts. Bring a computing device (laptop, tablet or smartphone) and be ready to dive in!

2021 TRADE SHOW

2020 was the first year, possibly ever, that IASB did not hold a Trade Show in conjunction with Annual Convention. We missed our exhibitors, and we know members missed this aspect as well. Due to the virtual nature of the 2020 Annual Convention, a Trade Show was simply not possible.

But the Trade Show is a go for 2021! Exhibitors can now [submit their contracts](#) for the trade show. We can't wait to see and experience the bustling Trade Show, brimming with new ideas and quality products for public schools!

Visit the [Trade Show webpage](#) for more information and submit your contract. For questions, email [Jeff Rohrick](#) or call (515) 247-7047.

DELEGATE ASSEMBLY

[Delegate Assembly & Annual Meeting](#)

Nov. 17, 2021

The Delegate Assembly & Annual Meeting is an important annual event where member delegates gather to hold the annual meeting, set and approve the legislative platform, and convene nominating caucuses for open IASB District Director seats. [Learn more.](#)

SCHOOL FINANCE 101

9–11:30 a.m. OR 1–3:30 p.m. (repeat offerings)

If you're a newer board member, you'll value this introduction and overview of basic school finance concepts and terminology. The session will introduce budgeting and funding components in relation to your role on the board. Session offers SBO credit.

SCHOOL FINANCE 201

9–11:30 a.m. and 1–3:30 p.m. (repeat offerings)

When the terms "authorized budget" or "unspent balance" come up in a board meeting, you'll know what they mean after attending this intermediate level workshop. You'll also understand trends using real-world data to help you meet the challenges your district may face. Session offers SBO credit.

SCHOOL FINANCE 301


9–11:30 a.m. and 1–3:30 p.m. (repeat offerings)

This advanced level workshop provides a more in-depth analysis of important concepts such as cash/fund balance, spending authority, use of the School Budget Review Committee (SBRC), fiduciary responsibility and more. Session offers SBO credit.

APPROVED - Cybersecurity

Cybersecurity has become a common discussion in organizations, including school systems nationwide and in Iowa. The Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency is offering our district, and other schools in the AEA, an opportunity to be involved in an internal and external security "penetration" through an outside organization to test our security systems. At the current time we have not completed an assessment like this, although we do have various security "walls" established. Yet, it is predicted that over 95% of schools have issues with security that could be invaded by amateur hackers. I am planning on taking part in this process for our district, and an estimated cost is approximately \$3000 (depending on how many systems participate).

The testing would provide us with areas of vulnerability and remediation steps after a team of "penetration specialists" from a company would try to invade our systems and other schools in our area. We do have a cybersecurity coverage with our EMC insurance for the district, and this will also lead to a consortium price ideally for our district in this cost for future years as well.



Cybersecurity

FACTS

Unfortunately, it's not a matter of if you get hacked, it's when.

Recovery costs can be extremely high!

(eg: Baltimore Public Schools got an open records request and had over \$8 million in costs associated with recovery from Ransomware.)

According to IBM, it takes the education industry 217 days, on average, to detect a breach.

(That's 217 days for hackers to document your network, develop strategies for attack, calculate the price tag of Ransomware, and steal your data.)

In May 2021, President Biden signed an Executive order stating cybersecurity needed to be a national focus.

On July 12, 2021 The Washington Post reported:

An organization run by the the Center for Internet Security saw a "19 percent increase in ransomware and other cyberattacks targeting K-12 schools between 2019 and 2020. It's projecting a whopping 86 percent increase in 2021."

On Oct. 12, 2020 The Detroit Free Press reported:

"Student personal information can be very valuable because the criminals can open credit in the record of students, who may not be monitoring their credit. If they're able to do that, they're able to use that student identity information to open account after account and essentially ruin the student's credit. They may not learn until they're 16 or 18 when they first go to establish credit or maybe try to get a college loan."

K-12 Schools
are the
#1
targeted
industry
in the U.S.

(Dec. 2020 FBI report)

For more information about how your AEA can help you be better prepared contact:

Randy Olsen, Coordinator of Information Technology
rolsen@mbaea.org | 563-344-6475



The Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, creed, gender identity, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, socioeconomic status, or disability in its educational programs, services or employment practices. Inquiries concerning this statement should be addressed to Kim Hofmann, Equity Coordinator, at 563-344-6415.

Cybersecurity

are you prepared?

User Awareness Training (Phishing Awareness)

- A majority of successful hacks start with phishing campaigns.
- Allowing IT to have tools is essential, but it isn't enough.
- Conducting **Phishing Awareness training empowers staff** to feel confident about how they process email.

Multi Factor Authentication (MFA)

- What is MFA? **Using two or more of the following** to gain access to your systems:
 - Something you know (ie. password)
 - Something you have (ie. Yubikey, Authentication code)
 - Something you are (ie. Biometrics like fingerprints)
- What should be protected by MFA:
 - Remote network access
 - Privileged administrator access
 - Remote access to email
 - Access to any apps that could contain mission critical or sensitive information

Cyber Insurance

- Cyber Insurance providers report that:
 - **99.9% of comprised users could be blocked by the use of MFA**
 - 94% of ransomware victims did not use MFA
- Insurance providers are planning to begin seminars this Spring notifying K-12 customers that **Multi Factor Authentication (MFA) will be required for renewal for Summer 2022.**

Disaster Recovery Planning

- **Assign a team** to own and execute the plan.
- **Identify the mission critical components of your system** (what you can survive with/without should it be down).
- Have a **data backup solution** that securely stores your data and allows you to recovery quickly.
- **Develop a recovery plan** that accounts for both mission and non-mission critical components.
- **Communicate** and process through a communication plan:
 - This would include all of, but not limited to, administration, faculty, board, Cyber Insurance provider, media, impacted persons, etc.
- **Walkthrough your plan** periodically (at least once per year) to validate that it's up-to-date and that new variables are accounted for.
- **Conduct a full test** of your plan at least once per year and document the **RTO (Recovery Time Objective)** so stakeholders know when things can come back online.
- **Keep your infrastructure** and software patched, updated, and **relevant.**
- **Spend money, appropriately,** on a full stack of security tools.

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rolsen@mbaea.org | 563-344-6475



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Comet Reading and Reflection

I am attaching the two excerpts from the prior weeks. One is on "boredom" and the other is on "innovation." These are both from a book called "Different Schools for a Different World" by Scott McLeod and Dean Shareski (McLeod has some Iowa connections working in the state for several years, and continuing his work world-wide). The Board shared some thoughts on these articles. Meyer also shared they were shared with MS/HS staff during professional learning in August.

Boredom

Chapter 4

The Boredom Argument

We've known for a long time that many, many students are bored in school. We see the signs in classrooms everywhere. Students slump down, eyelids heavy, or they slouch over with their heads on their desks. They gaze out the window, hoping for something more interesting than what's occurring in front of them. They doodle and pass notes and try to sneak a peek at Facebook. Anything to relieve the tedium. In this chapter, we look at the influence of teaching materials and assignments on student engagement and examine how cognitive demand affects this engagement.

Influence of Teaching Materials and Assignments

The daily rhythms of many classrooms are driven by educational publishing companies' materials, which have been sanitized, edited, and censored to remove any content that might be potentially controversial and, thus, interesting (Ravitch, 2003). Students sit and listen or read for hour after hour, class period after class period, while their teachers or textbooks (or now, YouTube videos) drone on about topics that are of little interest. At the end of each lesson, they answer review questions or do practice problems that have little relevance to their daily lives, or maybe teachers hand them a worksheet or quiz that's intended to assess their knowledge and understanding but that fails to concern itself with whether they will actually care about the topic for any longer than the teacher forces them to. More often than not, chapter review questions, practice problems, worksheets, and quizzes focus on low-level items of factual recall and procedural regurgitation, exactly the types of information that students can find with a two-second online search with Google or Siri.

Even when students get to do a "project," it typically consists of the presentation of low-level facts in some colorful but still regurgitative format. We've all seen these: sugar cube pyramids, Styrofoam ball solar systems, coat hanger mobiles,

cereal box book reports, and dioramas. Or maybe our students make posters, paper brochures, or PowerPoint presentations. Or they make structures out of construction paper, wire, cardboard, tape, or papier-mâché. John Dewey (1916) reminded us over a century ago that we learn what we do, yet most of the doing in projects like these involves creating the physical structure of the model rather than engaging with the academic content.

If you ask students to describe school in a word and tabulate the most common results, it's more likely than not that the word *boring* will be near the top of the list. This is nothing new: our students have checked out from school both mentally and physically for decades on end. But we've always tended to focus on those who physically disengage—tardies, absences, and dropouts—and much less on those who drop out mentally. As long as students are physically present and compliant, school systems are happy, and so are we as educators.

Influence of Cognitive Demand on Engagement

As a result, our responses to student disengagement are often both sparse and unsatisfying, and they have been for well over a century. Don't believe us? Believe Dewey (1916), who says in *Democracy and Education* that:

The chief source of the "problem of discipline" in schools is that . . . a premium is put on physical quietude; on silence, on rigid uniformity of posture and movement; upon a machine-like simulation of the attitudes of intelligent interest. The teachers' business is to hold the pupils up to these requirements and to punish the inevitable deviations which occur. (p. 165)

Half a century later, Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner (1969) say:

Now, what is it that students do in the classroom? Well, mostly, they sit and listen to the teacher. . . . Mostly, they are required to remember. . . . It is practically unheard of for students to play any role in determining what problems are worth studying or what procedures of inquiry ought to be used. (p. 19)

By 1984, a year after *A Nation at Risk*, John I. Goodlad notes in his landmark book, *A Place Called School*, that:

The data from our observations in more than 1,000 classrooms support the popular image of a teacher standing or sitting in front of a class imparting knowledge to a group of students. Explaining and lecturing constituted the most frequent teaching activities. . . . And the frequency of these activities increased steadily from the primary to the senior high school years. Teachers also spent a substantial amount of time observing students at work or monitoring their seat-work. . . . Our data show not only an increase in these activities but also a decline in teachers interacting with groups of students within their classes from the primary to the secondary years. . . . Three cat-

egories of student activity marked by passivity—written work, listening, and preparing for assignments—dominate. . . . The chances are better than 50–50 that if you were to walk into any of the classrooms of our sample, you would see one of these three activities under way. . . . All three activities are almost exclusively set and monitored by teachers. We saw a contrastingly low incidence of activities invoking active modes of learning. (p. 105)

Two decades later, Mike Schmoker (2006) cites a study of more than fifteen hundred classroom observations to make the following claims.

- **Classrooms in which there was evidence of higher-order thinking:** 3 percent
- **Classrooms in which teachers used high-yield instructional strategies:** 0.2 percent
- **Classrooms in which fewer than one-half of students were paying attention:** 85 percent

Also in 2006, Richard F. Elmore, who holds an endowed professorship at Harvard University, notes that “when [we] code classroom practice for level of cognitive demand . . . 80 percent of the work is at the factual and procedural level” and that “[teachers] will do low-level work and call it high-level work.” In 2007, Robert C. Pianta, later the dean of the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia, and his co-authors report in a study of over twenty-five hundred classrooms in more than one thousand elementary schools across four hundred school districts that “the average fifth grader received five times as much instruction in basic skills as instruction focused on problem solving or reasoning; this ratio was 10:1 in first and third grades” (Pianta, Belsky, Houts, & Morrison, p. 2).

Study after study, anecdote after anecdote, decade after decade all confirm that the work we typically ask students to do is dull, trivial, and thoroughly uninspiring. This is what’s known as a structural problem. It’s not the fault of a small handful of boring teachers or of a few students who simply don’t fit in. This is millions of students, year after year, who are bored out of their minds as we ask them to play “the game of school” (Fried, 2005): a game in which success consists primarily of regurgitating low-level information that students could care less about. Student disengagement is an egregiously ignored and ongoing challenge, one that few schools have been willing to face head-on.

A 2016 Gallup poll surveyed American students about their engagement in schools. The results are sobering. In elementary school, 75 percent of students said that they were engaged in what they were learning. By eighth grade, however, that already-low figure had decreased to 45 percent, and by the end of high school it was 34 percent. To get these figures, Gallup asked some very specific questions. The responses to these revealed that only one-third of high school students said that

they'd learned something interesting at school in the past week, only 20 percent said that they had fun at school, and less than 20 percent said that, at their school, they got to do what they do best every day (Gallup, 2016).

A tightly controlled environment in which you're not having fun, don't get to do what you do best, and aren't learning anything interesting isn't exactly a recipe for motivation and engagement. Yet that's the reality that most students face day in and day out, class after class, year after year. The biggest indictment we can make about our schools is not their failure to raise test scores above some politically determined line of "proficiency"; it's that they routinely ignore the fact that students are bored, disengaged, and disempowered. We've known this forever, but we have yet to really care about it in a way that would drive substantive changes in practice. As a result, our youth continue to be disenfranchised by the very institutions that are supposed to prepare them to be lifelong learners.

Here's a challenge for you: add up all the students in your local secondary school who have physically checked out—in other words, they've dropped out or have chronic attendance problems. Then add to that number all the students who have mentally checked out—in other words, they're at school because their friends are there and the law requires it, but they're not really engaged in their learning. They're just biding time, hoping that whatever comes next in their lives is more interesting. In most secondary schools, this overall total will easily make up half of the student body, and sometimes two-thirds or more (Gallup, 2016; Kamenez, 2016).

George Couros (2014) asks teachers a very pointed question in regard to boredom and engagement: "Would you want to be a learner in your own classroom?" We can—and should—do better for our students, but we do that by making schools different.

Practical Steps and Strategies

- Be intentional about creating structured opportunities for students to have greater agency over their own learning.
- Have teachers continuously ask, "Could students do part or all of this instead of me?" (particularly in technology-infused classrooms).
- Create communities instead of classrooms. Recognize that students should have a say in classroom design and, to a great degree, the learning itself. Be sure to include specific ways for them to learn from and with one another.

Different Schools for a Different World - Scott McLeod
Deem Sharpe
2018

Key Skills for Innovation

Beyond boredom and disengagement, what other factors prevent schools from producing innovators? Jeffrey H. Dyer, Hal Gregersen, and Clayton M. Christensen (2009) note there are five key skills of innovators: (1) associating, (2) questioning, (3) observing, (4) experimenting, and (5) networking. To answer our question, let's look at each in turn.

Associating is "the ability to successfully connect seemingly unrelated questions, problems, or ideas from different fields" (Dyer et al., 2009). Steve Jobs, former CEO of Apple, said repeatedly throughout his career that "creativity is connecting things" (Wolf, 1996). But in school, students rarely get a chance to connect content and ideas in interesting and interdisciplinary ways. When schools segregate subject areas into disconnected forty-five-minute blocks of time, students' ability to associate across different academic areas is at best an anomaly or wishful thinking. Add to this unfortunate situation the fact that teachers themselves struggle with associating across different academic areas. What can a mathematics teacher and a language arts teacher learn from one another? What can a kindergarten teacher and a high school biology teacher learn from one another? Many teachers and administrators would see no value in such superficially disparate pairings.

The second key skill of innovators is *questioning*. Innovators ask questions like "Why?" and "Why not?" and "What if?" (Dyer et al., 2009). The importance of questioning has long been recognized. For instance, Postman and Weingartner (1969) say, "Once you have learned how to ask questions—relevant and appropriate and substantial questions—you have learned how to learn and no one can keep you from learning whatever you want or need to know" (p. 23). Dan Rothstein and Luz Santana (2011) reiterate that teaching students to ask their own questions can be a powerful catalyst for deeper learning. The art of asking good questions seemingly falls right in line with schools' stated missions of preparing lifelong learners. But as Postman and Weingartner (1969) note, in most classrooms:

What students are restricted to (solely and even vengefully) is the process of memorizing . . . somebody else's answers to somebody else's questions. It is staggering to consider the implications of this fact. The most important intellectual ability man has yet developed—the art and science of asking questions—is not taught in school! Moreover, it is not "taught" in the most devastating way possible: by arranging the environment so that significant question asking is not valued. It is doubtful if you can think of many schools that include question asking, or methods of inquiry, as part of their curriculum. (pp. 23–24)

Nearly half a century later, these observations still ring true. Even when teachers occasionally encourage students to ask questions about what they're studying, many students are so disengaged—due to dull content, uninteresting learning tasks, and

the overwhelming institutional emphasis on convergent rather than divergent thinking—that they wonder why they should even bother. We have overvalued the importance of students giving answers and undervalued the potential of students asking questions.

The third and fourth skills of innovators are *observing* and *experimenting*. In other words, innovators scrutinize everyday phenomena with the goal of uncovering new ideas and solutions. Innovators are social scientists, trying to investigate patterns and gaps in the everyday in order to uncover meaning.

Yet in most schools, teachers spoon-feed students whatever information they want students to learn, and opportunities for genuine inquiry are rare. As Tony Wagner (2008) notes, even science “experiments” tend to be more like recipes than true explorations: students blindly follow the steps that the teacher or the lab manual gives them rather than engaging in authentic investigations where the outcome is unknown. If the experiment achieves “correct” results, students dutifully write down their “findings” in the format the teacher prescribes. If the experiment fails to achieve the desired results, students have no idea why: the conceptual understanding that genuine inquiry would have generated is not there. The number of opportunities for students to truly experiment in most schools is virtually nil.

Schools function through set curricula with set learning standards and set outcomes. The school assesses those outcomes with one-size-fits-all grading and testing instruments designed to move everyone toward one set of correct responses. The job of students is not to deviate but to regurgitate. Due to content coverage pressures and teacher control needs, any divergence from the established path is off-task by definition.

What we need is much more divergence from the established path. Douglas Thomas and John Seely Brown (2011) suggest that play may be the most important element in creating new learning environments. While play has traditionally been relegated to young children and viewed as something that we grow out of as we mature and learn, in a world of constant change we must embrace play and experimentation as key ingredients in continual learning. Play seems anti-intellectual for many people but in fact, it is quite the opposite. As Neville V. Scarfe (1962) stated decades ago, “The highest form of research is essentially play” (p. 120).

The fifth and final key skill of innovators is *networking*. Innovators expose themselves to a variety of people and perspectives, pulling together ideas and practices in ways that add value to their own domain. But although networking is vital in the real world outside of the classroom walls, students in schools remain isolated, with few opportunities to interact in substantive ways either with each other or with people outside of the classroom. There are occasional guest speakers or webcam experts, but those visits are rarely an open, freewheeling exchange of ideas that add value for both parties; instead, the visitor typically talks at the students while they sit and listen passively. Few schools help students create and nurture active networks of other students and outside adult individuals and organizations that would drive their learning forward.

Environments That Foster Innovation

Tony Wagner has spent much of his career studying environments that nurture innovation. He has interviewed young artists, scientists, and engineers; talked to entrepreneurs and founders of start-up companies; and had discussions with leaders of some of the most innovative companies and organizations in the world. Building on the work of Teresa M. Amabile (1998), Wagner (2012a) notes that expertise, creative-thinking skills, and motivation all work together to foster innovation. These qualities are fostered by environments that exhibit strong cultures of teamwork, interdisciplinary problem solving, and intrinsic incentives such as exploration, play, and empowerment.

Read those previous two sentences again. *Creative thinking, interdisciplinary problem solving, empowerment, and motivation*: Do these describe the classrooms in your schools? For most students, the answer is an emphatic *no*, usually because classrooms are focused on convergent compliance rather than on divergent or collaborative creativity. To illustrate this point, Wagner (2012b) surveyed dozens of young adults whom he deemed to be innovators in some respect. He asked the young adults to identify a teacher who had a significant influence on their current career. Most couldn't name one, and those who did referenced teachers who had a reputation as outsiders or noncompliers.

As Wagner (2012a) notes:

The way in which academic content is taught is often stultifying: It is too often merely a process of transferring information through rote memorization, with few opportunities for students to ask questions or discover things on their own—the essential practices of innovation.
(p. 141)

This is sharply at odds with the needs of our society. We've always needed innovators to some extent, but globalization has created a significantly greater imperative for schools to graduate them.

During the period when transportation and communication limitations kept most interactions local, it was relatively easy to be the only one within a certain geographic area who could provide a particular product or service. In a globalized world, however, people and organizations across the planet compete with us at equivalent service levels and often at lower prices. Countless others make competing products and services available with a tap on a smartphone or the click of

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a mouse. If we want to stay ahead of these competitors, innovation is a constant requirement. We must improve our offerings just to survive.

We also have seen a dramatic rise in the freelancing economy. Competitive economic pressures have driven corporations, universities, nonprofits, government agencies, and other employers to reduce their investments in full-time employees and instead rely on independent contractors and freelancers, creating a so-called *gig economy*. As many as a third of American workers, for instance, may now be engaged in freelance work, with at least part of their income dependent on a succession of independently negotiated work gigs (Horowitz, 2015). Dennis Yang (2016) notes:

These independent workers need to keep hustling to stay ahead of the curve and prove they can out-innovate their peers. In short, as more companies choose to depend on contract workers for key parts of their business, those freelancers will see increasing competition for those gigs and, therefore, more pressure to differentiate themselves and their skills.

Are most schools teaching students to leverage their individual interests and skill sets to out-innovate their peers and differentiate themselves from the crowd? Are most schools teaching students to adopt entrepreneurial mindsets, workflows, and financing techniques in order to be both self-sufficient and competitive in a highly complex and rapidly shifting work landscape? Are most schools teaching students to upskill themselves so that they optimize their chances to be selected for the next gig that they're seeking? Nope.

Instead, do most schools still primarily run students through a one-size-fits-all model, assess students in standardized ways, discount students' unique strengths and talents, and ignore the economic and workplace realities into which they'll send their supposedly qualified graduates? Do most schools still pretend that regurgitation of the same boring stuff that everyone else also sat through is adequate preparation for an innovation society? Yep.

Innovation is how we initiate movement beyond the status quo. Innovation is how we transform school structures and educator mindsets from the world as it was to the world as it is and will be. Innovation is *important*. But most schools don't have an innovation agenda. Instead, we make a few tweaks here and there, or we institute a new program that benefits a small number of students without significantly impacting the vast majority. And we pat ourselves on the back for doing something, anything, even if its transformative impact is minimal and marginal.

Innovation can't be fostered through simplistic approaches. It requires a transformation of mindset and culture, not just a script or a scope and sequence plan. But such a transformation represents an immediate challenge to the culture of compliance and conformity in schools. Innovation and "best practices" can (and

do) butt heads. Innovation often means that we won't or can't know the outcome of our attempts in advance. That ambiguity is not something that many schools are prepared to address.

But we need to address it. Technology companies describe the organic process of focusing on rapid, iterative change with frequent feedback loops as *living in perpetual beta*. Schools must do a much better job—on numerous fronts—of living in perpetual beta. Otherwise their pace of change is doomed to remain glacial, and their relevance gap with the society around them will continue to widen. As John Merrow (2012) asks so adroitly, "Who is going to hire young people skilled at regurgitation?" To keep that gap from widening, we must make schools different.

Information Items

Extracurricular Events and Homecoming Week

Meyer provided some updates on Homecoming, including the parade at 2:45 on Friday, September 24.

AEA Board Administrator Banquet

Trevor Ragan will be presenting, at the AEA for a banquet with board members across the area and AEA employees on October 6. This includes a meal also. He will also be speaking to our staff on November 1, along with students (during the day) and parents/community members (in the evening) on November 2. I would hope that all board members can attend on November 1, and let me know if you also want to attend on October 6. November 2 is open to the public.

Assessment Schedule

Below is the "Assessment Schedule" for the 2021-2022 school year. This is similar to previous years, but something good to be aware of overall in regard to testing for our students. We do not assess as much as some districts in some ways, and work to keep a balance with students receiving instruction in classrooms and not "continually" testing.

Bellevue Community School District Assessment Overview August 2021

<u>Name of Assessment</u>	<u>Date(s)</u>	<u>Grade Levels</u>
FAST Reading	Fall, Winter, Spring	TK-6
Iowa Youth Survey	September 27 - November 12	6, 8 & 11
ASPIRE	October	6 & 7
Pre-ACT	April	8, 9 & 10
ACT	April 5	11
Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress (ISASP)	March 14-25	3-11
Preschool Assessments		
IGDI's	Fall, Winter, Spring	4-year old preschool students
GOLD Assessments	Fall, Winter, Spring	3- and 4-year old preschool students

Comments from Building Principals, Superintendent, and Board Members

Principals discussed various things happening in their buildings. A discussion was held on the "conglomeration" of fundraisers happening at certain times and often overlapping each other. Meyer will work to develop a better format for fundraising with a "calendar" for all fundraisers.

Adjourn

Next meeting is on October 11, 2021