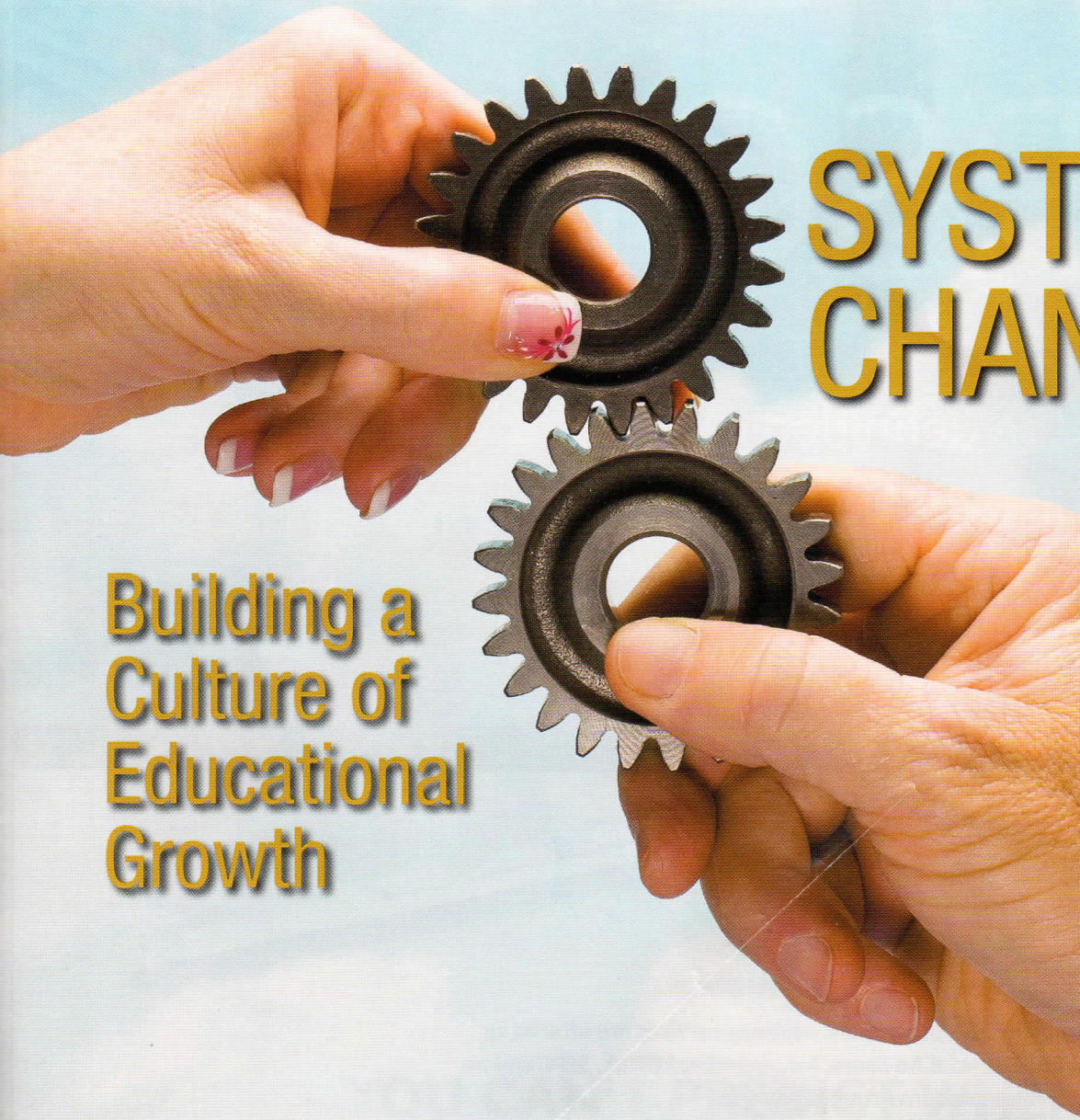


MASA LEADER

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SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Building a Culture of Educational Growth



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James Ferl
3460 LAKE SHORE DR
SALT LAKE MARIE MI 49783-1024

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Developing leadership and unity within our membership to achieve continuous improvement in public education.

Valuing Our Teachers, Our Profession

By James Feil

We have an opportunity to demonstrate to our teachers how much we value their expertise and desire to work so that all students achieve at high levels. Michigan recently passed legislation forbidding a number of contractual past practices from continuing into the future. This is a wonderful opportunity to implement new procedures and practices to ensure that all students demonstrate high achievement.

It is not a time to belittle our teachers into believing that they are no longer valued or part of the conversation. Quite the opposite as I see it. We need to engage our teachers as well as ourselves in a more meaningful, research-based manner. I don't mean in a right-to-



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bargain manner, but in a manner that promotes collegiality and professionalism.

As Robert Marzano writes in *What Works in Schools: Translating Research into Action*: "... studies that have found a statistically significant relationship between school climate and student achievement have

focused on collegiality and professionalism" (Marzano, 2003, p.61).

The question at hand is "Where do we start?" New Michigan laws require us to change many of our past practices and replace them with new, but we shouldn't go about it like a bull in a china shop. We need to proceed in a thoughtful and purposeful manner—with curriculum, the foundation of good teaching and ultimately rich and meaningful student learning and achievement.

As noted by Kim Marshall, "When a principal visits a classroom, one of the most important questions is whether the teacher is on target with the curriculum—which is hard to define when no

one is sure exactly what the curriculum is! ... Supervision can't be efficient and effective until curriculum expectations are clear and widely accepted within the school" (Marshall, 2009, p. 10). The first order of business, therefore, should involve our principals in ensuring that the district's curriculum is not only aligned with state standards but also that it is understood and delivered by all teachers.

This will not be an easy task according to Marzano, given that there aren't enough hours in a school day, even with an extended school day and year, to provide the instructional hours necessary to adequately cover a typical state's standards and benchmarks (Marzano, 2003, p. 24 & 25).

We should, therefore, use Marzano's five-step action plan to implement a guaranteed and viable district curriculum:

- 1) Identify and communicate the content considered essential for all students versus that considered supplemental or necessary only for those seeking postsecondary education
- 2) Ensure that the essential content can be addressed in the amount of time available for instruction
- 3) Sequence and organize the essential content in such a way that students have ample opportunity to learn it
- 4) Ensure that teachers address the essential content
- 5) Protect the instructional time that is available (Marzano, 2009, Chapter 3).

The first order of business, therefore, should involve our principals in ensuring that the district's curriculum is not only aligned with state standards but also that it is understood and delivered by all teachers.

While our new laws infer that this is a district decision, it cannot be achieved, nor would it be advisable to attempt, without help. We need

the committed involvement of not only our curriculum content teacher leaders, but also principals, teachers and support personnel involved in communicating and delivering a district's guaranteed and viable curriculum.

Principals are as responsible as teachers for knowing how the curriculum is formed, aligned, broken down into unit plans, taught, formatively and summatively assessed, and learned. How else can we offer legitimate and effective feedback for growth and improvement if we ourselves don't understand for what we are attempting to hold our valued teachers accountable? It is important, therefore, that all principals ready themselves to become more involved in all stages of curriculum development, alignment, delivery, and assessment.

continued on page 26

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THRIVE.

Teachers, continued from page 25

Our goal is not to place an undue burden on principals and teachers. As Richard Elmore and colleagues suggest in their book *Instructional Rounds in Education: A Network Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning*, we need to focus our attention on the instructional core composed of teacher and student in the presence of content (City, Elmore, Fiarman, and Teitel, 2009, p. 22). Elmore and colleagues go on to state, “many forces in the name of ‘improvement’ often pull the focus away from the instructional core. If this focus is lost, however, true instructional improvement is unlikely... Accountability begins in the tasks that students are asked to do. If the tasks do not reflect the expectations of the external accountability system, or our best ideas about what students should know and be able to do, then, we should not expect to see the results reflected in external measures of performance.” (City, Elmore, Fiarman, and Teitel, 2009, p. 38).

In placing emphasis on curriculum as a starting place, we are also emphasizing the need for all teachers to have a depth of content knowledge relative to their certification as a starting place, as well as the pedagogical skills necessary to engage their students in a meaningful ways. According to Danielson and McGreal, “Planning is an important skill in its own right, distinct from a teacher’s ability to conduct a successful instructional experience for students. Planning requires thoughtful consideration of what students should learn; the nature of the subject; the background, interests, and skills of the learners; and how to engage students in a meaningful way with the content. Skilled planning requires a thorough knowledge of the subject, but such knowledge is insufficient. Teachers also need knowledge of content-specific

pedagogy—how to engage students meaningfully and in increasingly complex ways with the content” (Danielson and McGreal, 2000, p. 48).

It is, therefore, important that we all work together at the beginning to understand how best to deliver the content knowledge that we want and expect our students to learn.

James Feil is a retired superintendent, most recently employed by Traverse City Public Schools. He currently is pursuing an Education Specialist degree through the University of Michigan-Flint and consulting on teacher preparation for Lake Superior State University. Contact him at james.feil@me.com.

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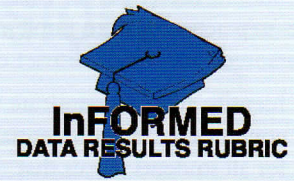
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