



Executive Viewpoint

Kevin S. Casey, Executive Director

A Common Characteristic

SAANYS is currently in the midst of a statewide series of dinners for unit presidents and other representatives of their bargaining units. We began these dinner meetings with the intention of troubleshooting issues that we expected would arise from the fallout of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Janus v. AFSCME*.

We begin each presentation with a brief overview of the *Janus* decision and how that decision could impact both SAANYS and local bargaining units. The

informed discussions that follow generally reveal that while there remains the potential for disruption of unit operations, very little of that has been seen to date. The overwhelming majority of administrators see the value of being part of their local bargaining unit, and having that bargaining unit affiliated with a statewide professional association. They have not been influenced by the DeVos affiliated interest group sending emails to "educate" public employees on the holding of *Janus*. These emails, financed by billionaires, urged our

members (and members of other organizations as well) to quit their bargaining units and began the very day the *Janus* decision was announced. Apparently very few think the DeVos Foundation really has their best interests at heart.

What has impressed me most about these conversations is how seamlessly they pivot from unit to educational affairs. We discuss the current state of APPR and how it might change in the near future and possible legislative modifications to administrative tenure to align with the teacher tenure process for those who have earned administrative tenure and then take another administrative position. We discuss a variety of certification issues and how unit officers can help newer

administrators avoid certain certification pitfalls. We speak at length regarding ESSA regulations, school accountability, and building level reporting. Any unit that would like

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its own update on any of these topics should contact SAANYS Director of Government Relations Cindy Gallagher. We are willing travelers.

There are aspects of these regulatory issues that are not liked, or that seem unfair. What impresses me however is that I consistently encounter a determination among administrators to work to improve outcomes regardless of the regulatory environment. I can't help

but believe that the level of commitment I regularly encounter is worth far more than even the most well thought-out regulation. Abraham Lincoln once said "Commitment is what transforms a promise into reality." I believe regulations are necessary, but without commitment to a higher ideal they result in compliance. A compliance mindset is satisfied with fulfilling specified minimum requirements, whereas the truly committed strive for excellence regardless of, and sometimes in spite of, a regulatory framework. Commitment trumps compliance every time, and my observation from traveling around the state is that our schools are full of committed administrators, and that bodes well for our schools and our students. ■

Improving Teaching as a System

Sponsor Opinion Piece by Dr. Bruce H. Crowder, Senior Researcher, Educational Vistas, Inc.

Teaching is a system. And, the same may be said of improving teaching. Current research by Hiebert and Stigler, based on high-achieving nations, shows a built-in system for improving teaching "gradually and steadily over time." It is not that our students are taught poorly in the United States; it is the lack of a mechanism for improving.

According to Hiebert and Stigler, the focus in the United States is on improving teachers by recruiting better qualified teachers, requiring higher standards for certification,

increasing accountability, encouraging professional development, and making it easier to fire ineffective performers. There is no evidence that evaluating teachers and holding them accountable for learning improves their teaching or their students' learning. The finding is that teaching improvement is a learning issue, not a motivation issue. In achieving nations, the focus is on continuously improving teaching through a school-based, collegial system of lesson study. The focus is on the

way teachers and students interact around the content.

To understand how a system of teaching works, the classroom lesson is the place to begin. The authors find four things that make teaching improvement possible: well-crafted learning goals for students, curriculum, assessments, and professional development (PD).

Shared learning goals for each unit of study establishes a common focus and curiosity about what is working best. While a common curriculum is essential, individual lessons may be tweaked as shared knowledge is embedded in teaching modifications. Lesson study by observation groups examine evidence of student learning as it happens. In

addition, unit tests are written collaboratively by teacher teams, given the same amount of time, and scored together as performance is compared among different classrooms.

Teachers whose students underperform get help from their colleagues. The PD focus is not on improving an individual teacher's capabilities, but on improving the methods of teaching and related student outcomes. In this approach, the group takes responsibility for the success of a lesson.

Implementation of a teaching improvement system requires a cultural change in American education. This may only happen when teachers, school district leaders, school boards, parents, and SED

work together to support the four initiatives presented in this research.

References

"Teaching Versus Teachers as a Lever for Change: Comparing a Japanese and a U.S. Perspective on Improving Instruction" by James Hiebert and James Stigler in *Educational Researcher*, May 2017 (Vol. 46, #4, P. 169-176).

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