



# REPORT



## Assistant Secondary Principal of the Year Andy Werling of Muscatine

**A**ndy Werling, assistant high school principal at Muscatine, was selected as the 2024 Iowa Assistant Secondary Principal of the Year. Michael Dale of Marshalltown was a finalist for the award. Thank you to selection committee members Nick Bradley of Denison; Adam Kent of Fort Dodge; Jerri Larson of Council Bluffs; and Dustin Smith of Nevada. Selection of the five remaining Administrator of the Year awards continues into 2024. Nominations for 2025 open in mid-February 2024. Details are available at [sai-iowa.org/awards.cfm](https://sai-iowa.org/awards.cfm).

Asked to share an example of his leadership involvement, Werling offers the following from the school's Portrait of a Graduate initiative.

Our high school had a problem. We were falling well short of employment readiness targets as forecast by Future Ready Iowa. While Muscatine High School had made remarkable progress in many aspects, including graduation rate, attendance rates, advanced placement enrollment, concurrent course offerings, and cocurricular involvement, to name a few, a vital piece of educational experience was missing. How were we going to prepare our students for employment in positions five, 15, and 25 years from now? We looked for solutions, and Portrait of a Graduate was the overhaul we needed.

Two things were clear at the beginning. First, 68% of jobs in Iowa will require education and training beyond high school by 2025. Those jobs will require employees to adapt rapidly to change. Fluency of ideas, decision-making, active learning, originality, and strategizing will all be essential competencies in the jobs of the next decade. Second, we couldn't get there with our current system. The combination of our credit requirements, daily schedule, course offerings, etc. were each prohibiting factors in any effort to bring about the necessary changes. If we were going to change for the future success of our students, we needed a full reevaluation of our academic structure. All the elements of large-scale change would be present over the next few years. We built the right teams, involved the right stakeholders, backward designed our plan, developed shared commitments, etc.

We formed a strong, positive relationship with Eastern Iowa Community College, which has a terrific campus in our town. We developed six career pathways in high-need, high-interest areas, including culinary, welding, healthcare, and manufacturing. We built a more intentional schedule and added academic support throughout the entire school day. Our redesigned course sequence and adding more relevant course offerings created space in schedules to participate in the academies. We built connections with local businesses to develop job shadows, internships, and apprenticeships for job-site experiences. Work-based learning courses were added explicitly into students' four-year plans so their school day was meaningful and individualized.

Over the three years since its implementation, our Portrait of a Graduate efforts have been fruitful. Student attendance climbed as we tailored students learning to their post-secondary goals and students saw the 'why' behind school. Graduation rates continued moving higher as students saw the tangible value a diploma has in the workplace. We offer five different career-related courses with 275 students enrolled last year preparing students for employment. We have 38 business partners offering 240 students job shadows, internships, and apprenticeships for real-world experience. Our 10 academies enroll 81 students pursuing their career paths and gaining certifications and endorsements while in high school. Currently, we have 115 students enrolled in 172 CCIR classes and earning college credit. None of that was possible before we overhauled our academic structure.

We have further to go. Not all of our goals have been reached, and there will be setbacks. In the coming years, we plan to steadily grow our course offerings, business patterns, academy pathways, and college readiness options for students. We are very proud of the progress we have made in providing students with a much more intentional high school experience. Our Portrait of a Graduate work has a daily positive impact on the lives of our students and our community.



### SAI Leadership Coaching Program: Unlocking Potential

Executive coaching is not just a passing trend; it's a powerful tool that can transform educational leadership and SAI is pleased to begin offering coaching to members.

Coaching offers a multitude of benefits that can significantly impact your leadership, communication, well-being, decision-making, and overall effectiveness in your role. By unlocking your potential, fostering collaboration, and developing coaching skills, you can not only enhance your leadership but also contribute to creating a positive and thriving educational environment for the entire school community.

SAI's Lisa Remy and Dana Schon are engaged in the FranklinCovey Executive Coach Training Program which is an International Coaching Federation Accredited Program and will begin coaching interested members as soon as January 2024.

Learn more: [bit.ly/SAIcoaching](https://bit.ly/SAIcoaching).



### District Meetings

Join SAI staffers and your colleagues for updates and collegiality at your local SAI District Meeting. Meetings kick off in December and there is no cost to participate.

Check dates and locations for your area and register at [bit.ly/SAIevents](https://bit.ly/SAIevents).

## Executive Director's Message from Lisa Remy ✉

### SAI Officers

#### President

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#### President-elect

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#### Past President

Dan Butler, superintendent  
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### SAI Representative Council

Listed at [sai-iowa.org/representative-council.cfm](http://sai-iowa.org/representative-council.cfm)

### National Representatives

#### AASA Governing Board Members

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Trevor Miller, superintendent  
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Joe Stutting (SAI president-elect, see above)

#### NAESP State Rep.

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## Strategies for staying focused and inspired during the busy holiday season

As we gear up for the holiday season, it's that time of year when everything seems to be happening at once. The holidays bring so much goodness — family time, twinkling lights, catchy tunes, and the excitement of what's to come. However, amid the cheer, the final months of the year can be a whirlwind of activity, countless distractions, and an overwhelming to-do list. Although I love the holiday season, I sometimes find it challenging to stay focused and concentrate on the big picture.

### Embracing Purposeful Leadership:

In the midst of the holiday chaos, effective leaders find their compass by homing in on the goals that truly matter. It's not about ticking off every item on the to-do list but rather aligning actions with a broader purpose. Take a moment to review your professional and personal goals for 2023-2024. Write them down, revisit them frequently, and let that sense of purpose be the driving force behind your daily endeavors. We all know that there are times throughout the school year when initiatives lose momentum. Having a clear purpose can keep you going strong and make those daily tasks feel a bit less overwhelming.

### Mastering the Art of Prioritization:

A common challenge during hectic times is task prioritization. While it may be tempting to tackle easy tasks first, consider reevaluating your approach. Let's talk about that to-do list. We've all been there, tackling the easy stuff first and leaving the tough things for last. But what if we flipped the script? Know when you're at your best (for me, it's definitely morning), and hit those big tasks then. Your energy levels will thank you, and you might find yourself breezing through the day. Also, think about urgency when prioritizing — what needs your attention pronto?

### Strategic Breaks for Renewed Focus:

Leadership is demanding, and maintaining focus is an art. One strategy successful leaders employ is incorporating regular, short breaks throughout the day. These intervals are not just moments of respite but are key to increasing energy levels, reducing stress, and fostering creativity. Set a timer to remind yourself to stretch, step outside, or enjoy a snack. A brief mental pause can do wonders, revitalizing your mind and allowing you to return to tasks with a newfound sense of clarity and productivity.

### A Journey of Skill Development:

Remember, mastering these strategies takes time and practice. As you work toward enhancing your focus, you'll reap rewards in various aspects of your professional and personal life. By embracing purposeful leadership, mastering prioritization, and strategically incorporating breaks, you can navigate the holiday hustle with grace and set the stage for a successful year ahead.

Wishing you a joyful and focused holiday season!



## 'It's been SAId: Conversations on Leadership' podcast

Join Maria Lantz from Ottumwa as she delves into the importance of collaboration in cultivating a

culture that embraces social and emotional learning.

In this episode, Maria discusses key components of a sustainable SEL program, emphasizing the need for adults to actively engage in social and emotional learning themselves.

Maria also shares proven methods for overcoming concerns about SEL, including transparent communication with families and providing educators with the necessary resources and professional development opportunities. **Listen now or subscribe.**

## In Brief



### November Rep Council highlights

- Approved 2024 Legislative Priorities;
- Accepted the 2022-23 audit and reviewed financials;
- Participation in meetings with Healthy Kids Act Nutrition Advisory, Greater Des Moines Partnership, Iowa Student Leadership Conference, RSAI, Education Heads;
- Equity Committee purpose and process;
- Annual Conference and professional learning updates;
- Exercise to identify resources/content for new SAI website;
- Legislative networking opportunities; and
- National affiliate reports.

## In Memoriam

**Dennis Shaltanis** - retired high school vice principal, Ankeny (11-1-23)



### Seeking Annual Conference presenters

Planning for SAI Conference 2024 is well underway! A significant part of the conference experience is the Promising Practices series through which we spotlight success stories and lessons learned in local districts across Iowa. Once again, we are calling for proposals for Promising Practices. We invite you to take a moment to reflect on what's going well, what lessons you've learned, and what would be of value to your colleagues. Then, we ask you to consider sharing your leadership with colleagues through a conference session! Learn more about the process through these [Submission Guidelines](#) and plan to submit a [proposal](#) by January 31, 2024!

## Legislative notes

from Dave Daughton, government relations director ✉

Welcome to December! I hope you had a great Thanksgiving break and are ready to finish strong before to winter break.

School board elections have come and gone and many of you have new board members. Make sure to welcome them aboard and if possible, get them into your buildings so that they can see all the great things you are doing with and for kids.

The SAI Legislative Committee and Executive Committee/Rep. Council finished up and approved the 2024 SAI Legislative Priorities. They are posted on the [SAI website](#) and here are the topics: Supplemental State Aid, Employee Recruitment and Retention, Preschool and Early Literacy, Funding Equity, Mental Health, and Education Savings Accounts. There is also a statement of support for the Area Education Agencies.

I encourage you to use these priorities as you meet with your board, community and legislators. Help them to understand why these topics are so important, and how your district is impacted. Along with that, make efforts as possible to build relationships with your legislators and work to get them into your buildings in the next two months.

The Revenue Estimating Conference meets December 13 and will establish the General Fund estimate to be used by the governor and the Legislature in developing the state's budget. The 2024 session begins January 8, and the governor will present her "Condition of the State" that week as well release her budget proposals.

In case you were not aware, the Legislature mandated an At-Risk Task Force to study uses of at-risk and drop-out funding, along with other things and provide a report by Dec. 31. **Take a look**, if interested. Also, the public has until 5 p.m. Dec. 1 to comment on the proposed recommendations. The Department of Education also released proposed rules for **SF 496**, which provides limited clarification on the book and gender identity issues in that law.

The January *SAI Report* will be the last before the session begins. Hopefully, by then, we will have some more information about the direction in which the Governor's office and Legislature is headed. In the meantime, keep educating and advocating.

As always, contact me with any questions at [ddaughton@sai-iowa.org](mailto:ddaughton@sai-iowa.org)

## Calendar of events

### December

- 5 - SAI Prairie Lakes District Meeting
- 6 - SAI Green Hills District Meeting
- 7 - The Four Disciplines of Execution (4DX) Organizational Approach (w/FranklinCovey)
- 12 - Recruitment Trends in K12: Flexible Pay

### January

- 17 - SAI Heartland District Meeting
- 23 - Masterminds Group begins - Equity Focus - virtual
- 25 - Masterminds Group begins - topics based on interest and need - virtual
- 25 & 26 - Executive Leaders

Register and find more information at [bit.ly/SAIevents](https://bit.ly/SAIevents)

## Iowa Dept. of Ed. deadlines

Use this link to access critical due dates: [bit.ly/DEdeadlines](https://bit.ly/DEdeadlines)

### REPORT

The *SAI Report* is published for association members and select community and business leaders by School Administrators of Iowa. The views expressed in the *SAI Report* do not necessarily reflect SAI opinion nor does acceptance of advertising imply SAI endorsement.

Your comments and suggestions are welcomed.

Tracy J. Harms, editor



## A holiday helper on religious expression

Regardless of your background, the holiday season likely reminds you of your childhood. Many of those memories are warm and bring back happy thoughts. For some, those memories aren't so happy and warm, and we are wise to remember that as well. Similar experiences, both good and bad, undoubtedly occur for the students in your buildings.

With the holidays in mind, I thought it would be a good idea to cover some common questions I receive regarding religious expression, especially in light of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Kennedy v. Bremerton*, where a majority of the court upheld a football coach's private religious expression at the 50-yard line after a game.

So, what types of holiday displays or expressions are likely permitted during the holiday season? I will break this down into three categories of display or expression: school, employee, and student.

### Official School Displays or Expression

Even before the *Kennedy* case, schools were permitted to display Christmas holiday decorations as long as they were secular in nature. For instance, schools could display a Christmas tree, lights, and secular reminders of Christmas (e.g., Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer, Frosty the Snowman, The Grinch, Santa Claus, gingerbread houses, etc.). Likewise, schools were permitted to display more religious reminders of the holiday season if the display included references to numerous religious backgrounds [e.g., a school might have a display case with a nativity scene (Christian), a menorah (Jewish), or objects symbolic to Diwali (Hindu) and Ramadan (Islamic), etc.].

Since all of the above were permitted prior to *Kennedy* (and *Kennedy* expanded religious expression), assume such displays continue to be protected. In *Kennedy*, the Supreme Court rejected the "endorsement" and "coercion" tests in favor of an "analysis focused on original meaning and history" and "reference to historical practices and understandings." As such, schools are likely able to display holiday decor that includes a more religious reference to a particular holiday if the display may be justified considering the historical context of the specific holiday. For instance, consider the various religious holidays I mentioned above. After *Kennedy*, it is my opinion that a school might decide to put up religious displays aligning with a particular religious holiday on the calendar without simultaneously displaying decorations from other religions.

### Employee Expression

The first part of employee expression will relate to what forum has been opened by the district within the employee's work area (classroom for teachers). The school is not required to permit employees to decorate the walls, desks or tables in their work areas or classroom. Likewise, the school district may open just a portion of a work area for employee expression (e.g., an employee's desk, bookshelves behind a desk, the wall immediately behind a desk, etc.).

They may also approve a hybrid display in a classroom. For instance, the district might decide that an employee may display personal items on their desk and on the wall behind their desk but then allow the individual to decorate the remainder of the work area using district guidelines. Those guidelines would follow the official school display standards.

Let's say a teacher in your building practices Judaism. If the school permits employee expression in the area behind a teacher's desk, then the Jewish teacher would be permitted to display an electric menorah during the time on or near the celebration of Hanukkah and could display other religious symbols throughout the school year.

**May an employee wear religious attire to work?** As long as that attire does not violate district dress code, safety or security standards (e.g., the attire does not create tripping hazards or is not so loose that it will get caught in equipment the employee is likely to use, the employee is still identifiable), then the answer to that question is yes.

**May an employee wear a Christmas sweater with a nativity scene to work?** Yes. Assuming it is an appropriate time of year to wear Christmas sweaters then the employee may do so. If the local shopping store has Christmas displays set up, then wearing a Christmas sweater at that time would likely also be considered appropriate.

**So, what is NOT permitted from employees after *Kennedy*?** Religious or other personal and private expression is restricted during times when the employee is actively supervising students. The employee may be praying, as an example, when they are not supervising or instructing students, but should not be doing so while they are expected to supervise or instruct as their focus should be on supervision or instruction at that time. If the district would permit a teacher to read a book during a particular time of the day, then the book may be religious in nature.



Also, the *Kennedy* case appears to continue to give credence to the significance of whether students are a “captive audience” in a particular scenario. School employees continue to be restricted from the expression of certain speech during times when students are a captive audience. This is why school officials still may not get on the school PA system or step in front of a classroom of students and lead students in prayer.

While we do not know the extent to which the Supreme Court will use the captive audience consideration, it is my opinion after reading *Kennedy*, that it is still firmly in play. This is why I have discouraged administrators from allowing teachers or other employees to overtly display religious messages in areas that would make it impossible for students to ignore during instruction. While a teacher may be permitted to display a menorah behind their desk around Hanukkah (consider the historical and traditional context), I believe the Supreme Court would find the display of that same menorah on a shelf immediately behind the teacher during instruction as a violation of the Establishment Clause (the government may not endorse or establish religion).

*This article is intended only as a reference in regard to the subject matter covered. It is furnished with the understanding that SAI is not engaged in rendering legal advice. If a legal opinion is desired, private legal counsel should be consulted.*

**May employees say “Merry Christmas,” “Happy Hanukkah,” or something similar during religious holidays?** Yes, employees may make such comments during a particular holiday season but should keep the greeting at that and not make comments that might be reasonably considered an effort to evangelize a particular student to their religious beliefs.

**In what religious activities might an employee participate when they are off the clock?** As long as the employee is following district policies regarding the use of technology and property, they may participate in religious activities to their heart’s content.

**May a choir teacher have students sing religious songs or traditional holiday songs?** Yes, as long as the teacher is not requiring the students to sing the songs in an attempt to endorse religion, then students may sing Christmas or other holiday songs in school.

### Student Expression

As you undoubtedly know, students have even greater speech and expression rights than school employees. As long as that expression does not cross the line into harassment or cause a substantial disruption of the school, students have an even greater ability to express religious speech at school and during school activities.

**If a student creates a holiday drawing or art project with an overtly religious message, may it be displayed in the school hallway or on the classroom wall?** Yes. Assuming it is apparent that the display was created by a student and is not the official speech of the school, such projects or artwork are permitted.

**May a student pull out a Bible and start reading after finishing their math test?** As long as the math teacher has not given instruction for the students to work on math homework at that time, then the student may read the Bible or some other religious text just as openly as any other book.

**May three students start praying openly together during class time?** If other students are permitted to freely talk at that time, and assuming the prayer is not causing a substantial disruption in class, then the students may pray at the same levels as other students might be talking to each other.

**May a student attempt to evangelize another student regarding their religious beliefs during the school day?** If it is a permitted time for students to talk, then the student may certainly begin to talk to another student about their religious or other beliefs, just as they might start talking to a student about their favorite football team. However, considering the captive audience factor and district harassment policies, the student should stop openly sharing those beliefs if other students ask them to do so. If a student is sharing with a group of five students, and the students are voluntarily together, then it would be reasonable to expect a student to leave that group if they do not want to participate in a discussion, but the other students do.

As always, please defer to district policy or your district counsel if they do not align with what I have shared about religious expression. Also, you know where to reach me. Be safe out there as we begin the snow and ice season in Iowa.

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## Who are your heroes?

**H**eroes have been on my mind lately. Maybe it's my recent binging of the Iron Man movies and noticing how Tony Stark uses his creativity, wit, and compelling vision to make the world better. Or, maybe it's the image of Santa everywhere and the stories we tell about how "he sees you when you're sleeping and knows when you're awake. He knows if you've been bad or good" (so, be good, for goodness sake); and, two bloggers I follow also both posted on the topic of heroes this past week. In light of these experiences, I felt compelled to explore how heroes are important to school leadership.

**Dan Rockwell** notes that a hero helps us imagine who we can become. We might see ourselves as more creative, more technologically savvy like Tony Stark or more patient, intuitive, and empathetic like Santa. More often, we see ourselves in our less famous heroes — those who walk among us every day. Within our organizations, these heroic figures embody the values that we espouse and their words and actions represent the ideal. For example, your 8th grade team willingly and gracefully commits to arriving well before contract time in order to partner with a parent before that parent needs to be at work; or your fourth grade teacher masterfully calms a dysregulated student and deescalates a tenuous situation to avoid significant disruptions to the class's learning. Heroes can anchor your vision and serve as concrete examples of the expectations you have. They contribute to your culture. Ideally, they represent "the way we do things around here." Note the word "ideally"; their impact is not guaranteed. Your leadership is the critical difference in whether these heroes serve your vision and culture or not.

To attain the ideal and maximize the impact of these heroes, you have to notice them. Who is living the values championed by your building or district? Who models the qualities you want to see in everyone? Who attends to all the little things and makes everyone else's life easier? Who shows gratitude? Whose attitude and energy are worth catching? Who builds quality relationships with students and staff alike? The more you look for what you want, the more you will see it; and when you see it, you will be energized and motivated. It feels rewarding and inspiring to witness others living their purpose in service of student growth and development.

In addition to taking notice, you need to tell the stories of these heroes. Stories capture the experiences and bring to life your desired values and expectations. They speak to who you are as a district or school. They communicate to the school community about what's important. Your stories can take multiple forms. It might be that in stopping by a classroom one morning, you relate the story of the fourth grade teacher who calmed a student. You might tell the story at your administrative team meeting of the custodian who pitched in to deconstruct the stage set after the fall play in order to ready the theater or gym for a concert or game. Your newsletter, board report, staff meetings, and other gatherings all offer additional opportunities to narrate using examples that represent your values. You may hear that some don't want to be acknowledged for doing what they believe is their job; they feel uncomfortable being celebrated. I would offer several considerations. One, living in this space of discomfort is a growth opportunity; accepting appreciation and celebration is a skill! So, we can invite our colleagues to embrace this. Two, we can find a multitude of ways to spread these stories without a grand presentation; and three, the more we tell our stories, the more acclimated our school community becomes until it's an expectation that we hold each other's experiences up as examples of who we are.

Though your own story may be untold, you are a hero. Each day, you live your values and those of the organization and you model the expectations you hold. **Fred Rogers** sums it up best, "When I was very young, most of my childhood heroes wore capes, flew through the air, or picked up buildings with one arm. They were spectacular and got a lot of attention. But as I grew, my heroes changed, so that now I can honestly say that anyone who does anything to help a child is a hero to me." You are heroes to me. Thank you for putting on the cape of leadership. Happy holidays!

## Masterminds: Two groups begin in January

1. Join a community of school leaders committed to their growth and development in the area of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. Through this SAI Masterminds experience, you will engage in a study of the book *Fix Injustice not Kids and Other Principles for Transformative Equity Leadership*; challenge each other's thinking; discuss and address individual participant's questions, situations, and ideas; and celebrate each other's successes. This Masterminds Group meets virtually from 4-5 p.m. on these six dates: 1/23, 2/6, 2/20, 3/5, 3/19, 4/2



2. Join a community of school leaders committed to their growth and development. Through this SAI Masterminds experience, you will engage in study of relevant and timely content; challenge each other's thinking; discuss and address individual participant's questions, situations, and ideas; and celebrate each other's successes. This Masterminds Group meets virtually from 7-8 a.m. on these six dates: 1/25, 2/8, 2/22, 3/7, 3/21, 4/4. Possible session topics may include (the group will determine topics based upon interest and need): leading schools in a Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous time; prioritization; change — a new process for transforming our schools; creative transformative gatherings; Artificial Intelligence; and supporting teachers with burnout.

6 Group sizes are limited to 15, so register soon! [Learn more using the corresponding event registration.](#)