



REPORT

Hire and Keep Classified Staff By Guest Columnist Deborah Bordenaro



Deborah Bordenaro, a doctoral student at Drake University, is a guest columnist this month. SAI is partnering with Deborah on her capstone project centered on the retention of classified staff. Through her work, she has developed and implemented successful strategies for onboarding, training, and retaining classified staff, contributing to improved staff retention rates in her schools.

Tired of the endless daily scheduling challenges with classified staff absences and vacancies? Struggling to onboard and train new classified staff? Is your system responding or reacting to these daily challenges? Would you like to be empowered with a framework and plan to meet these challenges?

Retaining classified staff is more than a logistical challenge; it's a vital investment in the heart of our schools. From administrative assistants to custodians, classified staff play an essential role in fostering a positive and efficient learning environment. Yet, schools across the country face mounting challenges in retaining these invaluable team members.

To address this critical issue, SAI's "Take 30" offers a dynamic series of four **FREE** virtual sessions designed to equip PK-12 school leaders with innovative strategies to improve classified staff retention. Each 30-minute session is packed with actionable insights, real-world examples, and tools to create a more supportive and engaging workplace. Leaders will walk away from each session empowered with actionable strategies that can be implemented immediately in their system.

The series begins on February 18 with **Session 1: Onboarding and Hiring Classified Staff and the Story the Data Tells Us**. Participants will explore how effective onboarding and hiring processes set the foundation for long-term retention. By analyzing data-driven insights, leaders can identify key trends, anticipate challenges, and tailor their approaches to meet the unique needs of their staff.

Session 2: Scheduling and Learning How to Maximize the Absence and Coverage Schedule, scheduled for February 25, delves into the perennial scheduling challenges schools face. Attendees will learn strategies to develop a responsive system that ensures seamless coverage during absences, minimizing disruptions while promoting flexibility for classified staff. This framework will flip the daily absence scheduling challenges from reactive to proactive strategies and responses and help stabilize your system.

March 4 brings **Session 3: Professional Development and a System of Support for Classified Staff**. This session highlights the importance of investing in ongoing learning and support, empowering staff to grow in their roles and feel valued. By providing tailored professional development opportunities, schools can boost job satisfaction and build a more skilled, motivated team.

continued on page 7

About Deborah Bordenaro

Deborah Bordenaro is an accomplished educator with nearly 30 years of experience in the field of education. Throughout her career, she has served as a teacher for 24 years and held leadership roles, including 6 years on the St. Anthony School Board of Education, three of which were spent as president. In 2005, Deborah was inducted into Who's Who of America's Best Teachers and was nominated for Teacher of the Year for the Des Moines Public Schools in 2018.

In 2011, Deborah played a pivotal role in launching and overseeing the first Spanish Immersion Program in the greater Des Moines area at St. Anthony School, reflecting her commitment to innovation in education. Deborah has also demonstrated leadership in school administration, serving as assistant principal at Carlisle Elementary for two years before becoming the principal at Olmsted Elementary School.

Currently a doctoral student at Drake University, Deborah is focusing on a capstone project centered on the retention of classified staff, an area of deep interest and expertise. Through her work, she has developed and implemented successful strategies for onboarding, training, and retaining classified staff, contributing to improved staff retention rates in her schools. With a dedication to student success and a commitment to fostering positive school communities, Deborah continues to impact the education sector through her leadership, innovative programs, and research on staff retention.

SAI Officers

President

Joe Stutting, superintendent
North Scott Community School District
joe.stutting@north-scott.k12.ia.us

President-Elect

Jennifer Schutte, elementary principal
Postville Community School District
jschutte@postville.k12.ia.us

Vice President

Tim Felderman, secondary principal
West Delaware County
Community School District
timfelderman@w-delaware.k12.ia.us

Past President

Jason Toenges, secondary principal
Union Community School District
j_toenges@union.k12.ia.us

SAI Representative Council

Listed at
sai-iowa.org/representative-council

National Representatives

AASA Governing Board Members

Chris Coffelt, superintendent
Central Decatur & Lamoni CSDs
chris.coffelt@centraldecatur.org

Brent Jorth, superintendent
Central Lyon Community School District
bjorth@centrallyon.org

Joe Stutting, superintendent
North Scott Community School District
joe.stutting@north-scott.k12.ia.us

NAESP State Representative

Rick Varney, elementary principal
Decorah Community School District
rick.varney@decorah.k12.ia.us

NASSP State Coordinator

Cindy Barwick, middle school principal
Sheldon Community School District
cbarwick@sheldon.k12.ia.us

SAI Staff

Administrative Assistant

Megan Mertes | mmertes@sai-iowa.org

Associate Professional Learning Director

Al Neppel | aneppl@sai-iowa.org

Communications Director

Laine Buck | lbuck@sai-iowa.org

Executive Director

Dr. Lisa Remy | lremy@sai-iowa.org

Finance Director

Debbie Wrenn | dwwrenn@sai-iowa.org

Government Relations Director

Dave Daughton | dadaughton@sai-iowa.org

Legal Services Director

Matt Carver, J.D. | mcarver@sai-iowa.org

Professional Learning Director

Dr. Dana Schon | dschon@sai-iowa.org

Program Coordinator

Amy Swanson | aswanson@sai-iowa.org

Executive Director's Message from Lisa Remy



Working with Legislators to Achieve Great Outcomes for Students

With the third week of the Iowa legislative session behind us, the momentum is building, especially following Governor Kim Reynolds' Condition of the State address on January 14, 2025.

In her address, Governor Reynolds highlighted several key initiatives directly impacting education. She emphasized the importance of literacy, proposing legislation to strengthen math instruction and equip teachers with evidence-based professional development.

Additionally, the Governor addressed the challenges posed by smartphone distractions in classrooms, proposing legislation to keep instructional time free from digital interruptions. She also addressed the childcare challenges faced by parents and is establishing a grant program for schools to help with transportation, preschool and childcare partnerships, and expanding student tuition organizations to include PK.

As school administrators, these developments underscore the importance of our roles as advocates and leaders. Engaging with legislators on these proposals is crucial. Sharing your district's experiences and perspectives can provide valuable insights as policies are shaped.

Approaching these discussions with professionalism and positivity fosters productive dialogue. By framing conversations around shared goals—such as enhancing student learning and well-being—we can build collaborative relationships with policymakers. It is important to remember we are role models for students, staff, and community members. Students are watching

“By staying positive and grounded in your purpose, you're not only helping to influence legislation but also inspiring those around you to approach challenges with courage and collaboration.”

how we respond to challenges, learning from our ability to approach difficult situations with a calm and constructive mindset. Staff members look to us for reassurance and guidance, especially when policy changes might affect their work. And our communities count on us to embody the resilience and determination that keep our schools thriving.

By now, many of you have likely had opportunities to connect with legislators or track specific bills that impact your district. These conversations are opportunities to advocate for the needs of your students, staff, and community. Sharing the stories of your district's successes, highlighting innovative programs, and illustrating the challenges your schools face are powerful ways to provide legislators with the context they need to make informed decisions. It's important to approach these interactions with professionalism and positivity. Even when advocating against a policy, framing the conversation around shared goals—such as improving outcomes for Iowa's students—can foster productive dialogue. Legislators appreciate hearing directly from those working in schools, and your voice is a key part of shaping education policy in Iowa.

As the session continues, I encourage you to remain steadfast in your advocacy and optimism. By staying positive and grounded in your purpose, you're not only helping to influence legislation but also inspiring those around you to approach challenges with courage and collaboration. Your leadership is a beacon of hope and determination, reminding your school community—and our state—that we can work together to achieve great things for Iowa's students. Thank you for your dedication, advocacy, and commitment to leading with positivity. Your efforts make a difference every day.



sai School Administrators of Iowa

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

WEST DES MOINES MARRIOTT
MARCH 27 & 28

Join us for this learning and networking experience intended especially for practicing and aspiring female leaders.

AGENDA

Thursday, March 27

5 p.m. — Dinner and Networking
5:30 p.m. — Kristin Anderson
8:30 p.m. — Adjourn

Friday, March 28

8 a.m. — Continental Breakfast
8:30 a.m. — Sarah Ciavari
11:30 a.m. — Adjourn

REGISTRATION

(includes dinner and continental breakfast)

\$125 for SAI members
\$250 for non-members

All participants must register. Click [HERE](#) to register today.

HOTEL ACCOMMODATIONS

A block of rooms has been established at the West Des Moines Marriott for the evening of March 27 for \$129 per night. To make a reservation you may use [this link](#), or call 515-267-1500 and mention the School Administrators of Iowa/ Women in Leadership room discount. The cut-off date for this block is March 5.

TOPICS AND SPEAKERS

Thursday, March 27

Dr. Kristin Anderson

The Catalysts and Inhibitors of Workplace Wellbeing: Cultivating the Conditions for Women to Thrive and Not Merely Survive

About Dr. Kristin Anderson

Dr. Kristin R. Anderson is an educator, researcher, author, and the co-founder and CEO of The Brilliance Project. She has dedicated over two decades to transforming education and unlocking the personal power of educators, leaders, and change-makers.

Friday, March 28

Sarah Ciavari, M.Div., PCC, BCC, CRA, CDTLF

Leading with Resilience to Bust Burnout

About Sarah Ciavari

Sarah is the founder and president of Level Up Leadership, LLC, a coaching, leadership consulting, and curriculum design firm. Sarah works with senior leaders and mid-level managers to maximize their adaptability, sustainability, and potential.

Upcoming Events

February

- 5: Elementary Principals Mastermind Group #2
- 6: Rewiring Perceptions of Discipline #2
- 6-7: Executive Leaders - CANCELLED
- 11: Virtual School Law Conference
- 12: Aspiring School Administrator Workshop #3
- 18: Take 30: Retention Revolution #1
- 19: Elementary Principals Mastermind Group #3
- 20: Rewiring Perceptions of Discipline #3
- 25: Take 30: Retention Revolution #2

March

- 4: Take 30: Retention Revolution #3
- 27-28: Women in Leadership Conference

April

- 10: Virtual Spring Legal Lab
- 15: In-Person Spring Legal Lab

SAVE THE DATE!

Summer Leadership Accelerator
June 17-18, 2025
in partnership
with FranklinCovey

Learn more and register for all SAI events online at sai-iowa.org/events.

Why Attend SAI's District Meeting?

Each school year, members of the SAI team travel to visit with administrators whose districts are associated with each AEA. Complimentary lunches are provided for each meeting. Registration is required to prepare for adequate seating and meals. View dates to mark your calendar.

Upcoming Meetings February

- 6: [Mississippi Bend](#)
- 13: [Grant Wood](#)

March

- 5: [Great Prairie](#)
- 13: [Northwest](#)

In Memoriam

Aaron Miller

Assistant Middle School Principal
Fort Dodge (01/11/25)

Please email lbuck@sai-iowa.org to share In Memoriam names that we can include in future publications.

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.

Laine Buck
Communications Director
lbuck@sai-iowa.org



Legal Vortex with Matt Carver, legal services director

Immigration Issues and Schools

As some of you likely expected, I have entered a mourning period of an undetermined length after Notre Dame's loss to Ohio State in the National College Football Championship game. Please note, I did not state that we lost to "The" Ohio State University.

What is up with that anyway? Should SAI members refer to me as "The" Matt Carver? Once Ohio State fans start referring to Notre Dame as "Notre Dame du Lac" which is Notre Dame's actual name, I will not be throwing around the silly "The" reference. In any case, I appreciate your emotional support and encouragement during this difficult time.

Now that we have gotten my pity party and self-reflective whining out of the way, let's get to one of the hottest topics in schools throughout the present time: immigration and concerns about Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids in our schools. I am aware that many of you have concerned immigrant students and families in your communities, and I hope this column helps to provide some reassurance.

On January 21, 2025, acting Department of Homeland Security Secretary Benamine Huffman issued a directive rescinding 2021 guidance from the Biden administration to refrain from enforcing immigration actions or arresting individuals at "sensitive locations[.]" Some examples of "sensitive locations" included schools, churches, and hospitals. The following statement is attributable to a DHS Spokesperson, concerning rescission of the directive:

"This action empowers the brave men and women in CBP and ICE to enforce our immigration laws and catch criminal aliens—including murderers and rapists—who have illegally come into our country. Criminals will no longer be able to hide in America's schools and churches to avoid arrest. The Trump Administration will not tie the hands of our brave law enforcement, and instead trusts them to use common sense."

I understand that some community members are concerned by this Department of Homeland Security policy change. As a point of hopeful reassurance to those community members, I share that during my 19 years as the attorney for School Administrators of Iowa, I am unaware of any "raids" at Iowa schools during this time. We have seen immigration enforcement actions at large employers within our state, such as meat packing plants and other large companies, but not schools. I don't foresee this changing.

Based on many communications shared by Trump Administration officials on television, I believe it is safe to state that ICE employees will have their hands full with immigration enforcement at jails, prisons, large employers, and the southern border. Am I able to give a one hundred percent guarantee that ICE will not go to schools? No, but history is instructive and the past Trump administration focused actions at these other locations.

In fact, between October 1, 2018 and October 31, 2020, there were only two, very limited, enforcement actions at schools: one in North Carolina and one in Texas. These were not "raids" but rather limited to specific individuals based upon prior criminal investigation. In the DHS Spokesperson's quote, which I shared above, I note that "murderers and rapists" are referenced, as well as a reference to law enforcement using "common sense." Both of these references reaffirm my belief that raids should not be suspected merely because some students are undocumented immigrants.

To help further assure school administrators, please let families know that all schools are required to follow the [United States Supreme Court's Plyer \(1982\) decision](#) which prevents public schools from excluding undocumented immigrant students unless there is an overriding state interest.

This case is still a precedent, and school officials do not ask questions relating to immigration status during the registration process unless a family affirmatively raises a visa issue. Some examples of when this visa question might be asked include a student attending as a foreign exchange student or when a student is attending while a parent is in the United States on an F1 student visa. In the latter instance, there would be some paid tuition requirements if the student is in secondary school.

Additional Immigration Q&A

Q: May ICE officials carry out an arrest, search, or detainment at the school if they have exigent circumstances?

YES. As with local law enforcement, there are times when ICE may carry out their duties due to some imminent emergency (an "exigent circumstance"). This might include situations where ICE believes the student is subject to sex trafficking, forced labor, or the student is an imminent threat to others (e.g., making threats online or the student is involved with a violent gang). Once again, such exigent circumstances were rarely used under the past Trump Administration and typically occurred to protect the student.

continued from page 4

Q: What other documents might ICE or law enforcement have to perform an arrest, detention, or search?

If ICE or law enforcement does not have an exigent circumstance, they may carry out their duties with a search warrant, arrest warrant, detention order, or subpoena. It is reasonable to ask for such a document, or an explanation of an exigent circumstance, if federal officials are wishing for school officials to pull a student out of class.

Q: What are some other scenarios in which you envision ICE or other officials potentially communicating with school officials about an immigrant student?

If the student's parents or guardians have already been apprehended and the student would be an unaccompanied minor, then such a situation might result in either federal or state officials working with the school to ensure the student is safe and not left to live on their own.

Q: If, in the unlikely situation, ICE agents come to our school, may school employees ask for credentials and for ICE officers to have written approval to be at the school or some exigent as to why they are there?

Yes. Just as with local law enforcement, DHS, or other government officials, you should always ask to see identification and appropriate credentials to verify the legitimacy of the individuals. Furthermore, I would encourage administrators to create a standard operating procedure for when such visitors, such as law enforcement or ICE, visit your office. It would be wise to immediately involve the building principal and notify the central office. In most situations it should be perfectly reasonable to expect for law enforcement to permit you to contact the district's legal counsel to ensure the law is being followed.

Q: What message, if any, do you believe we should share with concerned members in our community?

You are perfectly welcome to share this column or information I have provided in this column. It is always a difficult judgment call to determine whether to send a community message or to provide information when individual concerns are raised. This will vary with each of your communities. You know your community members best. *My underlying message is that school officials understand the concerns being raised but try to reassure students and community members that it has NOT been a practice of the federal government to focus immigration enforcement actions on schools.* History is always a good indicator and it is worth sharing that no school has been the subject of an immigration enforcement "raid" (to my knowledge) in recent history, if ever.

Until next time, don't forget, it is the University of Notre Dame du Lac!

Administrator of the Year Highlight: Central Office AOY Peggy Murphy

We [announced in December](#) that Peggy Murphy, director of technology with Marion Independent School District, was named the 2024-25 Iowa Central Office Administrator of the Year by School Administrators of Iowa. To get to know her better, we asked her to share some thoughts on leadership.

"The adage, often attributed to Mark Twain, 'If you tell the truth, you don't need a good memory,' resonates deeply with me. While acknowledging its association with Twain, I cannot help but connect this principle to my father.

Growing up in a large family on a farm southeast of Tipton, Iowa, I frequently witnessed him impart this wisdom to my siblings, shaping our understanding of honesty. As nearly the youngest of nine children, I learned a great deal through observation, and these words have become an integral part of my character and leadership philosophy.

I firmly believe that honesty is an indispensable quality for any leader. Throughout my career, progressing from teacher to technology coach, and ultimately to technology director, dad's words are always with me, while maintaining honesty and upholding my ethical principles. This commitment to truthfulness allows me to remain authentic. Honesty fosters integrity and trustworthiness, ensuring that I fulfill my promises and act with consistency. I am proud to embody this value, which I learned from both a renowned author and one of the most influential figures in my life – my father.

While I haven't been delving into Mark Twain's work lately, I've found inspiration from several other leadership resources since leaving the family farm. Simon Sinek's books, particularly "Start with Why," offer valuable insights into purpose-driven leadership. It's always about the students. Steven Covey's "7 Habits of Highly Effective People" provides a timeless framework for personal and professional development. It's easy to let our personal development take a back seat and 7 Habits is a solid reminder to take care of yourself. Patrick Lencioni's work, such as *The Ideal Team Player* focuses on building high-performing teams. Brene Brown's books, including *Dare to Lead*, encourage vulnerability and courage in leadership. Finally, Jon Gordon's works, like *The Energy Bus for Schools*, emphasize the importance of positivity and creating a supportive environment. Jon Gordon's books are typically quick reads that offer practical strategies for improving leadership, fostering a positive culture, and enhancing teamwork.

I often find myself revisiting key leadership books to gain fresh perspectives. I encourage you to do the same. Re-reading allows for deeper self-reflection and understanding of your leadership journey. Continuously seek new knowledge and revisit your foundational principles to better serve those you lead."

In Brief

Executive Committee January Highlights



- Approved Dec. 11, 2024 Executive Committee meeting minutes.
- Approved 2025 Annual Conference Exhibitor fee increase of \$5 to \$775.
- Discussed request to amend SAI's membership policy to include organizations due to a unique circumstance; after discussion, the committee decided to keep the membership policy as is.
- Approved a vendor social to be added to the upcoming 2025 annual conference.
- Executive Director Lisa Remy updated the committee on ISFLC, Executive Leaders, and an Apollo Insurance corporate partnership possibility. The committee approved changes to wording in Policy G-8 Office Hours.
- Finance Director Debbie Wrenn announced that membership is currently at 2,203, which exceeds our numbers from last year. She provided an update on the monthly financial report.
- Professional Learning Director Dana Schon led the group on an energy check and how that contributes to your surroundings. Schon mentioned that the next round of mentor meetings will kick off January 23.
- Schon remarked that we were gearing up for a busy spring with several professional learning opportunities. These include the Women in Leadership Conference, Coaching Program, Elementary Principal Masterminds, Every Leader a Coach, Rewiring Perceptions of Discipline, Take 30: Retention Revolution, and the Spring Law Conference. Neppel was proud to inform the committee of the launch of the Free Aspiring School Administrators Virtual Workshop.
- Associate Professional Learning Director Al Neppel shared the conference theme, 50 Years of Learning, Inspiration, and Innovation and that all of the keynote speakers and thought leaders were set. They are now turning their attention to Promising Practices, so please encourage anyone you know to complete the RFP for consideration.
- Communications Director Laine Buck informed the committee that we signed a contract with Embark for the large conference room renovation which should begin at the end of the month. She shared that the Middle School Principal of the Year finalists have been chosen and the final interviews will be held on January 17. The remaining AOY will be finalized soon. Buck then informed members of the SAI "brand refresh" that she hopes to show everyone next month. She also discussed the recent It's Been SAId podcast with Darin Haack and the upcoming edition about the 50th Conference with Al Neppel.
- Legal Services Director Matt Carver outlined the recent decision by the Iowa Court of Appeals and the impact on superintendent evaluations and interviews.

He is also in the process of finalizing presenters for the Spring Law Conference on February 11. Carver also mentioned he has really enjoyed the recent district meetings that he has attended and the chance to talk to members.

- Carver showed some of the recent graphics put out by IPERS to show how well the fund is doing.
- Government Relations Director Dave Daughton was not able to attend, so Remy outlined his report.

Legislative Notes

from Dave Daughton

government relations director

Week 3!! Another busy week at the Capitol. First, I want to thank all of you that were able to attend the Day on the Hill, co-sponsored by SAI, IASB and the AEA's. Several of the SAI staff were very involved in getting things accomplished for the event and we felt like it went very well. The highlight for me was seeing the 21 displays that showcased great things going on in Iowa schools. Many students attended and shared their projects/initiatives. Several legislators and staff came and talked to the students, and I think we accomplished our primary purpose.

The House Education committee passed several bills onto the floor for debate this week.

- [HF 1](#) — This bill would allow non-public students to participate on public school teams in certain situations.
- [HF 10](#) — A bill to correct a timing/calendar issue for a specific district as it pertains to a disillusionment of the district.
- [HSB 30](#) — Would require all students to pass the Naturalization (Civics) test in order to graduate.
- [HSB 31](#) — START DATE! August 23rd or the first Wednesday after the Iowa State Fair (whichever comes first) would be the earliest start date allowed.
- [HSB 32](#) — School silent periods; requires public schools and charter schools to display the national motto, the state motto, and requires public schools to start the day with two minutes of silence.
- [HSB 33](#) — Online Assessments; allows any school delivering instruction over the internet to administer any state summative assessment online. Includes requirements on the timing and on proctors for doing such assessments online.
- [HF 34](#) — Would require districts to send out waiver information with any information about immunizations. Also, they would need to post it on the school website.
- [HF 88](#) — This bill removes some of the restrictions on home-schooling and doubles the tuition tax credit.
- [HSB 2](#) — Provides a potential exemption for students in military training in regards to the chronic absenteeism legislation.

continued on page 10

Hire and Keep Classified Staff, continued from page 1

Four professional development slide decks will be given to leaders to use as a framework for classified staff professional development. The areas of professional development include: professionalism and confidentiality, setting SMART goals, scenarios and response to scenarios, and IEP/BIP practice and reflection protocol.

The series concludes on **March 11 with Session 4: Performance Feedback for Classified Staff**, focusing on goal setting and performance communication. Leaders will gain practical tools to provide constructive feedback, set meaningful goals, and create an environment where staff feel appreciated and heard.

This series emphasizes collaboration and practical solutions. Participants will engage in group discussions and leave with actionable takeaways to reduce turnover, address absence challenges, and foster a culture of appreciation.

Classified staff are often the unsung heroes of our schools. Recognizing and supporting their contributions is essential to building a cohesive, committed school community. By implementing the strategies shared in these sessions, school leaders can transform their approach to staff retention, creating workplaces where everyone feels valued and motivated to excel.

This free, four-part series is called Take 30: Retention Revolution: Strategies for Keeping Classified Staff Engaged and Committed in Schools. [Register online.](#)



As an exclusively Iowa-based law firm, Ahlers & Cooney has the knowledge and expertise to advise Iowa's K-12 schools, AEAs, community colleges, and public and private colleges on federal and state legal issues, including:

- Student Issues
- Board Governance
- Employment Law
- Employee Benefits
- Labor Law
- Title IX
- Procurement/Contracting
- Public Finance
- Construction Law
- Real Estate/Environmental
- Litigation
- Special Education

Ahlers & Cooney, P.C.

100 Court Avenue, Suite 600
Des Moines, IA 50309
515-243-7611 | info@ahlerslaw.com
www.ahlerslaw.com



High-Dosage Tutoring Programs That Elevate Student Outcomes

Varsity Tutors is the leading provider of High-Impact Tutoring. Our approach supports educators, engages families, and helps close learning gaps.

40k
Qualified Tutors

500+
K-12 Schools

Book a Meeting to Learn More
About Getting Access to Our Solutions

Bryce Schwanke | 402-369-1756 | bryce.schwanke@varsitytutors.com



The Latest in Learning with Dana Schon, professional learning director

Connecting Effectively Across Generations

Back in the late '80's, I brought my typewriter to college and hesitated to visit the computer lab until sophomore year when the power of word processing on a computer ensured I'd never go back to the days of Liquid Paper and ribbon replacements. My roommate and I paid for our landline phone in the dorm, and we waited until after 11 p.m. to make any long distance calls. We shared stories face-to-face. Any campus announcements were shared through posted bulletins and advisory groups. We were at the mercy of our professors, textbooks, and library resources for information; and we had to wait a week to find out if Sam would stay at Cheers or move to LA with Diane. These experiences formed the foundation for our communication expectations and preferences as Gen Xers (born 1965-1980) entering the workforce for the first time.

Today's educational workforce spans potentially five generations, and each successive generation has experienced greater and greater innovation and technological advancement. Coupled with the [rapid growth of knowledge](#), these advancements have shaped the way in which each generation communicates. As a leader, how can you ensure you communicate meaningfully with all staff members while simultaneously creating the conditions for them to engage productively with each other?

Consider first what staff know and understand about each other. You might organize staff into generationally diverse groups. Introduce a summary like [this one](#) and invite people to discuss the ways in which the traits associated with their generation reflect them or not and the stereotypes from their generation they would

challenge. Emphasize that not all members of a generation fit tidily into the same box. What gaps across generations do you notice? How can you collaborate to bridge these gaps to foster the kind of culture where everyone feels a sense of belonging?

Values activities can help surface commonalities across generations. As human resource expert [Jesse Stanchak of SHRM](#) writes, "Generations may value the same things but express those values in various ways. Preferred terms can change, standards can evolve, and new challenges can arise, but one group rarely holds a unique value." Engaging your staff in identifying both personal and team values can bring to light shared and distinct values while building empathy and understanding.

Taking into consideration what you learn from your conversations about generational traits and tendencies as well as insights you gain from the values activities, you can set clear expectations for formal communication in your building or district. You might include expected mediums of communication according to purpose (e.g. phone call if it's urgent — define urgent), response times by medium, and use of email scheduling tools, for example, to honor preferences.

Though my typewriter has long been buried, I hold an appreciation for the purpose it served and the speed with which it allowed me to write when compared to a pen and paper. Each generation has its "typewriter," and providing opportunities to share experiences and preferences builds connections and ultimately culture.

Call for Proposals: Annual Conference Promising Practices

Planning for SAI Conference 2025 is well underway! A significant part of the SAI Conference experience is our **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](#).

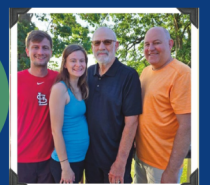
It's been SAId: Conversations on Leadership Podcast

In this episode of It's Been SAId, Dr. Lisa Remy talks with SAI's Associate Professional Learning Director Al Neppel. His role oversees the annual conference, which is held each August.

SAI will celebrate its 50th conference August 5-6, 2025. Listen to what members can expect at this milestone event.

[Listen to this and previously recorded episodes.](#)

Father/Son Iowa Superintendents
Featured in January 2025 AASA
School Administrator Magazine



Paul Gebel Named 2025 Middle School Principal of the Year



Paul Gebel, Denver Community School District middle school principal, has been named the 2024-25 Iowa Middle School Principal of the Year by School Administrators of Iowa (SAI).

"Paul exemplifies the heart of leadership in education. His unwavering dedication to fostering a supportive and dynamic learning environment at Denver Middle School has profoundly impacted students and staff. His commitment to collaboration, innovation, and student success makes him truly deserving of the Iowa Middle Level Principal of the Year recognition," said SAI Executive Director Dr. Lisa Remy.

Gebel has served as middle school principal for 21 years with Denver Community School District. Prior to that, he was a principal with Albert City-Truesdale Community School District for a year. He began his career as a business teacher and coach, first for Diagonal Community School District and then Emmetsburg Community School District.

A University of Northern Iowa graduate, Gebel received a bachelor's degree in business education. He then earned both a master's degree in education/effective teaching and his administrative endorsement from Drake University.

Denison Middle School Principal Patti Ryan was part of the selection committee and shared her perspective on Gebel. "Paul's leadership has helped earn the High Performing Performance Profile status at Denver Middle School. He is well deserving of this honor, and our committee was impressed with his dedication to his staff and students," she said.

One reference letter described Gebel as the cornerstone of their administrative team. "His experience as an administrator, and his tenure at our school, are valuable and are a great resource when making decisions. He has the amazing ability to make a comparison to a previous experience when making an important decision. He also has an outstanding understanding of how a decision will be received within the community."

Reflecting on the recognition, Gebel said, "I am deeply honored to be selected as the 2025 Iowa Middle School Principal of the Year by SAI. This award is a testament to the amazing educators, administrators, school board, students, and families that I have the privilege of working with every day. It's their passion, dedication, and support that make Denver Middle School a place where students thrive and prepare for success in the 21st century. Together, we have fostered an environment where students are encouraged to reach for their full potential, and I am grateful to be part of this journey."

Iowa's Administrator of the Year award recipients will be honored at SAI's 50th Annual Conference in August 2025.

SAI'S 50TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

50 years of Learning, Inspiration, & Innovation

August 5-7, 2025



HOTELS

Book your hotel now using SAI's room block discounts.



WHOVA APP

Download the WhoVA app for full agenda and engagement throughout the conference.



KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Dr. Jessica Minaham
Michael Bungay Stanier
Gregory Offner



REGISTRATION

Registration opens May 1, 2025.

SAI-IOWA.ORG/ANNUAL-CONFERENCE

Legislative Update, continued from page 6

- [HSB 5](#) — Would prohibit districts from serving food that contains certain ingredients.
- [HSB 46](#) — Defining grooming behavior. Adds building trust or emotional connections with a student for the purposes of exploitation to the definition of grooming behavior.
- [HSB 47](#) — School threat assessment teams. Requires public and private schools to create threat assessment teams to assess threats, to coordinate actions, and to intervene. Allows school districts to enter into agreements with other districts to create such teams. Authorizes the sharing of information and establishes civil immunity for persons who report information to teams.

The Senate Education Committee met on Thursday and passed the following bills to the floor:

- [SF 16](#) — This is a bill that assists one district with a dissolution timeline issue.
- [SSB 1022](#) — This allows some positions that are shared (operational sharing) to be exempt from the cap of 21. (SROs, social workers, and career counselors).
- [SSB 1023](#) — This bill attempts to provide clarity on activity participation for students that are in online schools.
- [SSB 1028](#) — This is the (slightly trimmed down) Baby Olivia bill from last session that would require certain types of videos to be used in instruction about pregnancy, etc.
- [SSB 1053](#) — 2% SSA for FY 26*****

The last one is the most important and disappointing. Their talking point is this is what the state can “afford” and is sustainable. We are hopeful that the House is able to propose a larger increase and get the Senate and Governor to agree.

There were also a large number of bills that went through a subcommittee. Here are some of the more important ones:

- [SSB 1030](#) — Civics test (same as HSB 30).
- [SSB 1036](#) — Another start date bill. Probably the best language of all of them.
- [HSB 44](#) — Requires districts to include career curriculum in 5th and 6th grade.
- [HF 60](#) — Addresses districts that have been hit by natural disasters and allows for budget adjustments.
- [HF 80](#) — Prevents consequences for staff or students if they use the wrong pronouns or salutation in addressing others.
- [SSB 1027](#) — Allows for teacher Recruitment and Retention policies and to use the Management Levy.

[SSB 1065](#) was also introduced. It is the Governor’s electronic device bill and also includes a requirement for instruction regarding the impact of social media.

It is possible/probable/likely.....that I missed some. Other than the Governor’s bill, these are just the ones that have had subcommittee review, so far.

If you have the opportunity, contact legislators with your concerns about 2% SSA. We appreciate that they have it moving quickly and hope they will settle it soon, but a number below the inflation rate and the CPI-U is not a good tradeoff for getting it done quickly.

Final Thought:

Seeing the student displays and interactions at the Day on the Hill this week helped me to remember our “why”. Why you do what you do, and why I do what I do. It’s about kids and the impact we can have on them, both directly and indirectly. It should be easy to remember that, but sometimes it isn’t. Thanks to all of you that were there and helped make it a great day.