



REPORT

Navigate the Digital Landscape with SAI's Expert Guidance: Your Website's Untapped Potential



As education leaders, you understand the critical role your website plays in connecting with parents, guardians, and the broader community. It's your digital front door, shaping perceptions and driving engagement. Yet, too often, these vital platforms fall short, leaving families frustrated and your district's story untold.

In today's era of school choice, your website isn't just a convenience; it's a competitive necessity. A [2022 Niche survey](#) revealed that 54% of families consider school websites the most influential engagement tool, surpassing even school visits and direct emails. Are you confident your site is making the right first impression?

Partner with SAI to Elevate Your Online Presence

Laine Buck, SAI's communication director, brings a wealth of expertise in website development and school public relations. She offers a **FREE, comprehensive website audit** to help you identify opportunities for improvement.

Before committing to costly upgrades, discover if your current site can be optimized or if a strategic redesign is the best path forward.

Unlock Your Website's Potential: Five Critical Questions to Ask

Audience-Centric Design

- Are you truly seeing your website through the eyes of your key audiences?
- Can they effortlessly find the information they need?

Data-Driven Insights

- Are you leveraging Google Analytics to understand user behavior?
- Are your top pages (lunch menus, schedules, staff directories) easily accessible?

Content That Connects

- Are you using compelling visuals (photos and videos of YOUR students) to tell your district's story?
- Are you speaking in clear, jargon-free language?

Up-to-Date Accuracy

- Is your website free of outdated information?
- Are you managing content to ensure relevance?

Authentic Representation

- Are you showcasing your students and community with genuine photos, fostering trust and connection?

Let SAI help you unlock your website's full potential. Contact Laine today to schedule your FREE website audit. Email lbuck@sai-iowa.org or call SAI at 515-267-1115.



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.

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Executive Director's Message from Lisa Remy



Building a Culture of Trust in School Leadership

I was recently asked to put together a presentation to the Iowa Principal Leadership Academy graduates regarding various leadership related topics. As I reflected on school leadership and what I want to share with the graduates, trust is one of the components that naturally came to mind.

I believe trust is the foundation of effective leadership. In education, where relationships with students, staff, parents/guardians, and the community are essential, building and maintaining trust is not just important—it's imperative. Several years ago I read the book, "[The Trust Edge](#)", by David Horsager and it emphasizes that trust is built through consistency, character, and competency. As school leaders, we must be intentional in cultivating trust daily to create strong, thriving school communities.

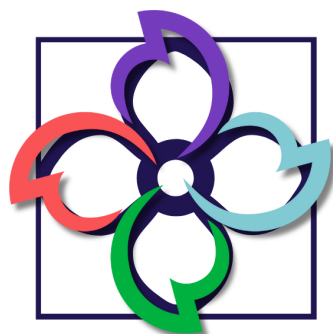
Horsager outlines eight pillars that drive trust. As school administrators, we can apply these principles to strengthen our leadership and organizational culture:

1. **Clarity** – Uncertainty breeds distrust. Clearly communicating expectations, goals, and decisions builds confidence among staff and stakeholders.
2. **Compassion** – People trust leaders who genuinely care. Taking the time to listen, show empathy, and invest in relationships fosters a positive school climate.
3. **Character** – Trust is earned by consistently demonstrating integrity, fairness, and ethical leadership in all decisions.
4. **Competency** – Staying informed about best practices, educational trends, and leadership strategies ensures credibility and confidence in decision-making.
5. **Commitment** – Following through on promises and demonstrating dedication to students and staff reinforces trust over time.
6. **Connection** – Strong relationships are the backbone of trust. Engaging with students, staff, and the community in meaningful ways fosters collaboration and support.
7. **Contribution** – Leaders who consistently add value, recognize others' efforts, and work toward solutions build trust within their schools.
8. **Consistency** – Trust is not built overnight. Consistently modeling the values and behaviors you expect from others strengthens credibility and reliability.

How can you as a school administrator put these principles into action? Consider these strategies:

- **Model transparency and honesty** in all communications, especially during times of change or challenge. Trust by definition is a combination of the person's character and competence. The leader needs to have these two character traits to build trust with their leadership team, transparency and honesty. Once the trust is built with your leadership team, it can flow outward to staff, parents and the community.
- **Foster a culture of appreciation** by recognizing and celebrating staff and student achievements.
- **Empower teachers and staff** by involving them in decision-making and valuing their input.
- **Maintain high expectations** for yourself and others, ensuring fairness and accountability.
- **Invest in personal and professional growth**, demonstrating a commitment to continuous learning.

continued on page 8



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

4:30 p.m. — Check-In
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

March

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

April

2: Take 30: Effective School Communications #1
10: Virtual Spring Legal Lab
15: In-Person Spring Legal Lab
16: Take 30: Effective School Communications #2
30: Take 30: Effective School Communications #3

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 March

5: [Great Prairie](#)

13: [Northwest](#)

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

In Memoriam

[Dr. Orville Dunkin](#), retired superintendent | Pella (02/20/2025)

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



Legal Vortex with Matt Carver, legal services director

Sex Offenders 101

I'm sure that there are many out there who also experience the dreaded "writer's block[.]" When it comes to writing, I was one of those college students who was motivated by the adrenaline associated with fear. I knew how much time it would take to do research and gather my notes, but wasn't sufficiently motivated to write until the fear of the deadline drew closer. This adrenaline rush brought clarity to my thinking and finally got me past the writing block.

Unfortunately, I have found that such a strategy is not appreciated quite as much when someone else needs to take receipt of your column so they can complete an entire newsletter! As such, I am doing my best to continue to grow as a colleague and writer. It has only taken me 19 years, but I'm a work in progress, so please continue to cut me a little slack. I'm sure the other procrastinators out there can appreciate this dilemma.

In any case, I finally got around to deciding that I would write my 170th column on sex offenders, so let's get started. This column could go on for many pages if I tried to address every issue, so I will cover those that seem most common with some questions and answers.

Student Sex Offenders

Are all students who commit sex offenses on the sex offender registry?

No. It is important to keep in mind that some minors commit sex offenses but are not placed on the sex offender registry. This is important to remember, as placement on the registry is what determines whether the code requirements in [Iowa Code §282.9](#) come into play when enrolling a student. Don't assume a student is on the registry. If in doubt, don't hesitate to contact your county sheriff. With this being said, school officials may still take reasonable steps to safeguard that student and others by instituting a safety plan for the student's attendance, which may relate to such things as passing time, location for attendance, and supervision.

What are the steps for enrolling a student who is on the sex offender registry?

Under [Iowa Code §282.9](#), a school district, through board action, must determine the educational placement of a student who is on the sex offender registry, pursuant to [Iowa Code Chapter 692A](#). Prior to board consideration, the agenda must specifically state that the board is considering the enrollment or educational placement of a student who is required to register as a sex offender under chapter 692A. If an individual is denied enrollment, the resident district shall provide education services, potentially in an alternative setting.

Are school districts required to accept student sex offenders under open enrollment?

No. While a district MAY enroll such a student, the resident district is the only district that is required to provide educational services.

What are some other common considerations regarding enrollment of a student sex offender?

Often, the student's victim also is enrolled in the same school district, and there may be a restraining order against the student. This will further impact the plan put in place, such as determining passing time, and whether the student may participate in certain classes or activities. Also, it is my experience that community knowledge of the crime might lead to a very difficult environment for the student to remain in the school building, and the officials and parents may wish to consider the benefits of educating in another setting or perhaps online, if that is possible. Of course, if the student has an IEP, this will also have to be considered when determining services and placement. However, the IEP does not trump a restraining order.

Adult Sex Offenders

Which sex offenders are impacted by Iowa's laws relating to schools?

Remember that all statutory restrictions apply to sex offenders who had offenses against a minor.

May we adopt policies that more severely restrict sex offenders, whether their offenses were against minors or individuals of majority age (18)?

No, schools must operate within the restrictions in Iowa Code and may not adopt additional policy restrictions relating to the presence of sex offenders on or around school property or events.

What are the statutorily required residency restrictions concerning sex offenders convicted of an offense against a minor?

"A sex offender shall not reside within two thousand feet of the real property comprising a school or a child care facility." ([Iowa Code §692A.114\(2\)](#))

continued on page 5

What are some common exceptions to the 2,000 foot residency restriction?

A few of the most common exceptions include:

1. an offender established their residence prior to July 1, 2002;
2. an offender established their residence prior to a newly located school or child care center; and
3. the sex offender is a minor. (Iowa Code §692A.114(3)(c)-(e))

What are the statutorily required exclusion zones concerning sex offenders convicted of an offense against a minor?

Such sex offenders may not be present upon or loiter within 300 feet of elementary or secondary school property without the written permission of the school administrator of their designee, unless the offender is enrolled as a student at the school. These same exclusions apply to child care facilities without the written permission of the child care facility administrator. Likewise, such sex offenders may not be present on a school vehicle. The exclusion zone further extends to public library, at school events outside of school property (e.g., bowling alleys or golf courses during school events), or other locations intended primarily for children (e.g., playgrounds, swimming pools, etc.) (Iowa Code §692A.113(1)(a)-(h)).

In addition to an enrolled student, what are some other exceptions to the exclusion zone for sex offenders convicted of an offense against a minor?

Other sex offenders who DO NOT require written permission to be present in an exclusion zone include:

1. an offender who has a previously established residence within the exclusion zone, while on that property or traversing to or from that property;
2. an offender who is a parent or legal guardian of a minor during the time reasonably necessary to transport the child to that school or child care facility; and,
3. an offender who is legally entitled to vote at that location solely for the period of time reasonably necessary to exercise their right to vote.

Does the transportation exception apply to grandparents, stepparents, or significant others of a parent or guardian who are on the sex offender registry for an offense against a minor?

No. Unless the adult is a parent or legal guardian, they must get written permission from the school administrator to transport the student to school, unless they drop the student off more than 300 feet from school property.

May parents or guardians who are sex offenders with a conviction against a minor wait in the car line, as other parents or guardians typically wait at many schools?

Yes, those parents may wait in their vehicle during that time when parents typically start waiting to pick up their students, but should wait in their vehicle while doing so, and not interact with other students.

May parents or guardians who are sex offenders with a conviction against a minor walk their student up to the school door when dropping off the student?

It depends. If the student is young and the school does not have adequate supervision outside of the school when the student is dropped off, then the parent or guardian may walk the student up to the door to ensure the student's safety. School administrators may reasonably consider if the parent or guardian is able to watch the child walk into the school from the sex offender's vehicle, as well as other circumstances regarding the student, such as the student having a permanent or temporary disability and requiring assistance.

Are school administrators required to provide written permission to a sex offender with a conviction against a minor if one of the statutory exceptions does not apply?

No. While it is common for school administrators to provide written permission in certain instances (e.g., activities, honor assemblies), school administrators are not required to do so under Iowa law.

May we place restrictions on sex offenders if we give written permission for them to be present on school property or at a school event under the school's authority?

Absolutely, I would encourage placing restrictions, such as: the offender checking in with an administrator or school official; utilizing restroom facilities prior to arrival; sitting in particular areas at activities, so they are easily supervised; taking a particular route while traversing to or from the event while on school property or at a school event; and, not interacting with other students unless in the presence of that student's parents/guardians or school officials).

May we restrict whether sex offenders serve as volunteers at the school or school event?

Yes. Even if the offender's offense was NOT against a minor, you always have authority to restrict who may serve as a volunteer, as long as you are not discriminating based upon a protected classification (e.g., race, sex, religion, ethnicity, etc.).

Okay, this is starting to get a little long. I know I didn't answer all of your questions. As always, I appreciate what you do for kids, and please don't hesitate to reach out with questions on this or other topics. Until next time, Go Cubs!

It's been SAId: Conversations on Leadership Podcast

In this episode of It's Been SAId, Dr. Lisa Remy talks with Olwein Community School District Superintendent Josh Ehn. He serves on the SAI Representative Council and has his referee certification.

Josh has been active in reaching out to the Boards of Control to bring to light the negative effects a classification system can have on the competitive nature of sports. Together, Lisa and Josh discuss this important topic impacting Iowa high school athletics.

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

In Brief

Representative Council February Highlights



- Approved Nov. 13, 2024 meeting minutes.
- Approved 2025 Annual Conference Exhibitor fee increase of \$5 to \$775.
- Approved addition to the office hours policy about additional office closure over winter break.
- Approved remote work guidelines to be included in an employee handbook.
- Government Relations Director Dave Daughton reported that there are 769 bills drafted and read in, with many more to come. Most of these bills are related to education. He asked members to submit comments to the public hearings regarding the current proposed SSA.
- Executive Director Lisa Remy addressed the following items from her report: joint Day on the Hill; fiscal year 2026 budget; district meetings; weekly meetings with IASB, ASEA, and AEA; AASA Conference in New Orleans; IDOE Finance Roundtable; Arts Alliance Advisory Board seat; IPLA; IHSADA potential collaboration; corporate partner updates; AEA superintendent meetings.
- Finance Director Debbie Wrenn announced that membership is currently at 2,217. She provided an update on the monthly financial report.
- Professional Learning Director Dana Schon updated the board on February mentoring meetings, discussed upcoming professional learning opportunities, including the Summer Leadership Accelerator, Take 30: Retention Revolution, and Every Leader a Coach. She also highlighted the Women in Educational Leadership conference scheduled for late March.
- Schon and Neppel then reviewed the recent and upcoming connections they have made including ASE PD group, 4ERL in Solon and Mt Vernon, Leadership-Life Fit with Perry Admin team, BASA Women's Group, IASB Collab, WASA AI Bot meeting, Every Leader a Coach, and the Aspiring School Administrators Workshop.
- Associate Professional Learning Director Al Neppel gave an overview of the conference agenda and speakers, hotel links, and reminded leaders that the RFP is still open for Promising Practices to those interested in presenting.
- Communications Director Laine Buck reminded General Administrators that the VP Election candidates need to be confirmed by the end of the week. She also mentioned that the Middle School and High School Principal of the Years have been named. Buck directed members to review and narrow the NAESP State Representative candidates to two finalists. She also said that information for District Officer election support will be coming in March. Buck was then very excited to reveal the new SAI brand refresh, including the new logo and brand colors.
- Legal Services Director Matt Carver noted that the SAI School Law Conference went well. He also mentioned that there have been a lot of recent calls about immigration considerations for schools. He encouraged members to reassure community members and remember that ICE has never had a raid on a school and immigration status is not something that schools keep on file.
- Carver informed members that IPERS is looking to hire a new Director and he would be a part of the interview process. He advised members to feel good about the fact that IPERS is currently 91% funded.

Legislative Notes

from Dave Daughton government relations director

We had another busy week at the Capitol in week seven of the legislative session. However there wasn't a lot of movement on some of our bigger issues. There was significant action on the Gender Protections and Sex Definitions bills that moved through both chambers, after a public hearing on Thursday. It remains to be seen how these bills will affect our school districts, assuming that the Governor signs the bill.

This week I had conversations with leadership in both chambers about the bigger topics, with no solid answers. We are still waiting on an SSA agreement and a subsequent TSS number, but that doesn't appear to be moving at the moment, with the Senate stuck on 2% SSA and the House asking for more. And, there has been no discussion that we are aware of on any change to the start date.

Next week is week eight, and Friday is the first **funnel date**. This is a preset date that requires bills to be passed out of the full committees in either the House or Senate. The purpose is to narrow down the bills and to focus the work of the legislators. However, remember that anything that takes an appropriation or impacts taxes is "funnel proof", which means they can still do it. Also, bills can still be added to other bills as amendments. The bottom line is that they can do just about whatever they want, even after the funnel date.

Here are the bills that moved this week.

Passed off of the Senate Floor

[SF 275](#) – **Purple Star School Initiative** by the DE – Passed, 41-0.

Passed out of the Senate Education Committee

– (Tuesday)

- [SF 8](#) – Bill that **prohibits disciplinary action** for not using preferred pronouns – passed 10-5.
- [SF 265](#) – **Creates a Conference realignment committee (for athletics)** – passed 15-0.

continued on page 7

- [SSB 1076](#) – **Reorganization and whole grade sharing** renewal for 5 years – passed 15-0.
- [SSB 1092](#) – w/amendment – Governor's **Math Bill** – Civics language was removed – requires DE to have the state math plan complete by July 1 – passed 10-4.
- [SSB 1100](#) – with amendment (**Governor's Omnibus**) TSS corrections/DCPP increase/ Transportation Equity funding/shorter student teaching for some/Allows for some reimbursement for out of state placement/allows schools to pay returning retired teachers \$50K – passed 15-0 – (Same as HSB 147).
- [SSB 1135](#) – Governors **Continuum of Care** bill (PK bill) – amendment clarifies that teachers in the new program must be certified – passed 10-5.

Passed out of the House Education Committee

– (Thursday)

- [HSB 147](#) **Governor's Omnibus** bill (TSS corrections – risk pool for out of state placement – Teach Iowa – IPERs limit for returning retirees, etc. – Passed 23-0.
- [HF 331](#) – Establishes a **Conference Realignment Committee** within athletic organizations – Passed 23-0. Same as SF 265.
- [HSB 105](#) – **Charter school** bill – amendment stripped concurrent enrollment portion out – passed 14-9.
- [HSB 137](#) – **Governor's Math** bill (Civics portion removed) – Passed 21-2 ([SSB 1092](#)).
- [HSB 108](#) – **Charter Schools** – TSS funds follow students to charters – Passed 14-9.
- [HSB 106](#) – **Phone and Device** bill – Amendment removed the mandated social media instruction piece – Passed 21-2.
- [HSB 155](#) – Prohibits **DEI programs and expenses** – Passed 16-7.

House HHS Committee

[HSB 145](#) – Governor's **Child Care Continuum** – Pre-K and more bill, amended to include language about teacher certification for new programs ([SSB 1135](#)).

House Public Safety Committee

[HSB 200](#) – Required firearm safety instruction in schools – Passed 18-4.

Subcommittees that were held this week

– (A reminder that you can go to [this site](#) and type the bill number into the box and search.)

- [HF 336](#) – Requires specific Holocaust instruction in Social Studies.
- [SSB 1172](#) – Regarding Certification Elections for collective bargaining.
- [SSB 1164](#) – Allows STEM courses for computer science credits.
- [SF 335](#) – Prohibits gender identity instruction and DEI and penalties.
- [HSB 220](#) – Concussion training every two years for coaches and officials.
- [HF 446](#) – OE deadline for virtual schools – Did NOT move out of subcommittee.

- [HF 334](#) – Allow districts to hire chaplains.
- [SSB 1056](#) – An IPERS bill that requires proxy votes, etc. (We have been told that this will not move on.)
- [HF 445](#) – Allows mid-year ESA enrollment.
- [HF 448](#) – Allowing Social Studies to include Bible study.
- [HSB 173](#) and [SSB 1158](#) – Nutrition instruction. A bill that could require major modifications for elementary and health content.
- [HSB 219](#) – Develops a “math path” for accelerating learners in upper elementary.
- [HSB 217](#) – Reduction in Force mandates.
- [SF 280](#) and [HSB 218](#) – Allows release time and academic credit for off-campus religious courses, with local board approval.
- [HF 221](#) – Limits Bond issuance to 80% of the total project cost.
- [SF 321](#) – Requires Athletic Association/Union to create a non-public enrollment multiplier.

Advocacy Points

- Advocate for 2.25% SSA, as well as all of the items in the House bill, and remind them that budget season is here and we need the numbers.
- Continue to advocate for additional work on the preschool issue.
- Advocate for any legislation that would help us with hiring of staff.
- Discuss what appears to be a constant “deluge” of education bills that require more from our schools. We need less, not more, when it comes to mandates or curricular offerings, and the opposite is true regarding resources.

Final Thought

Actually I have two this week.

1. The bullet above about the “deluge”. In a polite way, talk to your legislators about the massive numbers of bills that ask for schools to do more. Most don't replace other tasks, they just add to them. Talk to them about the challenges you have with items being added to an already overflowing plate.
2. I'm optimistic that we will see a large decrease in bills being proposed after next week, and we will have a chance to focus on some very important issues. Hang in there.

Building trust aligns closely with Franklin Covey's 4 Essential Roles of Leadership: Inspire Trust, Create Vision, Execute Strategy, and Coach Potential. As school leaders we must first inspire trust by demonstrating character and competence and foster an environment where staff and students feel safe and supported. This article, [Three Daily Leadership Habits That Build High-Trust Relationships](#), provides some insight as to actions you can take to build trust. Creating a clear vision establishes direction and purpose, ensuring that everyone is aligned toward a shared mission. Successful leaders then execute strategies with clarity and discipline, ensuring follow-through on initiatives that drive meaningful outcomes. Finally, by coaching potential, you can develop and empower others, reinforcing a culture of trust where teachers and students can thrive.

Trust is not built in a day, but it can be lost in a moment. By prioritizing trust in leadership, you can create schools where people feel safe, valued, and empowered to achieve their best.

What steps will you take today to strengthen trust in your leadership?

Nominations Open for 2026 Administrators of the Year

Celebrate educational leadership with Iowa's Administrator of the Year awards which recognize educators who are making a difference and have demonstrated dedication, leadership and innovation to improve education.

The awards also serve to spotlight student, faculty, staff and community contributions to the school or district, and the great things happening in Iowa schools overall.

Eight Award Categories

- Arts Administrator
- Assistant Elementary Principal
- Assistant Secondary Principal
- Central Office Administrator (includes AEA directors)
- Elementary Principal
- Middle School Principal
- High School Principal
- Superintendent (includes AEA chiefs)

[Learn more and nominate a deserving colleague >](#)

Administrator of the Year Highlight: Middle School AOY Paul Gebel

We [announced in January](#) that Paul Gebel, Denver Community School District middle school principal, was named the 2024-25 Middle School Administrator of the Year by School Administrators of Iowa. To get to know him better, read his response to the following question.

What are the best ways that leaders can support other leaders, whether within the same organization or different organizations?

"Leadership is not an independent endeavor, it thrives on collaboration, mentorship, and shared experiences. I recognize the importance of supporting fellow leaders, both within and beyond my organization. Effective leadership supports growth, resilience, and innovation in our schools and communities. Here are some of the best ways leaders can support one another:

Foster Meaningful Mentorship – Providing mentorship to emerging and experienced leaders helps build confidence and competence. Whether through formal mentorship programs or informal relationships, leaders benefit from having trusted individuals who offer guidance, share experiences, and provide encouragement.

Encourage Open Dialogue and Collaboration – Leaders should create opportunities for conversations about challenges, successes, and areas of growth. Collaboration across schools and districts promotes shared solutions and best practices, benefiting students and staff alike.

Provide Support During Challenges – Leadership comes with its share of difficulties, and having a strong network of peers to offer perspective, encouragement, and problem-solving strategies is invaluable. Leaders should make themselves available to support colleagues during times of challenges.

Celebrate and Recognize Achievements – Recognizing and celebrating the accomplishments of fellow leaders boosts morale and reinforces a culture of excellence. Public acknowledgement, handwritten notes, or a simple congratulatory message can go a long way in strengthening professional relationships.

Promote Lifelong Learning – Encouraging professional growth through workshops, leadership conferences, and continuing education empowers leaders to stay ahead of emerging trends and best practices. On-going learning fosters continuous improvement and change.

By embracing these principles, leaders can create a network of mutual support that not only strengthens individual leadership but also enhances the educational experiences of students and staff. Leadership is a journey best traveled together, and through collective effort, we can inspire meaningful and lasting change."



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.

Nicole Roder Named 2025 High School Principal of the Year

Nicole Roder, Rock Valley Community Schools high school principal, has been named the 2024-25 Iowa High School Principal of the Year by SAI.

"Nicole exemplifies the power of leadership in building a positive and inclusive school culture. Her dedication to fostering strong relationships among staff, students, and families creates an environment where everyone feels valued, supported, and inspired to succeed." said SAI Executive Director Dr. Lisa Remy.

Roder has served as a high school principal with Rock Valley Community Schools since 2009. Prior to that, she taught high school Spanish and coached for West Central Valley Community Schools from 1997-2009. A University of Northern Iowa graduate, Roder received a bachelor's degree in education. She then earned a master's degree in education from Viterbo University.

Mediapolis Middle/High School Principal Roger Thornburg was part of the selection committee and shared why the committee believed Roder was deserving of this recognition. "Nicole's passion for students,

exceptional leadership, commitment to academic excellence, and innovation stood out. Her resilience in navigating the challenges caused by the 2024 flood that hit Rock Valley was impressive as she helped ensure a successful school year, fostering both recovery and continued success for her students and staff," he said.

One reference letter described Roder's resiliency. "A couple of her most admirable qualities are her passion for learning and a resilient nature. Nicole approaches challenges with courage and a positive attitude, striving to overcome obstacles and grow from every experience. Her learning agility allows her to adapt to new situations and acquire new skills."

Reflecting on the recognition, Roder said, "This is such a tremendous honor to represent all secondary principals. I am truly only as good as the people I surround myself with, so I am deeply grateful to my staff, my students, parents, admin team, and my family. This job has absolutely been my calling, and I will continue to work hard for Rock Valley and the educators in our state to lead with excellence."