



REPORT

You Know The Difference You Make, Principals! *Taking Time to Celebrate YOU*

Each October, we enthusiastically celebrate our principals across the state of Iowa, and while we don't just acknowledge the hard work you do during these 31 crisp, October days, we want to make sure YOU understand the difference you make.

Because the decisions we make are so closely aligned with data, we thought we'd have some fun with a data-driven approach to why you are so awesome!

In a February 2024 National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) [article](#), author Kaylen Tucker summarized a report from a 2021 Wallace Foundation study on principals' effectiveness. The study gathered data from over two decades and determined that an effective principal's influence impacts far more than just academic achievement. "Effective principals build a productive school climate, facilitate collaboration, guide teachers on instruction, and manage school personnel and resources strategically," noted Tucker.

But you already know you have the opportunity to positively influence the direction of your school.

How do you do it?

[The Wallace Study](#) outlined four behaviors of effective principals:

- "Focusing their work with teachers on instruction.
- Building a productive school climate.
- Forging collaboration and professional learning among teachers and others.
- Managing personnel and resources well."

In addition to the behavior that impacts student achievement, the study also noted links between highly-effective principals and the training and professional development they prioritize. SAI's entire mission revolves around supporting, encouraging, and developing you as leaders. You not only have your peers as a support system — you have us.

In the 100+ page [Wallace Foundation report](#), their findings stated nearly 80% of principals previously served in an assistant principal role. SAI intentionally develops professional learning to help principals who are new to administration. Our Mentoring and Induction program pairs new administrators with seasoned SAI members in a similar role. This program, along with dozens of other learning opportunities, is developed with intention. If we can be part of your network of support to help you do your job more effectively, then we've done OUR job, too.

American Federation of
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NASSP
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Executive Director's Message from Lisa Remy



Smartphones: Deciding Best Practices to Support Student Health and Academic Success

How old were you when you received your first cell phone? I may be dating myself, but I was in my twenties before cell phones became readily accessible to most consumers. Things are vastly different today.

In a December 2023 article by [Consumer Affairs](#), most youth have their own cell phone by the age of 15, and the average age of receiving their first phone is 11. In today's world, cell phones almost equally translate to the term "smartphones" because very few phones now manufactured and sold are limited to just phone call or text capabilities.

The article goes on to share that socio-economic status has little impact on students having access to smartphones, unlike other electronic devices. As district and school leaders, this means the majority of your middle and high school students are most likely carrying a smartphone to school each day.

This may not come as a surprise to you because school leaders have been struggling with this topic for years, but now conversations are leaning towards whether schools should consider restricting phone use during the school day. I've received several phone calls on this topic as leaders want to understand if changes in legislation will create guardrails or if districts will need to decide independently what they want their policies and/or practices to be.

Through those conversations, I was introduced to [The Anxious Generation](#) by Jonathan Haidt. I felt compelled to read it and explore the latest research. The book challenged my thinking in many ways, and this month, I wanted to share some key insights with you. Two major takeaways stood out:

1. The profound impact of phone use on our young people.
2. The pressing need to foster more opportunities for face-to-face interactions.

Given the growing number of questions I've received about phone use in schools, this has become my primary area of focus for this column.

One of the challenges you all face is how to effectively address student mental health while balancing technological advancement. The insights found in [The Anxious Generation](#) points to the role smartphones and social media play in increasing anxiety among students. As school leaders, it is imperative that we reflect on the implications of this reality and consider how creating thoughtful cell phone policies can positively impact student well-being.

[The Anxious Generation](#) dives deep into the unique struggles of today's youth, particularly their heightened anxiety levels and how smartphones are a major contributor. Some notable reasons include:

- constant interruption with notifications;
- pressure to maintain a certain image on social media and frequency of need to post;
- difficulty unplugging which can impact sleep and focus;
- decreased face-to-face interactions which impedes developing meaningful relationships.

For administrators, this raises an essential question: What role should schools play in mitigating these effects? Schools have long been seen as safe spaces where students can learn and grow. Now, they must also be places where students can disconnect from the stressors of the digital world. Updated cell phone policies offer a potential solution.

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Varied Solutions

I don't believe there is a one-size-fits-all approach to managing cell phone use in schools. However, the policies and practices we implement must strike a balance between embracing technology as a tool for learning and creating boundaries that foster a healthy learning environment. Some schools have taken a bold step, opting for complete bans during the school day, requiring students to leave their phones in lockers or designated areas. Others have instituted designated times when devices are off-limits.

These policies can be controversial, but the data speaks for itself, according to Haidt. Schools that have implemented more restrictive phone policies often see improvements in student engagement, a decrease in classroom distractions, and, perhaps most importantly, a reduction in student-reported anxiety. This aligns with the core message of *The Anxious Generation*: when students are not connected to their devices, they have more space to think, reflect, and engage meaningfully with their peers and learning.

However, a strong cell phone policy is just the first step. SAI will be sharing more this fall on resources for helping students navigate the digital landscape in a healthy way. By integrating lessons on digital citizenship, schools can teach students the skills they need to manage their online presence, regulate screen time, and develop healthy relationships with technology.

As school leaders, we have a responsibility to create environments where students can thrive, not just academically, but emotionally as well. By carefully considering how cell phone use contributes to the overall school climate and addressing these issues with thoughtful policies, we can make a real impact. While we cannot shield students from every stressor, we can take steps to reduce the anxiety linked to constant connectivity and create a more focused, mindful learning experience.

If you have not had a chance to read the book, you can find a summary of the book, [*The Anxious Generation*](#), in our most recent Main Idea issue.



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Upcoming Events

October

- 3: CATCHLIFE30 October Challenge Begins
- 7: IASBO/SAI Activities Conference Short Stack #3
- 10-11: Executive Leaders Meeting
- 11: SAI Women in Leadership Masterminds Group
- 15: Legal Lab (virtual)
- 17: Statewide Mentoring Meeting (varied times based on role)
- 22: Every Leader a Coach
- 24: Legal Lab (face-to-face)
- 25: SAI Women in Leadership Masterminds Group
- 30-31: Four Essential Roles of Leadership

November

- 5: The Four Disciplines of Execution (4DX)
- 7: CATCHLIFE30 November Challenge Begins
- 7: Facilitating Awareness and Assistance Plans within a Supportive, Civil, and Professional Culture
- 8: SAI Women in Leadership Masterminds Group
- 14: Statewide Mentoring Meeting for Superintendents, Middle School/Secondary Principals
- 19: Statewide Mentoring Meeting for Elementary and Assistant Principals
- 22: SAI Women in Leadership Masterminds Group

In Memoriam

[Jill Greiman](#)

middle school principal
Carroll (09/22/24)

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
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Legal Vortex
with Matt Carver, legal services director

Increased Student Behavior and Discipline In First Few Weeks of School Year

Holy full moon, Batman! Students are keeping school administrators busy in Iowa!

I'm unsure if student misbehavior is connected to moon cycles, the barometric pressure, or just certain periods in the school calendar, but my phone has been busy with student discipline calls. As such, let's take this opportunity to cover some of the topics from my recent calls, as well as some other fan favorites from over the years.

Enrollment of Students Under Expulsion or Suspension from Another School

Under [Iowa Code §282.4](#), if a student is under suspension or expulsion from their previous school, they may not be enrolled in an Iowa school district without prior approval from the school board. This only applies when enrolling into a new school district that the student did not previously attend. It does not clarify if the suspension or expulsion needed to occur at another Iowa school, whether public or nonpublic.

Consequently, students under expulsion or suspension from in-state or out-of-state schools, whether public or nonpublic, require approval from the school board prior to enrollment. The board would need to go into closed session to discuss this matter prior to voting on the student's enrollment in open session.

FERPA and Video of Student Misbehavior

Are we required to allow parents/guardians to view video of a student fight or some other misbehavior which is the reason for a student's discipline? It depends. I know you're probably thinking, "Thanks a lot Matt, we appreciate ALL of your help!"

Be patient...I'm going somewhere with this. If the school is not relying on video to discipline, but instead has ample eye witnesses and statements, preferably including a staff member, then there is no reason to utilize the video as part of the disciplinary proceeding. This is also true if you have a confession or admission from the student being disciplined. In those situations, when the video is not being utilized as evidence, the parents/guardians do not have a right to view the video.

However, when the school IS utilizing the video as evidence, parents/guardians may visit the school and watch the portion of the video being used to discipline their student. Note that I said "portion of the video being used to discipline their student." They do not have a right to watch the entire fight or incident of student behavior for those portions which are NOT a basis for their student's discipline.

Another question on this subject may be if you are able to use video taken on a student's phone as the basis for discipline of other students, such as during an altercation or vandalism of the school. While it is certainly preferable to use school surveillance video or witness statements, it is permissible for school officials to use video or photos from students as evidence during a disciplinary proceeding. Often, a student recording the video was also violating district policy by the act of capturing a fight or other misbehavior through videos or photos. While the manner in which the media was captured may be inappropriate, it does not prevent the school from using it as evidence during a student disciplinary proceeding. School officials should obtain a copy of the video, photo, or audio, and then ensure the media is deleted from the student's phone.

Are we required to allow parents/guardians to see or hear media captured by a student? Perhaps. However, this time there is an additional caveat. There may be occasions during which the sharing of the video will identify the student who recorded or captured the media, and they are concerned about reprisal or being cast as a snitch. In these situations, school officials may make a written description of what is observed on the video and share that written description with the parents/guardians, explaining the need to maintain the confidentiality of the source. On other occasions, there may have been so many students who had their phones out that it would be nearly impossible to identify the source of the video. If that is the case, and the video is being used as evidence in a discipline proceeding, then it may be watched by the parents/guardians.

Another FERPA Reminder

This should go without saying, but you are unable to provide information regarding a student's discipline to other families or the community. I'm aware that many families become quite demanding, wanting to know what discipline you may have or may have not delivered to a particular student.

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Having shared this, it is ethical to share that a student will not be present in a particular class under circumstances in which a family may have obtained a restraining order, or when there has been direct conflict between two students. You are not sharing why the student will not be in class, but simply that they will not be in a classroom for a period of time. Similar to the last example, it is also okay to generally mention that a student was removed from the building, or something to that effect, when you feel the need to give a press or community communication regarding an instance of violence, possession of weapons, or similar, disruptive threats. Do not include the gender, age, or other information about that student that would identify them. Simply stating that a student was removed would suffice.

Escalating Discipline and Reports of Threats and Violence

With all of the discussion of chronic absenteeism, please don't forget requirements from 2023's [HF 604](#). Just so you read it directly from the DE, I have included below some of the most pertinent provisions from the DE's guidance regarding HF 604.

. . . These model policies are intended to support a school district and charter school in meeting the requirements of new Iowa Code section 279.79A and in developing policies for different grade levels that describe how a school district or charter school may discipline a student for making a threat of violence or causing an incident of violence that results in injury or property damage or assault. Districts are required to:

- Publish the district policy on the district website (2023 Iowa Acts, chapter 96 (House File 604), sec. 7, new section 279.79A).
- Provide each parent or guardian with a copy of the policy and require the parent or guardian acknowledge receipt of the policy in writing or electronically (2023 Iowa Acts, chapter 96 (House File 604), sec. 8).

. . . In the case of any threat of violence or incident of violence that results in injury, property damage or assault by a student, the teacher will report to the school principal or lead administrator within 24 hours of the incident. The principal or lead administrator will notify the parent or guardian of the student(s) who threatened or perpetrated an act of violence and the student(s) who the threatened or perpetrated act of violence was made against within 24 hours after receipt of the teacher's report and complete an investigation of the incident as soon as possible. The classroom teacher may also notify the parent or guardian of the student who made the threat or caused the incident, and the parent or guardian of the student against whom the threat or incident was directed (2023 Iowa Acts, chapter 96 (House File 604), sec. 4).

Reference the full DE guide, including its [model policies](#).

While some form of escalating discipline policy is required under HF 604, I encourage administrators and other school officials to remember that you are not robots. While you should consider the age of the students involved, and the particular facts in each situation, you are not required to follow the steps in the policy in some rote manner. Process, policies, and procedures are absolutely important, as is consistent application of discipline, but some behavior will reasonably call for you to skip one of the levels in your escalating discipline policy due to the severity of certain behavior. Likewise, other mitigating circumstances might lead you to not discipline a student at all.

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As one final observation regarding HF 604, while the administration SHOULD NOT prohibit a teacher from communicating a threat of violence or actual violence to parents or guardians, it is perfectly acceptable to require teachers to communicate with the building administration prior to contacting parents/guardians. Likewise, it is perfectly appropriate for the administration to offer to teachers that you are willing to deliver that communication to parents/guardians on the teacher's behalf. Again, teachers have a statutory right to communicate with parents regarding threats and violence if they choose, but we can probably all agree that this information is best delivered by the school administration so communications are consistent regarding threats or violence in different classrooms in the same building.

As usual, I may have created some additional questions with this column, but hopefully I provided a good deal of answers and guidance as well. Feel free to reach out with any questions.

Stay well out there! Go Irish!

Legislative Notes

from Dave Daughton, government relations director

As of this writing, it's beginning to look and feel a lot more like Fall. Enjoy the weather and the seasonal changes.

Speaking of changes, a bigger one announced in the news within the past few weeks was the [resignation](#) of Lieutenant Governor Adam Gregg. We are told that the Governor will appoint a replacement soon, but it could also be after the election. This decision could impact education legislation, depending on who is appointed because it may be a sitting legislator. We simply need to wait and see what unfolds in the coming weeks.

I would encourage you (if you haven't already) to take a look at the DE links in last month's [Legislative Notes](#) regarding Chronic Absenteeism, Reading Plans, Content and Curriculum Review committees, and more. Some of this information, rolled out by the DE, has escaped the attention of some administrators due to the flurry of activity and priorities surrounding the beginning of a school year. Please carve out time to dig into this information soon.

There has been some slight movement on the AEA Task Force that was mandated by [HF 2612](#) last spring. The House has posted openings for the committee positions mentioned in the law. However, the Legislative Committee has yet to meet. This Task Force is charged with creating a report for the legislature by the end of December. We are hopeful that districts will then be able to understand and share the impact of the new AEA law, which can also help districts with future decision-making.

As mentioned last month, the **SAI Legislative Committee** is on track to meet and develop the Legislative Priorities for SAI so that they can be used as guidance for our advocacy prior to and during the upcoming session. I'll share more in my November update.

The general election is now just over a month away and we all have the "pleasure" of seeing the countless commercials as well as our mailbox filling with print ads. And while we may get frustrated with the process, it is still the best form of government that has ever existed, in my opinion. You and I both know the election results will impact education legislation, so I encourage you to get involved, from the standpoint of a citizen and a voter.

In the meantime (and after the election), many of you should still be reaching out to make connections with your legislators. Ask to meet with them and get to know them. Share how your schools operate, and invite them into your buildings. Look over [this document](#) that we developed last year, and contact us with any questions. Our "unofficial" goal is to get ALL legislators into a school building before or during the legislative session. The sooner the better.

As always, if you have specific questions feel free to contact me. I'll do my best to help.



In Brief

September Rep Council Highlights

- Joni Klemesrud from Horace Mann, a SAI Platinum Corporate Partner, discussed the company's services and benefits.
- 2023-24 annual video was shown.
- Annual review of Conflict of Interest Policy and reminder to sign and send back to Lisa Remy.
- Overview of district meetings; council members selected dates and times on a spreadsheet.
- Dave Daughton's legislative update highlighted the upcoming legislative session. He reminded members to save the dates of Jan. 27-28 for Day on the Hill.
- Lisa Remy's executive director report included information on New Administrator Institutes, annual conference, United NAESP/NASSP Conference, IPLA, strategic plan, Day on the Hill Save the Date, Executive Leaders, district visits, School Leaders Nurturing Well-Being, UNI Principal Prep program, Dr. Shawn Datchuk, and an IASB Board presentation.
- Debbie Wrenn provided an updated report on membership and gave a financial report.
- Al Neppl said SAI has 130 new leaders in the mentoring program and explained how his role will primarily be in charge of planning the annual conference. He also shared data from survey results regarding the 2024 conference and asked the council to break into small groups to review information and provide feedback.
- Laine Buck introduced herself and asked members for feedback on what other communication services SAI could provide. She also shared that October is Principal's Month. She provided an update on the Administrator of the Year awards and the usage of SAI's Career Center.
- Matt Carver provided legal updates on the topics of absenteeism and how it can be recorded; open enrollment deadlines, and IPERS funds.
- Rick Varney highlighted the 2024 United with NAESP conference and shared the 2025 dates for next year's conference.
- NASSP and AASA representatives did not provide reports.



The Latest in Learning with Dana Schon, professional learning director

What Are YOUR Audacious Goals for 2024-25?

Have you asked yourself the question, “How will I grow professionally this year?” I don’t mean the learning you’ll do alongside staff so that you can provide coaching and support, although that is important. I mean, have you seriously considered how YOU will be intentional around your growth this year? What specific goal or goals do you have and how will you know you’re making progress throughout the year?

You might say that you’re constantly learning, and I know that you are! Maybe you skim [The Marshall Memo](#) each week and your curiosity pushes you deeper into those articles that really resonate. Perhaps you read the book summaries from [The Main Idea](#) we send out monthly. Or, maybe you keep abreast of educational issues through your national journals and magazines.

However, what I’d like to explore is the difference between coincidentally gaining insight and applying learning versus carving out time and space to design your own growth and development. I wonder if after so many years of experience, you risk plateauing in a sense with a random approach. The reading starts to affirm what you already know with a new nugget here or there. What then? That’s where intentionally focusing on how you can measurably improve in a specified time period makes all the difference.

“A professional is someone who is capable of managing their own improvement.” — Atul Gwande

This question comes from my own recent reflection on a comment by famous surgeon Atul Gwande in his [2017 TEDTalk](#), “A professional is someone who is capable of managing their own improvement.” Gwande explains that professionals feel responsible for their own learning and development; they believe once they complete their formal education, they “make their own way.” In school leadership, this might look like reading and reflecting.

I don’t know the origin of such thinking or the history that has shaped this mental model, but it has been my experience both as a student and as an educator. We strive to create agency and habits of thinking and learning in our PK-12 students so they don’t need us; we celebrate when they can learn independently.

We as lead learners in our respective roles exemplify this independent learning. I agree that being adept at different forms of thinking and capable of learning on one’s own is critical; however, to stop there falls short of addressing what it takes to improve. Improvement requires learning, growing, AND developing in one’s respective career.

Let me share an example. I can be reading, learning, and refining my thinking, but does that consistently result in ongoing professional improvement? How is that evidenced? Giving purpose to the reading through goal setting is a start.

Here are a few questions you can ask yourself:

- What significant change do I want to make in my leadership this year?
- What goal captures that?
- What are one to two behaviors or activities that I can influence that will lead to that improvement?
- How will I track these behaviors or activities every week or so? Who will keep me accountable?

These questions come from the Franklin Covey Four Disciplines of Execution and can serve you well in knowing where you are in your improvement journey and whether you’ll get where you intend to go by the date you’ve set, or if some adjustments may be in order.

The last Discipline — accountability — can easily be overlooked in leadership. Who can both support and challenge you along your journey? A leadership coach. Partnering with a coach can help you keep focused on your goals and surface strategies and practices for achieving them. We are excited at SAI to have trained individuals ready to help you take that next step. [Learn more](#) about how by investing in yourself, you can ultimately invest in others. Set yourself up to achieve your most audacious leadership goals in 2024-25!

Coach..... and Be Coached

Sign up at lead.sai-iowa.org/events

Every Leader a Coach

Oct. 22 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the SAI office in Clive

Effective, impactful leadership is synonymous with skilled coaching. This program emphasizes the critical role of feedback and coaching in building staff capacity and achieving school improvement goals.

Participants will learn practical strategies and techniques to enhance their coaching abilities, fostering a culture of continuous improvement, and professional growth. Through engaging activities, real-world scenarios, role play, and reflective practices, attendees will hone their skills to provide meaningful feedback, build capacity of staff, and drive positive change within their schools.

Join us to elevate your leadership impact and empower your team with the coaching skills necessary for sustained success and school excellence.

Facilitators: Al Neppi and Dr. Dana Schon, SAI

SAI Leadership Coaching Program

The SAI Leadership Coaching Program is an individualized coaching partnership between a building principal or district-level leader and their SAI coach established for the purpose of unlocking potential and jointly achieving prioritized personal and organizational goals. Your SAI Coach will partner with you in a thought-provoking and creative process that helps you break through barriers and focus on the actions necessary to achieve your desired results as a leader. Working with your coach, you can expect to enhance your leadership skills, amplify your impact, and foster sustainable change within your building or district.

The SAI Leadership Coaching Program includes six, 12 or 18 one-hour coaching sessions. Sessions will be conducted either virtually or via phone depending on the participant's preference.

Learn more online at

<https://www.sai-iowa.org/leadership-coaching>



It's been SAId: Conversations on Leadership Podcast

In the latest episode, SAI Executive Director Lisa Remy interviews CATCHLIFE30 Founder Rick Schupbach.

Get to know more about the CATCHLIFE30 program and how it supports administrator wellness.

He also shares some success stories and the biggest hurdles administrators face when starting a wellness program. [Listen to this and previously recorded episodes.](#)