

The United

Voice



United Teachers
OF WICHITA

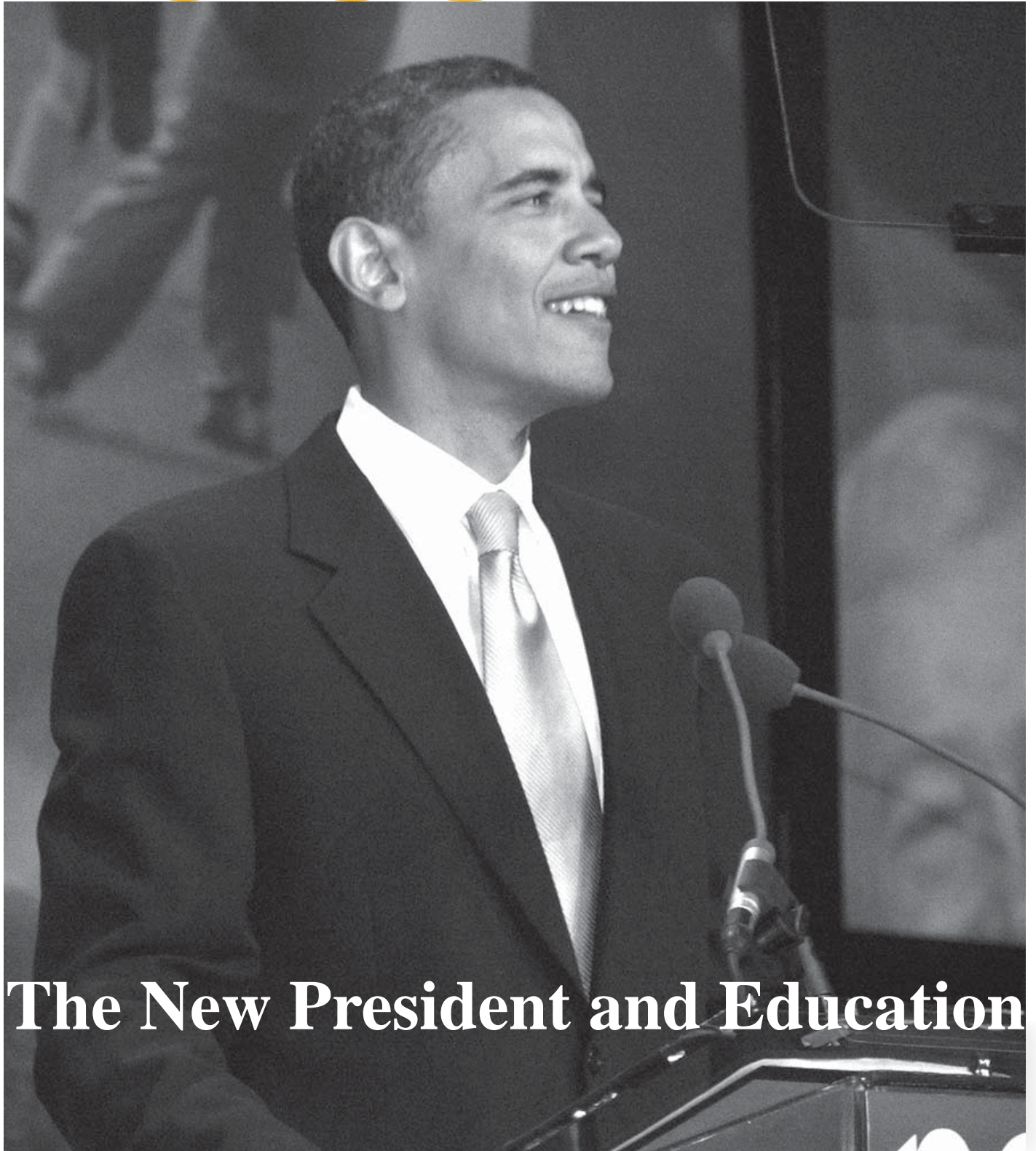
Creating Tomorrow Together

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The New President and Education

Evaluation Committee Begins Work

By Larry Landwehr, UTW Vice President

The 2008-2009 Negotiated Agreement included a Memorandum of Understanding which “establishes a committee whose function shall be to bring to the negotiating teams for the 2009-2010 negotiations sessions recommendations concerning the adoption and implementation of an evaluation system for District teachers.” The committee has fourteen members appointed by UTW and Administration with two co-chairs*.

Andrew Davis
Connie Foster
Larry Landwehr*
Randy Mousley
Mandy Pilla
DeLynne Osborne
Terri Ruland

Anne Clemons
Terrell Davis
Bruce Deterding
Neil Guthrie
Ed Raymond*
Denise Seguire
Mary Whiteside

The committee has already met in September and October and is scheduled to meet monthly in order to create a final report by February 15, 2009. A Concept Statement has been developed and approved by all members of the committee.

Our task is twofold: first, to develop and recommend an evaluation tool for teachers that consistently and accurately assesses the quality of a teacher’s performance in a manner that encourages significant professional growth, and second, to ensure*

this consistency and accuracy by providing adequate training in the evaluation process and insisting on high levels of accountability for all stakeholders.

Specifically, this evaluation tool will

- *Improve/support quality instruction as defined by the Danielson model*
- *Efficiently and effectively document performance*
- *Establish trust through open, honest and meaningful communication*
- *Encourage self-reflection*
- *Provide adequate resources, and*
- *Be easily adapted to different job descriptions,*

so that as a district we strengthen professional compliance with state statute, improve the quality of instruction for students, strengthen teaching as a profession, and celebrate student learning and achievement.

** Teachers shall refer to all positions covered under the Teachers Employment Agreement*

Members of the committee have researched and reviewed sample evaluation tools from other districts in the state and nation. Some members attend a conference on evaluations and shared the information with the committee. Much work and discussion is still ahead for the committee as it works toward its goal of creating a useful tool that meets all the requirements stated in the concept statement and is ready for the final report.

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Keith Welty, Editor

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Get To Know

Jeff Wiggins, South High School

Jeff Wiggins teaches at South High School. In these days of DCAs, NCLB, restructuring and all of the other issues aimed at student test scores, Jeff does something different. He teaches students to work with sheet metal. He teaches students work skills and prepares them for a career.

Jeff is the Coordinator for the Wichita KS Sheet Metal Local 29 Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committee. He teaches kids the basic skills and knowledge about working with sheet metal in the heating and air conditioning market. For students who go through the classes, they can enter the apprenticeship program after school. That program has the student working on the job for 40

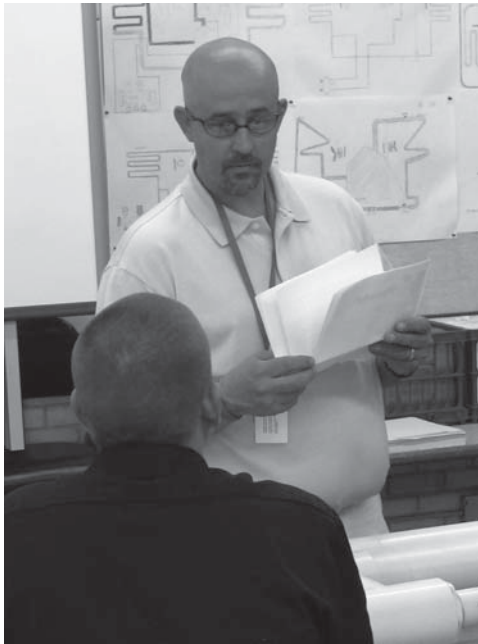
hours a week at \$14.43 per hour. They also attend classes two nights a week and most Saturdays. When they complete the program, usually four years, they will be fully certified and will begin earning \$26.35 per hour.

Jeff knows that not all kids are bound for college. It is also evident that one of the fastest growing job areas is in service, such as heating/air conditioning. The classes he teaches include Skill Mechanical Crafts, Sheet Metal Plumbing, and Refrigeration.

In addition to the skills they learn, students also have the opportunity to earn some money. There is a summer intern program that pays \$8 per hour, mostly for juniors.

While much of the job of dealing with vents and sheet metal is hands-on, computers play a bigger role than one might imagine. When designing a job for a work site, computers analyze the requirements for the job and determine the most efficient way to cut the pieces needed out the sheets of metal. The computer table utilizes a plasma cutter to do its work.

When dealing with plumbing, the students learn about volume, stress, and many other factors. Jeff spent twenty-two years in the industry before turning to teaching at South. The students have a teacher who has



Jeff Wiggins talks with a student about his designs in Pipe Fitting Class at South HS.

significant real-life work experience to go along with the teaching he does in his courses.

When talking with Jeff, it is obvious he really likes teaching the kids skills they can use to earn a very good living. But he also acknowledges that it can be tough for a student to choose his courses. They are electives, and with all of the graduation requirements these days, he competes with music, art, technology, and all of the other electives kids can choose from.

He does have one advantage, though. Few other classes prepare a student to begin earning a wage right out of high school.

* * * *

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Barack Obama's Education Plan

Early Childhood Education

- **Zero to Five Plan:** The Obama-Biden comprehensive “Zero to Five” plan will provide critical support to young children and their parents. Unlike other early childhood education plans, the Obama-Biden plan places key emphasis at early care and education for infants, which is essential for children to be ready to enter kindergarten. Obama and Biden will create Early Learning Challenge Grants to promote state “zero to five” efforts and help states move toward voluntary, universal pre-school.
- **Expand Early Head Start and Head Start:** Obama and Biden will quadruple Early Head Start, increase Head Start funding and improve quality for both.
- **Affordable, High-Quality Child Care:** Obama and Biden will also provide affordable and high-quality child care to ease the burden on working families.

K-12

- **Reform No Child Left Behind:** Obama and Biden will reform NCLB, which starts by funding the law. Obama and Biden believe teachers should not be forced to spend the academic year preparing students to fill in bubbles on standardized tests. He will improve the assessments used to track student progress to measure readiness for college and the workplace and improve student learning in a timely, individualized manner. Obama and Biden will also improve NCLB's accountability system so that we are supporting schools that need improvement, rather than punishing them.
- **Support High-Quality Schools and Close Low-Performing Charter Schools:** Barack Obama and Joe Biden will double funding for the Federal Charter School Program to support the creation of more successful charter schools. An Obama-Biden administration will provide this expanded charter school funding only to states that improve accountability for charter schools, allow for interventions in struggling charter schools and have a clear process for closing down chronically underperforming charter schools. An Obama-Biden administration will also prioritize supporting states that help the most successful charter schools to expand to serve more students.
- **Make Math and Science Education a National Priority:** Obama and Biden will recruit math and science degree graduates to the teaching profession and will support efforts to help these teachers learn from professionals in the field. They will also work to ensure that all children have access to a strong science curriculum at all grade levels.
- **Address the Dropout Crisis:** Obama and Biden will address the dropout crisis by passing his legislation to provide funding to school districts to invest in intervention strategies in middle school - strategies such as personal academic plans, teaching teams, parent involvement, mentoring, intensive reading and math instruction, and extended learning time.
- **Expand High-Quality Afterschool Opportunities:** Obama and Biden will double funding for the main federal support for afterschool programs, the 21st Century Learning Centers program, to serve one million more children.
- **Support College Outreach Programs:** Obama and Biden support outreach programs like GEAR UP, TRIO and Upward Bound to encourage more young people from low-income families to consider and prepare for college.
- **Support College Credit Initiatives:** Barack Obama and Joe Biden will create a national “Make College A Reality” initiative that has a bold goal to increase students taking AP or college-level classes nationwide 50 percent by 2016, and will build on Obama's bipartisan proposal in the U.S. Senate to provide grants for students seeking college level credit at community colleges if their school does not provide those resources.
- **Support English Language Learners:** Obama and Biden support transitional bilingual education and will help Limited English Proficient students get ahead by holding schools accountable for making sure these students complete school.
- Recruit, Prepare, Retain, and Reward America's Teachers
- **Recruit Teachers:** Obama and Biden will create new Teacher Service Scholarships that will cover four years of undergraduate or two years of graduate teacher education, including high-quality alternative programs for mid-career recruits in exchange for teaching for at least four years in a high-need field or location.
- **Prepare Teachers:** Obama and Biden will require all schools of education to be accredited. Obama and Biden will also create a voluntary national performance assessment so we can be sure that every new educator is trained and ready to walk into the classroom and start teaching effectively. Obama and Biden will also create Teacher Residency Programs that will supply 30,000 exceptionally well-prepared recruits to high-need schools.



- **Retain Teachers:** To support our teachers, the Obama-Biden plan will expand mentoring programs that pair experienced teachers with new recruits. They will also provide incentives to give teachers paid common planning time so they can collaborate to share best practices.
- **Reward Teachers:** Obama and Biden will promote new and innovative ways to increase teacher pay that are developed with teachers, not imposed on them. Districts will be able to design programs that reward accomplished educators who serve as a mentor to new teachers with a salary increase. Districts can reward teachers who work in underserved places like rural areas and inner cities. And if teachers consistently excel in the classroom, that work can be valued and rewarded as well.

Higher Education

- **Create the American Opportunity Tax Credit:** Obama and Biden will make college affordable for all Americans by creating a new American Opportunity Tax Credit. This universal and fully refundable credit will ensure that the first \$4,000 of a college education is completely free for most Americans, and will cover two-thirds the cost of tuition at the average public college or university and make community college tuition completely free for most students. Recipients of the credit will be required to conduct 100 hours of community service.
- **Simplify the Application Process for Financial Aid:** Obama and Biden will streamline the financial aid process by eliminating the current federal financial aid application and enabling families to apply simply by checking a box on their tax form, authorizing their tax information to be used, and eliminating the need for a separate application.



National Education Association President Dennis Van Roekel:

"Sen. Barack Obama is showing that he is committed to transforming America's public schools and is interested in getting input from those charged with the awesome responsibility of educating our youth. It is important to have educators' voices represented in this effort, because they can speak firsthand about what resources are needed to make sure every child receives a first-class education.

"Sen. Obama wants to fund technology programs that would help with everything from tutoring to skills assessment to successful strategy sharing among educators across the country. As a founding partner of the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, NEA joined business leaders and policymakers to promote the integration of technology and provide the resources needed to facilitate change. It is imperative that America's schools provide students with the skills that will help them compete in a global economy.

"Education should not end in high school. NEA agrees with Obama's assertion that every student who wants to attend college should be able to do so. Higher education is no longer a luxury, but a requirement. Our country cannot afford to shortchange our future and global competitiveness.

"Obama understands that public education is the heartbeat of our nation and wants to improve it.

In stark contrast, Sen. John McCain has shown he will simply be more of what we have had for the past eight years. He has voted with George Bush 90 percent of the time, and his education plan has erased any doubts that he would discontinue the misguided policies of the Bush administration."

American Federation of Teachers President, Randi Weingarten, on September 9, 2008:

Sen. Barack Obama hit the nail on the head today by embracing the kind of education reform that shows education is a shared responsibility and that holds everyone accountable to improve teaching and learning. He set a positive tone about how we can improve our schools, respect our teachers and work together to make sure our students get the world-class education they deserve.

Sen. Obama is absolutely right that successful charter schools should be supported and held accountable, and that failing charter schools should be shut down. We also share his belief that regular public schools, where most of our students attend, need the programs and resources to close the achievement gap once and for all. Sen. Obama and the AFT also see eye to eye on supporting differentiated compensation plans that are developed with teachers, not imposed on them. Well-designed pay plans negotiated with teachers treat them as the professionals they are, which in the end helps students.

Together with Sen. Obama, the AFT wholeheartedly supports programs that hold all of us to high standards, including teachers, parents and elected officials. Teachers who need help should get extra support, and those who still don't improve should be replaced. That's what the public wants, that's what teachers—our members—want, and that's what Sen. Obama supports.

What's Doing the Driving—Standards or Assessments?

What's most distressing is that we now find a heavy focus on—and a disproportionate weight being given to—the testing and accountability aspects of standards-based reform. Lately, states and the federal government have over-emphasized assessments and accountability and de-emphasized (or, in some cases, ignored) both the process of assessing the standards or aligning curriculum and professional development to them or of getting extra support to the individuals and schools that most need it. The 2001 No Child Left Behind federal legislation exacerbates this situation. In too many cases, states and districts have paid more attention to the development of "gotcha" assessments than to improving the quality of teaching and learning. Indeed, far too many examples exist of educational systems that are driven by assessments, rather than by the standards that tests are designed to measure. This approach is backwards. It's unfair to give tests that aren't aligned to the curriculum, or to impose sanctions without interventions, or to use test results strictly for punitive measures rather than as areas for improvement or celebration of growth.

The American Federation of Teachers has long

supported both assessment and accountability as integral parts of standards-based reform, but only when tests and accountability systems are fair, transparent, and aligned to state standards. Well-designed tests can provide an objective measure of how well students are doing, and consequences attached to these tests provide children with a strong incentive to study hard and do well. Well-designed accountability systems provide a check on this process, as well as insurance that teachers, staff, and students are getting the supports that they need to meet expectations. In our eyes, in a standards-based system, the primary purpose of assessment and accountability is not to sort "winners" from "losers." Rather, it is to ensure that all students have the knowledge and skills that they need to succeed at the next level and to trigger assistance for those who would otherwise fall through the cracks.

Join the United Teachers of Wichita and learn much more about AFT and NEA. Both organizations have vast resources for teachers and local unions. Call us today at 262-5171 or email us at utw@utw-ks.org. Join the profession!

* * * *

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Speak Out!

If you are running into anything like I am regarding people's curiosity about Wichita's new school superintendent, you have been asked about a dozen times, "Have they chosen a new superintendent yet?" Our citizenry seems anxious to have a new school chief on board ASAP. But the Board of Education has approved an implementation plan for the superintendent search, and it lays out seven basic guidelines that the search will entail. Those seven guidelines are: the direction of Wichita Public Schools, upcoming challenges and priorities, characteristics of the next superintendent, the selection of a search firm, the BOE's role in the search, community input and a timeline. I've observed many BOE meetings at which the topic of the plan has been discussed and it is clear that the Board is serious about meeting the timeline to have a new superintendent named by spring break. One of the priorities to which the Board has agreed is "continuing positive relations with employee groups" like UTW and SEIU. To that end, the members of UTW's Executive Board have been invited to participate in a focus group about what they would like to see in a new superintendent. Knowing the members of the Executive Board as I do, I am confident that they will be very forthright and quite thorough in expressing their opinions about the new superintendent. I sure intend to speak up in the focus group! There is a whole laundry list of what I would like the new superintendent to be, but a few considerations come to mind right away.

First of all, it will be necessary for the new superintendent to have an even temperament, a steady hand and a level head when engaged in employer-employee relationships. Our new superintendent needs to be a good communicator with employees and he or she ought to value transparency and openness. I want the superintendent to have a good working relationship with the union based on mutual respect. That includes a willingness to sit down at the negotiations table with UTW and be involved in the nitty-gritty of public negotiations. I want the superintendent to appreciate the value that professional organizations and unions

possess for individuals and for the school district.

Our new school chief needs to be genuinely eager to meet and know the employees of the district and to listen to their concerns. And the superintendent needs to have an understanding of the workload demands being made on teachers and possess a genuine interest in helping teachers manage and reduce workload and stress on the job. I want the new superintendent to have actual in-school experience. Multi-year in-school experience! With a healthy respect for all the work being done in our schools where the rubber meets the road.

I would like Wichita's new superintendent to be a person who knows that student achievement is more than a score on a state test, and who values the development of 21st century skills and a desire for life-long learning in our students. The new superintendent should be committed to raising student achievement and to closing the achievement gap, but should also support recess, fine arts, physical education, music, and a strong extracurricular program in all physical, academic and fine arts activities for USD 259.

I want the person who leads our district to have a high regard for community-school relations but never falter at standing up for our schools. The business community has needs, wants and expectations for our schools, and the superintendent should be the bridge between the schools and business. But the bridge needs to be a two-way street! The superintendent must be able to explain and defend our schools to the business community when the need arises.

As I noted earlier, I have a whole laundry list of what I would like to see in the new superintendent, and these are just a few of the items from my list. I'm sure you have your own considerations as well. I hope all employees will take advantage of the opportunity to express their opinions at any of the focus groups to which they are invited. Let's get our opinions heard! Speak out!

* * * *



UTW President Paul Babich

Which Wagon Should I Get On?

Keith Welty, Editor

Data matters. Best practices. Research based. Pacing guides... The list of current teaching techniques, strategies, and methodologies seems almost endless. The only requirement is that they be based on solid research that shows that it raises test scores.

Veteran teachers have been asking questions about the concept of academic freedom and does it still apply to teaching today? I would love to answer, "Yes." I would be okay with answering, "I hope so." The truth is I have to admit that the concept of academic freedom is quickly dying. I wish it was different, but the days of a teacher shutting the door and teaching what they felt was right, in the manner they felt was best, are gone. The folks who want to fight to protect this seemingly archaic right are viewed as out-of-touch dinosaurs. Many times, they are also seen as negative and unwilling to change. That is unfortunate.

Many of these teachers are excellent educators with a wealth of experience. If they seem unwilling to jump on the latest bandwagon as it rolls over them, please excuse them. They have seen too many bandwagons over the years and almost none of them stayed around very long. From the Edison Project to QPA to DCAs to Reading First to Whole Language to Phonics to Investigations to Professional Learning Communities to Kagan to Success For All to America's Choice to the newest, latest, and greatest fad to hit schools, they have seen it all. They have seen these things come, and they have seen them go. Please excuse them if they are not leading the cheers for the latest wagon train from downtown.

Does this mean that the old ways – shut your door and do what you want – are better than what is happening in our schools today? No. Many of the ideas touted by the district are very good and produce increased test scores. It is the way in which these ideas come to the teachers that is the problem. Does one technique or method work equally well for all teachers and students? No. Does every principal in every building want every teacher to teach the same way? No. There are too many buildings, too many teachers, too many students with varying needs for a one-size-fits-all approach.

Teaching has always been a stressful endeavor. Today, all of these wagons and the stress that comes from jumping on and off, or dodging them, adds to the level of frustration. It was not uncommon earlier in my career to find teachers still teaching in their early sixties. They loved it and didn't want to sit at home and

waste away. Today, there are few teachers who, once they qualify for the early retirement bridge payments at sixty, stick around. They can't wait to get away from the stress. Cross the fifty year old threshold and the prospect of retiring seems too good to be true. It is one of the longest decades of a teacher's life.

A couple of years ago I was sitting in the room of a third grade teacher. She was a veteran teacher who was admired and respected in her building and around the district. She helped other teachers and taught classes to teachers and seemed to be able to accommodate the latest and greatest fads. This particular February day after school, she was almost in tears. She pointed to the empty student desks and said, "I don't know who these kids are. I used to be able to tell you who had a parent that was going to have surgery, who had a relative that had to move in with them, who had a parent that lost a job. I knew their lives and what they were going through and the kids knew that I cared about them. Now, I don't have time in the day get to know my kids. There are so many demands on the time. I can't be there for them like I used to do. I can't take it anymore. I am going to retire at the end of the year." I tried to convince her she was still a great teacher and that she was needed.

She was 58 and she did retire at the end of the year. The district lost a great teacher. More importantly, the students at that school lost a great friend. Teachers at that building lost a veteran colleague who was a rock of stability and was seen as a mentor to young teachers. She didn't feel flexible enough to handle the transition from teaching as an art to teaching as a science and still connect with kids. That ramped up the frustration to a level that finally drove her out.

The phone calls, e-mails, and conversations with teachers this year indicate to me that the frustration levels continue to increase. There doesn't appear to be much hope in sight for lancing that boil. My frustration is that I consider myself to be fairly optimistic, but it is getting difficult to maintain that optimism in the face of NCLB inspired accountability.

An increase in the attempts to engage teachers and their union in discussions about possible changes and to come up with ways to support increased effectiveness while also supporting teachers so they can handle the stress would be a great place to start. That is one wagon upon which I would gladly leap.

* * * *