



# REPORT

## Joel Pedersen is 2019-20 Superintendent of the Year



**C**ardinal Community School District Superintendent Joel Pedersen has been named the 2019-20 Iowa Superintendent of the Year by SAI. Award finalists were Mary Jo Hainstock of Vinton-Shellsburg and Rich Powers of Bondurant-Farrar. Nominees included Terry Hemann of Spencer, Angela Huseman of Tri-Center, Dan Moore of South O'Brien, Greg Ray of Mediapolis, and Barb Schwamman of Osage and Riceville. SAI congratulates all candidates in recognition of their district leadership!

Thank you to selection committee members Russ Adams of MOC-Floyd Valley, Justin Daggett of Manson-Northwest Webster, John Henriksen of Mt. Pleasant, Chair Susie Meade of Winterset, Kristen Rickey of West Delaware County and Janet Stutz of Grinnell-Newburg.

To give some insight into his leadership practices, Pedersen provided responses to two questions.

**Q: What about your district are you most proud?**

**A:** I am most proud of the way our staff and students interact with one another. We have created a culture of positive and growth thinking. At Cardinal, we believe we can make positive changes in our student achievement, staff climate and district outcomes by always focusing on the things that are going well and continuing to remember to grow through the lessons we learn from our shortcomings.

I see this positive mindset when students interact with their peers or adults. It is an intentional positive interaction much of the time. This is also true when staff interacts in interdisciplinary teams or even district-level teams. The focus is on the things we are doing well and how to keep those things going in the right direction. We have fostered this type of attitude by starting with how we portray our district to the outside world. Using social media to share positive initiatives, activities or celebrations is one vehicle we have used to do that. At Cardinal, we also encourage sharing news via district email. Our intentionality with students begins with encouraging teachers to use class time to talk about things that are going well in students' lives.

Another way we create a positive culture is by how we intentionally decorate our environment. The walls, posters, paint and pillars are all inspected to ensure that our students have a school they can be proud of from an aesthetic nature. We have not only painted our walls to be more inviting, but also added many graphics that portray positive messages. The subliminal nature of the bright school colors and the messages they convey, in our belief, creates a positive culture for our students.

Tethered to our positive focus, I am proud that we have intentionally not forgotten that being positive alone will not allow us to achieve our district goals. We have kept our focus on ways of improving our practices based on data and collaboration. We use

- cont. on page 5

## Principals earn high confidence in public trust

**A** recent **Pew Research Center survey** shows the public has the most confidence in the way K-12 public school principals conduct themselves when caring about people, providing fair and accurate information and handling resources responsibly.

More than eight-in-ten survey respondents say public school principals care about the students in their schools all or most/some of the time, and 81 percent believe school principals mostly handle resources responsibly. In addition, 79 percent believe that at least some to most/all of the time principals provide fair and accurate information to the public and do a good job ensuring that students are developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Principals also take the lead when it comes to admitting and taking responsibility for mistakes. By a two-to-one margin, more U.S. adults say school principals take responsibility for their mistakes "all or most" or "some of the time" than say that principals take responsibility for mistakes "only a little" or "none of the time."

Questions focused on people comprising eight groups—members of Congress, local elected officials, K-12 public school principals, journalists, military leaders, police officers, technology company leaders and religious leaders—regarding:

- Level of empathy
- Adequacy in performing a specific part of their job
- Stewardship of resources
- Ability to provide fair and accurate information to their constituents
- Willingness to admit mistakes and take responsibility for them
- Frequency with which they behave unethically
- Frequency with which they face serious consequences when they act unethically

Thank you for continuing to model empathy, openness, integrity and accountability to the students and communities you serve! Read the **complete report online**.

## Upcoming new standards for Iowa's school leaders —What's in it for me?

Wondering what Iowa's new standards for school leaders will mean for your day-to-day leadership?

Check out this article published in NASSP's *Principal Leadership: What the New Educational Leadership Standards Really Mean* (available through your AEA online database. When you click on the link, you will be directed to the AEA's online database and prompted to enter the generic school username/password that your school's teacher librarian or AEA library will have.)

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### SAI Representative Council

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

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## Thanks for the memories

We equate November as a time to focus our reflections on what we are grateful for, and being richly blessed I could certainly use this space, and much more, to expound on all those things. But lately, my thoughts have turned to the value of failure—the important process of making mistakes and learning from them. This has led to quite an epiphany: many of the good decisions I have made on my leadership journey arose from the poor decisions I made in a previous situation. Now, I'm only given one page in the newsletter because absent those limits, it will not surprise you that focusing on my mistakes would lead to a never-ending column. So for space reasons, I want to focus on the most monumental mistakes I have made and explain why I am thankful for each.

For example, I am thankful I tried to dissuade a student from coming out as gay right before his senior prom 20 years ago. This student was kind and patient with me, but also insistent in helping me understand that the concerns I held for him were antiquated and misguided. The acceptance and the way his peers embraced him confirmed this. Through this one interaction, I found out how monumentally stupid and blind I could be, while at the same time learning that courage and inspiration come from being confident in who you are and trusting that others will accept that. And yes, an 18-year-old taught me that.

I am thankful I bent over backward for several months to keep a poor teacher in the classroom, despite every indication he did not have the talent, ability or motivation to teach. When he finally told me, "I think you want me to be a teacher far more than I want me to be a teacher," I knew my efforts had been misguided and foolish. After that, when working with struggling teachers the first thing I would ask is, "How badly do you want to do this work?" If they were motivated to improve, I would do everything I could to find them the resources to help. But when they weren't, I worked just as hard to assure they found their calling somewhere else.

I am thankful I entered my first few difficult conversations with parents with an arrogant and condescending attitude. As you can imagine, those exchanges went poorly, and I learned quickly that I would need new techniques and strategies. Turns out, I did not know more about parenting their child than they did. Listening and learning from parents about how we could best collaborate to maximize their child's potential helped me to understand the value of partnerships in the life of a child.

I am thankful I worked so hard and stressed myself out at one point that I compromised my health. Not only did I determine it would never happen to me again, but I also vowed to do everything possible to make sure that it did not happen to any colleagues, either. It's why it is a joy and an honor to be part of an organization that is always asking, "Are you taking care of yourself so you can take care of others?"

Finally, I am thankful for the one time I prioritized my work over my responsibilities as a father. I did not understand how important it was to my daughter for me to attend her concert and instead decided to stay in the office and catch up on my work. Fortunately, she shares my genetic disposition and had zero problems letting me know how upset she was when we both got home. I vowed to make sure that never happened again. Now that doesn't mean I never missed another of my children's events due to work, but the rare instances it happened were due to a major expectation at work, not because I just wanted to "catch up." And when I had to miss I made sure to explain to my children what was keeping me from being a dad at that moment. Seeing my children participate or compete became just as important to me as it was to them—a gift I owe to a daughter who had the strength and sense of fair play to tell her dad the way things could and should be.

These examples are just a few of the lowlights I have had in my career, yet they stick out in my mind as times when I experienced exponential growth as a leader and as a person. I hope that any errors you have made do not come close to the massive amount of cluelessness I displayed during these times. I also hope that if it is possible to learn from the mistakes of others, you can learn from mine. I encourage you to also reflect on the challenges you have faced during your time as a school leader and see what learning opportunities await you. Maybe, like me, you will come to feel those difficult times happened for a reason—for some unforeseen greater good you now carry with you as you model for and inspire others. If so, that will certainly give you yet another reason to be thankful this time of year.



# In Brief October Rep Council highlights

- Examined year-to-date financials;
- Received Equity Team update;
- Reviewed Executive Leaders meeting outcomes;
- Heard about outstanding September mentoring meetings and recent successful professional learning opportunities;
- Recognized Principals Month and Governor’s Proclamation being drafted for such;
- Learned three areas drawing attention in the legal arena: lack of understanding for probationary periods, custody/residency and student counts, mental health issues;
- Considered recent legislative priorities draft;
- Received CatchLife Program report; and
- Engaged in learning activity relating to positive communications.

## In memoriam

**Phil Hintz**, retired Newton superintendent, 1997 Iowa Superintendent of the Year and SAI past president (10-20-19)

**Leland Jesse**, retired Jesup JH/HS principal (10-22-19)

## Legislative notes

from Dave Wilkerson, government relations director

SAI’s Legislative Committee continues to discuss and develop the 2020 legislative platform. Important topics that are under review by the committee are:

- **Supplemental State Aid** – establishing a percentage ask for the first time in several years.
- **Transportation and Per-Pupil Equity** - we support legislation that addresses the inequities of transportation and per-pupil costs across the state. We’re asking the Legislature to expand on the efforts made in the 2018 and 2019 sessions.
- **Teacher Shortages/Recruitment** – asking the Legislature and governor to take an active role to attract and retain teachers, including one option which could remove some IPERS restrictions for retirees.
- **Mental Health** - we support state policy that identifies options and provides wrap-around resources for school districts to better meet mental health needs of students.
- **Vouchers/ESAs** – we are opposed to any and all forms of voucher programs/additional public funds appropriated to private school uses.
- **Probationary Administrators** – removing the three-year probationary period requirement for all administrators, regardless of experience, when moving to a new school district.

The Executive Committee reviewed a draft of the platform language at its October meeting. The Representative Council is scheduled to approve the priorities at its November 13 meeting.

At its October 14 meeting, the Revenue Estimating Committee set the October revenue estimate at 1.4% for FY20, or \$7.97 billion, and at 2.7% for FY21, or \$8.18 billion. Growth in tax revenues for FY19 exceeded 6%, but members said that growth was driven by federal tax cuts, state tax cuts and increased sales collections. Overall, the estimate for FY20 is up about \$120 million over the March estimate. The REC will meet again in December to set the revenue estimate and spending limit for the 2021 session. Dave Roederer, Department of Management director, said that he does not expect that the state will need to make any budget corrections this year because the state finished the fiscal year with about a \$290 million budget surplus. I’m confident the 1.4% estimate for FY21 will result in legislators claiming they can’t fund SSA at an amount greater than that.

I’ve had the opportunity to speak at several of your area meetings over the past month and have heard from a number of you regarding your efforts to meet with legislators, educate them, and urge them to support Iowa’s public schools. Thank you for those efforts, and keep it up!

## Calendar of events

### November

12 - Building a Contagious Culture

### December

5 - Teacher Evaluation and Assistance within a Supportive, Civil and Professional Culture

Register online and view additional learning opportunities at [bit.ly/SAIevents](https://bit.ly/SAIevents)

## Iowa Dept. of Ed. deadlines

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

## sai REPORT

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

Your comments and suggestions are welcomed.

Tracy J. Harms, editor



## Questions to ask when student behavior disrupts the classroom

For starters, this month's column will have enough disclaimers to cover a typical year of legal columns. We are going to review some hot topic issues that will fairly raise questions from different angles. Having said that, I have received enough calls, read enough articles, watched enough local news segments, and talked to enough educators to know that we need to openly address issues relating to student behavior in our schools and the frequency of room clears in some Iowa classrooms. Now for a few disclaimers: I do not profess to be an expert on special education law. There are many attorneys and educators in the state who work in this area daily, if not full-time. Next, this column will cover some things to consider when there are room clears and student misbehavior regarding students with disabilities. Having stated that, I AM NOT suggesting that students with disabilities are the only students who are misbehaving in our schools or acting in ways that result in numerous room clears. However, my discussion with educators (primarily administrators) has led me to believe that there are some common misunderstandings regarding state and federal law as it relates to educating students with disabilities.

So, what about the discussion that some educators and other adults have had concerning fears that certain students have taken over the classroom or even an entire building. I have received many calls and emails over the years about students biting, hitting, and kicking staff members and fellow students. I have likewise heard the stories of students screaming, tossing over desks, throwing objects and acting in a manner that is undoubtedly disruptive to the educational environment.

There is not a one-size-fits-all solution to how Iowa's schools should best educate these students along with their classmates while keeping all students, visitors and staff members safe. Furthermore, as I have shared with educators for years, your number one duty is to safeguard students, as it is impossible to educate students if they are unsafe. With that as a point of focus, this column isn't written to second-guess teachers or administrators when they have decided to clear rooms to ensure the safety of students, or when educators have used room clears in an attempt to de-escalate a potentially volatile situation. I do wish to raise awareness and perhaps clear up some misconceptions, so educators do not feel they've lost control of a student or their classroom.

I apologize in advance to the extent that some of my comments may come across as "no duh" suggestions (to use my 1980s vernacular), but they are important to cover nonetheless.

First, for those situations where students are acting disruptively in classrooms, is it happening more frequently during a particular time of day, in a particular class, while being educated by a particular teacher, or when they are around particular student(s)? All of these factors may be beneficial as the individualized education program team or 504 team determines the best course of action to educate the student.

Next, does the student have a behavioral intervention plan? I trust that many students who are having such behavioral issues likely have a BIP in place. If so, are classroom teachers, school administrators, and other school staff members following the BIP? Based on answers to the questions in the previous paragraph, does the BIP require modification?

At this point, let's assume the school is providing the accommodations and supports that it should to the student whose behavior is leading to numerous room clears and causing regular disruption to the classroom. Let's further assume that the IEP or 504 plan, as currently written, is being followed, to include the BIP. Now we are going to get to the crux of where I hear frequent misconceptions as to the education of students with disabilities. If educators have been doing everything they should be doing, student behavior should not get to the point where classrooms are being cleared eight, 10 or 15 times for the same student. Frankly, I would hope that the IEP or 504 team would be meeting if teachers are needing to clear the room three to five times for the same student during a given year.

There may be other situations where room clears have not been utilized but the student is regularly causing a significant impact on the education of other students in the classroom. As with room clears, if such regular and significant impact on other students is occurring, it is likely time for the IEP or 504 team to meet and determine the best manner to educate the student. What truly is the least restrictive environment for the student in such situations? Is the current manner of education or placement of the student allowing the student to make progress toward their educational goals?

As stated in the [Area Education Agency Special Education Procedures](#), dated July 1, 2019: "Eligible individuals are, **to the maximum extent appropriate**, educated with children who are nondisabled (i.e., in the least restrictive environment)." (page 15, emphasis added). I strongly encourage you to make this outstanding manual part of your toolbox.

281 Iowa Administrative Code 41.116(4)(a) instructs that educators should consider the following factors in determining the least restrictive environment of a student:

1) The accommodations, modifications and adaptations an individual may require to be successful in a general education environment

- 2) Potential barriers to providing these accommodations, modifications and adaptations within the general education environment
- 3) The supports needed to assist the teacher and other personnel in providing accommodations, modifications and adaptations
- 4) **The impact on the individual provided special education services and activities in the general education environment, and**
- 5) **The impact on other students when providing special education services and activities in the general education environment** (emphasis added)

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

Should students with disabilities be placed with general education students to the maximum extent appropriate? ABSOLUTELY. Yet, when I hear of educators speaking of such disruption or a high frequency of room clears it makes me seriously wonder if those educators have either received misinformation about the least restrictive environment or personally misunderstand what it means. If someone with specialized training in 504 plans, IEPs or disability law is informing educators that the current means of educating the student must be maintained, despite behavior that is not only impacting the student themselves or other students in the classroom, I would encourage your educators to get a second opinion. Talk to someone at the AEA or with the DE, as I believe you are likely receiving misinformation. Perhaps the individual relaying misinformation had likewise received inaccurate information from someone else. Regardless of the reason, if educators are not considering the impact on the individual provided special education services as well as the impact on other students, we are failing to adequately determine the LRE for the involved student.

Again, I am not an educator, I do not play one on TV, and I did not stay at a Holiday Inn Express last night, but stories I am hearing simply do not align with my understanding of what it means to educate a student in the least restrictive environment. For some students, it may mean instruction in a general education class every class period, for the entire class. For other students, it may mean participation in some general education classes or portions of those classes, but not others. In other situations, the least restrictive environment may include instruction with general education students at an alternative school. The examples could go on and on. Should educators err on inclusion with general education students? Yes. Does the least restrictive environment mean continuing to educate in a general education classroom regardless of behavior? No.

Bottom line, if you or one of your educators believe a student has taken over a classroom or a building, you need to reach out for help, whether through your central office, the AEA, the DE or your district's legal counsel.

As snow arrives in our state, be safe out there! Hopefully, we'll have fewer snow days this school year.

## Superintendent of the Year, *cont. from page 1*

data points to find where we might have growth opportunities, and then get the right people in the room who can generate new and innovative ideas to affect those data points. In essence, I am proud that we have encouraged and nurtured outside-the-box thinking. It has led to employees who feel empowered and confident that they can make a difference.

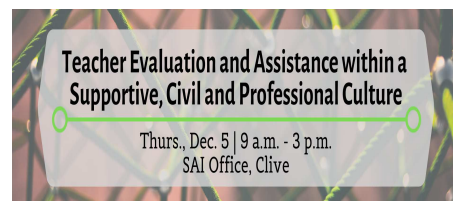
It continues to be amazing to see where Cardinal has come in the last 10 years. I have worked with so many good people who have helped shape the district into what it is today. I look around and am proud of how our district breaks the mold with people who continually use growth and positivity to increase all students' success.

### **Q: How do you encourage others in Cardinal CSD to communicate core values?**

**A:** Leadership matters. I think core value communication starts with our building principals. I am the one to set the core values but ask building principals to use their time and means to communicate it to their staff in ways they find most effective. It is a constant and important question that we talk about in our administrative meetings. We ask ourselves, "In what ways are we communicating our culture and climate to our staff and students?" We begin to share our initiatives and collaborate on future ones. This collaboration breeds many great ideas that we would never come up with on our own.

I also empower our leaders to encourage teachers to take small amounts of class time to portray these values to our students as well. I believe that EACH INTERACTION MATTERS. If we can trickle down our values as well as portray them, then our positive and impactful interactions will multiply exponentially.

Pedersen will represent Iowa in AASA's National Superintendent of the Year® Program. The State Superintendents of the Year will be honored on stage at the AASA National Conference on Education, Feb. 13-15 in San Diego.



Whether you're looking to support changes in instruction or teacher behavior, teacher evaluation plans of awareness and assistance anchored in cultural expectations create the pathway forward.

In this workshop, you'll delve into technical aspects/requirements of plans, discuss common elements of effective plans, learn how to build the cultural foundation as a staff to anchor any plan, collaborate regarding plan templates and walk through the process of implementing a plan. Expect to network, ask questions, view examples and non-examples, and share your practices!

**Facilitators:** Mark Timmerman, Indianola, and Dr. Dana Schon, SAI

**Register:** [bit.ly/SAIevents](https://bit.ly/SAIevents)



## Attention, please!

Are you listening? What are you doing? Are you paying attention? How often do we raise these questions and others like them throughout the day? What does it even mean to “pay” attention and is the price of attention different today than what it used to be? In flashback moments, I can still hear the voices of different teachers asking my class to quiet down and pay attention. I remember we responded by listening and stopping whatever else we might have been doing to focus on what the teacher was saying (at least I now tell myself that was my response). I don’t know that anyone gave much thought to the concept of attention itself or what it really meant. We didn’t think about attention requiring energy, and we didn’t think about energy being limited. After all, we were in a room with a teacher, a textbook, maybe a note from a friend, and a view out the window. Not much else existed to claim our attention, and the way to get attention was to raise your hand, complete what was expected, or misbehave. Information was limited to what the teacher imparted and what was printed in the textbook. If we wanted to be successful, we had better tune in; and if we wanted to get positive feedback, we had better do the work.

The meaning of attention hasn’t changed—selectively focusing on some stimuli while ignoring other stimuli. We still want our students to focus on whatever it is we are teaching and to ignore whatever else is vying for their attention. We want our teachers or other audience to listen and tune us in while tuning out everything else. What has changed; however, is the “everything else” and the nature of the demand for attention. From flashing images with millions of pixels to internet searches activated by our voices, the evolution of technology has resulted in an increased number of stimuli designed to capture our attention; and the information available to us continues to grow exponentially. At the same time the digitized world clamors for us to **give** our attention, it has also contributed to our compulsion to **get** attention from numbers of followers to numbers of clicks.

Unfortunately, our brains have not miraculously grown our capacity to pay attention alongside this rapid and overwhelming growth of stimuli. The mental energy required to pay attention is in limited supply; and no, our **brains really can’t multi-task** despite what we may think. Bombarded by stimuli throughout the day, we are constantly choosing where to devote our attention. We are also monitoring the attention we are receiving through whatever platforms to which we post (which is consuming our mental energy). Attention, then, has become both a valuable resource and a commodity—notice how you pay for Twitter service, for example, with your attention. By attending to Twitter, you subject yourself to marketers who pay money for a Twitter presence. Furthermore, in the midst of all this stimuli, few people take mental breaks. Waiting in line at the bank, check email. In between plays of the game, check Facebook. Commercial break, scroll Instagram. We never have to endure even a second of “boredom.” Meanwhile, all of these online services compete with each other to engage us and make us want more of what they’re offering—it’s the mark of this Attention Economy.

*“Asking provoking questions, showing a unique image, presenting an authentic problem to solve, or disrupting students’ expectation for a specific routine all exemplify ways in which we can foster students’ curiosity and inspire them to be seekers of knowledge.”*

What does this mean for education? We have been navigating the challenges of too much content and not enough attention—cognitive energy—since long before Google gave us searches and Facebook gave us Likes. We understand that our choice in content depends on our priorities, our vision for our graduates; and how we’ve engaged students in the past will still work today. Asking provoking questions, showing a unique image, presenting an authentic problem to solve, or disrupting students’ expectation for a specific routine all exemplify ways in which we can foster students’ curiosity and inspire them to be seekers of knowledge.

The real challenge may be in helping students (and staff) create more space between the stimuli—more opportunities to refuel their mental energy so as to avoid health challenges related to persuasive technologies:

Depression - “All my friends are living an amazing life. Why aren’t I?” ~ *Believes intentionally selected posts reflect an entire life.*

Stress - “I can’t get my work done. It’s too much.” ~ *Checks phone with each notification from Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook Messenger, Twitter. Doesn’t see behavior as addictive.*

A life less well-lived - “I don’t have time to exercise. I can’t find the time in my schedule to meet with friends.” ~ *Spends three to four hours a day engrossed in their phone.*

Supporting those we serve in recognizing the addictive nature of persuasive technologies and helping them understand that energy is limited may be a first step in refocusing and refueling. Specifically, we might issue a phone-free challenge one night a week or establish technology “availability hours.” We might encourage everyone to clear their phone’s home screen of all but the essentials and to disable notifications so that they are intentional about when and where they access apps. We might model a social media hiatus for a week or a month or... We might change our display to grayscale so that our attention isn’t drawn to the colorful apps. Regardless of how we do so, reclaiming our mental energy (and our time) allows us to be intentional about giving our attention to what matters most.