It’s time to disrupt education as we know it. Here’s the first step.

SAI Annual Conference keynote speaker Mark Perna will kick off the event August 2 with “Unleashing passion, purpose and performance in younger generations.” Building on the conference theme of “Write Your Story,” we can start to write a different story about post-secondary options and how we frame them. Read how Perna proposes to do just that.

Disruptive — it’s a buzzword for success and innovation in the business world. Being called a “disruptor” is a badge of honor, but what does it really mean? And how does it play out in the arena of education, workforce, and economic development?

One of my favorite authors and speakers, Tony Robbins, has a great article on disruption — what it is, where it started, and whether or not it’s something to pursue. True disruption, according to the originator of the term, is not simply a company coming in and shaking up the market in a big way. It’s more specific than that:

“Disruption describes a process whereby a smaller company with fewer resources is able to successfully challenge established incumbent businesses. Specifically, as incumbents focus on improving their products and services for their most demanding (and usually most profitable) customers, they exceed the needs of some segments and ignore the needs of others. Entrants that prove disruptive begin by successfully targeting those overlooked segments, gaining a foothold by delivering more-suitable functionality — frequently at a lower price. Incumbents, chasing higher profitability in more-demanding segments, tend not to respond vigorously. Entrants then move upmarket, delivering the performance that incumbents’ mainstream customers require, while preserving the advantages that drove their early success. When mainstream customers start adopting the entrants’ offerings in volume, disruption has occurred.”

You could argue that the postsecondary status quo is for students to graduate high school and go directly to a four-year university. Many high schools are funded, at least in part, based on their ability to get their graduates off to college without delay. This creates a huge incentive for them to promote a “college for all” model — regardless of whether or not it’s the right choice for each individual student.

Who’s disrupting this status quo? Career-focused education and workforce development providers, for one. Think about it: as per the definition of disruption that I quoted above, they frequently have “fewer resources” than the established four-year colleges and universities, which can be seen as the incumbents in the postsecondary educational market.

And these alternative postsecondary learning institutions also serve an oft-overlooked customer segment — individuals who choose to bypass the traditional university route.

Because of the high and constantly rising cost of college education, it could be fair to say that the incumbents are indeed chasing higher profitability, while the disruptive, smaller, alternative postsecondary organizations are targeting their segment with the “more-suitable functionality” and “lower price” of in-demand technical skill training.

This disruption should spur the incumbent colleges and universities to rethink what and how they deliver to their customer base. And when they do, everyone will win.

Celebrating all pathways

While I’m a huge fan of career-focused learning like apprenticeships, certification programs, industry credentials, coding bootcamps, and other ways to build technical skills, I don’t want to set up a hard dichotomy between traditional universities and other postsecondary learning institutions. College can be a great option when students go with purpose. In my mind, positive disruption will reach its zenith when all of these options are celebrated equally.

At the end of the day, all these pathways have the same goal: to prepare students and trainees for meaningful, rewarding, and productive lives. Education is a priceless asset, no matter how or where it is imparted, and the more choices that young people have, the more chance that they will succeed in whatever pathway they choose.

Everything we do must center on the students and trainees who are getting ready to change the world. And if we can give them a greater chance of success by disrupting the status quo, we should be all for it.

The first step

Robbins concludes that in most fields, the best disruption is “disrupting your business as usual.” If we want different results, we have to disrupt our old habits and ways of thinking. Different actions and approaches lead to different outcomes.

Education, workforce, and economic development in communities across America are ripe for positive disruption — in fact, there has never been a better moment to shift this paradigm. I believe one of the first steps to create this disruption is to bring all the stakeholders together around a shared vision. It’s why I created the Education with Purpose & Employment with Passion movement, to get entire communities pulling together like never before. For young people today, purpose is the thread that connects education and employment — and we can only deliver it when everyone catches that vision.

Every student deserves a purpose-driven education and career journey — and every community will benefit when they get it. Setting up our young people for a stronger economic future is worth a little disruption.

Read more from Mark Perna and don’t miss his opening session during the SAI Annual Conference, August 2 and 3!
Executive Director’s Message from Lisa Remy

Leading in uncertain times

It is time to say goodbye to 2022 and welcome to 2023. If you’re like me, I tend to ask myself, “Where did this year go?” Personally, this year not only flew by, but I also experienced change as I said goodbye to a long career with West Des Moines Community Schools and began my tenure here with SAI.

Change — both positive and negative — can be stressful and generate a sense of uncertainty. I am grateful for the decision I made to join SAI, even if starting a new career naturally brings some uncertainty. As leaders, we deal with change and uncertainty every day, and it is our responsibility to support our staff, students, and families. This is no easy task because we, too, are often experiencing our own stress during uncertain times.

Have you ever heard of the acronym VUCA that became popular in the 1980s? The term was created to describe an uncertain future, and it stands for Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity. VUCA only describes the problem...but doesn’t pose a solution. How DO we respond when living in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous times? I suggest now more than ever we must unite in support of one another and the districts we serve.

The upcoming legislative session will bring its own uncertainty and unpredictability. We could probably all agree there are hopeful and worrisome signs heading into the session. Many conversations have involved speculation as to what will happen, yet whatever results from the 2023 session will likely not resemble what we are anticipating today. If we could figure it all out ahead of time, then it wouldn’t be uncertain and unpredictable, would it?

Consider these three suggestions as we enter a new calendar year, address the upcoming legislative session, and focus on second semester goals.

Acknowledge (and perhaps even embrace) the fact that there are other viable views beyond the ones you hold. In the words of Steven Covey, “Seek first to understand, then to be understood.” Take time to really listen to divergent points of view. A growth mindset acknowledges we are continually willing to learn and grow as leaders.

Continue to model good character, integrity and professionalism. Others are watching what you say and what you DON’T say. Think of a leader who emulates these traits, then practice those same characteristics. I know you will experience unfair treatment and difficult situations. How you respond will be noticed and remembered long after the specific incident is forgotten.

View challenging times as an opportunity instead of a threat. At your core, you are an educator as well as a leader. Nothing excites you like seeing others learn, and one of the most natural opportunities is when we are faced with transition. Let’s not be afraid to reach out, ask questions, and learn from each other.

Advocacy is, first and foremost, about building relationships — with our students, staff, families, legislators, and with each other. I know it can be difficult to build relationships in uncertain times, but Iowa students count on us to do the hard work so they can discover their full potential and be prepared for the future.

‘It’s been SAId: Conversations on Leadership’ podcast

The latest episode of SAI’s podcast “It’s been SAId: Conversations on leadership” is a conversation with 2023 Superintendent of the Year Kristen Rickey of West Delaware County CSD. Hear how she clarifies direction for the district, sets goals and assessments for students’ future readiness and her experiences as she traveled to Finland as a Fulbright Leaders for Global Schools Program participant. Listen to the podcast
December Executive Committee highlights

- IRS Form 990 approval;
- Mentoring program serving 184 leaders and Mentoring Matters blogs reminder;
- Upcoming Professional Learning opportunities and Annual Conference update;
- Association state executives orientation and meeting summary;
- Commission on Educator Leadership and Compensation review;
- Financials overview and current membership numbers;
- Vice president candidate interest, SAI Report readership, It’s been SAId episodes;
- Importance of accountability for those educating children;
- IPERS’ unfunded liability is shrinking, will be fully funded in 2045; and
- Recent conversations with legislators.

In memoriam
Richard Doyle, retired Marshalltown superintendent (12-10-22)

Let’s hear from YOU at District Meetings
Join your colleagues for SAI Executive Director Lisa Remy’s listening and learning tour at your local SAI District Meeting.

Dr. Remy looks forward to getting to know more members and hearing ideas about the association’s direction and how to best serve member needs.

There is no cost to participate. Check the date and location in your area and register at bit.ly/SAIevents.

Legislative notes
from Dave Daughton, government relations director

I hope you all had a great Christmas and holiday break and are ready to start the new year. It does give us a good “reset” for the rest of the school year. And we all need to remember that the focus needs to be on the kids and their learning.

December is a fairly “slow” month in the Legislature, with most work happening behind closed doors as the parties caucus and set their priorities. A couple of events to report:

One of the House seats in Eastern Iowa went to a Republican after a recount. This puts the House at 64-36, Republican. And, the Revenue Estimating Conference met December 14 and predicted a decrease in state revenues. This was expected, due to the income tax reduction legislation passed the last session. In many years, we would look at those numbers to predict the new SSA percentage, but that should not be the case this year. If you want to look at the exact numbers, access dom.iowa.gov.

The legislative session begins January 9, but we believe that most of the work will start the following week. Something to watch would be the Governor’s State of the State address on Tuesday evening, January 10. There she will outline her priorities for the state, including education. We will receive her budget shortly after that. For what it’s worth, the Legislature is scheduled to be in session through April.

Many of you will be at legislative forums or one-on-one meetings with legislators in early January. I would encourage you to find/schedule those as soon as possible and share the items that are important, not only for your district, but for all districts. In addition, make sure that you are educating your staff, your board, and your community about the issues. We are educators, and advocacy is really educating others about the issues, especially at the local level. Among other things, you can use the information found in this link to the SAI Legislative Priorities, or contact me for any specific talking points on the issues. In addition, if you would like to visit the capitol and attend committee meetings or just see how the system operates, let me know and I would be glad to facilitate that and/or meetings with legislators.

Let me know if I can assist you in any way. My email is: ddaughton@sai-iowa.org.

Have a great new year!
I have said for many years that perhaps no school-related law is as well known, while perhaps not well understood, as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. The concern over a FERPA violation sends chills through educators, both young and old. There is a certain reverence for this federal law that is seen in few other areas. Why, you ask? The answer has eluded me for nearly 17 years. Perhaps it is the mere fact that it is somewhat fun to pronounce. “FERPA!” Not all acronyms are quite so fun and whimsical to pronounce. And this is coming from an Army veteran who learned more acronyms during a 29-year career than any reasonable person should be required. OK, perhaps I am not reasonable, but you get my point.

In an effort to publicly share my personal respect and appreciation for FERPA, we will start 2023 off with my Top 10 FERPA reminders for the new year!

10. School board member access to educational records – Membership on the board of directors does not, in my opinion, give board members access to all educational records at any point in time. I often receive calls from principals or superintendents who have been contacted by a board member about information concerning a particular student. My recommendation to all of you is that the board member needs to have a “legitimate educational interest” in the records to have access. Otherwise, the board member would need to have written approval from the parents/guardians or an eligible student (students who are 18 years of age) to access said records. Now, when a matter is going before the board, whether due to discipline or some other reason, then the board members will have a legitimate educational interest at that time, and administrators may share records. For those situations during which a superintendent wants to keep board members apprised about a matter that may be particularly public or expose the district to liability or otherwise cause a hardship, I encourage the superintendent to describe the situation in a way that keeps the board informed without identifying the student or students involved. (34 CFR 99.21)

9. Surveillance or other video recordings used in student records – The key consideration regarding video recordings is whether they are included in a particular student’s records as evidence. If the recording is used as evidence, then the parents/guardians of the student against whom the recording is being used may visit that school and view that portion of the video being used as evidence to discipline their student. They may do so even if video shows other students, assuming it is difficult for school officials to blur or otherwise edit out those other students. If a student is a victim in the video, and another student is being disciplined, then the parents/guardians of that victim may not review the video without a subpoena or another order from a court.

8. Eligible students may deny parent/guardian access to records – As briefly referenced above, when a student turns 18 years old they become an “eligible student” and control access to their own records. While this may be upsetting to parents/guardians, students may ask school officials to remove parents/guardians from communications or the school’s information system. Having said that, if parents/guardians are able to prove that they may claim the eligible student as a dependent on their federal tax returns, school officials MAY still provide the parents/guardians access to records. (34 CFR 99.5)

7. Sharing identifiable information of eligible students during health or safety emergency – In addition to the possibility of sharing information if a parent/guardian may prove that a student is a dependent for tax purposes, school officials may also share identifiable information “to appropriate parties, including parents of an eligible student, in connection with an emergency if knowledge of the information is necessary to protect the health or safety of the student or other individuals.” (34 CFR 99.36) This is typically the case during a medical or mental health emergency, as well as situations during which the student may be expressing thoughts of potential harm toward others.

6. Own mistakes if FERPA is violated - Encourage staff members to let the administration know if student records information is accidentally or negligently shared with others. Follow up with the individual who may have received the missent email or other form of communication, and ask that they delete it and not share the confidential information with others. Meanwhile, let the parents/guardians or eligible student know that there was a breach and corrective actions have been taken, while explaining the extent of the breach and type of information shared. Remember, the cover-up is almost always worse than the crime, as the saying goes.

5. Legitimate educational interest – staff members in the building – As I hope all of you are aware, staff members, including teachers, do not typically have a legitimate educational interest to the student records for every student in their building. Instead, the administration and classroom teachers should determine what information in a student’s record may be shared with other educators. Please also consider that the staff member may have an interest in one part of a student’s records, but not another. For instance, one staff member may have an interest in the behavioral and/or disciplinary portion of the student’s records, based upon that employee’s role in the building, but not in the student’s math or science records. For other staff members, the opposite might be true. And then there are some employees who have a legitimate educational interest in the student’s entire record.
4. Limiting access on information system or having staff members sign an acknowledgment on computer system. Relating to staff member access to records, one of the most frequent FERPA questions I receive concerns the duty of the district to restrict access on the school’s information system. If at all possible, the district should ensure that staff members only have password-protected access to the records of those students for whom the employee has a legitimate educational interest. For those situations during which it is overly cumbersome to limit employee access on a student information system, I strongly encourage for school districts to have a reminder during employee access to the system that said employee should only review records of students for whom they have a legitimate educational interest.

3. Cover important FERPA and other student confidentiality issues with employees at least annually, as well as during initial employee training. Most of you have a variety of topics you cover at least once per year with your entire staff, often during August or some in-service training. I strongly encourage including key FERPA expectations during said opportunities. Failure to adequately train staff members about confidentiality concerns heightens the likelihood that the administration and/or district itself may be blamed for FERPA transgressions committed by other employees. Providing such training will give administrators an excellent point of reference should an employee require counseling or remedial instruction due to their violation of student confidentiality requirements.

2. Update your directory listing information. Double-check your policies and student handbook to ensure the FERPA directory listing includes all of the practical information your district may wish to share about a student. Consider the type of information that may be included in a choral or athletic program, a student directory, the yearbook, student newspapers, or information provided to members of the community or the parents/guardians of your students. This may include such things as a reference to the image of the student, or the student’s height and weight, as frequently shown in athletic programs.

1. Remember that you may have different levels of directory listing information. What I mean is that your district may set forth in policies and the student handbook that a certain subset of directory listing information will be provided to the general public, but perhaps a broader amount of information to other groups, such as families in the district, in a particular building, or even in a student’s classroom. This allows for the district to potentially develop a directory at the building level or provide parents/guardians with the contact information of the parents/guardians in a student’s class, perhaps for a birthday party, while being able to restrict that information from merely a community member or business that is fishing for data.

I’m sure this has raised some other questions in the realm of FERPA. If so, you know how to contact me.

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**School Law Conference**

Thurs., Feb. 16, 2023 | 9 a.m. – 3 p.m. Virtual event

February weather can be quite unpredictable, and we don’t want you to miss the ever-critical information provided by leading Iowa attorneys, so this event will be virtual again this year. Check out the session topics.

- **First Session: Employment Issues** - hiring; employment; intensive assistance; placing employees on leave; communications to the public regarding employee discipline or leave (including public records); and termination
- **Second Session: Current hot topics** - open enrollment (including issues of eligibility); student and employee political and other speech; religious liberties; use of wands for searches; book and curriculum challenges
- **Legislative Update**
- **Third Session: DE Update** - special education; discipline; diplomas; district authority to give credits (including co-taught courses); number of required meetings to make educational decisions; when may or should a district drop a student?
- **Fourth Session: BoEE Update** - Licensure and certification issues; what to do when you learn a license has expired; use of substitutes; alternative licensure; considerations for hiring educators licensed in other countries

Sign up at bit.ly/SAIevents

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Happy New Year! What’s your resolution? Have you noticed that many well wishes this time of year are quickly followed by curiosity about the new commitments you’re making? Our connotative associations with a new year always seem to include resolutions and goals. Though we can make plans and resolve to change at any time during the year, the turning of the calendar to January seems to bring with it a special boost of positive energy and a renewed sense of confidence and self-efficacy. You see more people at the gym, eating fresh fruits and vegetables, and in other ways engaged in self-improvement efforts. We can also direct this heightened emotional energy toward increasing student engagement and learning outcomes by facilitating student goal-setting (or goal-refreshing).

Do the students you lead have goals and know where they need to head next to achieve them? Fisher and Frey describe student goal-setting as the “secret weapon for getting students in the game.” Our students feel that same energy we do around the fresh start a new year brings. They’re ready for us to get curious about them and to help them discover their purpose, their future. How do they see themselves as learners? Mathematicians? Scientists? Writers? Readers? Artists? Musicians? Welders? App developers? We can build the bridge between their vision of themselves and the content and skills being taught in our buildings that will lead them to that vision. When students know their current level of performance and their next steps, they can take action to move to their desired level of performance. This is true for any age!

Engaging students in goal-setting not only helps them clarify their vision and purpose, it serves to motivate their learning and increase their achievement. However, “certain conditions and properties need to be part of the process in order to realize these gains,” explain Jon Saphier and his colleagues. Leaders and teachers play a critical role in guiding students in setting challenging AND attainable goals, in ensuring the goals are captured in writing, in checking to see that they are able to be accomplished within a set timeframe, in verifying they reflect what the student wants to achieve, and in supporting students in monitoring and evaluating their progress. As Saphier notes, this does not mean that teachers relinquish control over the expected outcomes, standards and assignments; rather, teachers guide students within the parameters of these expectations. Students set goals around their own commitments to improving the quantity or quality of the learning performance.

When students experience wins as they accomplish steps toward their goals, they become more motivated to take the next step and then the next. The impact is not only increased learning and achievement but also a stronger sense of self-efficacy, the student’s belief that they have the capacity to take action that will produce their desired outcomes. Students with high self-efficacy persist in the face of adversity and challenge, and a strong sense of self-efficacy coupled with a goal-setting process fosters student agency.

Student agency helps students be independent in the sense they know when they understand and when they need more clarity; agency promotes personal responsibility, accountability and ownership. More importantly, student agency transcends the world of school and empowers students to navigate life with more confidence, flexibility, and control. This vision for student success begins with a goal — capitalize on the energy of the new year as you prompt students and staff to name their goals and engage in the work to achieve them.

Submit a proposal to present at SAI Annual Conference ’23

Planning for SAI Conference 2023 is well underway! A significant part of the conference experience is the Promising Practices series through which we spotlight success stories and lessons learned in local districts across Iowa. This year, we are calling for proposals for Promising Practices. Take a moment to reflect on what’s going well, what lessons you’ve learned, and what would be of value to your colleagues. Then, consider sharing your leadership with participants through a conference session! Learn more about the process through these Submission Guidelines and plan to submit a proposal by January 31, 2023!