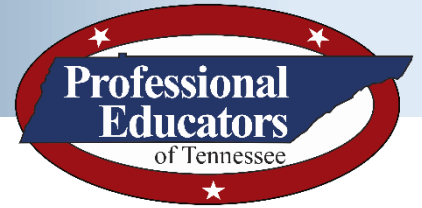


EDITORIAL

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IT'S STILL THE ZIP CODE

In many high-poverty communities, the zip code remains as strong of a predictor of student success as it did a half-century ago. Federal education programs have come and gone, as have politicians who promised results. In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson declared war on poverty. However, it is as problematic as it is enlightening.

Fifty years later, it generated 92 federal programs, which Chairman of the Budget Committee of the US House of Representatives at the time, Paul Ryan states, "[Federal Programs] have not provided the relief intended and that there is little evidence that these efforts have been successful." Based on those results alone, it gives credence to the belief of many, that we need to limit the federal role in public education. Ronald Reagan may have been correct when he said, "Government is not a solution to our problem. Government is the problem." It is especially true when it comes to addressing issues of poverty at the federal level.

Mark Elgart identified several School Quality Factors in high-performing schools in a well-written white paper. Elgart identified: clear direction, resource management, culture, implementation capacity, engagement, high expectations, and impact of instruction as critical factors for effective continuous improvement practices and high performance. He added, "Too many schools and systems embrace continuous improvement efforts that go nowhere but in circles."

Elgart wrote that engaging "all stakeholders in common goals is a hallmark of effective continuous improvement." Engaging and soliciting input from all stakeholders is mission-critical. For policymakers, they have to understand the problem from the eyes of the stakeholders is to set priorities to identify a clear direction for student success. It is a model replicated in many successful schools and districts. Stakeholders, more than policymakers, can communicate a message within their networks to their constituents to collect even more stakeholder input. To get a clear direction, you have to establish an effective communication plan and engage all stakeholders. In education, student success is the clear priority.

"All schools face the challenge of limited resources — time, staff, funding, and materials — which requires leaders to allocate them toward specific goals," according to Elgart. Finding the balance is essential for school quality. He defines that balance this way: "Instructional time and resources to support goals and priorities, sufficient resources and materials to meet school needs, and a variety of information resources to support student learning."

SUMMARY

Regardless of zip code, we all win when our focus is on student success as we endeavor to attract the best jobs and create a higher standard of living for all of our citizens.

According to the National School Climate Center, “School climate includes major spheres of school life such as safety, relationships, teaching and learning, and the environment as well as larger organizational patterns (e.g., from fragmented to shared; healthy or unhealthy).” These dimensions not only shape how students feel about being in school, but these larger group trends shape learning and student development. “Effective leaders,” adds Elgart, “shape the beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes, and written (and unwritten) rules that influence every aspect of how a school functions.” School culture matters, and changing it could be a key to turning around some low-performing schools and districts.

Frederick Douglass wrote, “What is possible for me is possible for you.” Writer Ken Gulley tackled the concept of expectations with this statement: “You’ve seen education systems play their part; lowering or eliminating rigorous academic standards in favor of intersectional quotas – in doing so they’ve sacrificed the once highly favored standards they boasted about exchange for the virtue of being depicted as diverse and inclusive.” We cannot squander the human potential of children because of where they live, or because of the economic conditions in which they are raised. Rather we must help all reach their potential.

Elgart answered the [key question](#): “Many reasons exist for these disappointing results: an emphasis on compliance over-commitment, the need for annual improvement leading to short-term fixes at the expense of sustainable progress, narrow measures of progress resulting in narrow strategies to improve them, and the challenges of building on gradual improvements over time. The principles of continuous improvement are straightforward, but putting them into practice given these pressures has proven challenging.”

[Research](#) demonstrates that all children need certain types of support to fully develop. Too many children come from homes where there is “abuse, domestic violence, an incarcerated parent, or a parent with drug or mental health problems. They don’t get that kind of attention and suffer the consequences of [higher risks](#), later-life depression, adolescent pregnancy, alcoholism, drug use, and poor academic performance,” according to Jill Suttie, a freelance journalist, and a staff writer and contributing editor for *Greater Good*.

The challenges are immense in public education, poverty merely exasperates the problems. However, it cannot be an excuse. We also know that a teacher is the most significant factor in determining the quality of education a child receives. Educators are critical to student success, and public schools bridge so many gaps. We have to embrace the belief that all children, including poor children, children of color, children with limited English-speaking proficiency, and all other children adversely impacted by disadvantages are as capable as any other children in our society. Regardless of zip code, we all win when our focus is on student success as we endeavor to attract the best jobs and create a higher standard of living for all of our citizens.

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