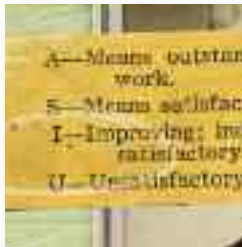


FROM THE EDITOR

Turning Things Around



Recently, as I flipped through the pages of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association’s bimonthly magazine, the headline for Executive Director Thomas Gentzel’s column caught my eye.

“New use for an old word,” it read. The word is one all school board members have heard: micromanagement. But what made the headline so accurate and the column so interesting was Gentzel’s premise. Given the level of state and federal involvement in public education, he writes, micromanagement “describes perfectly the actions of legislators, governors, presidents, and other policymakers in state and national capitals to impose their will on school districts.”

“There is no top or bottom of the clock for them; their hands move freely over the entire face of public education,” Gentzel writes.

Nowhere is that more true than in trying to fix low-performing schools, an area that has drawn intense scrutiny at the state—and especially at the federal—level over the past decade. From No Child Left Behind to the Obama administration’s moves to reform the nation’s 5,000 worst-performing schools, local districts are facing a full-court press.

And, as our September cover package by Senior Editors Del Stover and Lawrence Hardy points out, it’s not likely to ease anytime soon.

In their stories, Del and Larry look at two aspects of this reform movement. Del’s story, “Turning It Around,” looks at various sides of the turnaround debate

and what districts are doing about it. For “Falling for Change,” Larry visited Rhode Island’s Central Falls School District, which received national attention earlier this year when the superintendent announced plans to fire everyone at the town’s low-performing high school.

These staff-written stories are accompanied by Mike Ward’s “Lasting Change,” a look back on reform lessons he learned during his tenure as North Carolina’s state superintendent, and Gary Chesley’s “The Promise Delivered,” the story of how a Connecticut school district closed learning gaps by revamping its early childhood programs.

Reading these pieces, I kept returning to a paragraph in Gentzel’s column, one of the most succinct descriptions of the government’s role in education that I’ve seen.

“Education is primarily a state and local responsibility,” he writes. “The role of the federal government, fueled by billions of dollars in funding for a range of programs and initiatives, may have grown dramatically, but it is supposed to be a supportive, not directive, one.”

In each story in this cover package, you see worries here and there that raise concerns similar to Gentzel’s. If anything, these stories show that reform—while a tough slog—can be achieved with strong local leadership and support—not micromanagement—from the state and federal governments.

I hope you enjoy our September issue.

Until next month ...

Glenn Cook, Editor-in-Chief