

# sai REPORT

## *Impact on Student Achievement* Maintaining a Positive School Climate When It's a Blizzard Out There



**B**udget cuts, snow, negotiations, snow and ice, schedule changes, snow, ice and sub-zero temperatures — you know the challenges. Yet with these demands and more, how do you maintain a positive school climate? The weather-related situations certainly present a harsh twist of irony to the realities of providing the best education environment.

Temperature and precipitation aside, the importance of the learning climate should not be minimized. It has long been associated with increased job satisfaction and, moreover, identified as critical to students' academic achievement and healthy development. So, in the scope of all of your day-to-day concerns and responsibilities, what areas should you consider when examining the learning environment? Numerous researchers and the National School Climate Council agree that four major factors shape school climate: safety, relationships, teaching and learning, and the institutional environment.

Several SAI members were asked to share what they do to make a positive impact on the school or district climate, especially in light of the current economic situation.

On a building and district level, Sioux City elementary principal Rita Vannatta conveyed that climate is an issue that doesn't cost a lot of money. "We can have a good climate with budget cuts or money flowing in. The customer service piece needs to be in schools every day, and relationship building with students is key to school climate," Vannatta said. However, in an effort to provide a greater understanding of budget cuts the district faces, superintendent Paul Gausman gave an illustrative demonstration to the entire district staff to help them better understand why money couldn't be taken from one funding source and applied to another area of need. He is also asking staff for money-saving suggestions and involving stakeholders as well. While people may not be happy with cuts, the participation in decisions and openness go a long way toward their being satisfied in having a say in what occurs in the district. Vannatta concluded by emphasizing that school climate is a way to "make everyone know that they're important and wanted in our school."

Richard Bridenstine, superintendent of Columbus Community, stated, "In times like this, I believe that working on positive staff morale can impact student achievement in favorable ways. To help achieve that goal, try to be more visible in the buildings, give compliments for efforts, and try to be as transparent with information as possible." He further explained, "It is important that the staff know that you believe in them. Praise them as much as possible. Try to know staff members and ask about them and their families. Your caring goes a long way. Finally, I've learned that my words have more impact than I often intend them to have. Therefore, think about what you say, and be kind, compassionate, and truthful."

High school principal Todd Wolverton of Creston said, "Right now I am trying my best to be positive and keep a smile on my face." "I have made a greater effort to talk with kids and staff, and give praise where it is warranted. As a staff we are doing some fun things to keep things light, such as a Super Bowl tailgate the Friday before the big game, and a 'Pink Out' to support our girls basketball team when they play a rival and to try to raise awareness for the efforts to find a cure for breast cancer. There are some pretty creative minds around here, and they come up with some things to keep people loose!"

While schools and districts are affected in varying ways, the ongoing winter months can be challenging for everyone. Despite a groundhog's shadow being cast over the land, express your optimism that spring is right around the corner and that, collectively, educators will do all they can to provide the best possible environment for student learning.

"In the depth of winter, I finally learned that within me there lay an invincible summer."

~ Albert Camus

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## Executive Director's Message from Dan Smith

### Common Sense

"Common sense is the knack of seeing things as they are, and doing things as they ought to be done" ~ Harriet Beecher Stowe

A new report by ACT titled *The Forgotten Middle* documents the importance of success in upper elementary and middle school on students' college and career readiness. This research shows that "under current conditions, the level of academic achievement that students attain by eighth grade has larger impact on their college and career readiness by the time they graduate from high school than anything that happens academically in high school." (p. 2)

I suspect that most Iowa administrators would respond to this research with something along the line of "Well, duh." It seems to be mere common sense that if a student is struggling academically in eighth grade that the student will probably struggle in high school.

And yet it seems that relatively less attention has been paid in recent years to the importance of the upper elementary grades and middle school and the role they play in the preparation of students for life after high school. This research suggests that even improving high school rigor may not succeed unless we first increase the number of entering high school students who are prepared to benefit from such rigorous courses. (p. 2)

The study indicates that eighth-grade achievement is the best predictor of college and career readiness. It is a much better predictor than the following characteristics that are usually identified:

- Background characteristics such as gender, race, parent educational level, family income, primary language spoken at home;
- Standard coursework;
- Advanced/honors coursework (including Advanced Placement courses);
- High school grade point average; and
- Student testing behaviors.

Compared to eighth-grade academic achievement, the predictive power of each of these factors was small and in some cases negligible. (p. 8) The study further states that "Improvement in eighth-grade academic achievement and being on target for college and career readiness in eighth grade are more beneficial than any high school-level academic enhancement." (p. 11) The research also indicates that being on target academically in eighth grade puts students on a trajectory for success. (p. 19)

The report makes the following recommendations:

1. Focus K-8 standards on the knowledge and skills that are essential for college and career readiness, and make these nonnegotiable for all students. It is especially important that students master foundational English and reading skills because the benefits far outweigh other action that can be taken in high school. (p. 37)
2. Monitor student progress in becoming ready for college and career, and intervene with students who are not on target to become ready, beginning in upper elementary school and continuing through high school. Strong attention should be paid to literacy skills beginning in fourth grade with the goal of making timely interventions until at least the eighth grade. (p. 38)
3. Improve students' academic behaviors. "Academic discipline" is the key here. The report includes three primary components of academic discipline:
  - a. Planning and Organization – Helping students to devise a plan to achieve objectives.
  - b. Follow-through and Action – Helping students to assess their own progress on objectives.
  - c. Sustained Effort – Helping students to stick to long-term goals and work through setbacks. (p. 26)Administrators (and parents) who have worked with upper elementary and middle level students know the importance of academic discipline. They know how difficult it can be to help students develop it as they deal with their emerging adolescence.
4. Increase federal and state support for schools to implement intervention programs that help all students become ready for college and career. Currently the lowest level of federal funding is allocated for students in grades 7-9. (p. 38-39)

The report makes a strong case that failure to aggressively intervene for middle level students may mean that it will be too late by the time they reach high school. Our common sense tells us that this is the case. We need to review our programs to be sure our actions are following our common sense.

To read the full report, go to [www.act.org/research/policymakers/reports/ForgottenMiddle.html](http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/reports/ForgottenMiddle.html)



# In Brief

At its January meeting, the SAI Executive Committee:

- learned about initial redesign ideas for the Iowa Leadership Academy Principals Center, focusing on involving teams and ensuring that every student has the opportunity to develop 21st century learning skills.
- approved a staff military leave policy consistent with that of the state.
- discussed and approved the 2009 SAI Legislative Platform which is available at [www.sai-iowa.org/legplat.html](http://www.sai-iowa.org/legplat.html).
- heard a Wallace report re: redesigning Evaluator Training into an ongoing developmental process, and Iowa representatives attending a four-session Leading and Sustaining Change workshop sponsored by The Wallace Foundation.

## Mentoring and Induction Program

There are 172 mentee/mentor matches currently involved in SAI's Mentoring and Induction program. This is a significant increase in the number of participants since the beginning of the program in 2003. Because of this growth, there is a need to update some of the procedures associated with the program. This need was affirmed by the Advisory Committee as recommendations for change were discussed at its meeting in November. The committee's recommendations were in the areas of mentor/mentee matching process and timeline, mentor training and statewide meetings. The recommendations have been compiled into a comprehensive plan for further consideration and adoption. The updated plan would expedite the matching process, streamline meeting expectations, and still maintain the quality and effectiveness of this program.

The success of the program is unquestionably dependent on the expertise and dedication of the administrators selected to be mentors. We are extremely fortunate in Iowa to have an outstanding group of quality individuals who are willing to put forth the extra time and energy to assist a new colleague as s/he enters the profession. We thank them.

## Training on New Restraint and Physical Confinement and Detention Rules to be Repeated

ICN training on the seclusion and restraint rule-making will be held February 12, 2009, at 41 sites around the state. The presentation will begin at 3:30 p.m., and last until 5 p.m. The ICN will go online at 3 p.m. to allow sufficient time to check communications and resolve any technical issues. Check the February issue of the DE's *School Leader Update* for a list of sites.

## Give us your feedback\*

### January Question Results:

#### What are your professional resolutions for the new year?

No data were available from the SAI survey. However, NASSP conducted a similar survey at the beginning of the school year with these results.

#### What's your biggest resolution for the new school year?

- 63% To spend more time observing teachers
- 10% To make more time for my own professional growth
- 21% To spend more time with beginning teachers
- 4% To attend more school activities
- 3% Other

### This month's question:

#### What methods do you use to assess your school climate?

A recent article in ASCD's Education Leadership offers ways to assess school climate, read more at [www.ascd.org/publications/educational\\_leadership/dec08/vol66/num04/The\\_Challenge\\_of\\_Assessing\\_School\\_Climate.aspx](http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/dec08/vol66/num04/The_Challenge_of_Assessing_School_Climate.aspx)

### Provide your answer at

<http://survey.aea267.k12.ia.us/survey/5500/1d51/>

\* This is an unscientific survey of volunteer participants and is not a valid statistical sample.

## Conversations on the Iowa Core Curriculum

On February 23, choose to join colleagues from around the state at one of two sessions, 9-11 a.m. or 1-3 p.m., as we discuss and reflect on leadership practices to implement the Iowa Core Curriculum. Principals and superintendents on a panel will share ways they are guiding this important work in their buildings and districts. There is no registration fee for SAI members; it's \$25 for non-members. Advance registration is required. Sign up online at [www.sai-iowa.org/listsrv/reg.html](http://www.sai-iowa.org/listsrv/reg.html)

## In Memoriam

Harold Davis, retired superintendent, Deep River-Millersburg. (1-19-09)

## Upcoming Events

### February

10 - School Law Conference, Sheraton West Des Moines

23 - Conversations on the Iowa Core Curriculum, Hilton Garden Inn, Johnston

### March

24 - Transitioning Schools into the 21st Century - Session 3, SAI Office, Clive

25 - Transitioning Schools into the 21st Century - Session 3, Coralville Library

31 - Transitioning Schools into the 21st Century - Session 3, Loess Hills AEA 13 Office, Council Bluffs

Find registration information and learn about future offerings at [www.sai-iowa.org/events.html](http://www.sai-iowa.org/events.html)

## SAI REPORT

The *SAI Report* is published for association members and selected community and business leaders by School Administrators of Iowa.

Your comments and suggestions are welcome.

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by Matt Carver, Director of Legal Services

## 'Sexting' Students Could End Up in a Sex Sting

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.

Just the other day, I was talking to a high school student about her part-time job. When I asked if the job was minimum wage, she confirmed that it was. Thus, she was earning over \$7 per hour. Quickly, my mind raced back to my first job at Hy-Vee in the 1980s, when minimum wage was just over \$3 per hour. (I know, some of you were around when minimum wage was a dime.) Anyway, in a fit of nostalgia and wishing to explain how tough things used to be, I shared this historical information with the young woman. Unimpressed, she quickly replied, “Yeah, but how much was college?” I had to give her that point.

The lesson of the story is that our recollection of how good OR bad things used to be is often exaggerated or misplaced.

Then again, there are other times when I think most of us would agree that it is fair to ask, “What happened to the good ol’ days?”

Let’s take the topic of student photographs.

My memory of photographs at school revolved around athletic teams, school clubs, dance photos of guys in ugly sweaters with girls wearing big corsages and even bigger hairdos, and a few nutty year-book pictures from homecoming activities.

Today, with the invention of cell phone cameras, in addition to all of the photos that students took 20 years ago (perhaps short the girls in big hair), some kids are taking photos (and video) of things that they would not have dared send to the film developing store back in the day. In some circles, “sexting” (the sending of text messages with nude photos to others) is a frequent occurrence.

Unfortunately, my call volume has gone up on the topic of “sexting” during the last year. I will give you the two most common scenarios.

Scenario #1 – Sally, a fine young woman whom her boyfriend probably does not deserve to be dating, lacks some self worth, so she sends Bill, her boyfriend, a photo of her bare chest. Bill, either before or after breaking up with Sally, forwards the picture to his three best friends. The three friends then send it to others, and before the end of the day there are girls in school making fun of Sally. Sally then goes to the office in tears.

Scenario #2 – Jim, mistakenly thinking that he is really going to impress Jane—a girl he very much would like to date—sends a photo of his genitalia to Jane. Meanwhile, Jane, who is disgusted by the photo, sends it to a couple of friends. The friends send the photo to other friends, and before the end of the day students are making fun of Jim. Jim then goes to the office in tears.

Hopefully, portions of today’s column can provide you with some ammunition that will help scare students away from taking or forwarding such photos.

Before I give an overview of some applicable and eye-opening state and federal criminal law, I would like to thank Mr. Mike Ferjak with the Iowa Attorney General’s Office, and Mr. John Courter, the district coordinator for Project Safe Childhood, who works out of the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of Iowa. Both of these gentlemen were kind enough to share their insights on the troubling trend of sexting.

For those students who think it is cute and harmless to send nude photos of minors (those under the age of 18) or to minors, they need to know that such activity is a likely a criminal act under Chapter 728 of the Iowa Code. For instance, if anyone, to include another minor, persuades, entices, or even attempts to persuade a minor to engage in a “prohibited sexual act” or simulate a “prohibited sexual act” for the purpose of taking a photo or video of such an act, that individual may be found guilty of committing a Class “C” felony and fined up to \$50,000 for each offense. As Mr. Ferjak brought to my attention, Chapter 728 defines “prohibited sexual act” as, among other things: “nudity of a minor for the purpose of arousing or satisfying the sexual desires of a person who may view a depiction of the nude minor.” For those who think they are going to get off on a technicality and argue that the photo wasn’t for the purpose of arousal, Mr. Ferjak suggested that the defendant may have a hard time explaining to the judge or jury why he didn’t take a picture of his girlfriend’s foot, rather than her bare chest.

So, what about students who merely possess a nude photo of a minor on their cell phone or computer (including a nude photo of him/herself)? Under Iowa Code §728.12, individuals who merely

possess a nude photo of a minor may be found guilty of committing an aggravated misdemeanor for a first offense and a class “D” felony for a second or subsequent offense.

In addition to the above Iowa specific crimes on their rap sheet, students sexting photos of minors may also violate Iowa Code §728.15 if they knowingly disseminate “obscene material” by the use of their cell phone. “Obscene material” includes, but is not limited to, any material depicting or describing genitals, sex acts, masturbation, and other such things that community standards would find unsuitable for minors. I underlined “describing” because I know there are times when students send inappropriate sexual texts to other minor students without a photo or video. Those students, along with others who violate Iowa Code §728.15, may be found guilty of committing an aggravated misdemeanor for a first offense and a class “D” felony for a second or subsequent offense.

For your scorecard at home, here are the potential Iowa prison sentences for the above-described crimes:

- class “C” felony – maximum prison term not to exceed 10 years; fine of at least \$1,000 but not more than \$10,000;
- class “D” felony – maximum prison term not to exceed 5 years; fine of at least \$750 but not more than \$7,500;
- aggravated misdemeanor – maximum prison term not to exceed 2 years; mandatory fine of at least \$500 but not more than \$5,000.

Also keep in mind that individuals who are convicted of any of the above referenced crimes under Iowa Code Chapter 728 may be required to register as a sex offender under Iowa Code Chapter 692A.

Now that we have gotten warmed up, and in case I haven’t shared enough to scare students into cleaning up their cell phone and Internet activity, let’s move on to the federal crimes. Individuals are subject to federal jurisdiction through the use of a vehicle of interstate commerce (e.g., the Internet or any wireless transmission, such as a computer, cell phone, PDA, etc.). Based on information from Mr. Courter with the U.S. Attorney’s Office, here is the rundown on potential federal prison sentences for individuals who produce, transmit (whether by text, computer or other means), receive, and/or store visual depictions of a minor engaging in sexually explicit conduct.

- Production of images (those involved in taking the photo or video) – MANDATORY MINIMUM PENALTY of 15 years;
- Possession of images – maximum penalty of 10 years;
- Receipt and/or distribution of images (those who knowingly receive or forward the photo or video);
- MANDATORY MINIMUM PENALTY of 5 years.

The above are crimes under Title 18 Section 2252 of the United States Code. Note that I have referenced MANDATORY MINIMUM PENALTIES for federal crimes relating to production, receipt and distribution of images.

As Mr. Courter mentioned to me, another ramification of minor students sending their personal pornography to others is that it often ends up on the Internet, where it is spread around the world. He shared that they have tracked down the distribution of child pornography taken in Iowa that shortly thereafter ended up in Australia, Germany, Sweden and Italy.

While this month’s column has largely focused on potential crimes involved when students send pornographic photos and video of minors, we could just as easily have spent as much space on examples where students have lost out on college scholarships, college admissions or getting hired due to inappropriate behavior captured on cell phones or transmitted on the Internet.

In case you were wondering, my intent was not to write this column so that administrators would immediately contact law enforcement the next time a student informs you that another student is passing around a nude photo of her ex-boyfriend. In many instances, the combination of staff, student and parent involvement should help to put a stop to the problem. However, I would like to think that this month’s column has provided you with some additional background information to educate students before they ever get started sexting, or scare the daylight out of students and parents in situations where the sexting activity has already transpired.

If they still don’t get the picture (pun intended), you might share how six students in Greensburg, Pa., were recently arrested and charged under Pennsylvania child pornography laws for their sexting activities. While life in the digital world may not always seem real to students, you can assure them that the consequences of sexting are dire and far from harmless.

As a side note, I have just given myself another reason to hold off buying a cell phone for my oldest daughter.

And if you’re available on February 10 there are still seats available for the School Law Conference. Hope to see you there!



## School Law Conference

Feb. 10, 2009

9:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Sheraton West Des Moines

### Topics covered:

- Immigration Issues
- Physical Confinement and Restraint Rule Revisions
- Student Rights in the Cyber Age
- ADA Amendments
- Student Fees
- FMLA Amendments

Make an investment in this day to head off future issues that can be costly to the district in time committed to an issue and in the court of public opinion. It will be well worth it! Register now at [www.sai-iowa.org/events.html](http://www.sai-iowa.org/events.html).



## A 21st Century Learning System for Iowa (part 2)

by Scott McLeod

Last month I highlighted what I believe are some of the key elements of a robust statewide 21st century learning system. Those elements included

- curricula that emphasize 21st century skills rather than treating them as mere add-ons to existing pedagogical practice;
- LOTS of training for both practicing and preservice educators to help them transition to a new teaching paradigm;
- more robust online learning opportunities for both students and educators;
- some kind of computing device in the hands of every student and teacher;
- ubiquitous high-speed wireless access across the state; and
- much higher levels of P-20 cooperation, coordination, and vertical articulation.

I have run these elements by a number of folks at both the state and national levels, and so far they seem to be holding up fairly well. They at least pass the “smell test” for most people!

A number of support systems need to be in place to make all of this happen. I’d like to highlight three in this month’s column:

**1. Changes in law, policy, and funding.** To achieve the new 21st century learning paradigm, educators will need a variety of laws, policies, and/or funding mechanisms to be put into place. Sometimes existing mechanisms will need to be changed (e.g., greater funding flexibility; rethinking filtering policies). Sometimes new enabling structures will need to be enacted (e.g., monies for 1:1 laptop programs; technology literacy requirements in educator licensure).

**2. Monitoring, assessment, and evaluation.** As we put the new system into place, we need to ensure that there are adequate feedback loops present to ensure that we are getting the results that we want. This often will include rethinking student assessment to a more performance-based paradigm; it’s awfully difficult to assess many 21st century skills using standardized bubble sheets! It also will include someone (such as CASTLE or the Department of Education) collecting better data on technology infrastructure, purchasing, training, staffing, and support. Right now I’m not sure we have enough data in Iowa from which to intelligently make policy.

**3. A mindset shift.** The digital, global age is HERE! It’s time we stopped being afraid of it and started preparing our graduates for it.

Other states are implementing a number of promising initiatives. In Virginia, for example, the state is paying for a technology integrationist in each school district for every thousand students. Virginia also just passed a law requiring schools to teach students about information / media / Internet literacy. Maine has been buying laptops for every middle school student for years. Michigan requires every student to have an online learning experience before graduation. Florida and other states have statewide online high schools that are struggling to keep up with incredibly high student demand. And so on...

The Iowa legislature is now in session. It’s time for us school leaders to start advocating for the necessary components to move our system forward into the digital, global age.

As always, please stay in touch! [mcleod@iastate.edu](mailto:mcleod@iastate.edu)

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“The digital, global age is HERE!  
It’s time we stopped being afraid of it and started preparing our graduates for it.”

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# Worthwhile Reading

SAI staff recommend the following books for your consideration.

- *Influencer: The Power to Change Anything* by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, David Maxfield and Ron McMillan
- *The Global Achievement Gap: Why Even Our Best Schools Don't Teach the New Survival Skills Our Children Need—And What We Can Do About It* by Tony Wagner
- *Disrupting Class: How Disruptive Innovation Will Change the Way the World Learns* by Clayton Christensen, Curtis W. Johnson and Michael B. Horn
- *Caught in the Middle: America's Heartland in the Age of Globalism* by Richard C. Longworth
- *The Six Secrets of Change: What the Best Leaders Do to Help Their Organizations Survive and Thrive* by Michael Fullan

And, an excerpt from *The Skillful Leader II: Confronting Conditions That Undermine Learning* by Alexander Platt, Caroline Tripp, Robert Fraser, James Warnock, Rachel Curtis. In the book, both strategies are included in a text box labeled LEADER ALERT.

“Make Your Deeds Match Your Words—Because so many people in schools have been socialized to believe that open conflict is unhealthy and/or inefficient, they often suppress information that might help the group make a better decision. Many believe that surfacing genuine concerns or asking probing questions is tantamount to ‘nay-saying’ or that doing so will result in recriminations from an administrator. Be conscious of the messages you send both in word and deed; avoid cutting off debate that might lead to a better understanding of an issue or silencing healthy skepticism without identifying any way to check the speaker’s point against data. Structure meetings so that opposing points of view can be surfaced safely, and be worried when an initiative that should genuinely change people’s practice sparks no debate at all.”

“Chemistry Is Not the Answer to the Question—Beware of attributing a group’s effective or ineffective performance to personalities, chemistry, or the innate intelligence of some of the members. Chemistry explains strong relationships; however, it doesn’t shed much light on ability to use data to identify a problem or willingness to be responsible for results. Those capabilities may be more a function of members’ prior knowledge, experience, or training than anything else. If leaders believe there is a bell curve for innate ability to collaborate, that some groups are just naturally great and some are not, they will make decisions that inadvertently reduce group conviction and encourage dysfunctional group behavior.”

## News About Nationals

### AASA Nebraska/Iowa Reception

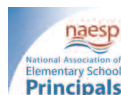
Join colleagues February 20, at 6 p.m. at Forbes Island, Pier 39, in San Francisco. A private shuttle boat will run continuously from H Dock (left of Pier 39, directly below the pedestrian overpass) after 5 p.m. Parking is available at Pier 39’s main parking garage for \$8, with validation.

RSVP to [kelly@ncsa.org](mailto:kelly@ncsa.org) if you plan to attend. For more information on Forbes Island visit [www.forbesisland.com](http://www.forbesisland.com)



### NAESP Convention April 1-6, New Orleans

The Iowa room block is at the Hilton New Orleans Riverside. Contact Jody at the SAI office for more information, 515-267-1115. Deadline is Feb. 13. The Zone 6 Reception will be held April 3 from 5:45-7:45 p.m. at the Ernst Cafe, located at 600 S Peters Street (within walking distance of the convention center).



## SAI Annual Conference August 12 & 13, 2009



Diane Hodges, SAI August Conference speaker

SAI is bringing you a speaker who addressed filled-to-capacity rooms at last year’s NAESP Conference. Come hear Diane Hodges provide her climate-building ideas.

Two different sessions:

- *Looking Forward to Monday Morning, Drive Your Staff HAPPY!* and
- *Staff Recognition: Beyond the Paycheck!*

Is your school a great place to work? Diane is a national expert on staff dynamics, development and training. Like educators everywhere, she is all too aware that staff recruitment and retention are critical issues facing school districts today.

Her latest book and presentation series — *Looking Forward to Monday Morning* — is packed with ideas you can use immediately to make your school the kind of place where you and your colleagues want to be — and stay! Over a period of five years, with the help of fellow educators nationwide, she compiled hundreds of simple, fun, low-cost ways to give staff members what it turns out they want most — simple recognition and appreciation for a job well done! The results across the nation have been nothing less than astonishing!

# choices



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