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Welcome to Dimensions Online, the electronic edition of FASCD’s monthly newsletter. In it, readers will find current news and information that pertain to our roles as instructional leaders in today’s schools and classrooms. You make a difference, and FASCD wants to support your work and your efforts. Tom Lindsay, FASCD Executive Director

Can We Reverse the Wrong Course on Data and Accountability?

A new NEPC report and model legislation offer a positive alternative to today’s poor uses of student data and punitive approaches to accountability: A new report by two professors at Boston College urges American schools to use data and accountability policies in the more successful ways now seen in high-performing countries and in other sectors of U.S. society.

In their report, Data-Driven Improvement and Accountability, authors Andy Hargreaves, the Thomas More Brennan Professor of Education in the Lynch School of Education, and Henry Braun, the Boisi Professor of Education and Public Policy in the Lynch School of Education, find that the use of data in the U.S. is too often limited to simply measuring short-term gains or placing blame, rather than focusing on achieving the primary goals of education. The report is published by the National Education Policy Center (NEPC), which is housed at the University of Colorado Boulder.

http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/data-driven-improvement-accountability/

Never be afraid of trying something new. Remember: amateurs built the ark and professionals built the Titanic.
FASCD Welcomes New and Renewed Members

We would like to thank the following people for their new/renewed FASCD memberships for September. These are the names and spellings that I received from ASCD.

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<th>Maritza Aragon</th>
<th>Cindy Barton</th>
<th>Karen Beattie</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Patricia Butler</td>
<td>Kris Charlton</td>
<td>Holli Fears</td>
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<td>Ashley Exterkamp</td>
<td>Gina Fontana</td>
<td>Karyn Gary</td>
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<td>Cathy Greenspan</td>
<td>Dean Johnston</td>
<td>Bobbie Khoury</td>
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<td>Terrie Mitev</td>
<td>Karen Nolen</td>
<td>Carla O’Connor</td>
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<td>Jason Flom</td>
<td>Shannon Schwartz</td>
<td>Christopher Spinale</td>
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Check out our amazing space and astronomy facts for kids. Learn about different space objects and enjoy a range of cool trivia.

**Whole Child Tenets:**

- Each student enters school **healthy** and learns about and practices a healthy lifestyle.
- Each student learns in an environment that is physically and emotionally **safe** for students and adults.
- Each student is actively **engaged** in learning and is connected to the school and broader community.
- Each student has access to personalized learning and is **supported** by qualified, caring adults.
- Each student is **challenged** academically and prepared for success in college or further study and for employment and participation in a global environment.
“How to Be Thankful and Improve your Life”
by David Hochman Reader’s Digest

On day one of my self-proclaimed Month of Gratitude, my five-year-old son woke up “bored” at 5:15 a.m. I spied a speeding ticket in my wife’s purse, and our water heater sputtered to its death as I was getting into the shower. Ordinarily, I would have started grousing and the day would’ve been off to an ugly start. But this day was different. How cute my child’s dimples are even at this ungodly hour. How fetching my wife’s taste for adventure. Only 29 days to go.

Just a week earlier, as I struggled with the feeling that I’d been put on this earth to load and unload the dishwasher, I’d decided it was time to end my reflexive complaining. But it wasn’t simply the little things that were gnawing at me. All of a sudden, my friends were dealing with bad news—cancer diagnoses, divorce, job loss. Shouldn’t I be celebrating my relative good fortune?

I’d heard about the feel-good benefits of a gratitude attitude. What was less clear was how to move from griping to gushing. Hoping for tips, I called Robert A. Emmons, a professor at the University of California, Davis, who pioneered research on the benefits of positive thinking. Emmons quoted new studies that indicated that even pretending to be thankful raises levels of the chemicals associated with pleasure and contentment: serotonin and dopamine. Live as if you feel gratitude, he said, and soon the real thing will come.

He recommended keeping a log of everything I’m grateful for in a given week or month. One major study showed that people who wrote down what they are grateful for felt 25 percent happier after ten weeks than those who did not. They even felt better about their jobs and exercised an hour and a half more per week.

I was sold, but my first attempts at keeping a gratitude list were pretty weak: 1. Coffee. 2. Naps. 3. Caffeine in general. As my list grew, I found more uplift: 114. Freshly picked blueberries. 115. The Beatles’ White Album. 116. That I’m not bald.

By day three, I was on a tear, thanking every grocery bagger and parent on the playground like I’d just won an Oscar and hanging Post-it notes to remind myself of the next day’s thank-you targets: the mailman, my son Sebastian’s pre-K teacher. But soon, the full-on approach started to burn me out. Researchers call it the Pledge of Allegiance effect. “If you overdo gratitude, it loses its meaning or, worse, becomes a chore,” Martin E. P. Seligman, the author of Authentic Happiness, told me when I mentioned my slump. Be selective, he advised, and focus on thanking the unsung heroes in your life.

Then Seligman suggested a “gratitude visit.” Think of a person who has made a major difference in your life and whom you’ve never properly thanked. Compose a detailed letter to him or her that expresses your appreciation in concrete terms, then read it aloud, face-to-face. “It’s very moving for the giver and the receiver,” Seligman told me. “Be prepared for tears.”

I immediately flashed on Miss Riggi, my eighth-grade English teacher. She was the first one to open my eyes to Hemingway, Faulkner, and other literary giants. She was the first to encourage me to write. To this day, I am guided by her advice ("Never be boring"). But had I ever thanked her? Had anyone? I made some quick calls and discovered she was still teaching in the same school district, after nearly 40 years. I booked plane tickets to my hometown, Scranton, Pennsylvania, for Sebastian and me.

I had a week before the trip to Scranton, so I continued to flex my growing gratitude muscle. The author of The How of Happiness, Sonja Lyubomirsky, a psychology professor at the University of California, Riverside, recommended “taking time off from some-thing you love but take for granted.”

It was easier to love the car after spending a day riding public transportation—and racing ten sweaty blocks to Sebastian’s gymnastics class when the bus was 35 minutes late.

For a week, my wife and I gave up TV, our cell phones, even sugar. I gave up coffee—briefly. The short-term exercises woke us up to the value of the little things. But caffeine withdrawal is one thing. How would a gratitude attitude help my friends with cancer? Or the couple who’d announced their divorce? Or the father of three who’d told me he couldn’t find a job?

“Gratitude is never so important as during those times when everything appears to be lost,” Emmons said. Finding something to appreciate, he said, can save us from absolute despair—in a way that abject complaining cannot. I discovered that truth when I began driving my friend with lymphoma to the hospital for his chemotherapy treatments.

Despite his suffering (or perhaps because of it), our connection grew more meaningful. “I realized when I got sick that I’d spent years worrying about things that mean absolutely nothing,” he told me. Celebrating life while it’s here, he said, was most important now.

I thought about his words on the plane to Pennsylvania, as I wrote draft after draft of my letter to Miss Riggi. I thought I’d nailed it, but as I walked into her classroom, with Sebastian clinging to my leg, I was more anxious than I’d been in years.

Miss Riggi was shorter than I remember, though unmistakable with her still-long, still-black hair and bright, intelligent eyes. After a slightly awkward hug and small talk, we settled in. I took a deep breath and read.

Check out the lesson plan for teaching a Letter of Gratitude lesson at:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/17Vfjne4hD5bN75gO6bbvLxhkACmWjozL3PhG9S_0_zI/edit?hl=en_US

“I want to thank you in Impact you’ve had on”
November: Feeling Thankful and Reflective

Don't miss this: *Dealing with Difficult Parents and with Parents in Difficult Situations* by Todd Whitaker and Douglas J. Fiore- ISBN: 978-1-930556-09-6

Written for teachers, principals, and other educators, this book will help you work with the most challenging parents in the most challenging situations. This is essential in every educator's professional library. Check out bestwebbuys.com to buy your books! It is my favorite and does all the price comparisons for you.
Most States Surpass Global Average in Math, Science

A new analysis of how all U.S. states stack up against countries around the world shows that 8th grade students in 35 states outperformed the international average in math and those in 46 did so in science. How did Florida do? Check out this website and find out:

https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/studies/naep_timss/

*** If you know of other professionals in your school that are currently not members, please pass this information along and encourage them to join and share their expertise, too. We are only as strong as our membership to make a difference in teaching, learning, and leading here in Florida. Membership forms are on the FASCD website at http://www.fascd.org FASCD Strong! Until we meet again…..Tom