

Superintendents Panel at the 2009 NNER Annual Meeting Summary Report

Facilitated by Jim Lowham

Name	Friday Participants	Saturday Participants
Ted Adams		
Frank Alvarez	X	
Cliff Janey	X	
Dianna Clapp	X	X
Amalia Cudeiro	X	X
Dave Barker	X	X
Vern Henshaw	X	X
Chuck Birkholtz	X	
Roger Leon		
Bill Mester	X	
Donna Michaels		
Carol Renner		
Ray Schulte	X	X
Jerry Wilson	X	X

A quick summary of one key finding for each question:

1. What can the NNER do for superintendents—readers' guides to books and documents that will build conversation about the Agenda. Keeping the NNER and the Agenda as a topic in the professional development and orientation programs of districts is critical. The NNER has many "readers", let's publish some annotations, study guides/advanced organizers.
2. What can superintendents do for the NNER—keep their districts involved in the work of the NNER and the Agenda. Superintendents could be key leaders in the Access to Knowledge issue discussed in the following paragraphs.

To Glow:

1. The thoughtful conversations generated whenever the work of the NNER and its sites are being undertaken are valuable, valued, and needed.
2. The support offered by the NNER encourages the moral courage needed to support superintendents through tough decisions knowing that there are people who think similarly.
3. The journey of exploration and development of one's philosophy is an important endeavor.

To Grow:

1. The work of the NNER must be accessible to staff developers, leaders, and policy makers.
2. The connection to everyday life in schools is important to maintain along with the exploration of philosophy.
3. The NNER and the superintendent must nurture the view from the balcony.
4. The NNER must be part of the front-line with issues that are important to the practitioners and the students. Here is one front line issue that is surfacing in several settings and states: The school as a broker of education rather than a single provider is an important topic with deep implications for the P-20 systems. The is surfacing in some sites as dual/concurrent enrollment questions, while in other districts the question is of recognizing other providers such as internet providers, extended "camps," and other local providers of education. When colleges wish to deny dual/concurrent credit, other providers will take the money, grant the credit and not look back. Parents with money will provide whatever it takes to advantage their children, while children without such means or whose parents are not as involved will be denied such opportunities. The NNER could be a convener of conversations that could move the work into meaningful dialog. Without such a convener the conversation may well be a turf fight without winners, just a long list of losers, including those who are concerned about access to knowledge.

Parents enroll students in some of the ubiquitous distance or off-site learning opportunities. After the student completes the experience/course, the parents expect credit to be awarded either in lieu of or in addition to course work taken at school. In some cases it is a two week camp experience, in others a distance education course, and in others extensive local "learning" in dance club level sports or similar work. In other communities/states, the discussion is still limited to whether a high school student should earn college credit and, if so, who should teach the course, the high school teacher or a college professor/instructor. Being a broker for educational opportunities provides some students with avenues to customize their education which many students cannot travel or are even not aware of the avenues.

Other points that may add value to the NNER and to the role of the superintendent:

The local settings are leadership dependent until the partnerships become part of the culture. This seems to take quite a while. LEA Boards are rarely involved with or aware of the work of the NNER. Over a number of years and numerous changes in leadership the purpose or focus of the NNER can be lost or significantly changed. The only site where the superintendent disagreed with this was Montclair. Frank felt as if the work was so much part of the culture at the teacher level that the work could and has sustained through changes in leadership.

It appears that key administrative leaders have to be involved, but sustainability is reached when classroom teacher leaders become actively involved in the work of the setting.

Superintendents have to be willing to give up control of the work of the setting in their districts

It would be very beneficial if study guides, including advanced organizers, were available for books and articles that superintendents could use to introduce people to the work of the NNER and the Agenda. Board members are very busy people, but are willing to read outside of meeting times. Resources and training for facilitators to orient new leaders would be valuable. We frequently do not think of Board members when we think of orienting new leaders.

Sharing stories of successful Leadership Associate programs would be valuable. Settings with successful, sustaining Leadership Associate programs should be encouraged to open their programs to other settings.

It would be beneficial for the NNER setting to make purposeful visits with new superintendents.

There seems to be little time for conversation related to the philosophical underpinnings of our work, yet there is a reported hunger for such conversation. Many times tensions get naturally untangled through

such conversation.

Working through the philosophy of the NNER is a great journey. Our beliefs drive us whether we recognize them or not, whether we examine them or not.

The concept of asking “Essential Questions” related to the work of the Agenda generates thought and conversation.

Symposia could be a way to infuse the Agenda into local conversations

Superintendents could make the Agenda part of the induction program in their districts.

It is important to remember that the NNER and the Agenda are not programs. They are not something new to do. The NNER and the Agenda are what we do.

The NNER needs to be on-the-line for a “topic” that links everyday life in schools to the Agenda. One topic might be the discussion of dual/concurrent enrollment for college credit and access to knowledge. This topic appears to be “heating-up” in several settings. One of the current hot buttons is the school district or school becoming a broker for education.

One great value of the NNER is the provision of risk-free spaces to have conversations of important questions. The idea of the district/school being both a provider and a broker of educational opportunities may be one of the on-the-line topics to be discussed. Such risk-free spaces help leadership feel as if they are not all alone, out on the limb while some one else is sawing. The President’s speech about the importance of schools to students was an example of feeling isolated. Finding the appropriate policies and rules for brokering educational opportunities may be another challenge facing superintendents in the very near future.

As we have heard many times, in today’s environment, the public purpose of education is rarely discussed as important. Private, personal oriented achievement is all that is measured and reported.

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