



WISCONSIN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL BOARDS

WELCOME!

Leading with Certainty
During Uncertain Times

Supporting,
Promoting &
Advancing Public
Education



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This Unprecedented Time: Headlines from Ed Week Articles In One Recent Issue

- ▶ When Schools Shut Down, We All Lose
- ▶ Separated From Peers and Teachers, Students More Prone to Drop Out
- ▶ Lengthy School Closures A Costly Endeavor
- ▶ Student-Teachers Caught in the Middle By Shutdowns
- ▶ Stand Down on Sales Pitches During COVID-19
- ▶ Now Is No Time For Spectator Democracy
- ▶ What the Coronavirus Feels Like in Communities Around The Country
- ▶ How To Make Decisions In A Pandemic



Yes, We Live With a Pandemic

- ▶ Our Family Life Has Changed.
- ▶ Our Work Life Has Changed.
- ▶ There Is Not Much Around Us That Has Not Changed.
- ▶ The Key Questions For Us Is: Why Is Certainty Called For and How Do We Lead With Certainty During This Very Uncertain Time?





WHY CERTAINTY?



Seeing All of This
Through the Eyes
of Children and
Their Families



Matters in Schools,
We Have a
Responsibility to
Help People
Address



WHY CERTAINTY?

Pausing to Ask

Selective Certainty

Lead with Certainty

[www.rapidstart
leadership.com/lead-
with/certainty/](http://www.rapidstartleadership.com/lead-with/certainty/)



Selective Certainty



When Action is Required, Do Something,
Anything



When Values Are On The Line, People Must
See Us Leading By Our Values



When You Truly Are An Expert: While
Remaining Humble, Share What You Know



Lead With Certainty- The Takeaway



If You Humbly Admit You Are Not Certain,
People Will Respect This



Again, Share What You Know and Contact
Others for Advice



Do Not Make Sweeping Promises About
Things Out Of Your Control



With These In Mind, Make Decisions and
Communicate Them Clearly



Crisis Decision-making

- Speed and scope of coronavirus crisis
- Making good, fast decisions very challenging anytime
- Uncertainty, instinct, management training cause delay in action
- Need to act in urgent, honest, iterative fashion
- Recognize mistakes inevitable
- Correct course – not assign blame – when mistakes occur





Postponing decisions to wait for more information might make sense during business as usual. But when the environment is uncertain and defined by urgency and rapidly changing information, waiting to decide is a decision in itself.





Principles to make bold decisions quickly in these uncertain times

Ways to Take a Breath

- Express the need for a moment to think.
- Go to the “balcony” to try to gain a broader perspective.
- Focus on your breathing – take several slow, deep breaths. In a group, do this together.

Ask these questions:

- What is most important right now?
- What might we be missing?
- How might things unfold from here and what could we influence now that could pay off later?



Principles to make bold decisions quickly in these uncertain times

▶ 1. Involve more people

- ▶ Amid uncertainty, leaders often feel the need to limit authority and make big decisions huddled behind closed doors
- ▶ May need to reject hierarchical model that is comfortable in normal times
- ▶ Involve more stakeholders and encourage different views and debate
- ▶ Can lead to smarter decisions without sacrificing speed





Principles to make bold decisions quickly in these uncertain times

▶ 2. Steps to involve more people

- ▶ Clarify the decisions to be made.
- ▶ Identify a small number of decision makers.
- ▶ Identify who should have a voice, including relevant stakeholders and experts, and those who will implement decisions.
- ▶ Create a forum for rapid debate to take place. Be clear that everyone has a voice but not a vote.



Principles to make bold decisions quickly in these uncertain times

3. Make the critical small choices

- In normal course of business big decisions obvious – large cost or impact.
- In uncertain times some decisions that seem small or routine at first can have large long-term strategic implications.
- Can be hard to spot, but leaders must look for them.
- Build a bridge to the future by taking smaller steps, keeping something familiar and secure with each step.





Principles to make bold decisions quickly in these uncertain times

Steps to make the critical small choices

- Learn as much as possible about options before choosing.
 - Anticipate multiple possible scenarios for how things might unfold over time.
 - Knowledge makes the new seem more familiar
- List 5 to 10 choices that, making today might, depending upon what happens, make a difference later.
- Engage others to help identify which small decisions you should make now in case they become the difference makers down the road.
 - Which should you spend time on today?
 - Which should you monitor and reconsider later?





Principles to make bold decisions quickly in these uncertain times

4. Recognize strategic decisions vs tactical decisions and be clear about levels of authority

- In stressful times, leaders will have to make more big-bet decisions than before and also will be worried about their people.
- When making a high-stakes decision, it's important to be able to focus attention on the issue at hand and minimize distractions.
- If a leader is too frenzied, they are likely to make errors in judgment.
- School boards and superintendents need to focus on the strategic decisions and let other administrators deal with the tactical ones.



Principles to make bold decisions quickly in these uncertain times

Strategic Decision

- high degree of uncertainty
- large likelihood that things will change
- difficulty in assessing costs and benefits
- result of several simultaneous outcomes

Tactical Decision

- clear objective
- low degree of uncertainty
- relatively clear costs and benefits





Principles to make bold decisions quickly in these uncertain times

5. Empower leaders with judgement and character

- Leaders with the right temperament and character are necessary during times of uncertainty
- Stay curious and flexible but can still make the tough calls, even if that makes them unpopular.
- Gather differing perspectives and then make the decisions, with the best interests of the organization (not their careers) in mind
- For decisions within their delegated authority, they escalate only the trickiest problems for input or approval.



Principles to make bold decisions quickly in these uncertain times

Recognize Your Superintendent's Experience

People who have done as many of the three following things as possible will increase the likelihood of being successful in the current times of uncertainty:

- Lived through a crisis (personal or professional) and shown their mettle and personal resilience
- Made a tough, unpopular decision because it was the right thing to do, despite the fact that they took heat for it and potentially burned bridges or spent social capital
- Willingly gave bad news up the chain of command to leaders who didn't want to hear it





Principles to make bold decisions quickly in these uncertain times

Review Levels of Authority with your superintendent with discussion of current situations

Level 1 – Superintendent has complete authority to decide and act

Level 2 – Superintendent has complete authority to act but must inform the board about each decision or action

Level 3 – Superintendent must obtain prior approval from the school board before acting

Level 4 – School board makes the final decision but may permit or require a recommendation from the superintendent



Principles to make bold decisions quickly in these uncertain times

6. This is not a marathon but it is a call for endurance

Like a marathon, this coronavirus crisis evokes the need to face difficulties with perseverance and sustained energy over time.

We can borrow the marathoner's most helpful meditation, drawn from American half-marathon record-holder Ryan Hall - "Run the Mile You're In".



Worrying about the miles remaining could paralyze you in the current moment, could discourage you or drag you.

Long-term planning is critical, but you'll find strength to endure if you show up for what's needed in this moment.

- Do what is right, even when it is not popular.



During the coronavirus crisis, with so many changes to your lives and school realities, you can be easily overwhelmed if you spend too much time thinking about all of the months of difficulty that lie ahead of us. The call to run the mile you're in is a call to stay present in this day, in this moment. When you do, you can find strength and endurance, one moment at a time.



Nine Decision-making Biases

Adapted from an article by Thomas H. Davenport

Does your Board show any of these?



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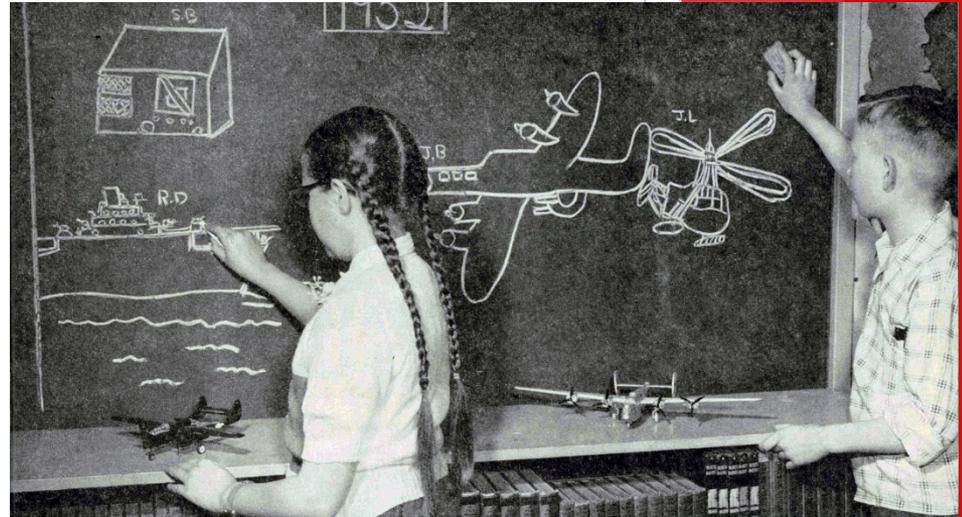


1. Normalcy Bias

The belief that things will return to the way things were done in the past

Effect

This makes us unwilling to plan for unforeseen circumstances.





Antidote

Make assumptions

There is unlikely to be significant state or federal money for more staff members, additional school buses, or redesigning school buildings

There will not be a cure for COVID-19 by the Fall 2020.

Social-distancing will need to be practiced.

Parents and teachers will prefer that some, if not all, instruction take place in person.





Brainstorm and Visualize

Brainstorm changes that will need to be made.

Then visualize impediments to each proposed change.



2. Probability Bias

- ▶ Except in Las Vegas, most people are uncomfortable making decisions based on what is **likely** to happen.
- ▶ Most people prefer absolutes.





Antidote #1

- ▶ Thinking locally can help because we know more about what might happen.
- ▶ How will this affect our community?
- ▶ Our students?
- ▶ Our staff?





Antidote #2

Make contingency plans.

What will we do if we have a coronavirus case in our school(s)?



3. Hostile Attribution Bias

When others don't agree with us, we assume hostile intent on their part.

“If you don't agree with me, you must not care about our students.”





Antidote

Assume the best intentions of others, especially when they disagree.

Since very few of us have been in this pandemic situation before, assume that we are all trying to do what is best for kids.





4. Bandwagon Effect Bias

We tend to go with the
popular trend of the
moment



Whether it is Zumba or Zoom

We tend to go with
the popular trend of
the moment.





Antidote

Listen to the recommendations of staff members who have a good idea of what will work in our schools and what won't.



5. Either/Or Bias

- ▶ We tend to think of the options as two opposite points.
- ▶ It is sometimes called binary thinking.
- ▶ It shuts out other possibilities.





Binary Thinking

Why make all choices opposites?

Schools are open or closed for all students.

Learning is in-person or online.

Testing is good or bad.

Students have choices or the school decides.



Antidote

If possible, consider multiple different framings of the same decision - ideally, some with nonbinary outcomes.



6. Availability Bias

Anecdotes about high profile people or school districts tend to shape our thinking.





Antidote

In general, it's more useful to pay attention to the data about our situation than to highly available stories about others.



7. Confirmation Bias

We pay more attention to information which supports our own views.



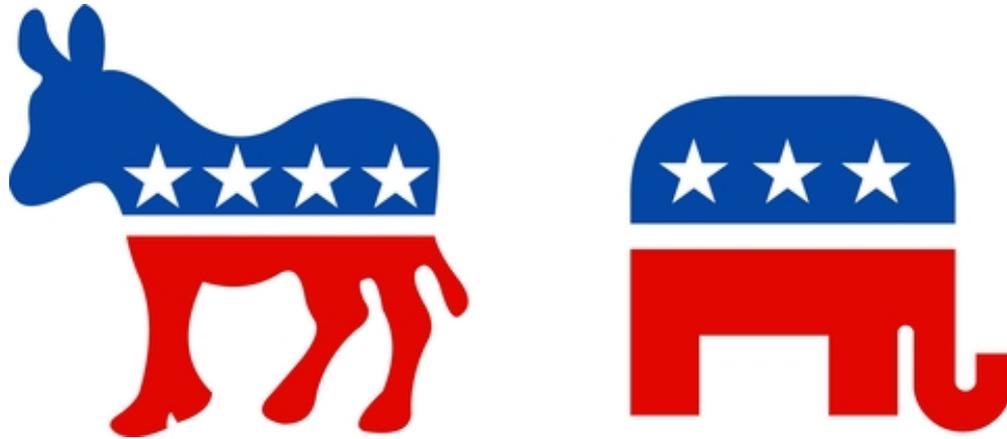
Antidote

Seek out sources that may contradict our bias.

**“CONTRADICT
YOURSELF. IN ORDER TO
LIVE, YOU MUST
REMAIN BROKEN UP.”**

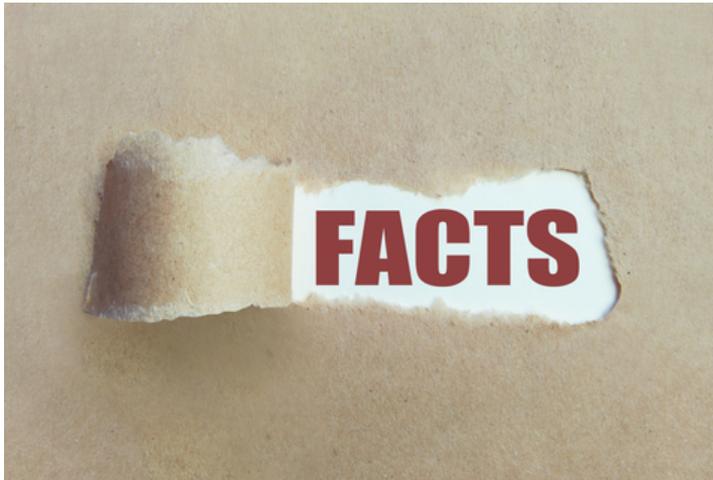
WYNDHAM LEWIS

QUOTESEVERLASTING.COM



8. Political Bias

Politics affects how people interpret information and make decisions.



Antidote

Try to work from facts rather than opinions, especially when dealing with school district issues.

Politics within the community or on the board itself can needlessly complicate and prolong important decisions which need to be made in a timely manner.



9. Status Quo Bias

Considering the current state of affairs to be optimal and anything different as a loss.





Who wants the status quo?

Given the current state of affairs, almost no one wants to continue in this manner, so this bias is unlikely right now. However, until recently this had a powerful effect.





Educational Leadership During A Pandemic: The Global Purpose Approach



Calling On School Boards and Superintendents



An Eight Point Plan



Medium.com



1. Equity

Climate/Culture

Food and Supplies
Insecurities

Safety

Health

Technology

Internet



2. Training and Development

**Preparedness for
Emergencies**

**Training Must Be
Ongoing Due to
Unpredictable Nature of
Life Situations**

**Training on Sanitary
Classrooms and
Disinfecting**

**Teachers Must Be
Supported in Distance
Learning**



3.Special Education and Students With Disabilities

Distance Learning is Difficult for Students who Have Special Needs and Require Different Teaching Techniques and Methodologies

Many Parents Do Not Have Skills to Teach Their Special Needs Child

Special Accommodations Are Needed

Home Visits Should Be Considered And/or Other Virtual Methods By Partnering with Parent

Consider Not Requiring Attending Until All Are Able to Receive the Education They Need Equitably



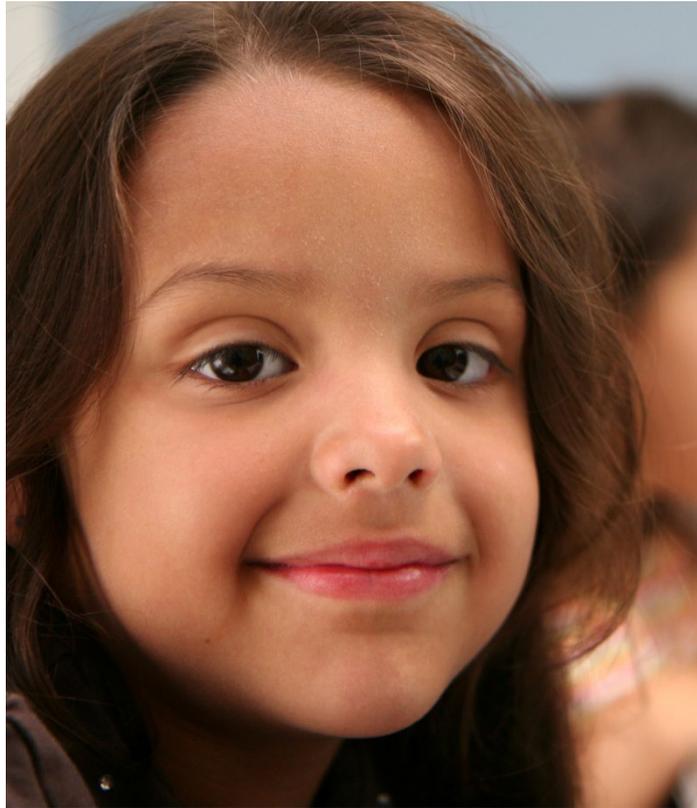
4. English as a Second Language

- Need to Customize Communications
- Distance Learning May Present Challenges
- Communications Should Be In Their Native Language
- Educators Should Continue To Teach in a Virtual Environment that is consistent with the Usual-In-Person Classroom Experience as There May Be Intersecting Needs, Communications Related to Food and Safety
- Technology Should Be Posted Online, Mailed, and Emailed in the Native Languages Spoken By Families



5. Prekindergarten and Kindergarten

- Challenging to Work from Home and Also Teach Young Children
- Children More Dependent on The In-Person Teacher Led Experience
- Lessons Must Be Short, Engaging, Interactive and Fun.
- Limit Required Parental Engagement as Parents Try to Balance Learning and Work
- If With a Caretaker, May Be Challenges Related to Technology and Online Classes





6. Parent and Teacher

- Transparency
- Communications Should Be Frequent, Concise and Simple
- Based on Demographics, Communications Should Be in Multiple Languages
- When Schools are Closed, Teachers Should Call or Text Every Student
- Parent to Follow Up with How They Are Doing and To Understand How They Can Be Supported





7. Grading, Assessment, Homework and Standardized Testing

- During a Pandemic, Standardized Testing and Assessments are Not Easy to Administer
- Due to Challenges of Administering Tests Remotely, They Should Be Cancelled, Postponed or Adjusted to Meet the Situational Needs of the Student
- Assessments May Be Completed During Small Informal, On-line Learning Sessions
- Homework Should Not Be Excessive or Overwhelming. It Should Reinforce Learning, But Not Create Inequities





8. Revolutionary Leadership

- Leaders Must Be Authentic and Communicate Accurate Information Expediently
- Lead by Example by Demonstrating Our Values and Dedication
- Consistent Communication
- Training on Virtual Tools
- Emergency Preparedness Policy and Procedures
- Virus Prevention, Mitigation and Management
- Re-entry - An Onboarding Process - new expectations, information to protect from viruses, cultural sensitivity, and empathy for others
- Facilities - conduct an assessment, regular sanitizing, and stockpile of supplies



ARE YOU READY TO LEAD WITH CERTAINTY DURING THESE UNCERTAIN TIMES?

**The future is
completely
uncertain...**

**...I am completely
certain of this.**



Leadership Matters

- ▶ School board members and district administrators need to look for insights as they navigate this time -- showing their staff, students, parents, and community that embracing a “new normal, regardless of how unplanned or undesirable it may be, is the only way to focus on the future.
- ▶ Leaders, it’s up to you to inspire, motivate, and engage your people by leading by example.



Champion Transparency and Authenticity

- ▶ Be optimistic about the future; however, ground your optimism in the truth.
- ▶ Set new priorities for your district. Revisit your Strategic Plan - are changes needed to align with the “new normal”?
- ▶ Support your superintendent and district administrators as they tackle challenging decisions.
- ▶ Ensure adequate resources for teachers.
- ▶ Communicate often and in various ways.
- ▶ Acknowledge and celebrate the hard work that is being done.



Ensure Equity for All Students

- ▶ Students with Disabilities
- ▶ English Language Learners
- ▶ Pre-kindergarten and Kindergarten
- ▶ Be informed on how instruction is adapted for all learners
- ▶ Review your grading policy
- ▶ If the virtual environment is not working, how will you adapt instruction?
- ▶ Discuss learning loss and make decisions for remediation



Leading Through Uncertain Times

- ▶ Understand that this shift in how we do school through this pandemic is a second order change, meaning it is a fundamental and significant shift from the past.
- ▶ Communicate belief in your staff. Acknowledge their expertise and listen to them.
- ▶ Understand the emotional side of change. Stress and anxiety are human conditions; empathize with feelings of stress so they trust you and will follow your direction.
- ▶ Have a plan, make difficult decisions, and strive for a united front with the board, administrators and staff.
- ▶ Communicate, communicate, communicate!



Leading with Certainty

- ▶ A Framework for a Plan (Oconomowoc Area School District)
 - Phase I: Resilience - Leading and Supporting Kids, Families, and Staff Through the Pandemic Crisis
 - Phase II: Return - Preparing For and Leading Through the Aftershocks
 - Phase III: Redesign - Innovating to Create New Opportunities



Leading with Certainty

- ▶ Portray a positive, optimistic, unified front and maintain it.
- ▶ Know the implications of this “new normal” and understand how this second order change affects the lives of all district stakeholders.
- ▶ Remind yourselves and your staff that you are doing your best under these circumstances. Things will go wrong. People will make mistakes.
- ▶ Work collaboratively with your district administrator and support her/his decisions.
- ▶ Communicate regularly even though things are changing rapidly.
- ▶ Take care of yourself. Be okay with not having all the answers. Be the example and lead!



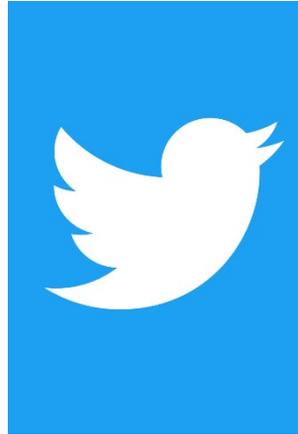
Summary

The important thing is to be aware of these biases when your board and administration are creating a plan for your district. Make sure that you are **not** being led by your biases.





THANK YOU



Stay Informed

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