

A Generation Conversation

Thirteenth Generation or Generation X (1961-81)

Alienated, "reactive," cynical generation that challenges the ideals of their parents and develops into pragmatic, risk-taking adults.

Worried that the world is gearing up to punish them down the road.

Concerned with making a comfortable living as much as with a meaningful philosophy of life.

Older generations see them as frenetic, physical, slippery, wasted "numb and dumb" generation driven more by appetites than ideas.

Legalized abortion, two career families, unable to afford traditional family life based on one income.

Concern about declining U.S. economy closing off of economic opportunities.

End of Cold War, country no longer seen as leading an important "cause" on the world stage.

Boom Generation or Baby Boomers (1943-60)

Inner-driven, "idealist," moralistic generation that comes of age during a period of spiritual awakening and develops a new creedal passion.

Woodstock, counter-culture, "Aquarian conspiracy," rebellion against conventional family life.

Pampered by parents, expect the world to take care of them.

Tend to make plans or judgments according to internalized, immutable principles of right and wrong.

"Generation gap" – disagreed with and looked down upon prior generations.

Favored spiritualism over science, gratification over patience, negativism over positivism, fractiousness over conformity, rage over friendliness, self over community.

Understanding what motivates younger school administrators is paramount to sustaining ACSA membership

It is a common misperception that younger school administrators are not "joiners," that they are somehow less committed to the profession and that commitment does not include association membership.

The truth is, school leaders in their early 30s bring to the job passion, an inspiration to lead, the ability to be good at living as well as teaching, and a will to transcend the "dance of perception."

And, like their more mature peers, they need a personal invitation to become members of ACSA.

The association recently brought together a group of member and potential member young administrators for a "Generation Conversation." We asked the group to share their thoughts on the profession and their hopes for ACSA now and in the future.

The outcome was remarkable.



David Herrera and Erik Burmeister



Melissa Bazanos

An inspiration to lead

Many Baby Boomers would agree they entered the profession to "serve." While service is part of the equation for younger school leaders, it is not the primary motivation.

"Instead of 'service,' I'd use the word 'leadership,'" said Matthew Griffin, assistant principal at Dale Jr. High in Anaheim USD.

Griffin said the idea of service isn't really relevant; it's more the specifics of leadership. To ensure student success, leaders must be in charge of a school's "bureaucracy," such

as what teachers teach, he said.

"My focus is so much on student achievement as a part of service. It's always on the forefront of my mind," said Amy Peterman, principal of Vaughn Elementary in Ceres USD.

Indeed, the message is being heard that leadership matters in public education. In addition, younger school leaders understand that change is imperative, and they are eager to meet the



Rick Yee

"Doing your own thing" an ideal.
Silent Generation
(1925-42)

Hypocritical, "adaptive" generation that coasts along on the accomplishments of earlier generations, laying the groundwork for a new idealist era.

An outer-directed, "Lonely Crowd."

"Helpmate" generation, people who tended to be in the "second-in-command" role.

Generation of bureaucratizers, building institutions and organizations.

Never expected to accomplish great things, content to settle down.

G.I. Generation
(1901-24)

America's confident and rational problem-solvers.

High achievers in war, peace, science, business, community life.

Superman the most enduring comic strip character, symbolizing unstoppable energy

Valued outer life over inner life.

Traditional sex role and family life attitudes, child centered homes.

Received many advantages in education, health, financing for homes and businesses.

Most affluent generation of the 20th century.

Synthesized from William Strauss' and Neil Howe's "Generations, The History of America's Future."



Matthew Griffin

that takes a special individual; one who recognizes and utilizes the power in those around them."

"I'm not so much a leader as a facilitator," Griffin said.

Griffin came from corporate America, and said there's a gap between skilled people and those "people" skills you learn in the corporate world. He said he'd rather deal with spitballs and expulsion issues any day; it's much more rewarding.

Scott Smith, an assistant principal in Barstow USD, said the quintessential question is, "If my child was in that classroom, what would I want to happen?"

"If you treat the kids you work with as your own child, you'll steer the school in the right direction," Smith said.

As teachers, he said, each classroom is an individual "fiefdom."

Administrators see the "bigger picture."

challenge.

According to Benjamin Hutchins, a researcher from Michigan State University: "The school leader of today is surrounded by many challenges, and, in looking at the future of education, is sure to be confronted with more in our quickly changing culture. However, just as education has transformed throughout the generations, leadership has changed as well. The leaders of today are surrounded by a wealth of knowledge, motivation, ideas and passion.

"Gone are the days of top down management. The school leader of today is a coach, leading his team to confront the challenges that the educational world brings. It is a job



Jennifer Backman



ACSA Executive Director Bob Wells, standing, and Assistant Executive Director Karen Stapf-Walters, seated left, join the Generation Conversation.

Smith said he had a principal who encouraged him to get out of his fiefdom, and he does the same for his teachers.

Many young administrators work in schools with large numbers of low-socioeconomic students. They learn that often the only structure these children have is during school hours.

Melissa Bazanos, principal at Edgemont Elementary in Moreno Valley USD, grew up in the area she now works. She understands the community. Her school supports a large number of high poverty students and English language learners.

Bazanos said being young, no one thought she could tackle the leadership role. But she's full of energy and motivation. Working together with a staff that was ultimately inspired by her commitment, she led her school out of Program Improvement.

"I came from the community. I knew these kids. I knew these families. I knew the structure," she said.

While many young administrators prefer to work in proximity to their outside interests, money is not a huge motivator.

Jennifer Backman, assistant principal at Ceres High, chose Ceres USD because it is close to her parents in Oakdale. She said school leadership, especially at the high school level, is labor intensive, but she mitigates some of that by bringing



Erik Burmeister



Scott Smith

her family to sports events or other late night meetings.

Griffin said that when factoring in the extra hours administrators work, the hourly rate of pay goes way down. But the job is satisfying. "Money always has to be a part of the decision making process but it begins to slip down the rungs," he said.

"We can take our skills to the private sector and make more and work less, but we chose education," said Erik Burmeister, assistant principal at Union Middle School in Union SD.

Rick Yee, a fellow principal in Union SD, added that his friends in the private sector wonder why young administrators choose to work so hard in public administration, when they could make so much more and work less in private industry.

"I just love learning and teaching," Yee said. "Working as an administrator has its challenges, but they are far outweighed by the rewards of helping children learn and grow."

Yee, like other younger site leaders, moved from high school to middle school and eventually down to the elementary level, where the late night hours are fewer and the impact on students more immediate.

Seeking respect for a balanced life

A balanced life is probably more important to younger administrators than any other factor in their careers. And they do not want "lip service" or professional

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Rick Yee, principal, Union SD



Melissa Bazanos

development in balanced leadership. They simply want respect for seeking a balance.

Family is extremely important to younger administrators. They are unwilling to give their lives to education, and have become adept at balancing family and work.

Unfortunately, they often encounter resistance from their superiors.

“We want balance in our lives,” Burmeister said, adding that older colleagues, retirees, and superintendents may think younger leaders need to “pay the piper.”

But younger administrators pride themselves on efficiency. They stay late when they need to, but are adept at getting work done in a timely manner. They disdain too much dialogue, and prefer superiors to simply get to the point – tell them what to do and get out of the way.

They don’t want divorce, and feel they shouldn’t have to sacrifice travel or social life. And they often feel their older mentors do not encourage them to have a life. They are made to feel guilty for taking personal time or a day off, or even for leaving at 5 p.m.

This can lead to what Burmeister called the “dance of perception,” where younger administrators waste time proving they are not “slackers” by staying late, skipping lunch or otherwise performing based on what older school leaders deem admirable.

If older administrators continue to evaluate younger administrators through an established experiential lens, they will continue to alienate those entering the field.

“We want the flexibility to use our skill set to work less,” Burmeister said. “We want our faculty to be good at living as well as teaching.”

David Herrera, principal at Cesar Chavez Academy in Ravenswood City ESD, said sustainability of staff is important. Working people to death isn’t beneficial. He pushes people to take personal days.

Bazanos works long hours because she wants to inspire the same commitment from her staff. Her boyfriend refers to her job as “the other man.” She sees this effort as “front loading” because she knows a family is in her future. One day she will marry, have children and may want to stay home with them.

ACSA Executive Director Bob Wells has long understood the need to maintain a balance between work and family.

“I’m entering my 25th year with ACSA, and my story has been very much like yours,” Wells told participants in the Generation Conversation.

One of his children is now in college and the other in his early teens, but as a young father, Wells “got grief” from colleagues whenever he took time off to be with his family.

He has worked to build a culture within the association where people can be proud of what they do, both at work and in their personal lives.

A personal invitation to join

Thirty-something administrators often cite a lack of time for networking, but understand that in the long

run association membership is beneficial.

“It’s been so long since some people have had kids, they don’t remember how it is,” said Smith, who has twin 3-year-olds and a 5-year-old to tuck into bed at night.

Smith must travel three hours round-trip to attend ACSA region meetings. He said when he chooses to attend, he does not see his children that day.

Yee said the difficulty in creating an opportunity for people to meet is not particularly unique to younger administrators.

Young administrators know meetings are a great idea, but could be a challenge for those in rural areas. ACSA should also look at technology, such as the Web site, to keep people connected and keep the conversation going. That would be a selling point for young leaders.

However, face-to-face contact is still very important to all school administrators. A personal invitation to participate in ACSA events will bring younger administrators into the fold.

ACSA members who consistently recruit high numbers of new administrators to the association ranks agree that often it is as easy as asking them to join. Of course, there must also be follow-up contact.

Herrera pointed out there is a long lag time between signing up to become a member of ACSA and getting that first EdCal. A phone call from a colleague in a neighboring region would be nice, he said.

And establishment events, such as delegate assemblies, may be perceived by younger administrators as “old boys’ club” bureaucracies.

Burmeister suggested ACSA sponsor more local programs, such as gang awareness workshops, that would be beneficial to site leaders, provide an opportunity to get the ACSA message out, and use time more efficiently.

Backman and Peterman, who are active in their local charter, understand the benefits of ACSA membership.

“It’s a great networking opportunity and a great way to learn from other people as much as possible,” Backman said. “I look at ACSA as that tool.”

Peterman added: “You feel like you’re on your own little island; when you step off it’s invaluable.”

There is a beginning of the year event sponsored by Peterman’s charter, during which ACSA membership is explained. In addition, monthly meetings include valuable speakers and are used to entice new members.

Unfortunately, early in their careers younger administrators are not hearing enough about ACSA.

In Peterman’s district no one initially pushed ACSA. Getting a personal invitation to her first charter function made it important. That was very crucial to making the decision to attend.

Smith said that when he was working toward his credential, he took a course during which two of the retired superintendent instructors failed to mention ACSA. A third said for \$50 he could get a job list.

When ACSA is mentioned to developing school leaders it often has little meaning. If a job list is deemed to be the only benefit, the cost of membership may not be

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seen as such a good deal.

Herrera, whose father, Joel, is a region president, still took years to join. "I just joined three months ago," he said. "My father mailed applications to me every year."

The Generation Conversation, and consequently the 2006 Annual Conference during which it was held, was his first ACSA-related event.

"I get a lot of e-mail that I just have to delete," he said. "I just don't have time." The personal invitation to the conversation made the difference in his decision to participate.

Joshua Federwisch, a teacher in Central SD who has earned his credential but has not yet found his first administrative position, also has a legacy connection to ACSA.

"My dad was an administrator all my life. I swore I'd never even go into education," Federwisch said. "There are probably some administrators out there who don't learn about ACSA."

"Last year, my dad said 'come to the ACSA conference and network.' In the long run it was really beneficial making those connections."

Those without family connections to ACSA find it even more important to be invited into the association. Most of the young administrators who participated in the Generation Conversation did so because they were personally encouraged to attend.

"My understanding and interest (in the Generation Conversation) went from 'this might be fun' to 'wow! What a forward looking organization,'" Griffin said. "This kind of process is in the best interest of children."

Getting to know the next generation

The next challenge for Boom Generation administrators will be understanding the early twenty-somethings now serving in the teaching force – what generation experts William Strauss and Neil Howe call the Internet Generation or the Millennials (born 1982-20??) in their book "The Fourth Turning."

"This generation is going to rebel by behaving not worse, but better," the authors state. "Their life mission will not be to tear down old institutions that don't work, but to build up new ones that do. Look closely at youth indicators, and you'll see that Millennial attitudes and behaviors represent a sharp break from Generation X, and are running exactly counter to trends launched by the Boomers. Across the board, Millennial kids are challenging a long list of common assumptions about what 'postmodern' young people must become."



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GENERATION CONVERSATION PROMPTS

Having conversations with younger administrators in regions and charters is encouraged in an effort to move forward the agenda to better serve members and to increase membership.

The ACSA Vivid Descriptions states: "Ninety percent of all school administrators will belong to ACSA, and its membership will be regarded as virtually indispensable. ACSA will cultivate and mentor California's administrative leaders, and be the primary provider of their professional development and networking opportunities."

Following are prompts used to drive the Generation Conversation held by state ACSA this year. They may be used to start your local conversations.

1.) When asked why they do their jobs, most Baby Boomer administrators say "service." Talk about your motivation to enter the field.

Where does money fit it?

2.) Discuss how important it is to you to achieve balance between career and personal goals.

How important is where you live?

How important is a flexible schedule?

3.) Talk about how you learned about ACSA. Who got you involved; what was said or done that enticed you to join the association?

4.) If you could create a member service model for ACSA, what would it look like? Think of examples of great customer service and why.

5.) Job politics and bureaucracy dynamics are often avoided by the post Baby Boom generation. What do you see as a replacement model?

ADDITIONAL PROMPTS IF NEEDED:

1.) What are the most rewarding aspects of your current job? Give an example of a recent rewarding experience on the job.

2.) Where do you see yourself in five years? What would your dream job look like?

4.) What are the most important things an organization should do to help you achieve your goals?

5.) How important to you is: legislative advocacy? Professional development opportunities? Networking with other administrators?