

# THE REFORMER

## EDUCATIONAL MAGAZINE

## Life-Long Learning in Leading



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At ASCD, our tagline is “Learn. Teach. Lead.” Working with leaders of our Constituent Services groups, we live this motto every day; not in a straight line, but a repeating cycle of leadership. To grow and fulfil our roles as leaders, we are continually questioning, un-learning, re-learning and applying new understandings, skills and strategies in serving the educators who serve our children.

As an international organization, ASCD sponsors Constituent Services groups to provide a meaningful, engaging way for practitioners to contribute to and benefit from their connection to the organization. Through its Affiliates, Connected Communities, Professional Interest Communities, Student Chapters and Emerging Leaders, ASCD serves and supports educators through its global mission to support the Whole Child.

As the world evolves, so does education to reflect the changing needs of society, its families and children. Moreover, much like teaching and learning, leadership in education is morphing via a new generation of district, building and classroom leaders. For those of us who have enjoyed entire careers in the profession, these are challenging times. The pathways to leadership forged in our youth are no longer viable, and it is difficult to identify and embrace new ways of leading. However, the signs are there. Traditional conferences, workshops and other forms of training are no longer viable, publishing now takes place in all kinds of formats, as information is shared openly and immediately without the need for hard-copy paper and ink, and teachers seek to be leaders without having to leave their classrooms and assume administrative roles. These factors (and more) have challenged membership organizations to rethink how they recruit and retain members and earn enough revenue to sustain their mission. The imperative is to change or face extinction.

Because the education landscape is changing so quickly right under our feet, the immediate demand is for educator-leaders to be responsive to the needs of those they serve, agilely adapting to the needs and interests of their colleagues in education. This requires learning through fresh eyes and new understandings. Educators vote with their feet; if they are no longer showing up for your offerings, what needs to change? We needed to shift from being purveyors of exclusive content to conveners of communities where educators network, share and learn.

For ASCD Affiliates, the response has been new delivery formats for professional learning. Historically, one or more annual conferences were a reliable driver of membership and revenue for affiliates. However, as professional development monies have dried up, and both teachers and administrators find it increasingly challenging to be out of their buildings, face-to-face events are more sparsely attended. Starting in 2011, affiliates piloted edcamp and unconference events in attempts to innovate and reinvent professional learning. These events were excellent incubators for grassroots learning and collaborating, which could be held at little or no expense, but they also did not bring in much revenue. It marked the beginning of the shift towards convening educators to empower them to learn from each other, but affiliates still needed a model that could fund and sustain their work.

In the same spirit, ASCD Affiliates have hosted Teach to Lead summits. Originally developed by the United States Department of Education, ASCD became a partner in Teach to Lead and offered training and support to its affiliates so that they can offer this learning model to affiliate members. Several Powered by Teach to Lead summits have been offered by affiliates across the country, and the format is available for educators outside the United States, as well. At these summits, teams of educators (district and building administrators, classroom teachers, specialists and support staff) come together from their schools and districts to work on a problem of practice they have identified to work on together. Through the rigorous Teach to Lead format, including the logic model and critical friends, each team leaves the summit with an action plan ready to implement upon their return to school. It is a revolutionary way to bring together educator teams and empower them to learn and lead around challenges and opportunities they face. As one team from New York noted, “We never get the chance to do this when we’re in the district. We’re all too busy.”

The third affiliate innovation in delivering professional learning is hybrid professional learning, which ASCD calls the hub-and-spoke model. Our affiliates identify multiple centers (spokes) in their region where educators can come together locally and receive learning from noteworthy practitioners sharing virtually (from the hub). This is not a webinar from a sit-and-get talking head. Instead, the presenters interact with their audiences with lots of give and take, and there are live facilitators at each center who work with their local audience to explore and apply the concepts, skills and strategies that are shared from the hub. Even the different centers interact with one another during the day. This model saves on traditional face-to-face costs (free or inexpensive sites, local participant travel with no overnight lodging, reduced presenter fees since they can present from their home base) and it allows hosting organizations to earn revenue from reasonable registration fees. What is critical for affiliates, is that they can identify the high-interest, hot topics for educators in their backyard instead of one-size fits all professional development themes.

In all three of these examples, affiliates were challenged to think differently out of necessity. Educators sought new ways to learn that helped them immediately in their work. Hosting a conference at a pricey location with big-name experts and hit-and-miss concurrent sessions was the hallmark of the industrial age, where organizations held the keys to learning opportunities and charged membership in exchange for access. In the information age, educators are not interested in transactional relationships where they pay to play. This was difficult for veteran leaders to wrap their heads around. If educators are not as interested in joining or attending events, how are we supposed to lead? They’ve always come to us. Suddenly, we have to find ways to go to them to remain relevant and, indeed, solvent.

This realization is only the beginning. Membership organizations need to walk it as they talk it. It's not enough to exhibit an old leadership model while attempting to attract this new breed of educators. We must welcome young educators into our governance structures so that they can learn, teach and lead from within, and we can learn from them. Veteran educators need this infusion of new thinking and new blood to transform their organizations. The next generation of educators can tell the difference between traditional organizations by posturing themselves to solicit them, and new-aged organizations that genuinely and meaningfully invite them to contribute and lead from wherever they sit in the profession. You can't fake being authentic.

ASCD's Emerging Leaders offer another example of un-learning and re-learning how to lead. Each year, a new class of rising stars in education are inducted into the ASCD Emerging Leader program. Historically, my office would provide induction and orientation into the program as the parent organization. In short, Emerging Leaders were welcomed into a one-size-fits-all program with well-defined expectations, select opportunities and measurable outcomes. Beginning in 2017, my office asked for input from alumni Emerging Leaders, seeking their recommendations for making the program more personalized and dynamic. The flood of insights and ideas offered were more than we could have anticipated, prompting us to bring together a team of Emerging Leader veterans to help plan the orientation of our 2018 class.

The result was a complete transformation of the program's selection and orientation processes, including:

- Selection of smaller classes to ensure more individualized engagement
- Virtual orientation as the first phase leading up to face-to-face orientation
- One-to-one mentor pairings for each new class member
- Interest inventories to help match new members to opportunities
- Veteran Emerging Leaders helping to plan and facilitate the orientation experiences
- Requiring Emerging Leaders attend an orientation to accept their seat in the new class
- An extended full-day orientation with numerous opportunities for networking
- Orientation held as part of our annual Leader to Leader conference so that the new class can meet other Constituent Services group leaders

As a result, last year's class of Emerging Leaders gave high ratings for their orientation experience. Participant feedback indicated that the new class wanted a second day to continue to delve into their rich orientation experience. This success is a direct result of our staff opening up the selection and orientation processes to alumni who infused much-welcome energy and ideas into the long-standing program. The entire organization benefits.

As an outward-facing arm of the organization, ASCD Constituent Services also has had to rethink how it supports all five of its member-led groups. Traditionally, each group has been an entity unto itself, both in the minds of staff and in the minds of the educators leading them. This created unintended gaps and disconnects between all five programs. An affiliate may be well-established in its region but have no connection to ASCD Student Chapters at nearby

universities. Likewise, Emerging Leaders highly celebrated in their local community had mixed results in connecting with ASCD Affiliates in their regions. Yes, there were examples of student chapters, connected communities and professional interest communities collaborating with affiliates and emerging leaders, but the full potential for building such connectivity and capacity was untapped.

In response to this need, Constituent Services is currently mapping out clusters of all five groups in each region of the world. As a result, all ASCD Affiliate, Connected Community, Professional Interest Community, Emerging Leaders and Student Chapter leaders will have a quick-reference visual guide to all ASCD Constituent Services groups where they live and work. Through these efforts, we are working to promote networking among all our groups through communications and programming, breaking down silos and barriers to collaboration, under the ASCD Communities banner.

Traditions and turf can get in the way, so building a climate of trust, collaboration and risk-taking is vital. As with all good learning, the right questions begin the journey: How do we remain relevant in a new era of education? What do educators want and need? What are today's value-added member benefits? How do membership organizations lead, and how are they led? What does servant leadership look like at an organizational level?

Walking the walk, we are always a work in progress. The learning never ends, as it is generated from points across the organization pushing, asking, theorizing, testing, observing and sharing outcomes. ASCD understands that learning is prerequisite to leading.

## About the Author:



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Walter McKenzie is Senior Director for Constituent Services at ASCD, leading its affiliate, connected community, professional interest community, student chapter and emerging leader programs. In this role, he supports ASCD governance, education policy and educator advocates, the Whole Child and Healthy School Communities initiatives. He is a strong proponent of using social media technologies to transform organizations as they strive to meet the needs of their members in the 21st century.

In addition to his work in public education, McKenzie is an internationally known author and presenter on multiple intelligences theory and instructional technology, and he has authored several books on these subjects. A 25 year veteran in public education, he has been proudly working on behalf of ASCD members for 9 years.