



Horace Mann League of the USA

Founded in 1922 to Support Public Education

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**An Honorary Association of
Public Education Leaders**

August 4, 2026

Greetings!

**Welcome
The HML Post,**

**News, Insights, and Perspectives
Shaping Public Education**

The HML Post is published every Tuesday to engage and inform the League's members of trends and issues facing public school leaders.

*If you change your email address, **please send us a note** so you can continue receiving the Post.*

Editor
James Minichello, Executive Director, The Horace Mann League

Thought of the Week

"Leadership is first having a point of view and then bringing people together to fuse together a vision. That shared vision, matched with patience, persistence, and resources, has a chance of being realized."



— **Michael V. Simeck, Superintendent, Illinois' Deerfield Public Schools District 109; Member, HML Board of Directors**

HML News



Editor's Note: A Season to Recharge

As we welcome the month of August, we hope you're continuing to enjoy the quieter pace that summer provides. Before calendars begin to fill and a new school year takes shape, we encourage you to make the most of these remaining weeks by spending time with family and friends, exploring the outdoors, reading a good book, or simply enjoying moments of quiet reflection.

No one knows more than you that leadership is demanding work. Renewal is an important part of leading well. There will soon be meetings to attend, decisions to make, and students to welcome back into our schools. Until then, give yourself permission to pause.

Sometimes the most meaningful preparation for the year ahead isn't found in another meeting or another email—it's found in moments of rest, perspective, and gratitude. We hope the weeks ahead leave you refreshed, inspired, and ready to begin the new school year with renewed energy and purpose.

On behalf of the Horace Mann League family, thank you for your continued leadership and steadfast commitment to public education.

(Photography by James Minichello, Provo, Utah)



Spotlight Conversations: Kenneth Spells

Spotlight Conversations is a Q&A series produced by the Horace Mann League highlighting leaders who are shaping today's public education landscape—individuals whose work reflects the League's mission: that the public school system of the United States is an indispensable force in sustaining our democracy and a dynamic influence in American life.

It's a pleasure to speak with **Kenneth Spells**, superintendent of North Carolina's [**Hoke County Schools**](#), a learning community serving nearly 8,900 students.

HML: Please tell us about Hoke County Schools. Located just over an hour from Raleigh, what is your district best known for?

KS: We're located between Fayetteville, Fort Bragg, and Pinehurst, and we're especially known for serving a large military population. Supporting military-connected students and families is an important part of who we are.

HML: Hoke County Schools was recently recognized by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction as a Purple Star District, an honor that recognizes military-friendly schools and districts. What has this designation meant for your students and community?

KS: The Purple Star designation has strengthened our partnership with the military community. Each April, we host a celebration honoring our Purple Star families, reinforcing that military students and their parents are valued members of our district.

Military families are often highly mobile. It's important that they feel a sense of belonging right away. We want them to know they have a place here and a voice in our schools.

The designation has also become a recruiting tool. With three school districts serving families near Fort Bragg, parents have choices. We want Hoke County Schools to be viewed as a destination district, and our commitment to military families helps set us apart.

HML: What are some of the biggest challenges facing your district?

KS: One of our greatest responsibilities is telling our story. That means providing excellent customer service to parents and community members while ensuring everyone has a seat at the table. When people feel heard and included, they develop a sense of ownership in the district, and that ultimately strengthens the entire community.

HML: How would you describe the Hoke County story?

KS: Our story is about providing every student with a high-quality education while creating opportunities that meet their individual needs. Hoke County is a special place with tremendous potential. Our goal is to ensure every graduate is prepared to compete—whether they're pursuing college, the workforce, or another path after graduation.

HML: Summer provides school leaders with an opportunity to reflect on the past year while preparing for the next. What are some of your priorities as you look toward the new school year?

KS: We're excited to open a new comprehensive high school, which is expected to be completed next month. It's a tremendous investment in our students and community.

Academically, we're focused on literacy and mathematics while helping students avoid summer learning loss. Our "Rising Stars" program prepares incoming kindergarten students for a successful start, and we're also providing access to online learning opportunities throughout the summer to keep students engaged.

HML: What does it mean to you to be a member of the Horace Mann League Board of Directors?

KS: For me, it's simple. I grew up in Bladen County, North Carolina, where my high school enrolled about 500 students. Today, I'm fortunate to serve as a superintendent, and I want to be a champion for public education.

The Horace Mann League has always been a champion for public schools. I want today's students to have even more opportunities than I had and to be prepared to seize them when they arise.

Serving on the Board has also been a tremendous learning experience. We have outstanding thought leaders who bring different perspectives from across the country. We share ideas, discuss challenges, and learn from one another—all with the common goal of better serving students.

HML: Before we conclude, is there anything else you'd like to share?

KS: I truly enjoy serving on the Horace Mann League Board. The League has been a steadfast champion for public education, and strong public schools are essential to helping every student achieve success and pursue the American dream.

HML: Ken, thank you for sharing your insights and for your continued leadership. We appreciate your leadership and service to Hoke County Schools, the Horace Mann League, and public education.

Feature Stories



Social media lawsuits could net payouts. How are districts planning?

by Kara Arundel / *K-12 Dive*

School systems like Spokane Public Schools are boosting extracurricular activities - and hoping payouts from litigation will sustain the investments.

[Read More](#)



Too hot for summer school?

by A. Felix / *The Hechinger Report*

Scorching temperatures test the limits of programs meant to help students catch up academically

[Read More](#)

Issues of the Week



How to Mitigate Teacher Turnover Amid School Closures

by Anna Merod / *K-12 Dive*

Veteran educators are among those most likely to exit, leaving leaders to rely on novice teachers at a time when students need stability and experience.

[Read More](#)



Why Standardized Tests in English Fall Short for English Learners

by Ileana Najarro / *Education Week*

The Migration Policy Institute found 35 states and the District of Columbia offer native language assessments.

[Read More](#)

Leadership Ideas



Lonely at the Top: The High-Risk Mental Health Reality of Fortune 500 CEOs and Executives

by Alexandra Dimitropoulou for *CEOWORLD*

Fortune 500 CEOs face rising burnout and mental health strain. Discover why leadership stress is now an enterprise-level risk and how boards should respond.

[Read More](#)



Chipotle's COO looks for four key traits when promoting leaders

by Ella Chakarian / *Fast Company*

Jason Kidd visits several Chipotle stores a week and has dinners with regional managers to identify potential candidates for internal promotions, *Business Insider* reports.

[Read More](#)



The Principal Effect: How Investing in School Leaders Is Key to Solving Education's Challenges

Publisher: Learning Policy Institute (May 2026)

[**Read the report**](#)

Concise Summary

This comprehensive synthesis concludes that effective principals are one of the strongest school-controlled influences on student success. The report argues that investing in principals simultaneously improves instruction, teacher retention, school climate, student attendance, and family engagement.

Key Findings

- Principal leadership is second only to classroom instruction in influencing student learning.
- Effective principals significantly improve teacher retention.
- Leadership stability is especially important in high-poverty schools.
- School climate improves under strong instructional leadership.
- High-quality preparation and coaching produce measurable long-term benefits.

Practical Implications

- Build a district-wide leadership development strategy.
 - Provide every new principal with an experienced coach.
 - Reduce administrative burdens that pull principals away from instructional leadership.
 - Track principal retention as a key district performance indicator.
-



Webinar, Aug 11: Grow Leaders, Keep Teachers: Leadership Development as a Staffing Strategy / *Education Week*

Find out how to turn leadership development into a staffing strategy and grow your next generation of school leaders from within.

[Read More](#)

AI



Most Kids Use AI Chatbots, Some Seeking Advice on Sensitive Topics

by Jennifer Vilcarino / *Education Week*

A new survey of young people highlights how they use AI chatbots and their experience with deepfakes.

[Read More](#)



In the Debate Over Whether Teachers or AI Accelerate K-12 Achievement More, What If the Answer Is Both?

by Chris Hull for *EdTech Digest*

AI can accelerate instruction, but teachers remain essential for creating the relationships, structure, and learning environments where students thrive.

[Read More](#)



The Digital World Disruption

by Jim VandeHei / *Axios*

The way your work shows up in a digital-dominated world is changing lightning fast, starting with the total collapse of Google Search traffic.

[Read More](#)

HML Wants to Hear From You

Share Your Story With the League

One of the greatest strengths of the Horace Mann League is the remarkable work our members do every day on behalf of students, schools, and communities.



As we continue planning upcoming editions of The Post, we encourage you to share your accomplishments—or those of a member of your staff—including publications, awards, leadership transitions, innovative programs, noteworthy events, and other news that may be of interest to fellow members.

Your stories help strengthen our community, celebrate the important work taking place across the country, and inspire fellow League members. We look forward to hearing from you.

Please send submissions and ideas to James Minichello, executive director of the Horace Mann League, at jminichello@hmleague.org. We look forward to hearing from you.

Featured Book

This book stands apart from others on the topic by offering the combined wisdom of two veteran superintendents who, together, bring over three decades each of hands-on leadership experience and nearly 60 years in education.

Drawing from their careers “in the seat,” the authors demonstrate how challenging the status quo and embracing innovation can lead to meaningful, sustained change. While rooted in the context of K–12 education, the book's leadership lessons extend far beyond schools, offering valuable guidance for leaders across sectors.



Spotlight Conversations



**Tobin Novasio, Superintendent of Montana's
Hardin Public Schools**

"In rural education, our greatest strength is the power of relationships."

"The future of rural communities depends on our ability to attract, support, and retain great educators."



**Louis Wool. Superintendent of New York's
Harrison Central School District**

"If we don't see that connection, that very precious thing that has defined my life, given me so much opportunity, can soon be gone. And when we lose public school, in my mind, we lose America."



The Horace Mann League's Video Archives

HML Gallery 1996-2023

2023 Annual Meeting Video -Presidents and Boards

HML Board Meeting and Annual Meeting 2015

The Iceberg Effect - Student Achievement

Special Reports for League Members

Click on the title to view (and download) the topic of interest.

1. [Wisdom and Leadership](#) (updated on May 11, 2026)

2. [Letters to the Editor from the Superintendent](#)
(updated on June 9 2026)
 3. [Arguments by Conservatives to Diminish Public Schools. \(New\)](#)
 4. [OP-ED Letters to the Editor: Ideological and Policy Arguments About Public Education \(new\)](#)
 5. [Most Common Theories of Leadership](#)
 6. [Long-Range Planning](#)
 7. [Quotes for Leadership](#)
 8. [Good to Great: The Guide to the Superintendent's Success](#)
 9. [The Blueberry Story: Operating Schools Like a Business.](#)
 10. [What Teachers Make: Wow! You Asked Me What I make?](#)
 11. [Better Interview Questions and Possible Responses](#)
 12. [Suggestions Guidelines for Better Presentations](#)
 13. [Opening the Schoolhouse Door for Patrons](#)
 14. [Signals in the Life of the Superintendent](#)
 15. [Best Leadership Quotes of All](#)
-

Podcasts by Education Leaders

The Horace Mann League's Podcast Series. (Click on the [blue](#) title to listen.)

Glenn Robbins: Nationally recognized leader in education technology.

Glenn was recently honored with the 2026 School Leader of the Year Award from EdTech Digest. During the conversation, he reflects on what the recognition means to him, his district, and the Brigantine community.

A Tribute to David Berliner by Dr. Gene Sharratt.

We honor the life and legacy of Dr. David Berliner, one of the most influential education researchers of our time and a steadfast advocate for public education and democracy.

Growing Partnerships that Strengthen Learning Communities by David Law, President of AASA and Superintendent of the Minnetonka Public Schools.

Rural Schools are the Backbone of Many Communities by Dr. Melissa Sadorf, Executive Director of the National Rural Education Association.



On Fire, Under Fire, or Fired: Reclaiming Passion, Purpose, & Progress in Troubling Times by Dr. Kristi Wilson and Dr. Susan Enfield.

Schools Reimagined with Dr. Jacqueline Grennon Brooks. Unifying the Science of Learning.

Path to Leadership by Dr. Martha Bruckner
Suggestions for women educators striving to advance their careers in education administration.

Artificial Intelligence in School Settings by Dr. Ray McNulty

Equity Paradoxes Created by Educational Policies

Dr. Alfredo J. Artiles:

Diversity in America: Teaching Students to Know, to Care, & to Act in Global Times by Dr. James Banks

Women in Leadership by Andi Furlis
Andi Furlis describes her career journey and shares suggestions for women seeking to grow their public education careers.

The Journey with Dr. Jack McKay. An opportunity to meet some great public educators.

Artificial Intelligence, the Landscape of Public Schools by Joshua Starr

Artificial Intelligence and the impact it has on public education today by Ben Williamson

Equity and Leadership with Gary Orfield and Patricia Gande

The Future of Public Education with Gloria Ladson Billings, professor at the University of Wisconsin. (Annual Meeting Presentation)

Democracy and Education: The Crisis of our Times with David Berliner and Joel Westheimer

The Future of Public Education with Valerie Strauss, education journalist for the Washington Post. (Annual Meeting Presentation)

Why Public Education is the Best Safety Net for Democracy with James Harvey and Jimmy Minnichello.

Recent Supreme Court Decision and the Implications for Public Schools with Derek Black and Jessica Levin.

Equity and Equality in the Public Schools with Linda Darling Hammond and Joshua Starr.

The U.S. Dept. of Education and the Local Public School with Secretary Miguel Cardona and Julie Underwood.

Critical Race Theory and School Board Meetings with Bryan Brayboy, Adrienne Dixon, and Daniel G. Solorzano.

The Implications of Charters and Privatization of Public Education with Carol Burris and Kevin Welner

Challenges and Opportunities of Leading with Jeanne Collins, Doug Burge, and Laurie Barron.

Leading a School District During a Pandemic with Jim Sutfin, Luvelle Brown, and Andi Fourlis.

Thoughts on the State of Public Education by David Berliner and Diane Ravitch.

Notable Books and Reports for Members

Click on the title to download.

Long-Range Planning -
(Strategic Plans: Benefits and Consequences)

Good to Great: The Guide to the Superintendent's Success by Jack McKay



The Guide for Using AI - ChatGPT (Getting Started)

The Book of Wisdom (Good coffee - Great Friendships)

The School Leader's Special Topics

1. Better Interview Questions and Possible Responses
2. Suggestions Guidelines for Better Presentations
3. Opening the Schoolhouse Door for Patrons
4. Signals in the Life of the Superintendent
5. Best Leadership Quotes of All
6. Horace Mann: An Exemplar of Reform
7. The Blueberry Story

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Purpose

The Horace Mann League, founded in 1922, perpetuates the ideals of Horace Mann, the founder of the American public school system. Its basic purpose and activities are to strengthen our public schools.

The League's members believe that the public school system of the United States is an indispensable agency for strengthening the ideals of our democracy and the most necessary unifying and dynamic influence in American life.

Accordingly, our public schools should be free, classless, non-sectarian, and open to all children of all the people. The school system should be dominated by such purposes that will insure the preparation of

The Horace Mann League Past Presidents

2025 Kevin Riley, (NE)
2024 Brent Clark, (IL)
2023 Bill Mathis (VT)
2022 Ruben Alejandro (TX)
2021 James Harvey (WA)
2020 Lisa Parady AK
2019 Laurie Barron, MT
2018 Eric King, IL
2017 Martha Bruckner IA
2016 Christine Johns, MI
2015 Charles Fowler, NH
2014 Gary Marx, VA
2013 Joe Hairston, MD
2012 Mark Edwards NC
2011 Julie Underwood, WI
2010 George Garcia, CO
2009 Steve Rasmussen, WA
2008 Fred Hartmeister, TX
2007 Colleen Wilcox, CA
2006 Walt Warfield, IL
2005 John Simpson, VA
2004 Spike Jorgensen, AK
2003 Larry Dlugosh NE
2002 Arthur Stellar, MI
2001 Ben Canada, OR
2000 Kenneth Bird NE
1999 Beverly Reep OH

Bd. of Governors, Metro
Comm. College, Omaha,
NE

Mr. Douglas Burge,
Supt., Zillah, WA

Dr. Roxann Caserio,
Supt. North Ridgefield,
OH

**Dr. Linda Darling
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University,
Palo Alto, CA

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Supt., Omstead Falls
schools, OH

Mr. Tobin

Novasio, Supt, Hardin
School Districts,
Billing, (MT)

Dr. Theresa Rouse,
Supt, Joliet Schools, (IL)

Dr. Ray Sanchez
Supt. of Schools
Tarrytown, NY

Dr. Michael Simeck,
Supt. Deerfield 109 (IL).

Dr. Kenneth Spells,
Supt., Hoke County
School District, Raeford,
NC

Dr. Jerry Thacker, Supt.
Penn-Harris-Madison
School, Mishawaka, (IN)

Dr. Louis N, Wool,
Supt of School, Harrison
Central School District
(NY)

Dr. Greg Wyman
Exec. Dir., Arizona Rural
Schools Association

Executive Director
of the HML
James Minichello
Alexandria, VA

Past Executive Directors

2025 Jack McKay
2023-24 Jeanne Collins
1993-23 Jack McKay
1992-93 Paul Rossey
1977-91 Robert
Fleischer
1972-77 Clayton
Hutchins
1963-71 William Early
1959-63 Benjamin Smith
1955-59 E.I. Williams

children and youth for
effective citizenship in
our democracy.

The League believes
that the American
tradition of separation of
church and state must
be preserved and should
be most vigorously and
zealously safeguarded.
The League grants the
right to special interest
groups, including various
religious sects, to
maintain their own
schools so long as such
schools meet the
standards defined by the
states in which they are
located.

The League believes
that these separate or
non-public schools
should be financed
entirely by their
supporters. It is therefore
unalterably opposed to
proposals to devote
public funds to the direct
or indirect support of
private schools.

The League favors the
generous financial
support of the public
schools by local, state,
and federal funds. It
believes, however, that
those federal grants
should be so made that
there will be no federal
control or interference in
local schools'
administration,
curriculum, personnel, or
instructional procedures.

1998 Jane Hammond CO
1997 Cleve Hammonds MO
1996 Terry Grier, CA
1995 Paul Houston, VA
1994 Edna Manning, OK
1993 Malcolm Katz, GA
1992 Bob Fortenberry, MS
1991 Ron Etheridge, OH
1990 John Prasch NE
1989 Jack Mawdsley, MI
1988 Linton Deck NC
1987 Patrick Hoban WA
1986 M Donald Thomas UT
1985 Anne Campbell NE
1984 Floyd W. Parsons AR
1983 Paul Shelly NJ
1982 Orvin Plucker KS
1981 Albert Ayers VA
1980 Ken Hansen CO
1979 Homer Elseroad CO
1978 W J. House NC
1977 Paul Rossey NJ
1976 Charles Weaver NC
1975 Frank Yulo CT
1974 Archibald Shaw MI
1973 George Brain WA
1972 Mildred F. Reed DC
1971 Eugene Mellon IL
1970 Walter Hetzel IA
1968 Chester Swanson CA
1967 Phillip Weaver NC
1966 Edward Rutter CT
1965 Shirley Cooper WV
1964 Lynn Bennion UT
1963 John L Buford IL
1962 Frank W. Cyr NY
1960 L. Stacy Weaver NC
1959 Edgar Fuller DC
1958 Richard Kennan MD
1957 Henry H. Hill TN
1955 Selmer H. Berg CA
1953 Virgil Rogers VA
1951 Mark A. Smith GA
1950 Benjamin L. Smith NC
1948 I. E. F. Williams OH
1947 James Edmonson MI
1946 Howard Driggs NY
1944 Homer Anderson MA
1942 Harold J.
Benjamin MD
1941 L.J. Nuttall UT
1940 Alexander Stoddard RI
1939 Willard Given DC
1938 John Sexton CA
1937 Millard Leffler NE

1946-54 Joy Elmer
Morgan
1925-45 Carroll Pearce
1924 Robert Wright
1923 John R. Kirk
1922 John A. Smith

1936 Ben G. Graham PA
1935 John K. Norton NY
1934 H Lester Smith IN
1933 E.E. Oberholtzer TX
1932 Fred M. Hunter OR
1931 George Strayer NY
1930 George M. Child UT
1926 Payson Smith ME
1922 Carroll Pearce WI



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