



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 11, 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



"I'm excited to join the Horace Mann League. The League's mission aligns perfectly with my commitment to building school communities where every single child belongs, thrives, and has access to a world-class public education."

— Peter Dillon, Superintendent, Berkshire Hills (Mass.) Regional School District

HML News



Editor's Note: A Season to Recharge

As the new school year draws closer, calendars are beginning to fill, and attention is naturally turning toward the busy months ahead. But summer isn't over yet. We hope you'll make time in these remaining days for one more experience that brings you joy—an outing with family, dinner with friends, a walk along the water, a favorite summer tradition, or simply an unhurried morning someplace that allows you to appreciate the world around you.

Leadership asks a great deal of those who serve our schools and communities, which makes these moments all the more valuable. Before the meetings, schedules, and responsibilities of another school year take over, give yourself permission to make another memory. Sometimes the best way to prepare for what lies ahead is to step away from it for a little while.

We hope you enjoy these remaining days of summer and return to the academic year ahead refreshed, grateful, and ready to lead 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, Wrightsville Beach, N.C.)



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



2026 EdWeek Leaders To Learn From

Education Week

Introducing our 2026 EdWeek Leaders To Learn From, highlighting innovative district leaders.

[Read More](#)

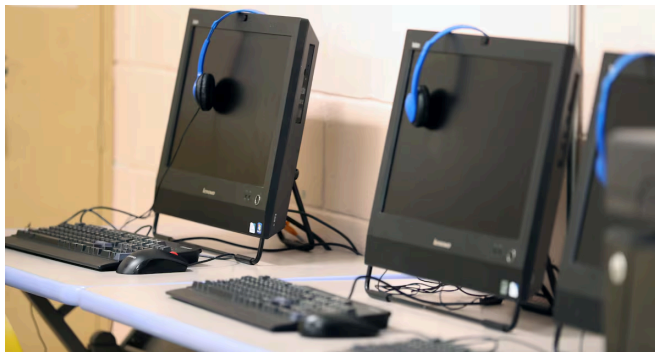


Writing Skills are Getting More Attention in School

by Jackie Mader / *The Hechinger Report*

Compared to reading, writing has gotten comparatively little focused attention. Now, some districts are looking for ways to strengthen their writing instruction.

[Read More](#)



Ed-Tech Failed to Live Up to the Hype. Should Schools Give Up on It?

by Matt Barnum / *Chalkbeat*

It's a tough time to be an education technology enthusiast.

Ed-tech was once **widely touted** as key to improving learning, but these days many state officials, **school leaders**, **teachers**, and **parents** want to get students off screens in class.

[Read More](#)

Issues of the Week



Superintendents agree on goals, but not necessarily how to achieve them

Naaz Modan / *K-12 Dive*

A Center on Reinventing Public Education report outlines ways to successfully transform school systems for improvement.

[Read More](#)



A First-Week Routine That Gets Middle School Students Thinking Like Scientists

by **Bexaida Buzzie** / *Edutopia*

Here's a day-by-day plan for guiding your students to start the year by asking questions. Just resist the urge to answer them.

[Read More](#)



What Does it Cost to Convince Top Teachers to Switch to High-Need Schools?

by **Sarah D. Sparks** / *Education Week*

New research underscores how hard it is to pull top educators to rural or high-poverty schools.

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Why Media Readiness is the Modern CEO's Most Underrated Skill

by Theresa Miller / *CEO Magazine*

Brand reputation can shift in a single news cycle, yet many CEOs overlook the critical capability of media readiness in a crisis.

[Read More](#)

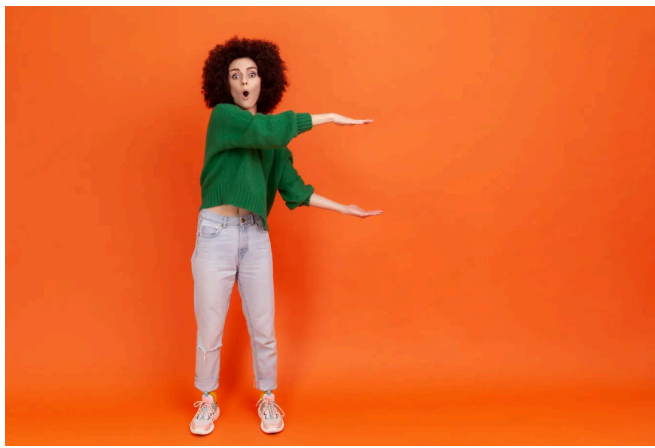


Your Company Culture Is Built One Story at a Time, Says This Psychologist. Here Are 4 Ways to Get It Right

by Marcel Schwantes / *Inc.*

Why culture lives in the stories and rituals your people repeat.

[Read More](#)



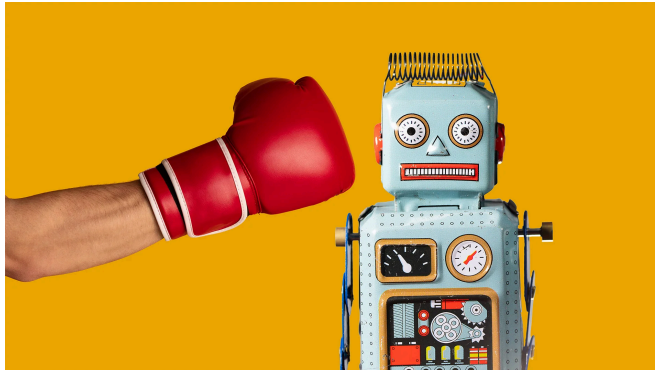
Why Presentation Skills Are The Ultimate Differentiator In AI Era

by William Arruda / Forbes

As work continues to evolve, the professionals who command the greatest opportunities will be those who communicate with clarity, build trust, and inspire people to act.

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AI

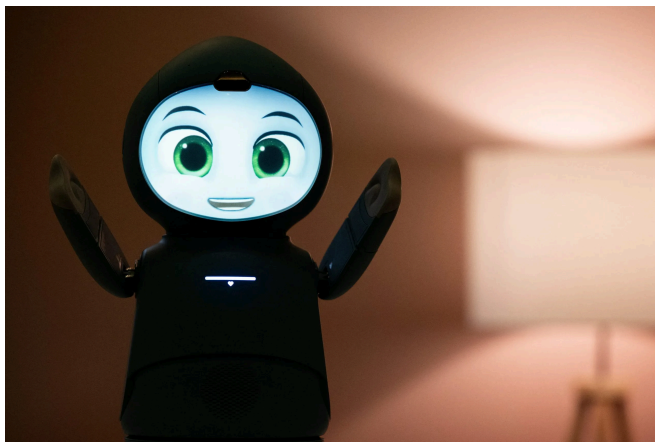


Fake AI Content Is Everywhere. Here's How Smart Companies Are Fighting Back

by Ken Sterling for *Inc.*

AI-generated fake content is putting executive identities at risk, requiring leaders to strengthen protections, contracts, and response plans.

[Read More](#)



Don't let AI Raise your Kids

by Jackie Mader / *The Hechinger Report*

A new book stresses that for young children, human interaction is the key to growth

[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](#)
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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 Dixson, 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 Furlis.

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
 8. What Teachers Make. . .
 9. Examples of "Letters to the Editor" (updated)
-

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Professor, Stanford
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schools, OH

**Mr. Tobin
Novasio,** Supt, Hardin
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Supt, Joliet Schools, (IL)

Dr. Ray Sanchez
Supt. of Schools

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 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

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
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2001 Ben Canada, OR
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 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

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

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.

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
 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 Pearse WI



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