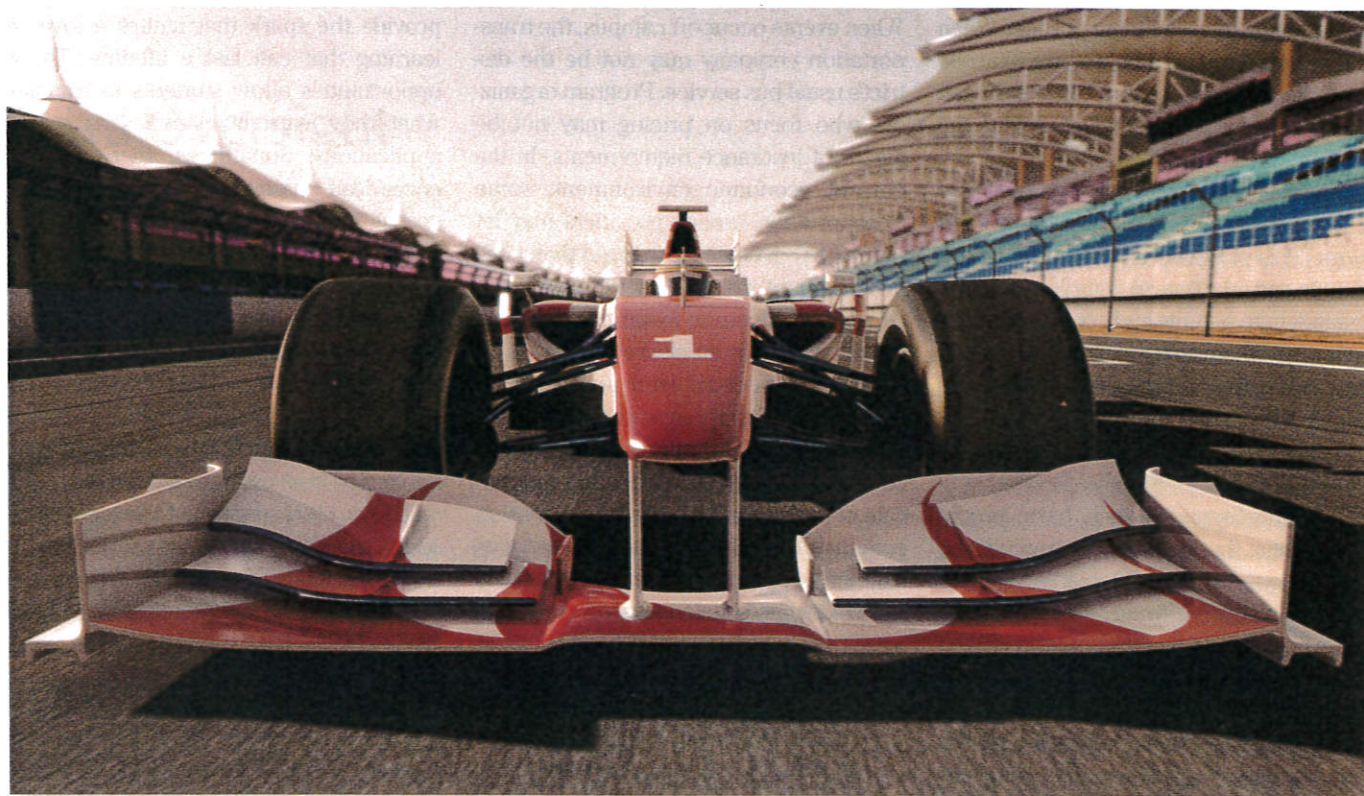


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LIFE ON A SCHOOL BOARD

A race to hurry up and wait

Dan Schlafer

Winning a race doesn't happen by accident. Just ask NASCAR driver Jeff Gordon, IndyCar racer Helio Castroneves, or Olympic sprinter Usain Bolt. Each will quickly confirm that their success over time wasn't happenstance.

Dig a little deeper and you'll find a common thread of excellence that allows each of these champions to finish on top again and again. Each knew all of the rules before the race started and mapped out his strategy in

advance. Support personnel on their teams had trained for the opportunity. They knew what they were doing, had discussed the plan in minute detail, and were committed to doing their part to ensure a celebration and victory lap at the end of the day.

What's more, Bolt, Castroneves, and Gordon are never caught by the infamous hurry-up-and-wait syndrome. Schedules are completed a year in advance so their fans can plan accordingly. Everything that needs to be

known, is. Everyone who needs to know, does. Flow charts documenting who handles what, and when, are meticulously prepared, and contingency plans abound. There is a logical progression from the start of the race to the final victory lap.

There are great lessons to be learned here by those in charge of shaping public education policy and funding in the current chaotic and challenging economic climate. Administrators, educators, and school board members have raced around the funding track for the past two years, waiting for the next shoe to drop.

Sadly, the effect feels like a line from Bruce Springsteen's epic song, "Born in the USA": "End up like a dog that's been beat too much, spend half your life just covering up."

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act brought unprecedented-

The Leading Source, ASBJ's blog, features our editors writing on education trends, topics, and ideas. Here's a sampling from recent posts:

I pity any local school board that tackles the issue of sex education. No matter what its decision, someone is going to roundly criticize it.

These days, the school board in Cedarburg, Wis., must feel like a punching bag. It's being attacked for a new "opt in" policy for students participating in the district's revised sex ed curriculum.

Among the touchy matters covered are abortion, contraception, homosexuality, intercourse, and masturbation.

Del Stover, Senior Editor

Bed bugs—those creepy, icky, blood-sucking insects that we thought were eradicated long ago—are back. And while they've been most likely to show up in hotel rooms in big cities, they've also made surprise visits to schools.

An elementary school in rural Russell Springs, Ky., banned backpacks, lunchboxes and other items earlier this month after a half-dozen bedbugs were found on a classroom floor and on a student's backpack.

Joetta Sack-Min, Associate Editor

My dad was a fan of superheroes—Batman, Green Hornet, the Flash, and, yes, Superman—for his entire life. He drew pictures, collected comic books and action figures, and saw the art that was brought to life within the pages of a comic book.

He also was a teacher, someone who taught art and history for more than 30 years and a person who affected the lives of thousands of students.

I looked up to my father—and to my mom, whose career also was spent in classrooms—and respected his opinions, even though they differed greatly from my own at times. Today, watching the opening of "Waiting for Superman," I wondered what he would have thought.

Glenn Cook, Editor-in-Chief

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ed, well-documented, and much-needed cash to our nation's crippled economy. With the controversial funding came the unmistakable message: "Hurry up! Spend this money NOW."

Clearly, a sense of urgency was present. Huge dollar amounts were to become the proverbial oasis in the desert for struggling school districts. So we hurried. We prepared. We quickly made plans based on what we were asked to do. Anxious to please and ready to get with the program, we followed the map that was provided.

Unfortunately, for those of us left to administer federal stimulus funds as well as billions of dollars in competitive grants, the map to the oasis was confusing at best. The map's legend wasn't clear. Perhaps the mileage was predicated on a faulty GPS.

We were monitored. We adjusted and modified. We waited for new guidelines, rules that we would gladly have followed had we received them before the race began. Once again, we thought the oasis—more funding, a lifeline for many schools and dis-

tricts—was in sight.

But then, like a mirage, it appeared to move, so we waited for additional guidance, ready to adjust our path to the promised land once again.

We're still waiting, hurrying up and making adjustments on the fly, and waiting some more. We're still doing it because the finish line—an opportunity to help our schools improve education for all children—remains in sight. But the path to get there remains muddy and filled with potholes.

Thank goodness the NASCAR, IndyCar, and International Olympic Committee folks aren't relegated to a life as nomads wandering in the desert. Lack of direction can do that to you.

At least we—local school leaders—have our priorities in order! I wish our organizers did.

Dan Schlafer (dan@monroek12.org) is a member of the Cumberland County Board of Education and serves on the Tennessee School Boards Association's board of directors. He also is the federal programs director for Monroe County Schools.

READINGS AND REPORTS

From green schools to Southern poverty

Center for Green Schools
www.centerforgreenschools.org

School buildings represent the largest construction sector of the U.S., with approximately 20 percent of our population going to school every day as students, teachers, staff, or administrators, according to the U.S. Green Building Council's new website, Center for Green Schools. The website builds a case for why districts should move to green building, and offers comprehensive information about building and maintaining green schools.

Charter schools, Latinos, and ELLs
www.americanprogress.org

Almost 24 percent of all charter school students are Latino. Four of the five states with the highest number of charter schools are also among the five states with the highest Latino enrollments—Arizona, California, Florida, and Texas. A new report, *Next Generation Charter Schools*, outlines strategies that have proved effective in serving Latinos and English language learners in charter and traditional public schools, such as expanding learning time and setting high expectations for