

# October Staff Development News

October 1st, 2025

## SPS Mission

Seward Public Schools - a district rooted in excellence - in cooperation with family and community members is committed to the development of the whole student and affirms that all students will have the skills to become productive, resilient, and contributing members of their community.

---

## A Message From Matt

Fall always reminds me of carving pumpkins with my own children. Some years we had the time and patience to be really detailed—carefully cutting out shapes and faces. Other years, we pulled out a drill and made a pumpkin full of little holes that glowed brightly when lit from within. Those pumpkins weren't perfect, but they shone just as brightly, and more importantly, they gave us special memories together.



That story reminds me of the important balance we all face as educators. We have a lot going on in our lives—lesson planning, grading, meetings, and the personal responsibilities that come with family and community. In the middle of it all, it can be easy to let meaningful moments slip away. But just like with the pumpkins, sometimes the simple things, the things that fit into the moment we have, can create lasting memories for our students.

Our work is not just about academic achievement—though we certainly aim for high expectations and strong results. It is also about the small interactions, the creativity, the laughter, and the encouragement that stay with students long after they leave our classrooms. Whether it's a word of affirmation, a creative activity, or even just listening when a student needs to be heard, those little "pumpkin carving" moments are the ones that light up their lives.

We don't have to do everything alone, either. Just as I used tools and a drill to help with carving, we can lean on our colleagues, our support staff, and the systems we have in place. Teaching is

demanding, and none of us can carry it all by ourselves. It's okay to simplify when we need to—it's still meaningful, it's still important, and it's still creating memories.

I want to thank you for the way you continue to balance these demands: holding our students to high expectations while also creating the special, human moments that make learning meaningful. Your work matters deeply, and it leaves a mark that students will carry with them for a lifetime.

---

### 3 Things You Need to Thrive in Life and Leadership- Jon Gordon

Some try to survive. Others thrive.

The difference isn't talent, luck, or even opportunity.

It comes down to three essentials we all need in life and leadership... without them, burnout, discouragement, and mediocrity creep in.

Recently, I had a powerful conversation with my good friend John Maxwell on the Maxwell Leadership Podcast [[listen here](#)] where we unpacked these truths. And I believe they can change the way you live and lead.

#### 1. Mission

We don't get burned out because of what we do.

We get burned out because we forget why we do it.

Your mission is your why. It's what wakes you up in the morning and keeps you going when obstacles show up.

If you don't feel clear on your mission yet, don't panic. Start by asking:

- How can I add value today?
- Who can I serve?
- Whose dream can I support until I find my own?

When you live on purpose, your purpose often finds you.

**Action:** What's one sentence that describes your mission right now? Write it down.

#### 2. Team

No one creates success alone. Leaders, difference makers entrepreneurs... everyone needs a team.

I realized this more than ever during the pandemic. Without connection, we grow weak and discouraged. With a team, we grow stronger.

Your team may be your coworkers, your family, your community, or close friends. They challenge you, encourage you, and make you better.

**Action:** Who are three people that make you better? Reach out and thank them today.

#### 3. Scoreboard

Humans are wired to keep score. It's who we are and what we do. It's why every game has a scoreboard and so does life. We need to measure progress but we need to measure the right things. There are two scoreboards that matter:

1. **Success** – your goals, wins, and achievements.
2. **Significance** – the lives you impact, the difference you make, the legacy you leave.

Success is temporary. Significance lasts forever.

**Action:** What are you measuring right now? Is it only success... or also significance? Write down one way you can track the impact you're making on people, not just the results you're achieving. [Listen to the full conversation with John Maxwell and me here](#).

Lead Positive,  
-Jon

---

## Parent-Teacher Conferences

Here are a few tips for parent teacher conference- especially if you have a behavior concern you want to talk to parents about.

### What to think about before parents arrive

All behaviors can fall under one of four goals:

**They want their child to be Smart, be Liked, Feel Good, Taken Care Of**

It is up to us to partner with parents so that they will allow us to develop plans that will help their child be more successful in school.

### Be aware of

Their readiness level to receive information

Your need to control and have power in the situation

The parents may not process all the information given to them

Keep the emphasis on the 4 Goals that parents want:

### Talking points

#### Be Smart

- **My goal for your child is to be successful and learn....When s/he:**
  - Talks out
  - Makes Noises
  - Loses or does not complete assignments
  - Falls or is out of their seat
  - Plays with things on the floor/desk
  - Bothers others
  - Interrupts the teacher
- **This interferes with their ability to be the smartest person they can be.**

#### Be Liked

- **My goal for your child is to be liked by others and have friends at school....When s/he:**
  - Bosses others around
  - Tattles
  - Rolls her eyes
  - Has an attitude

- Calls people names
- Destroys property
- Talks behind others back
- Doesn't share
- Lies
- Steals
- Fights
- **This stops others from liking your son/daughter**

### Feel good

- **My goal for your child is to feel good about him/herself....When s/he:**
  - Argues
  - Rolls eyes
  - Doesn't follow instructions
  - Calls people names
  - Doesn't complete assignments
  - Curses
  - Hits people
  - Yells
- **It may affect how s/he feels about him/herself**

### Taken care of

- **My goal for your child is to take good care of him/herself and avoid getting into trouble....When s/he:**
  - Yells
  - Rolls on the floor
  - Curses
  - Runs out of the room
  - Talks back
  - Calls names
  - Talks out
  - Becomes angry, frustrated, annoyed, bothered, worried,
- **It interferes with his/her learning and ability to make good decisions**

### Goals

Structure

Support

Relationships

Working Towards Something

Commitment

---

## Marzano on Direct Instruction

Marzano on Conducting Direct Instruction Lessons

Marzano recognizes **direct instruction** as a powerful and research-based way to introduce new content. While some may think of it as a teacher-centered "lecture," he reframes it as a **highly**

**structured and interactive process** that helps students move from **exposure to mastery**.

He outlines several essential components:

### 1. Setting Clear Learning Goals

- Every direct instruction lesson begins with a specific **learning target**.
- Goals must be **explicit, measurable, and student-friendly** so learners know *what* they are working toward.
- Marzano emphasizes that sharing the “why” (purpose and relevance) is as important as sharing the “what.”

### 2. Chunking Content into Manageable Segments

- New information should be broken down into **bite-sized pieces** to avoid overwhelming students.
- Teachers should pause frequently to allow processing, reflection, and questions.
- This aligns with research on **cognitive load theory**—students retain more when learning is scaffolded in smaller steps.

### 3. Modeling and Demonstration

- Teachers **think aloud**, show worked examples, or demonstrate processes so students see the steps behind a skill or idea.
- This transparency builds confidence and provides a mental model for students to follow.
- Marzano notes that modeling is especially important in complex problem-solving or abstract concepts.

### 4. Guided Practice with Support

- After modeling, students need **hands-on attempts** while the teacher is actively monitoring.
- Teachers circulate, ask questions, and provide immediate feedback to correct misunderstandings.
- This stage bridges the gap between explanation and independence.

### 5. Checking for Understanding

- Ongoing **formative assessment** is a cornerstone of direct instruction.
- Strategies include: cold calling, exit tickets, quick writes, response cards, polls, or digital checks.
- The goal is to identify misconceptions early and adjust instruction in the moment.

### 6. Independent Practice and Application

- Once students show readiness, they transition to **independent work**, where they apply learning without teacher scaffolding.
- This helps solidify mastery and transfer knowledge to new contexts.
- Independent practice should still include feedback loops to ensure accuracy.

### 7. Review and Closure

- Strong lessons end with **synthesis and reflection**.
- Teachers revisit the learning goal, highlight key takeaways, and connect the lesson to future learning.
- Closure helps students consolidate information into long-term memory.

#### Key Distinction: Not Just “Lecture”

Marzano stresses that effective direct instruction is **not about teacher talk time**—it’s about **designing structured, interactive experiences** that deliberately move students through the stages of learning. When done well, it keeps students active, engaged, and clear on their progress.



---

## Patriotic Holidays

### Patriotic Holidays

Nebraska Revised Statute 79-724 requires the following:

Appropriate patriotic exercises suitable to the occasion shall be held under the direction of the superintendent in every public, private, denominational, and parochial school on George Washington's birthday, Abraham Lincoln's birthday, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, Native American Heritage Day, Constitution Day, Memorial Day, Veterans Day, and Thanksgiving Day, or on the day or week preceding or following such holiday, if the school is in session.

There are no patriotic holidays in October.

---



**Seward Public Schools**

The background of the page is a large, vibrant image of a bonfire. Bright orange and yellow flames are rising from a pile of burning logs, creating a warm and intense atmosphere. The fire is the central focus, with its light illuminating the surrounding area.