without measurably improving the company's results. Microsoft ended up ending the practice because it was a horrible system that created many problems.

– Schools need to increase STEM courses to make our students more competitive and to guarantee that they find jobs.

"There are 11 million Americans with STEM degrees who are not working in a STEM field," Berliner said. "Each year we produce 100,000 more people with STEM degrees than there are STEM jobs. There is no national shortage of STEM graduates. I get really crazy over all the STEM BS."

– Holding a child back who is not doing well academically is good for the child.

"Holding kids back if they are not reading well in third grade, which Arizona and Florida passed, is a stupid policy," Berliner said. "We have a lot of data that shows that holding a child back is a mistake that significantly increases the child's chance of dropping out of school. Those students not reading well by third grade require attention, not retention. Tutoring is cheaper and more humane than flunking a child."

Berliner's type of aggressive debunking has earned him enemies and he's no stranger to controversy. His 1996 book, *The Manufactured Crisis: Myths, Fraud, and the Attack on America's Public Schools*, co-authored with Bruce J. Biddle, raised public outrage over their arguments that legislators and Presidents Reagan and both Bushes manufactured an assault on American public schools based on misleading data that spawned misguided reforms. The real problems in our schools run

much deeper and are caused by fundamental societal and economic failures, they argued. The themes explored in *The Manufactured Crisis* are extended and broadened in *50 Myths and Lies*.

"We have a long history of anti-intellectualism that runs really deep in the American psyche that comes and goes in waves," Berliner said. "It just takes a few declines in test scores to bring it all to the surface again and we pin it all on the teachers. Our poor schools are not working because of poverty in those neighborhoods, not because of poor teachers. It's a misattribution. I've studied and written about public versus private schools for a long time. When you adjust for social class and poverty, in every case the public schools do better than the privates. Don't give me the BS that private schools are better. They're skimming kids and it's only higher social class, not a better school."

Berliner has a simple formula for improving schools: address the underlying social problems and invest in failing neighborhoods if you want the quality of the public schools there to rise.

"My bottom line message to administrators and school boards is that if you expect to improve education without improving communities, it cannot be done," Berliner said. "Administrators who have schools with many low-achieving kids have to figure out how to get them jobs and to find more

money for drug prevention, adult education, and effective social programs for their communities. They need to increase funding for breakfast and lunch programs because poor kids can't learn if they're hungry. If

> "My bottom line message to administrators and school boards is that you expect to improve education without improving communities, it cannot be done."

school administrators do not engage the community and they just work on what goes on inside the school, they will never achieve the academic success they dream of for their students."

In the past six months or so, Berliner has actually become more of an optimist when it comes to the contentious education debate. "I thought we had lost the battle and I was losing faith, but the things I've seen recently are encouraging. Nearly 200,000 students opted out of standardized tests in New York. People are saying we've had enough testing, just teach our kids some useful things that will help them learn and grow. Teachers are fighting back in the state of Washington and striking for more pay because of additional requirements being demanded of them. I see these things happening all over the country. I say it's about time and I like to think our books are playing a part."

PAUL GRONDAHL is an award-winning reporter at the *Albany Times Union*. A paperback edition of his political biography, *Mayor Corning: Albany Icon, Albany Enigma,* was recently published by SUNY Press.
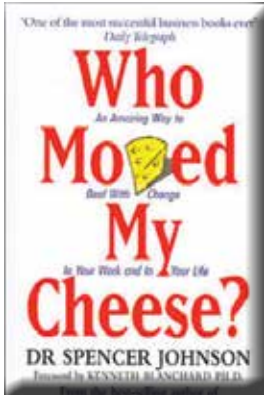
Who Moved My Cheese?
Spencer Johnson

This issue of *Vanguard* asks us to consider new ideas for teaching and learning. Since this column began, we've used the space to share information from current professional books that we hope have enhanced your practice in some way. This issue's book review presents a different idea around professional reading for administrators to consider.

The role of an administrator always includes modeling learning no matter the level or department you are in. One way to model learning and share in the celebration of literacy is by coordinating a book club.

Dr. Donald Gately, principal of Jericho Middle School in Long Island, NY, has written about how he uses the reading of literature meant for his students as a means to connect to his families. In a blog post from last year, "About Booktalks, A Sure Thing," Don describes how he led a book talk with parents and students. Johnson used the book, *Who Moved My Cheese?* Johnson wrote: "Our goal for the book talk is twofold. First, we want to develop adolescent literacy, there are few goals more important than this. Secondly, we want to give adults a role in the school that is tied to both our academic mission and our efforts to build social emotional literacy." According to Dr. Gately, this book can be considered the children's version of *Mindset* (by Dr. Carol Dweck) as it deals with the same themes about moving beyond our comfort zones and embracing failure.

Dennis Schug, principal of Hampton Bays Middle School in Long Island, NY, hosted a book talk around the book *Wonder* by R.J. Palacio for his incoming fifth graders last year. *Wonder* is the endearing story of a young man with a facial deformity and the challenges he faces navigating a new school. Mr. Schug explains that a copy of the book was provided to each student. They were invited to read with him. He even hosted four summer meetings to discuss the book. The final meeting about the book took place in September. He also used eighth grade mentors to read the book and attend the meetings as a way of mentoring the younger students. Mr. Schug found his book study to be meaningful and an authentic reading experience for students. He was able to use the theme of empathy present in the book to springboard many conversations. Students' parents also commented it was a great way to get students into the building before the start of the year!

Wonder
R.J. Palacio

I was able to host a similar book talk with the same book, *Wonder*, during the school year with students who volunteered to be part of a principal's book club. We met during lunch periods and discussed the book over a few weeks. My students connected so closely with the story of acceptance in the book that they recommended that it become required reading for all incoming sixth graders. I found the reading of literature intended for the middle school age group refreshed some of my understanding of what it must be like to be an adolescent. I enjoyed learning from the reflections students shared and I think it helped me further develop empathy and a younger perspective.

It is not uncommon for administrators to host book studies with teachers but that idea can be extended. Use book studies with parents and students to make powerful connections on an academic level and on an interpersonal level. Learning and growing together presents opportunities for everyone. Plus, you'll be surprised how enjoyable reading children's literature for the level you lead really can be!
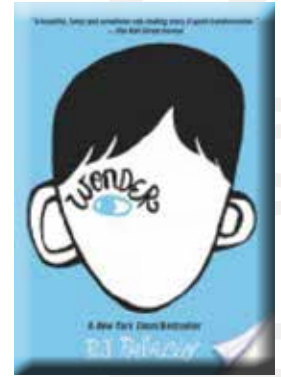
Dennis Schug

Dr. Donald Gately

BOOK REVIEW BY LISA MEADE

Lisa Meade is middle school principal at Corinth CSD. You can find her on Twitter at @LisaMeade23.