



New Year To-Do's

1. Remember to do something more romantic than taking Renee to SAI in August for our 20th anniversary.
2. Cut Diet Coke consumption from seven to five cans per day.
3. Start purchasing Christmas gifts no later than December 23.
4. Remember to silence phone and turn it off "vibrate" prior to August presentation.
5. Behave in a marginally less intimidating manner to the boys who are friends with my teenage daughters. (For some reason my daughters find it inappropriate that I may, on occasion, share that I was one of three officers in my Officer Basic Course to achieve a score of 40 out of 40 on the firing range.)

Well, that is a start to my New Year's resolutions. Actually, it is an end as well. If I set my goals low enough, I have learned that I am more likely to achieve them. (Ease up ... I'm joking ... sort of ... well not really, but cut me some slack.) Sorry if my list seems a bit troubling, but let's be honest, I am a bit troubling. I consider self-awareness one of my strengths.

As you might guess by reading my list, I should be the last person to give others lessons or suggestions on their "personal" New Year's resolutions. Having stated that, I will take the liberty to make some recommendations regarding resolutions that relate to your professional life as a school administrator.

In no particular order, here we go:

1. **Technology policies** (for staff members, students, and visitors). If you are waiting to update your technology policies or practices every three years, you are waiting too long. Technology evolves so quickly that I would encourage you to review such policies and practices every year. You may not need to make changes, but at least review your language. In particular, I encourage you to add language which restricts the ability of students, staff members and visitors to capture audio, video or photographs, unless it fits into a particular exception (as noted in the policy) or they have received permission from a designated school official (e.g., teacher, principal, etc.).
2. **Yik Yak geofence**. Some of you may be wondering what the heck I am talking about. Yik Yak is an app that permits individuals to anonymously make comments with others who are in a certain area. Such anonymous, social networking sites provide an insidious means for individuals to make nasty comments about others. If you request a geofence through Yik Yak's website, <http://support.yikyakapp.com>, they will put a virtual fence around your school buildings so Yik Yak does not function on school property.
3. **Discuss blind spots in your policies** with the team of administrators in your district. For example, a couple of years ago there may have been a blind spot concerning e-cigarettes in your tobacco policy. Iowa law now covers e-cigarettes and restricts purchase by those under 18, but many school policies were silent on this topic prior to the change in the law. Once you determine blind spots, set a plan for the development of new language for recommendation to the school board. Until new language is approved, if you find your interpretation or concern to be supportable and reasonably related to the intent of past policy, communicate your interpretation to students and parents. For instance, I recently learned of the potential danger and possible use of powdered alcohol by teenagers. I previously had not heard of powdered alcohol. Fortunately, it appears that there is some proposed legislation in the works to prohibit the use of powdered alcohol moving forward, and include such terminology in relevant Iowa Code sections regarding alcohol possession and use. Having stated that, in the meantime it would be perfectly appropriate (from my perspective) for administrators to send a message to students and parents that the administration will treat powdered alcohol like it would any other form of alcohol and treat individuals accordingly who decide to bring powdered alcohol on school property or to school activities.
4. **Improve your communications with superiors and subordinates** (sorry, military terminology is slipping out a bit). Point being, however well you believe you communicate with others, try to find a way to do it even better. Keep your boss informed, and do your best to keep those for whom you are responsible informed of matters that may be of interest to them. Try to remember when you were a teacher, for instance, and ask yourself if you would have liked to know more about what was going on in the world of your leaders and the district, building or office at-large. If something impacts others and it is not confidential, err on the side of openness. Don't assume that others are as informed as you might have guessed, and consider the possibility that they may actually be misinformed about a particular issue or topic.

5. Ensure that students and parents/guardians are educated about how to file formal bullying complaints. While we undoubtedly wish for concerns about mistreatment and misbehavior to be settled quickly and through direct intervention, please explain to students and parents/guardians where they may find bullying complaint forms (whether hard copies or electronic) and how they may go about filing them. I have yet to visit a district where more than 20 percent of the students know where they may find bullying complaint forms, usually it is closer to 5 or 10 percent actually knowing where to pick up forms.

6. Discuss student supervision expectations with your administrative team, communicate those expectations to staff members, and perform spot checks (either by you or other administrators) to see if those expectations are followed. I am not one to spend a great deal of time worrying about liability (typically, if you can honestly say to yourself that you are making a good-faith effort to do the right thing, liability is unlikely to be a concern), but inadequate or failed supervision which results in injury to a student is a surefire way to expose the district to liability. Not to mention, your number one duty as an educator (in my humble opinion) is to protect and safeguard students. If students do not feel safe and protected, how can we expect them to learn? Be careful about staff members delegating too much responsibility to volunteers for supervision. Remember, volunteers should supplement and not supplant school employees when it comes to supervision. Prioritize your efforts on those locations or activities that place students in the most vulnerable position to be harmed, whether by their own actions or the actions of others (e.g., recess, field trips, buses, shop class, dances, nooks and crannies in your buildings where supervision is difficult, lunch room/commons, football games, chemistry class, etc.).

7. Communicate with legislators and other politicians when you have suggestions or concerns about education issues. If you are communicating in an official capacity, you may want to first check with your superior (see paragraph 4 above), but do not underestimate the stature each of you carries as a school administrator when you share concerns or ideas as an educator. If a legislator hears from several superintendents and/or half a dozen other school administrators from his/her legislative district about a particular issue, I can assure you that they will take note of those communications. They realize how far your wings extend and the number of their constituents with whom you interact on a nearly daily basis. Case in point, consider the current discussion of the early start date. While we might all feel better commiserating with each other about the present situation, such talk will do little good when we do not effectively articulate it to decision-makers. While SAI has consistently communicated that this should be a matter for local control, I am not suggesting that you should have one position or another on this topic. Instead, I am encouraging you to provide your unique perspective or observations to those who are not working in the education world every day and send that message in a constructive manner.

Seven seems like a good number to end with this month. I don't want to bury you with additional work. Let's keep this "to-do" list manageable. Notice that I only had five items on my personal list.

I hope you are looking forward to the rest of the school year. Never hesitate to give me a call or shoot me an email.

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Join school law attorneys presenting at this annual event, Tues., Feb. 10 at the Sheraton West Des Moines. Supplement your knowledge with sessions covering

- homeless students, residency and open enrollment issues;
- special education and disability law;
- employee and student medical issues;
- student accommodations;
- technology issues and school authority; and
- open meetings and open records laws.

Register using the School Law Conference link at www.sai-iowa.org/events.cfm

Bullying Investigation Training

Fri., Feb. 6 at the SAI Office in Clive

A properly conducted bullying investigation is an essential intervention which supports any effective bullying prevention and resolution process. This training teaches the Easton Bullying Investigation System, the system currently used by the DE to train designated bullying investigators around the state, which focuses on demonstrating and utilizing the following skills:

- identifying bullying behavior;
- intervening in the bullying behavior;
- determining whether the behavior warrants investigation;
- conducting a legally-defensible investigation, step-by-step;
- effectively and efficiently analyzing evidence and investigative facts to render a finding.

Additionally, this training provides tools to ensure a target's safety during the investigation and logically consequence students engaged in bullying behavior.

Register now at www.sai-iowa.org/events.cfm