

Snapshots

Fast Fact: Almost 60 percent of



Self-control is one of seven cognitive skills that prime students for success, according to author, researcher, and NAESP Conference presenter Ellen Galinsky.

“All children are born with executive function skills, but we don’t promote them,” says Galinsky, president of the Families and Work Institute. “There are everyday things we can do to promote these skills that help children thrive now and in the future.”

In her book *Mind in the Making: The Seven Essential Skills Every Child Needs*, Galinsky delves into neuroscience, cognitive science, and developmental research to highlight how the following seven skills allow humans to analyze, evaluate, and reflect:

- Focus and self-control;
- Perspective taking;
- Communicating;
- Making connections;
- Critical thinking;
- Taking on challenges; and
- Self-directed, engaged learning.

Strengthening students’ executive functions, says Galinsky, can be as simple as playing structured games. She gives the example of the “Simon Says”-esque “head to toe” game. When the adult touches her head, kids are to touch their toes, and vice-versa. This teaches students to pay attention (which kids learn better by doing physical activities than by just sitting), and calls on working memory,

7 Essential Executive Functions

MOST EDUCATORS ARE familiar with the famed Stanford University “marshmallow experiment,” which pitted preschoolers in the 1960s and 1970s against a tough dilemma: have a treat now, or wait 15 minutes and enjoy two treats. Self-control became a key education buzzword when, years later, follow-up studies tied delayed gratification to academic success and higher SAT scores.

MYTWOCENTS

What’s one task you make sure to tackle before the end of the school year?

Student/parent and staff handbook revisions have to be approved by the school board by June, so I try to finalize all revisions before the final day of school.

—**Jessica Johnson**, principal, Dodgeland Elementary, Juneau, Wisconsin

My secretary and I brainstorm and prioritize a summer work list with the must-dos as well as bigger projects or new ideas we may want to start for the new school year. Creating a list together means we increase our accountability for getting it done.

—**Jacie Maslyk**, principal, Crafton Elementary School, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

self-control, and cognitive flexibility. As students get older, educators can make these games more complicated.

In the trainings she conducts with educators and adults, Galinsky says she reinforces that adults need effective executive function, too.

“It’s better if you start younger, but the wonderful thing about executive function skills is that it’s never too late,” she says. “Adults need to see and understand why these skills are so important in their own lives to get engaged in promoting them in children.”

Don’t miss Galinsky’s presentation (an interactive session that will give principals a taste of innovative brain research) at NAESP’s 2014 National Conference and Expo. Register at naesp.org/conference.

Use VAMs Wisely

MANY STATES AND districts have turned to value-added models (VAMs) to measure teachers’ and schools’ effectiveness—but school leaders should do their homework before crunching the numbers. VAMs require thorough analysis, cautions the American Statistical Association (ASA) in a statement released this April.

Do view VAMs in the larger context of school improvement. “[The] majority of opportunities for quality improvement are found in the system-level conditions. Ranking teachers by their VAM scores can have unintended consequences that reduce quality,” according to the statement.

Don’t assume causation. VAMs typically measure correlation instead. “Effects—positive or negative—attributed to a teacher may actually be caused by other factors that are not captured in the model,” writes the ASA.

Ultimately, VAMs provide school administrators with information on students’ performance and can help identify areas for improvement. But, stresses the ASA, data from VAMs do not provide information on how to improve teaching.

We always make sure to have the school events and meeting calendars for next school year complete. Second, we try to draft our cultural arts schedule before the end of the year. Though the calendar inevitably changes, we usually share cultural arts personnel and it can be difficult to reach colleagues over the summer.

—**Christopher Wooleyhand**, principal, Richard Henry Lee Elementary, Glen Burnie, Maryland

✦ What do you do at the end of the school year to prepare for the next? Share your responses on Twitter [@NAESP](https://twitter.com/NAESP)

3 Executive Function To-Dos for Today

1 PRAISE A STUDENT’S EFFORTS rather than intelligence. This can reinforce his or her willingness to take on challenges.

2 ASK STUDENTS WHAT-IF QUESTIONS in discussions. An imaginative or role-playing activity can deepen students’ communication and critical thinking skills.

3 Disputes between students are an opportunity to teach students to deal with conflict constructively. **CHALLENGE THEM TO CONSIDER OTHERS’ PERSPECTIVES.**



New Principals Corner

NAESP’S NEWLY FORMED National Panel of New Principals aims to explore the struggles and successes of early career principals. Each month, the panel of first- and second-year principals answers a few brief questions about their experiences, and NAESP shares the insights.

Bright Idea

Recently, the panel explored professional development for teachers. Here’s a strategy from Janice Croasmun, principal of Rashkis Elementary School in Chapel Hill, North Carolina:

Conduct learning walks in colleagues’ classrooms. Teachers watch a colleague teach a lesson, then debrief together about what they observed both teacher and students saying and doing, providing constructive feedback. Our literacy coaches have also recorded themselves teaching a lesson and then had the teachers watch and discuss the strategies used and instructional decisions made by the coach during the lesson.

Hot Resources

- **Books:** *Formative Assessments* by Dylan Williams; *Mindset* by Carol Dweck
- **Article:** Nancy Barno Reynolds’s “I Start the Year with Nothing,” *Teaching Tolerance*, Spring 2014
- **Blog:** connectedprincipals.com

To join the panel, or nominate a colleague for it, visit naesp.org/national-panel-new-principals.