

THE GREAT CONVERSATION™

Study Guide

32 Questions
9 Learning Objectives

Watching The Great Conversation™
Mini-Series and completing this Guide
now earns Continuing Education
Credit in a growing number of states.

“Public education is a cornerstone of American democracy.
We have never needed it more.”

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SchoolsCannotDoltAlone.com

Purpose

The Great Conversation™ Study Guide was created to help staff and community members become more informed, confident, proactive ambassadors for their public schools. The content promotes increased public understanding, trust, and support.

Taken together, the Mini-Series and this Study Guide can be used as:

- A fifteen-part PD seminar that improves organizational health and advances the district's community engagement agenda.
- A self-study program that provides the motivation and skills needed to promote personal and district success.
- A continuing education project that strengthens partnerships with parents, business, community groups.

Completion will prepare all participants to effectively build a community-wide coalition working to increase student success.

Primary materials

- The Great Conversation™ Mini-Series
(Stream-on-demand from the district's website)
 - 3.5 hours of content
 - 15 sections (7 -17 minutes long)
- *Look What We're Doing to Our Schools* (12"x 40" Poster)
 - Supplements Episode #5 Section #3
 - Available at www.schoolscannotdoitalone.com

Supplementary Materials

- Schools Cannot Do It Alone, Jamie Vollmer,
Paperback, 230 pages, Enlightenment Press
 - Available at www.schoolscannotdoitalone.com
and Amazon
- The Blueberry Story: A teacher gives a
businessman a lesson (8.5" x 5.5" pamphlet)
 - Available at www.schoolscannotdoitalone.com
- The 5Ss – Five steps to improved morale.
(18"x18" Poster)
 - Available at www.schoolscannotdoitalone.com

9 Learning objectives

Successful completion of this Study Guide will help staff and community members:

1. **Understand the importance** of public education in the 21st century
2. **Appreciate the need** to aggressively defend public education and the people working in our schools
3. **Counter the arguments** of those who promote free-market solutions and unfairly criticize public schools
4. **Articulate why and how** our schools need to change
5. **Understand psychological and cultural obstacles** to systemic change
6. **Present the history** of public education to soften resistance to change
7. **Explain the choices** communities must make to ensure all children are prepared to thrive and prosper
8. **Describe “mandate creep”** and the ever-increasing burden that has been placed upon public schools
9. **Apply the lessons learned** to engage the community, promote public education, and increase student success

Main Points and Study Questions

Episode #1 - Defending Public Education (Part One)

Section #1 - The Nation Was Not At Risk

Main points

- Introduces Jamie and the series major goals:
 - Increase public support for public education and the people working in our public schools
 - Encourage schools and communities to work together to prepare all students to succeed as adults
- Explains Jamie's pro public education bias
- States the need to defend public schools and promote their success
- Presents "The Blueberry Story" to demonstrate the staff's power to counter unwarranted criticism
- Debunks the rhetoric of *A Nation at Risk* regarding public education's threat to the American economy
- Recommends a day of Thanks and Celebration in every community for the people working in America's public schools

Study Questions

1. Given the current social and political environment, do you think it is possible to substantially increase public support for our schools? Explain your answer.
2. What benefits might accrue if you work with your peers and community allies to accomplish this goal? To educators? To students? To the community at large?
3. What can the people of your community do to help increase student success in the 21st century?

Section #2 - A Flood of Negativity

Main points

- Begins an analysis of the forces that are actively undermining public support for public schools
- Explains human tendencies that encourage the media to focus on the negative
- Suggests a proactive, grass roots response to counter viral negativity
- Examines and refutes the “people problem” logic that underlies political rhetoric and drives standardized testing hysteria
- Argues that an emphasis on test-based accountability retards systemic change and weakens traditional American values
- Challenges elected officials at every level to spend a day working in a public school
- Introduces the “Every Day Evidence” program to help districts promote their success

Study Questions

1. Since the cost of public education is the biggest line item in every state budget, should every legislator be required to spend a day working inside a public school once every budget cycle?
2. How would we structure the day for maximum impact?
3. What would be the benefits, if any?

Section #3 – What Can We Do Now – Marquees

Main points

- Presents Field Report #1: Leveraging School Marquees. A practical, no-cost step that publicizes the contributions public schools make to the health of their communities

- Contends that the people working in public schools have the knowledge, experience, and power to increase public support

Study Question

1. In addition to school marquees, are there other district assets that can be used to increase public understanding and support at little or no cost?

Episode #2 - Defending Public Education (Part Two)

Section #1 – The Privatization Con

Main Points

- Reinforces public education’s vital importance by showing the link between the quality of local public schools and the quality of life of everyone in the community
- Analyzes the often-counterproductive actions of business leaders who are, in fact, public education’s natural partners
- Encourages an “Employer of the Month” program that brings local businessmen and women into to the schools to work with staff for an entire day
- Examines the motivations of so called “reformers” and their calls for privatization
- Explains the limits of the transformative powers of the free market when non-commercial objectives are paramount
- Explains the damage that privatizing the preK-12 arena inflicts on the traditions, values, and social fabric of the entire community

Study Questions

1. What do employers want students to know and be able to do when they graduate?
2. List two things that educators and businesspeople can do to strengthen their alliance and increase student success.
3. Since it is not uncommon for charters and schools run for profit to purge students who present physical, cognitive, or behavioral problems, what is the rationale for continuing to support these schools with taxpayer dollars?
4. Do you have an idiot brother-in-law?

Section #2 – What Can We Do Now – The 5Ss

Main Points

- Presents Field Report #2 – The 5Ss: Stop the trash talk - Shift your attention - Share your success - Sustain the effort - Start now
- Asks educators how many people in the community understand the challenges they face.
- Encourages everyone to engage their families, friends, and neighbors in The Great Conversation.

Study Question

1. In the context of S#3 – Share something positive - what kinds of positive things about your job, your peers, your schools, and your students could you find to share with the people you encounter in the course of your daily routine?

Episode #3 – How We Got Here – Why We Need to Change (Part One)

Section #1 – Why Are We Not Getting The Results We Need?

Main Points

- Explores five pervasive public responses to this question: (1) we have a people problem (2) it's the unions (3) we need to run schools like a business (4) it's these kids today (5) there are too many out of school factors.
- Introduces the core problem: our schools were designed to select and sort students for an industrial America that no longer exists

Study Questions

1. Why are so many people willing to believe that the people working in our schools are obstacles to progress?
2. What steps can we take at the local and state levels to counter this belief?

Section #2 – Raking the Genius from the Rubbish

Main Points

- Presents an interview with Thomas Jefferson, a principal founder of the system, to explore his rationale for creating public schools
- Explains why he built the selecting and sorting flaw into the heart of the K-12 system
- Shows how the dominant mental model of “real school” acts as a powerful obstacle to any plan for major reform

Study Questions

1. Assuming for the moment that we have a systems problem, list two aspects of the system that frustrate our best efforts to prepare every child to succeed.
2. What do we, together with the public, need to do to remove these obstacles?

Episode #4 – How We Got Here – Why We Need to Change (Part Two)

Section #1 – America’s First Schools

Main Points

- Introduces the need to change the system by discussing the growing disconnect between what Jefferson’s system can provide and what our society needs
- Argues that meaningful restructuring is a subjective process that can inflame human passions
- Contends that providing a deeper understanding of the history of reform will help staff and the public overcome resistance to change
- Begins the story by examining the creation and evolution of public education from 1640 to the Civil War
- Reinforces the link between Jefferson’s design and the workforce needs of the Agricultural Age

Study Questions

1. Why do people - even those who had a bad experience in school – oppose changing the present model?

2. Do your answers to this question suggest things we can do to overcome resistance to change?
3. What are they?

Section #2 – Rise of the Industrial Age

Main Points

- Continues the history into the Industrial Age and explores the changing needs of the American economy
- Identifies two opposing factions of reformers at the crossroads of change and outlines their respective positions
- Reviews the actions of Administrative Reformers and the steps they took to strengthen Jefferson's model
- Chronicles the growth of public education and America's rise to global preeminence

Study Questions

1. What were the principal benefits of the Administrative Reformers' triumph?
2. How, if at all, has the success of Jefferson 2.0 contributed to the present resistance to change?
3. In strengthening the annual raking process, did the Administrative Reformers sow seeds of discontent toward public education and the people who work in public schools?

Section #3 – Three Paths Through the Knowledge Age

Main Points

- Brings the story of reform to a close in the Knowledge Age

- Describes changes in the economy that have reversed the Learner to Laborer relationship and put the pressure on our schools
- Takes us back to the crossroads of change and explains our options
- Introduces the Four Prerequisites of Progress: Community understanding, trust, permission (to change), and support

Study Questions

1. In our conversation with the community, how can we use the rapid changes that are taking place today across the economy to overcome resistance to systemic change?
2. How can we help educators and the people of our communities choose the middle path when, unlike the other paths, there are so many unknowns?

Episode #5 – Engaging the Community – Removing Obstacles to Progress

Section #1 – Jamie’s Number One Rule

Main Points

- Begins an in-depth analysis of the Four Prerequisites of Progress
- Describes the fallout from the collision of the moral and fiduciary need to move schools forward and the widespread resistance to systemic change
- Portrays public schools as a 3D projection of the community’s expectations, values, traditions, and beliefs
- Presents a dream sequence that leads to Jamie’s First Rule of School Restructuring: You cannot touch a school without touching the culture of the surrounding town.

- Follows Jamie’s First Rule to its logical conclusion: to increase student success we must do more than change our schools. We must change our communities.

Study Questions

1. Name one thing that each of these groups can do to encourage a community-wide culture that fosters student success:
 - Public school employees
 - Board members
 - Governors
 - Legislators
 - Local elected officials
 - Businessmen and women
 - Departments of Education
 - Judicial officers
 - Not-For-Profits
 - Social Service Agencies
 - Parents/Surrogates
 - Students

Section #2 – The Mental Affliction Called “Nosteisa”

Main Points

- Makes the case that to successfully move our schools from A to B we must go through C: the Community
- Expands the First Prerequisite of Progress to include community understanding of public education’s history, which was the focus of Episodes #3 and #4.
- Examines the debilitating mental affliction of Nostesia: the conviction that the schools of the past were superior to the schools of today

- Argues that increasing understanding of our history can help cure this affliction
- Provides examples of Nostesia over time

Study Questions

1. Why would understanding the history of reform make people more accepting of the changes in curriculum, instruction, assessment, and scheduling that we need today?
2. How would you use the story told in Episode #4 to soften rigid notions of the way school ought to be?
3. What is your honestly calculated Nostesia quotient?

Section #3 – The Ever-Increasing Burden

Main Points

- Continues to expand on the First Prerequisite by discussing the need to increase understanding of the challenges facing our schools
- Presents Field Report #3 – A review of the ever-increasing burden that has been placed on public schools
- Describes *Look What We're Doing to Our Schools*, the poster that chronicles a century of mandate creep

Study Questions

1. What can you do to effectively present the reality of mandate creep to the people of your community? List your options.
2. How might broad exposure to the ever-increasing mandates change the way the public thinks and acts toward their local schools?

Section #4 – We Have the Power

Main Points

- Brings the series to a temporary close
- Characterizes this moment in time as one of great risk and opportunity
- Argues that teachers, support staff, administrators, Board members, and community allies have the power to change the trends of time
- States the fact that when educators take a step toward the community the community takes a step toward their schools, bringing a host of practical benefits

Study Questions

1. List all the ways you might share the information presented throughout The Great Conversation with the people in your social network and in the community at large.
2. What stories and facts from your experience could you share to increase understanding and support for your schools?

Thank you for participating in
The Great Conversation™

For more information visit
www.SchoolsCannotDoltAlone.com