

Blog 9: April 2026: The Courage to Color Outside the Lines

Breaking Education Rules that Don't Make Sense

Recently, I was reviewing a faculty's feedback they provided to questions designed to help them identify what they thought necessary to improve their school's culture; more creativity and fun were the most often repeated responses.

Some of the most transformational educational leaders are also the most creative rule-breakers. Not the ones who ignore important policies or cut ethical corners, but the ones who have the courage to question conventions that limit student potential and create new approaches when old systems aren't working.

Every meaningful innovation in education started with someone brave enough to say, "What if we did this differently?" The principal who turned detention into community service. The teacher who replaced textbooks with real-world projects. The superintendent who eliminated homework in elementary grades. The department chair who let students design their own learning assessments. These weren't rebels without a cause—they were courageous leaders who recognized that some rules exist to maintain systems, not serve students.

The courage to color outside the lines requires distinguishing between rules that protect and rules that constrain. Safety protocols, ethical guidelines, and legal requirements are non-negotiable boundaries that protect everyone. But scheduling conventions, traditional grading systems, standard meeting formats, and "the way we've always done things" are often just habits masquerading as requirements.

Start small and think creatively. What if faculty meetings were walking meetings? What if parent conferences happened at coffee shops? What if students presented their learning to community members instead of just teachers? What if staff professional development happened through peer observation rather than external workshops? What if discipline focused on restoration rather than punishment?

The key is involving others in your creative rule breaking. When you say, "I have a crazy idea—what do you think?" you invite collaboration rather than resistance. When you pilot new approaches and measure results, you build evidence rather than arguments. When you celebrate the successes and learn from the attempts that don't work out, you create a culture of innovation rather than rebellion.

Your willingness to question conventional wisdom and try new approaches signals to your entire organization that creativity is valued, that improvement is possible, and that everyone has permission to imagine better ways of serving students and families.

The most successful educational leaders aren't the ones who follow all the rules perfectly—they're the ones who have the wisdom to know which rules serve their mission and the courage to write new ones when necessary.

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