



## LAWRENCE SCHOOL

# First-Person POV: A Kick in Our Behinds

By [Lou Salza](#) Head of [Lawrence School](#)

**Editor's Note:** *The Lawrence School is recognized as a leader among schools for children who learn differently. It took years—navigating crises and pushing boundaries—to get where the school is today. Yet, as Head of School Lou Salza writes, their quest for high performance continues.*

Complacency is the enemy I fear most on the journey to high performance. As programs, finance, governance, and outreach get better and stronger, there is a universal gravitational pull—a siren song—seducing us with the feeling that we have arrived at some hoped-for “destination.” This sense of self-satisfaction is a killer. It kills initiative, diminishes drive, and discourages the disruptive, innovative thinking required to keep on the move toward excellence and high performance.

In the past, for our leadership team’s annual reviews, I’ve chosen books on topics relevant to our mission and asked everyone to respond collaboratively to open-ended questions. The dialogue—which was far more interesting and valuable than the usual fare at annual review time—would result in some insights into how we could function better as individuals and as a team and how we could more effectively advance our mission.

But then I contributed to the Pillar 5 (culture of learning) proof points for the [Performance Practice](#). I immediately realized that they would help us do an even deeper dive into how our team works together.

As a result, a few months ago, members of our leadership team all completed the “culture of learning” section of the Performance Practice. When we aggregated the ratings and reviewed the notes, we realized that—even around the table of leaders—there was some lack of knowledge and understanding of what data we were gathering about our students, what it meant, and how we were using it. I realized we had moved quite a distance from where we started on this data-



**Location:** Cleveland, OH

**Field:** Education

**Budget:** \$10 million

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Lou Salza  
Head of Lawrence School

gathering journey. While everyone was there at the start—not everyone had kept pace with our progress.

As one team member pointed out, we can also do a much better job of using data to support recruitment: “We tell the stories of our kids. How can we better show how these stories evolve? It’s not magic. It’s thoughtful, systematic, and child-centered.” We decided collectively that finding better ways to communicate data—internally and externally—had to be our immediate improvement priority.

The Performance Practice kicked us in our collective behinds. It focused our discourse and consideration in a way that:

- Disrupts complacency by forcing a deep dive inward—and a thoughtful look outside to the marketplace
- Requires personal as well as professional learning

- Unifies departments by challenging us to make this happen throughout the program—with admins, teachers, parents, and students
- Requires us to use the data in marketing and branding.

My take away: The first bullet alone is worth the time and effort we’re investing in the Performance Practice.

Prioritizing our use of data and communication cuts across every operation in the school. It starts with how we serve the students and requires us to discern how we know we are successful. But it quickly moves to operations, finance, outreach, branding, personnel, training—so everyone gets wet when this data thing splashes down.

As a kick in the behind often does, we’re forced to take a fresh look at where we are and roll up our sleeves to continue—and improve—our work on behalf of the students and the families we serve.

*Photos in this story provided by Lawrence School.*

### Performance in Action

This story is part of the Leap Ambassadors Community Performance in Action series, which features stories about organizations on the path to high performance—different in size, location, mission, and maturity, but with a shared commitment to getting better at getting better. Find additional stories at [leapambassadors.org/performance-in-action/](https://leapambassadors.org/performance-in-action/)

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