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March 2021

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Tracking student strides

10 ways to help educators monitor special education student progress, 17

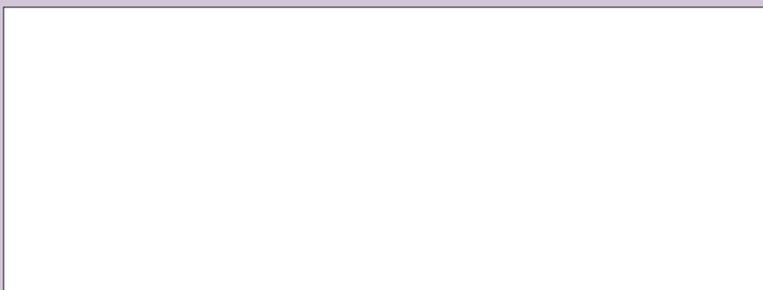
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Recommended reading

This month's issue focuses on some timely and important topics.

Anti-racism efforts have blossomed in the wake of George Floyd's death last summer and the social justice movement that it sparked. We look at how several school districts are tackling systemic racism and implicit biases, often with their students leading the way. Page 7

You would think that Silicon Valley of all places would have overcome the digital divide that keeps some students from accessing the internet and remote instruction. But the epicenter of the tech world has struggled to provide students from lower-income families with the tools they need. Other districts we spoke to have managed to tackle this complex problem. Learn about how they did it on Page 11

Special education progress monitoring has taken a hit with distance learning. But tracking how students with disabilities are doing is a vital piece of the process. In this feature, we offer 10 ways to tackle progress monitoring through the remainder of the pandemic and beyond. Page 17.

Finally, in our Last Word column, read about a five-step plan to ensure that educational content supports an anti-racist mission and addresses issues of systemic racism, injustice, inequity and inequality. Page 20

I hope you find these articles helpful in your mission to educate students. As always, feel free to send your thoughts and feedback. You can reach me at eweiss@lrp.com.

—Eric Weiss, executive editor

FETC by the numbers

The 41st annual Future of Education Technology Conference, virtual for the first time, took place Jan. 26.-29. Here are some key takeaways. Learn more about the conference at fetc.org.





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Cover photo: [gettyimages.com](https://www.gettyimages.com)



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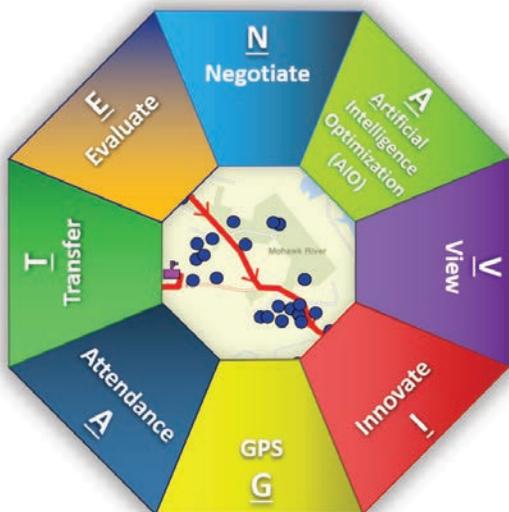


NAVIGATE 2021

A ROADMAP DURING UNCERTAINTY

A roadmap may be the most important tool for your school transportation department in 2021. A map provides a look at the big picture. A map is also useful to help navigate around unforeseen circumstances, such as what we have seen occur at schools across the nation due to the pandemic.

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Digital self-harm: What is it and could it be on rise?

In an online forum, a message appears.

It contains a threat against a student from an anonymous source. The person spotting it reports it to a school official, the website or police. After a short investigation, the findings are disturbing. The perpetrator who posted it is actually the student engaging in an act of digital self-harm ... or cyberbullying themselves.

One in 10 middle and high school students said they have engaged in digital self-harm in the past year, according to a new study based on data from the 2019 Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey.

So where are the red flags, and why is almost no one discussing it?

“If you’re talking about implications for district administrators, it is a behavior that is so new and so novel, the vast majority of the public has still never even heard of it,” says one of the study’s authors, Ryan Meldrum, a Florida International University professor.

In one of the earliest reported cases of digital self-harm in 2013, a 14-year-old from England named Hannah Smith, a victim of bullying, had posted negatively about herself before she took her life.



SELF BULLYING— The phenomenon of students cyberbullying themselves, especially during distance learning, is a topic that needs immediate attention.

So when and where is digital self-harm occurring? Because it can be difficult to spot, there are no clear answers yet, Meldrum says.

“Doing school in Zoom oftentimes brings in a whole new arena of opportunities for students to be mean,” Meldrum says. “If I Zoom, I have a virtual background, and nobody knows what is sitting behind me. But I’m sure there are plenty of students who don’t have virtual backgrounds who may be Zooming from their bedroom or Zooming from a location where other students might take opportunities to make fun of their surroundings.”

District leaders and faculty can promote positive online behavior, enforcing policies that address cyberbullying and ensuring that online spaces are well-monitored. Schools also should work with parents to ensure that they are keeping children safe in online spaces at home.

“I think it will be important for elementary school principals and guidance counselors to start to raise awareness and think about kids in second and third grade who might be doing this,” Meldrum says. “The long term question is, what type of implications does this have? Is this a stepping stone [to further behaviors]?” —Chris Burt

2 studies urge schools to reopen despite COVID

District leaders should strongly consider reopening classrooms as COVID transmission within schools remains low, two new studies have found.

If students and teachers continue to wear masks, wash hands and practice distancing, schools can reopen safely despite the level of community spread, say researchers from Duke University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

During the first nine weeks of the school year, COVID transmission in 11 North Carolina districts that held in-person instruction was far lower than the rate of spread in surrounding communities, the researchers found.

To safely reopen schools, communities should consider

taking other measures such as restricting indoor dining, the CDC said in an article published recently in the *JAMA* medical journal.

Administrators should consider limiting athletic programs, which have resulted in higher COVID transmission rates than has classroom instruction, the CDC said. “With 2 vaccines now being distributed under Emergency Use Authorizations and more vaccine options anticipated to be available in the coming months, there is much hope on the horizon for a safer environment for schools and school-related athletic activities during the 2021/22 school year,” the CDC concluded.

—Matt Zalaznick



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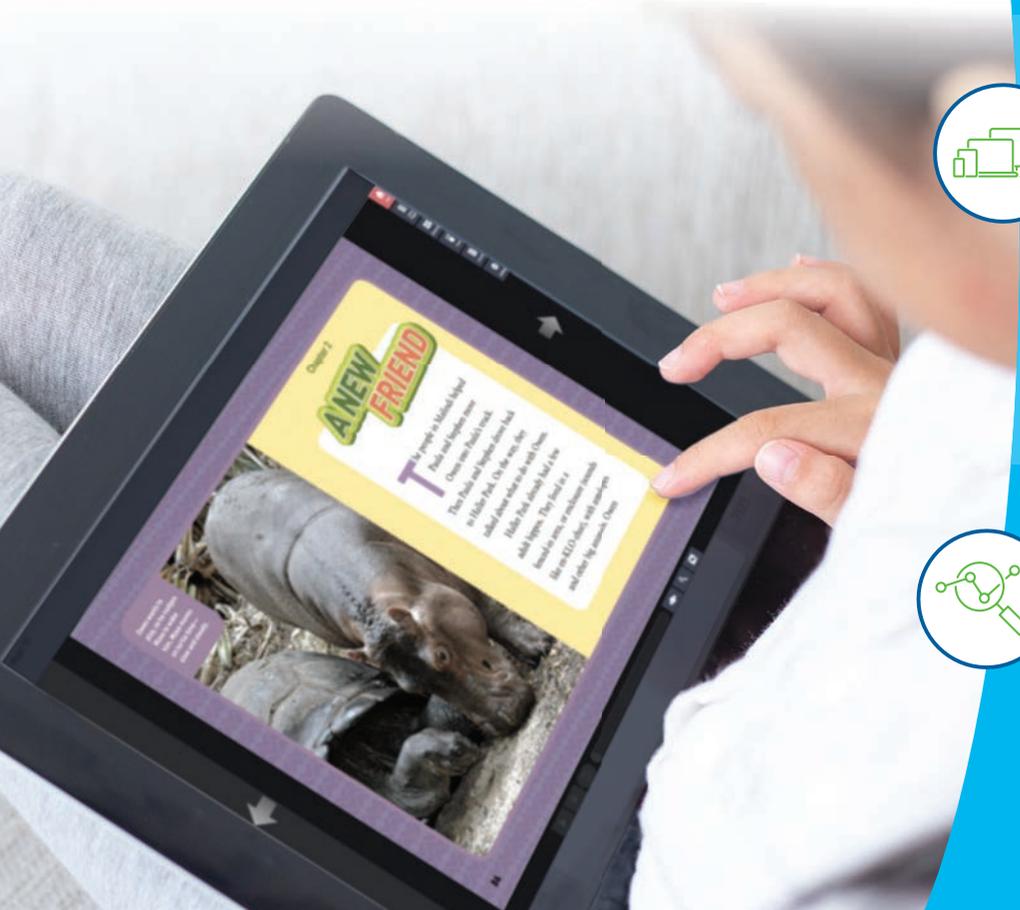
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BY MATT ZALAZNICK

How districts are taking action to embed anti-racism in the curriculum and teacher training

REJECTING RACISM

One change in behavior that can begin to dismantle systemic racism and implicit biases involves the hundreds of “discretionary moments” that occur during the school day. These are the moments when a teacher may alter facial expressions and body language—whether consciously or unconsciously—as different students raise their hands or behave in certain ways, says Superintendent Robert Runcie of Broward County Public Schools.

“These things are rooted in our history, our perceptions, our biases,” says Runcie, who has over the last several years worked to build the cultural competence of the educators in his Florida district. “Those discretionary moments can have

a significant impact on student learning and engagement.”

One of Runcie’s primary tools has been Courageous Conversation, a professional development framework that guides administrators, teachers and other school staff in leading discussions about race, diversity and tolerance.

When the district launched Courageous Conversation, 300 teachers trained to become equity liaisons to champion the program’s goals with their colleagues and to work with their principals to develop school-based equity plans.

“Our schools can be ground zero for a better dialogue, for a better level of conversation among adults who can better prepare the next generation to behave in ways that are an improve-

ment on what we see going on today,” Runcie says.

Transforming teaching practices

Many educators and community members are hungry to discuss these issues, particularly in the wake of the shooting deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, says Glenn E. Singleton, who created Courageous Conversation through his consulting firm, Pacific Educational Group.

“It’s a very sensitive area to say, ‘with all the incredible things you’re doing, there are still these parts we want you to pay attention to because of the of results—because bias is showing up in curriculum and instruction,’” Singleton says.

CURRICULAR JUSTICE—Slavery will no longer be the first contact students have with African American history in districts where leaders are embedding concepts of anti-racism into teaching and learning.

These discussions start with the educators themselves, regardless of their background, examining how race has impacted their lives and shaped their beliefs. This leads educators to discover the role race plays in their teaching and leadership practices.

That process spans practices as simple as learning to pronounce students' names correctly to understanding and appreciating nuances in how different students express their knowledge, Singleton says.

The fact that the educators in a district as large as Broward can take on this work should serve as a model for other districts hoping to make progress on race, he adds.

Collectively, Broward County schools are one of the nation's most diverse, with the district serving students from more than 200 different countries.

As part of the Courageous Conversation initiative, Runcie and his team are now modifying the curriculum to make instruction more relevant to students of all socio-economic backgrounds.

The district has also made social justice a key focus of its speech and debate program, which is the largest in the nation.

Broward leaders are looking to distribute resources more equitably as well. For instance, some schools need more funding than others to fortify early literacy programs.

"It is enormously difficult for a young person to be the best they can be, academically or otherwise, if they're dealing with a bunch of social-emotional issues, many of them grounded in issues of race," Runcie says.

Letting students lead the work

After a white supremacist rally turned into a riot on Charlottesville, Virginia, the local Albemarle County School District turned to its students to begin work on one of the state's first anti-racism policies (DAmag.me/albemarle).

The effort also jibed with the division's commitment to project-based learning, as students trained with community experts to write policies and regulations, gather community input and interpret achieve-

How COVID and anti-racism initiatives should transform K-12

Will responding to the "twin pandemics" of coronavirus and systemic racism represent only slight deviations in K-12 education? Not when there's an invaluable opportunity for a permanent transformation, according to a new report, "Will Schools Change Forever?" (bit.ly/school-changes) from the Clayton Christensen Institute, the Harvard University-based think that studies disruption.

The report guides administrators in making COVID-era innovation permanent. While investment in resources is crucial, those resources must power new practices that outperform existing approaches, says Chelsea Waite, an education research fellow who co-authored the study. "I have spoken to some school leaders who see confronting racism as even more of a challenge than surviving the pandemic."

Administrators can dismantle systemic racism and gender disparities by ending disciplinary practices and other policies that punish Black, Latina and Native students disproportionately, another new report says.

The guide, "...And They Cared: How to Create Better, Safer Learning Environments for Girls of Color" (bit.ly/they-cared), provides guidance in creating a positive and inclusive school climate for female students of color.

Here are key equity steps the report urges school leaders to take:

- Use discipline data and make it publicly available.
- Eliminate racist and sexist dress codes.
- Implement student- and community-centered approaches to restorative discipline.
- Invest in support services for families, restorative justice programs, school counselors and psychologists.
- Divest in school police or similar structures that criminalize students.

ment gap data, says Assistant Superintendent L. Bernard Hairston. "We have not been able to affect the achievement gap. With the rally, we took adversity and turned it into an opportunity."

The policy covers a wide range of issues. On the dress code, for instance, it prohibits the wearing of Confederate and Nazi symbols.

The district has also promoted the policy widely, including on posters at every school and through a student advisory group that is helping the school board implement the regulations.

The students recently held a virtual town hall where they examined three

types of racism—structural, institutional and personal. Discussion covered how and why the COVID pandemic has done disproportionate harm in communities of color too, Hairston says.

The division provides summer professional development to guide teachers in identifying equity gaps and culturally responsive practices, such not trying to predict how students will perform based on racial or socio-economic factors.

"There are some things that people don't always realize about their daily practices and the impact race is having on themselves and others," Hairston says.

The anti-racism policy also contains a checklist by which all other school policies can be evaluated through an equity lens to determine if it might have unintended impacts of certain groups.

“Oftentimes you don’t see racism unless you’re looking for it, and you can’t see it unless you know what you’re looking for,” Hairston says. “You can’t change structures and practices without changing behavior and that is a slow process.”

‘Huge dividends’ ahead

Slavery will no longer be the first contact students have with African American history in social studies classes in the Evanston/Skokie School District 65.

Administrators and teachers there are in the process of rewriting curriculum in a wide-ranging effort to make the Chicago-area district more anti-racist and to close persistent achievement gaps, Superintendent Devon Horton says.

“My responsibility is to be a system buster-upper,” Horton says. “There are

systems that exist—or don’t exist—that contribute to us not being anti-racist.”

Students will also begin learning about the impact of racism at younger ages as part of the district’s anti-racism framework.

“Teachers will know that when they’re teaching about Huck Finn or Tom Sawyer or *Of Mice and Men*, they will talk about who was in power and who was oppressed at that time, and why was it like that,” Horton says. “We won’t be leaving out major parts of history and the roles that everyone played in the development of our country.”

Because teachers are key to embedding anti-racism in a district, Evanston/Skokie is embarking on a residency program with nearby Northwestern and National Louis universities.

Student teachers seeking master’s degrees will pursue a social justice program and be placed in Evanston/Skokie schools that have struggled to recruit diverse candidates, Horton says.

The district has also hired a new manager of equity and diversity, and all new staff members must take diversity training. Evanston/Skokie’s new diversity hiring specialist will, among other initiatives, analyze why the district loses teachers of color at higher rates.

Central office leaders meet regularly with building teams to go over student achievement data and develop action plans to close any gaps.

Finally, the district intends to build a new school in the city’s Fifth Ward African American community. It will use a unique funding source: the city of Evanston is funding reparations for the Black community with taxes raised from the state’s legalization of cannabis.

“We are at the beginning of our anti-racism work,” Horton says. “We know this is a big project that is going to pay off with huge dividends in the future.” **DA**

Matt Zalaznick is DA’s senior writer.



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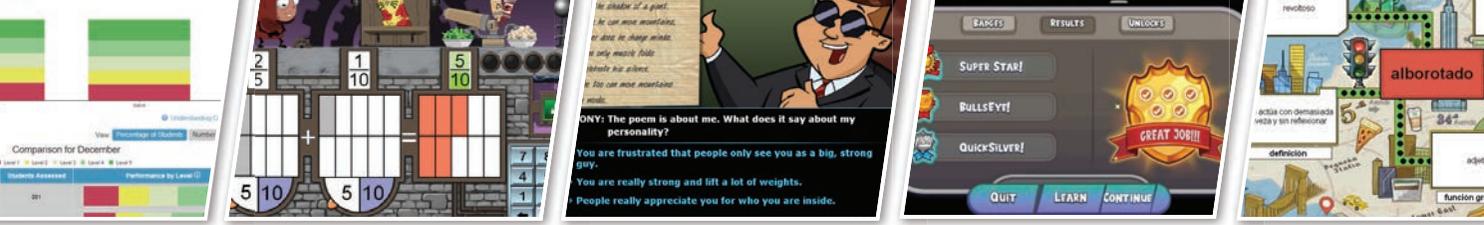
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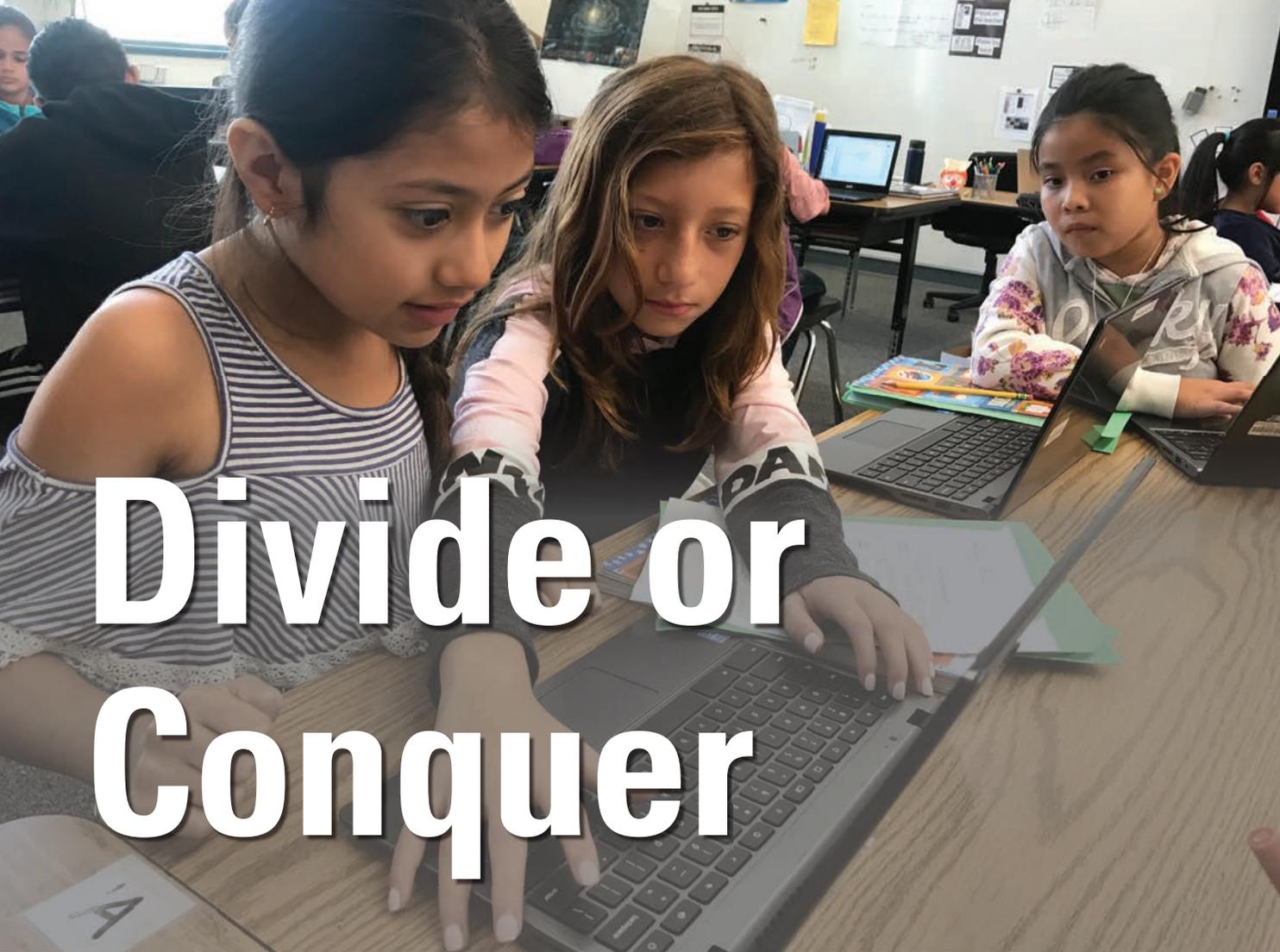
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Divide or Conquer

STRUGGLING TO CONNECT: Though most districts have been able to distribute devices to students, getting them high-speed internet continues to be a source of frustration even in Silicon Valley. (Photo courtesy of Mountain View Whisman School)

School districts are doing all they can to provide adequate distance learning but they need help, especially in that last mile

By Chris Burt

The crossroads of the digital divide intersect squarely at the Mountain View Whisman School District in California. The area that serves 5,200 children sits in the shadows of a few tech giants in Silicon Valley, including Google, Microsoft and LinkedIn.

Yet, some schools in the district do not enjoy the same benefits as their neighbors, or even those in surrounding communities like Palo Alto. Students here come largely from lower-income families. Some are homeless. Many struggle with getting internet. And so school leaders have had to find creative ways around it.

Among the many gaps they've had to bridge, superintendent Ayinde Ru-

dolph and his team have delivered more than 30,000 meals to families since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, ensured all students have devices, created support pods for students (including those who are homeless) and partnered with a local hospital to get kids tested.

But internet connectivity is a problem that remarkably, in this hotbed of high tech, they can't seem to overcome.

"We don't have community Wi-Fi in our area," Rudolph says. "You would think in a place where Google exists, we would. I can look across the bridge, it's a two-mile walk, they're not even thinking about internet in this area. I think mak-

ing the tech companies aware of it is a big issue. I need a solution in an urban center, in a city where the city doesn't view it as their obligation and tech companies don't view it as obligation."

Mountain View is not alone. Most districts have solved the device piece. Most have solved other problems using CARES Act money or working with supportive partners. But high-speed internet, either you have it or you don't.

Unless, of course, the district made inroads before the pandemic. At the Santa Fe School District in New Mexico and the San Antonio Independent School District—where the divide could have crippled instruction—the IT infrastruc-

DIVIDE OR CONQUER

ture groundwork was laid well before COVID struck.

Thanks to a robust fiber network connecting all schools, Santa Fe had 98% of its students, including those in mobile homes and in the mountains, connected less a week after they closed last March. The decision to spend on infrastructure over devices years ago panned out.

“We didn’t miss a beat,” says Tom Ryan, chief information and strategy officer in Santa Fe. “Most of the other school districts in the state stayed closed.”

San Antonio had 50,000 students and 110 schools up and running in the fall courtesy of a wide-area network that was being developed even before chief information technology officer Ken Thompson arrived.

“We were truly blessed and fortunate in that we had laid a foundation that allowed us to be successful, Thompson says. “Am I saying we didn’t have bumps? No. We had the opportunities to excel.”

Taking the lead

Santa Fe and San Antonio were both ahead of the curve and lucky. Rural students in many areas have been completely shut out, forcing some to consider datacasting (using television signals for internet) instead of hotspots.

The stories of Mountain View, Santa Fe and San Antonio have a common theme—they’ve all been able to make virtual instruction a reality because they’ve all had strong leaders to lean on.

In Mountain View, despite the internet issues and operating 100% remotely, students have adjusted to distance learning, which Rudolph says is far better than it was last April. Buoyed by consistent messages around remaining safe, Rudolph’s district got devices into the hands of all students and staff quickly. He and his team have worked tirelessly to solve both the internet divide and the meals situations.

“While they may not agree with whether or not we open or reopen, what is universal is the fact that the distance learning that we provide is so much more,” Rudolph says. “I get more complaints about the fact that it’s too much. I’ll take ‘it’s too much’ any day of the week.”

In Santa Fe, Ryan was a bulldog from the start in helping carry through a plan

How significant is the divide?

A study conducted in June 2020 showed the disparities among the haves and have nots when it comes to devices, internet connectivity, and distance learning.*



Who lacks adequate internet?

15-16 million K-12 students
300,000-400,000 teachers
50 states. All are affected in some way
Not public schools. 99% have broadband



Which areas are most affected?

Rural 37%
Suburban 25%
Urban 21%



What are the largest populations of students affected?

1.83 million Texas
1.53 million California
801,000 Florida
726,000 New York
589,000 Illinois



Who lacks adequate internet and devices?

9 million K-12 students nationwide



Which states most lack adequate internet?

Mississippi 50%
Arkansas 46%
Alabama 41%
Oklahoma 41%
Louisiana 40%
New Mexico 40%
Tennessee 36%
Kentucky 36%
Missouri 36%
West Virginia 34%



What are the costs to bridge the digital divide?

\$6 billion to \$11 billion in the first year alone
\$1 billion for teachers to get them adequate internet
Millions more from Congress, the states and the private sector

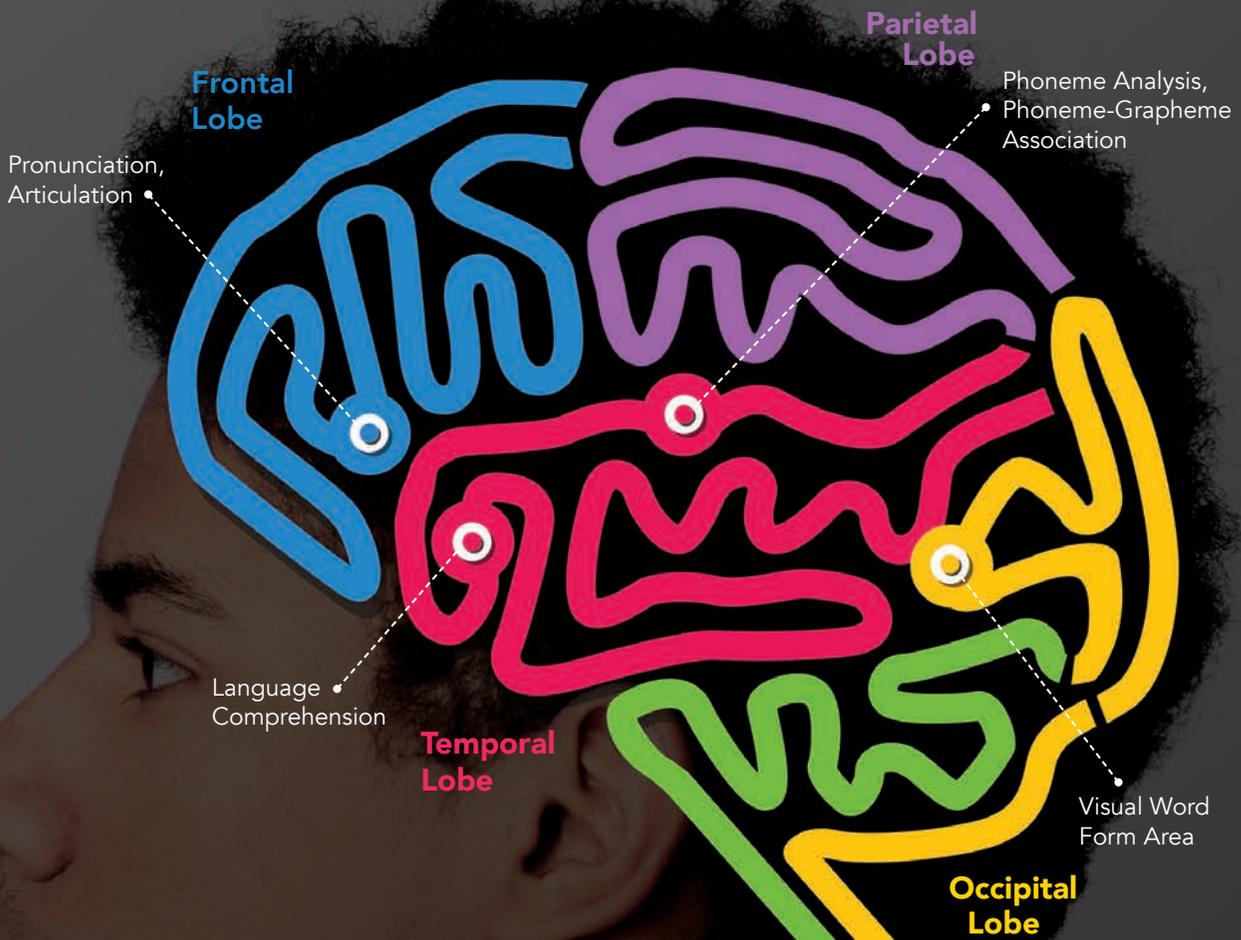


Which ethnic groups are most affected?

Native American 35%
Black 30%
Latinx 26%
White 18%

* At the time of this report’s publishing, private sector vendors were still providing short-term discounts/free connectivity and devices, or were just ending their discount periods. These offers may have distorted the results.

Source: “Closing the K-12 digital divide in the age of distance learning,” Boston Consulting Group in partnership with Common Sense, 2020, bit.ly/bsg-common-sense



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8 ways school districts can help bridge the divide

1. Fully achieve 1:1 devices for all students. Survey families to ensure students aren't sharing laptops with siblings or parents. Mobile devices are not adequate means for learning remotely.
2. Define long-term aspirations and objectives. Any plan should look at three-to-five year views, so technology can be acquired and sustained. Don't rush into decisions that will need further investment.

3. Listen to your CIO, who knows your technology needs best. If they are competent and hard-working, give them a larger role in decision-making, especially in this time.
4. Ensure synchronous learning and technology is being done effectively. Platforms such as Zoom and Google Meets are only good if connections can be interruption-free and speeds and data requirements can be assured.
5. Protect students. No distance learning solution is good if you can't provide safe and secure access and connections.
6. Reevaluate broadband access and internet speeds. They can vary during the day. Check with service providers regularly

to ensure they are delivering high-speeds. Continue building out infrastructure to improve it.

7. Consider alternative instruction if distance learning can't be done equitably online. Currently, 34% of families say they cannot afford broadband. If there's no way to get students proper internet, distance learning might not be an option.
8. Give teachers the tools they need. A Gallup poll revealed that 53% of teachers want some professional development in distance learning, yet 56% of them have not been given training to do so.

Source: "Closing the K-12 digital divide in the age of distance learning," Boston Consulting Group in partnership with Common Sense, 2020, bit.ly/bsg-common-sense

that began with building up that fiber network along with a wireless infrastructure that blanketed all of its schools. They purchased Chromebooks for all in grades 6-12 and had them ready to go in carts in the lower grades.

"The question was, can we do it?" Ryan recalls. "And I said yes."

The day after the lockdown was announced in Santa Fe, those other devices were distributed to all students. They got hotspots to whoever needed them, forged a professional development plan for staff, upped their digital technology coaching team (to 15, serving 12,000 students) and launched a touchless, drive-up repair service for devices. Most importantly, they relied on a backbone of willing teachers who were savvy enough to pull others on board to get instruction off the ground.

"We didn't want to be a victim to the fluidity of the virus," Ryan says. "We built a system that can transition kids from face to face or fully online or anything in between. We designed our system with the expectation, from now on, parents will have a choice on whether they want to educate their kids face to face, hybrid or online. Kids will always be one to one. So, let's start redesigning our facility, our supports and embracing the new future."

Putting it together

In San Antonio, Thompson and his team worked days, nights and weekends for months to get a system in place. They procured 30,000 Chromebooks and 5,000 hotspots. They built a new data center, implemented a new learning management system (to go alongside a new student information system), beefed up security and handled triple the amount of help calls. Late last year, they received another shipment—30,000 iPads for their youngest students.

They've been blessed with infrastructure and a \$7 million grant through the federal E-rate program and other monies from the state of Texas, but the task was a monumental one and making those connections was not easy. The leadership of Thompson and others helped pull them through. He will be the first to say, their work is not done.

"I'm making a point to talk to my parents and talk to my board, to talk to my teachers," he says. "How's it going? Is it working? How many clicks is it taking you to get there? How long does it take to load? How is it working for the end user? That's the most important part in my mind."

While not perfect in any situation, there were two lessons learned.

The first is that districts must give leaders, especially in technology positions a chance to lead. "We had to move from what nobody's ever done to what everybody had to do," Ryan says. "We needed to make sure that the possible became concrete. Innovation became normal. IT's been saying for years, we need a seat at the table. Now, they're saying, we have one. HR, special education, health and mental health instruction, they're all dependent on us. The CIOs that are future-oriented are heroes. Exhausted heroes."

And the second is that the digital divide cannot and should not be an issue that schools can figure out on their own. Sure they can buy devices and prepare their teachers to instruct remotely. They can deliver Chromebooks to students in need. But they are in no position to seamlessly figure out the most critical part of it—getting fast internet to schools and students no matter where they are.

"This isn't an issue [superintendents] should be facing alone or trying to solve," Rudolph says. "Someone should be stepping up and saying, look, here's how we're going to do the internet. And that's just not the case." **DA**

Chris Burt is associate editor of DA.



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TRACKING STUDENT STRIDES

10 ways to help educators monitor special education student progress during remote and hybrid learning

By Cara Nissman

Student progress monitoring must remain on educators' radar, pandemic or not. Tracking how students with disabilities are doing with the goals and objectives on their individualized education plans is a key piece of the special education process—one that both classroom teachers and special education staff spend time on. With many schools closed or in hybrid mode, the progress tracking process can be more challenging than ever.

Remotely monitoring the academic progress of students with more significant needs requires extra thought and support.

"The requirements are still there," says Shelley Garcia, special education director at Crane Independent School District in Texas. "But it's a little trickier to [remotely] assess the progress of students who have a great number of modifications and accommodations. You have to rely on parents to help you."

Monitoring progress in counseling in hybrid and remote learning modalities also involves seeking help from parents—and being open to various methods and timing of updates. The student receiving counseling can assist in tracking how things are going as well.

The key is being flexible and recognizing when an approach may need to be altered, says Chris Stoddard, a nationally certified school psychologist and associate professor of school psychology at Plymouth State University in New Hampshire. For example, a social worker may be able to gauge the student's progress based on what the parent writes down one day, but have to set up a videoconference to talk through how an activity went and what tweaks may be needed on another day.

"You have got to be willing to adapt," he says. "There is not one consistent way of progress monitoring at this time."

Following are 10 ways to tackle stu-

dent progress monitoring throughout the remainder of the pandemic and beyond.

1 Prioritize goals. Discuss with parents via videoconference, telephone call, or email which goals you want to concentrate on and the activities the student needs to do to work on those goals, Garcia suggests. Document what you agree on.

2 Ask parents to monitor the student. Encourage them to track how much time the student worked on an activity and what they thought worked or didn't, Garcia says. Talk through adjustments you could make to the activity, then ask the parents to take the same steps to monitor the student the next time he engages in the activity. Also make sure there aren't any technology issues or other reasons the student may resist doing the activity. "Teachers rely on the parent to tell them if they had trouble logging on or the student didn't like the activity," she says. The student may simply not want to complete the work on the computer, and

TRACKING STUDENT STRIDES

the teacher could switch to a paper-pencil activity to meet the goal.

3 Get the student on board. With consent from parents, and as is age appropriate, a student could be involved in monitoring his own progress and offering feedback on support received. A counselor might say, “You’re going to give feedback on how things are going for you. What do you feel needs to change so school is more OK for you?” says Stoddard. Just be aware that a student might not answer truthfully. An educator might try asking again, requesting that the student imagine what a parent or teacher would answer for her.

4 Ease parent access. Schools should ensure parents can easily share information about their child’s progress on your learning management system. “Our teachers do a lot with Google Meet,” Garcia says. “They can communicate with the parents that way.”

5 Observe the student. A special education teacher or paraprofessional can spend time observing a virtual lesson to see if the student struggles during a class, Garcia says. After the class, the edu-

cator can seek feedback from the student and his parents about whether he understood the assignment, and then clarify expectations. A student may have accommodations such as completing fewer math problems or having more time to turn in work.

6 Use a data tracking sheet. It include sections for the goal/goals the student is working toward mastering, the activity/activities the student engaged in to work on it, how long it took the student to complete an activity (or how long the student engaged in an activity before stopping) and parent observations.

7 Ensure the family’s basic needs are being met. Family needs could be an additional section on the data tracking sheet for parents to share anything the school should know, such as if the household could use help with meals. Garcia poses this question: “How well are the parents going to be helping you with tracking the student’s progress if the family’s basic needs haven’t been met?” She adds that “every family’s needs are different. You need to document what their needs are.”

8 Be aware of signs that a goal may be too ambitious. If the school team and the parents have seen little improvement despite various attempts to work toward a goal, it’s important to recognize that the goal may be too ambitious for the circumstances the student is learning in at this time, Garcia says. “You really need to match the activity to the ability of the student and of the parent to assist you.”

9 Allow access to progress monitoring graphs. The chance to review data points over time to see progress in a visual way will be beneficial for students and parents. “The hope is that when things feel dire,” Stoddard says, the student can be told, “Look at how you’re improving how you think and feel.”

10 Be consistent. Counseling sessions could begin with the same questions each time, for example. This way, the questions become routine, says Stoddard. “Consistency is a big part of the effectiveness.”

Cara Nissman is a reporter for Special Ed Connection, a DA sister publication.

Tracking behavioral progress: Beyond the sticker chart

Students who engage in challenging behavior, such as randomly shouting out during the teacher’s lesson, during in-person learning are often motivated to behave more appropriately by earning stickers throughout the day toward a reward. But a student for whom tokens helped previously may lose interest in such incentives. This may especially be true of digital sticker charts that can be used in remote learning. When reward options are limited because of the pandemic, the incentives don’t hold as much weight.

“There’s a time and place for sticker charts, but we don’t give enough attention to other methods,” says Katherine Price, a school psychologist at Metro Nashville Public Schools in Tennessee.

Here are a few other progress-monitoring strategies to try.

• **Direct behavior rating.** The teacher identifies one 20- or 30-minute point

of the day or class period to observe the target behavior, rating frequency between 1 and 10. This observation has to happen at the same time every day by the same person. “Because the behavior is rated with the same frequency, by the same person, at the same time of day, you can see reliable data over time,” says Price. Teachers can be encouraged to create online calendar notifications for themselves.

• **Daily report card/point card.** The teacher may rate the student at the beginning and end of the school day on his behavior, such as his ability not to disturb others or to stay on task, says Taylor Biondi, also a Metro Nashville school psychologist. Reporting can be via a check-in/check-out system—in person or via chat or videoconference. A student requiring more behavioral intervention might check in multiple times a day for reinforcement. “The student may be rated on a number scale of 0 to 2 or given a thumbs up or

thumbs down,” Biondi says. Young children may respond to smiley and sad faces. She cautions against teachers providing a negative rating in the middle of the day, however, since it might disrupt the student’s leaning.

• **Goal attainment scale.** Teachers can use a goal attainment scale in person or online to track the frequency of a particular behavior. Such a scale could number ranges such as -3 to 0 to +3, equidistant from each other, with the 0 rating serving as the baseline. For example, a +1 might equal 3-4 times a day that behavior was observed, a +2 might be 1-2 times a day, and a +3 might be not at all that day. Negative scale ratings would show larger, undesirable frequency of the behavior occurring. “If you set it up appropriately, it’s pretty easy for teachers to use and it’s easy to see if the student is making progress,” Biondi says.

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5 steps to ensure students see themselves in instructional content

Follow this five-step plan to ensure educational content supports an anti-racist mission and addresses issues of systemic racism, injustice, inequity, and inequality

By Randi Bender

Social justice protests this year sparked a wave of reflection and change across our nation. In education, the movement revealed the need to intensify efforts to provide students with diversity and inclusivity in books and reading programs.

It's imperative that curriculum providers proactively incorporate a range of cultures, characters, and experiences within instruction materials. Follow this five-step plan to ensure educational content supports an anti-racist mission and addresses issues of systemic racism, injustice, inequity, and inequality.

1. Ensure texts serve as both mirrors and windows

The scholar Rudine Sims Bishop, considered the “mother of multicultural literature,” published an influential essay in 1990 in which she advocated for children's texts that are “mirrors and windows.” When reading “mirrors,” students see themselves and their lives reflected in the texts. “Windows,” enable readers to gain an understanding and appreciation of experiences different from their own.

All students should have the opportunity to read about people who look like them, share their culture, their heritage, and their beliefs and values. These “mirror” texts are empowering, affirming, and motivating.

Students also need to be encouraged to develop empathy, respect, and understanding for the life experiences, culture, and background, of others. This is why students need “window” texts, especially those who have limited interaction with people who look different

from them, or have different cultures or backgrounds.

2. Find reputable sources

Think about the company you keep. To help in your mission of delivering an anti-racist curriculum, look for like-minded publishers. Do the legwork to find those who offer content that is trustworthy, well-researched, and supports social justice efforts. When identifying publishers, you should also look for those who have demonstrated a commitment to diversity and anti-racism in their publications.

3. Rely on experts to tell the story

Look for texts written by experts. Encourage students to read authors from a range of cultures and backgrounds. Talented writers can distill difficult topics into appropriate texts for children that serve as powerful, informative mirrors and windows.

For example, Dr. Duchess Harris, is an expert in many fields. As a professor of American studies specializing in black feminism, U.S. law, and African American political movements, she writes about issues in ways that resonate with students. Dr. Harris pulls readers in with how she details the experiences of people of color, talks about the legacy of slavery in today's world, and explains how racism continues to be systemic in America. Her books also address social justice issues around LGBTQ rights, feminism, and the experiences of indigenous people.

4. Ensure images support diversity

It's important to not only examine the

texts used in the classroom, but also the accompanying imagery. A text does not need to be specifically about issues of race or gender to be supportive of diversity and anti-racism. A text describing a career in tech and science, for example, can feature images that normalize female engineers and computer programmers. Narratives about families need visuals that reflect the family structures of all students, including those with same-sex parents or multiracial families.

5. Be sensitive to language choice

Remember that words matter. Examine your writing preferences or house stylebook to determine if there is room to improve your terminology so it is more inclusive of your student community. Observe how other publishers have shifted on their chosen terms, descriptions, and capitalization.

For example, style guides are beginning to shift to the singular “they” pronoun to refer to a person without the context of gender. Last June, the AP Stylebook announced it would capitalize “Black” when used in the context of race.

The words we use make a great impact on our students. Just like the work of being actively anti-racist, this process requires ongoing effort to remove the unintentional biases that emerge as language evolves. **DA**

Randi Bender is the chief content officer at Reading Plus, a research-backed online program that uses personalized instruction to improve students' reading proficiency. She believes reading literacy is a human right and is devoted to ensuring students of all ages and abilities become stronger, more confident readers.



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