

DA

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October 2021

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Required reading in this issue

Now that the new school year has begun, albeit far from normally, it's time to get back to the work of bringing students back up to speed after more than a year of remote learning.

Given that COVID-19 is still in a pandemic phase, the obvious challenges districts and schools must tackle to facilitate effective learning will require creative thinking and experimentation.

One such idea is using outdoor spaces to create learning environments that both engage students while mitigating the risks the virus poses. In this cover story, we look at some innovative outdoor spaces and share recommendations from schools that have found success with this back-to-nature approach. (Page 9)

In another story, we bring you some of the ways that the use of education technology over the past year and a half is here to stay as part of K-12 education. We explore how the online experience is showing educators the way forward with ed tech. (Page 17)

And as students return to schools, the social and emotional baggage they bring may not present for weeks or even months. Here, we look at ways school leaders can help children (and adults) cope with the trauma and uncertainty of COVID while getting back into the swing of brick-and-mortar learning. (Page 25)

Finally, this month's "Last Word" focuses on the benefits of using open educational resources (OER) to boost teacher collaboration and curriculum coherence. Learn how these free, openly licensed materials give teachers a sense of ownership and allow them to customize lessons with far more flexibility than using textbooks. You'll find this column on Page 28.

Eric Weiss, executive editor

Reasons to visit DistrictAdministration.com

School closings tracker: Where districts are shutting down again due to COVID-19 outbreaks

Administrators are seeing much more in-school transmission this year.

bit.ly/closing-tracker



5 important ed-tech lessons schools are learning from the pandemic

Why the kind of devices distributed to students matters just as much as getting those devices into their hands.

bit.ly/edtech-lessons

Why activists just launched a campaign to remove police from schools

About three dozen districts have recently removed police from school buildings, advocates say.

bit.ly/school-police



Substitute teacher crisis: What will it take to attract them to schools?

The nation's schools are facing a shortage of substitute teachers, forcing staffers to help take on the task.

bit.ly/sub-shortage



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Samuel Mormando, Brian Messinger and Anthony Gabriele

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Schools can keep serving free meals through 2021-22

School districts will be able to provide free meals for students through the end of the 2021-22 school year due to nutrition waivers extended by the Biden-Harris Administration in August.

The program crucially gives schools several meal service flexibilities that enable social distancing, the USDA said as education advocates applauded the decision.

“As schools and students face uncertainty in the wake of the pandemic, one area that continues to shine brightly is the critical work school systems are doing—in large part due to flexibilities granted through the U.S. Department of Agriculture—to help keep students fed even while schools were closed,” said Daniel A. Domenech, executive director of AASA, The School Superintendents Association.

School food-service operations are still recovering from the pandemic, and the USDA’s decision gives superintendents the tools to customize meal service to fit local needs, Domenech says.

“The extension of these flexibilities through the 2021-22 school year will ensure food security as we continue to return to normalcy,” he said.

The move will also help schools cut down on meal waste, Anna Maria Chávez, executive director & CEO of the National School Boards Association, added.

“The extension of flexibilities for sodium, grain and milk targets will help reduce plate waste that many school districts have reported,” Chavez said. “These actions help provide certainty for many children whose families have been impacted by COVID-19



FREE MEALS — The USDA decision allows schools to feed all children.

and they increase flexibility and relief for school districts to successfully administer school meal programs.”

The USDA’s decision allows schools to serve meals under the National School Lunch Program Seamless Summer Option, which is open to all children and maintains the nutrition standards of the standard school meal programs.

Schools that choose the Summer Option will receive higher-than-normal meal reimbursements for every meal served.

Schools offer the single-healthiest source of food for children while the nutritional quality of school meals has improved significantly, a recent study from Tufts University found.

“It’s critical that our efforts to reopen schools quickly and safely include programs that provide access to free, healthy meals for our most vulnerable students, particularly those whose communities have been hardest hit by the pandemic,” Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona said in a statement. “This program will ensure more students, regardless of their educational setting, can access free, healthy meals as more schools reopen their doors for in-person learning.”

—Matt Zalaznick

BytheNumbers

Advocacy organization YouthTruth polled 206,000 students in 600 schools this spring to see how they were feeling about school now as compared to pre-COVID. Here’s some of what the survey showed:

20% of Latinx students said they lacked teacher support, compared to 14% of other students.



75% of students reported facing one or more obstacles to learning.

70% of students reported they feel respected by their teachers or other adults at school in 2021, as opposed to 57% in 2020.



28% said their post-high school plans had changed, up from 18% before the pandemic.

43% of students said they feel like a part of the school community, up from 30% in 2020.



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{ In Their Own Words }



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The 3 areas Title I educators say American Rescue Plan funds should be spent on

More than \$120 billion has been allocated to schools from the American Rescue Plan. But the vast majority of individuals charged with ensuring student success at diverse K-12s and in under-resourced programs—Title I educators—say they haven’t had a voice in how it should be spent.

According to a study done by non-profit, First Book Research & Insights, only 17% of classroom leaders who likely should have a say haven’t been asked how they would allocate some of that funding. If it were up to them, books and learning materials, mental health support and a boost to support staff would be top priorities.

Their responses are chronicled in a 31-page report from First Book called “The Voice of America’s Educators: Teaching Children Living in Poverty.” In it, there are additional insights beyond those three categories that could help them better deliver for their students while raising the bar for their schools.

“Educators have faced incalculable obstacles throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and have adapted to these obstacles with grace and an unrelenting commitment to our children,” says Kyle Zimmer, President, CEO and co-founder of First Book. “Our classroom leaders are the backbone of the American education system and their priorities reflect the changing needs of the students they serve. As school districts and communities evaluate how they will use the influx of ARP funding, this valuable input should be at the heart of spending decisions.”

One of the most pressing needs are books and learning materials, as stated by 99% of the more than 2,000 educators polled nationwide. Nearly 60% of educators spent more \$1,000 of their own money to keep their classrooms revving, with 91% saying that they used cash for books. That outpaced even

classroom supplies (73%) and games/activities (61%). Recovering from the pandemic with funds in hand, schools should consider books for students first, according to 86% of Title I educators—whether they are reading for pleasure, engaging struggling students, teaching about diversity and inclusion or boosting social-emotional skills.

“Our students want to read, but they don’t have access to high-interest, good-quality reading materials,” an educator quoted in the report said. “The items that we do have, that fit this category, end up never being returned or are falling apart from so much use. Our school is living in a book desert; we need to be offering students a book ocean of materials.”

Beyond the traditional, educators would like to see their schools keep pace with technology through education apps, internet access, online learning tools and iPads.

Mental health resources checked in at No. 2. More than 85% of educators say they are moderately, slightly or not at all prepared to assist children who have experienced losses over the pandemic-devastated year. What would help they say are books and conversation guides to help address their trauma (68%), trained



staff and community partners (63%) and evidence-based toolkits and training (57%).

One educator said simply that academic needs must follow the mental health needs of students returning to school.

Aside from additional support staff noted by nearly 60% of respondents, some of the other needs they mentioned were: educator mental health resources (52%), remote learning support (43%), anti-bias/anti-racist teaching resources (30%), health safety products (27%) and professional development (25%).

—Chris Burt









Ed Tech, Now & From Now On:

“Hopefully, people achieve a greater comfort level with their use of tech, so that we can have conversations about the next steps and figure out how to go deeper, encourage creativity, make things, work together. I also hope we continue to use what we’ve learned. It’s been amazing to record instructional videos for students, so even if we’re back face-to-face this year, why let those go?”

-FETC keynote speaker Eric Curts









How one district is working to block bullying over students' mask choices

Amidst the debate over school mask mandates, some districts want to prevent students from getting bullied over face coverings—whether they wear them or not.

Masks remain optional in many districts, and administrators in Florida's Collier County Public Schools want to focus on kindness and personal choice, says Chad Oliver, the executive director of communications and community engagement.

"On the first day of school, we want students to look around and notice some students may be wearing masks and some may not, and that's OK," Oliver says.

During the first week of school, principals in the 48,000-student district shared messages about masking during morning announcements.

"They will say something like, 'As you may know, masks are optional this year. As we build a culture of kindness, let's remember to respect, be sensitive to and value individual choice,'" Oliver says.

Oliver's team featured students in public services announcements to spread the message of respect for masking choices.

"We know the value of students speaking to students," he says. "We want to get in front of any potential harassment tied to masking."

Several other districts where masks are optional are taking a similar approach. In its policies for returning to in-person instruction, Onslow County Schools in North Carolina declares: "Harassment, discrimination, bullying or intimidation based on any person's decision to wear or not wear a face covering or mask will not be tolerated."

Mask mandates multiply

New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy placed schools in his state under a universal mask mandate because of rising delta



infections, the ineligibility of kids under 12 to get vaccinated, and lingering vaccine hesitancy among teens and adults who can get a shot.

New Jersey officials are adamant about conducting full-time, in-person instruction. Without a mask mandate, it is not a matter of if but when a school or district shuts down because of an outbreak of the delta variant, which has put children in its "crosshairs," Murphy said.

"This is not an announcement that gives any of us, or me personally, any pleasure, but as the school year approaches and numbers rapidly increase, it is the one we need to make right now," Murphy said at a press conference Friday. "Anyone telling you we can safely reopen our schools without requiring masks is quite simply lying to you."

In the 2020-2021 school year, when a universal mask mandate was in place, New Jersey documented a little more than 1,260 in-school COVID transmissions among the state's one million students, staff and teachers, Murphy said.

"I want as much as anybody else in our state to see our kids' smiles as they start their school years," he said. "But I do not want to see any of them getting sick needlessly or schools having to shut down again or go remote because of an outbreak, especially of a dangerous

variant that has put kids in its crosshairs."

In Minnesota, which has not yet announced a mandate, two of the state's largest districts have announced they will require face coverings regardless of age or vaccination status.

Minneapolis Public Schools' mandate went into effect on Aug. 9 while St. Paul Public Schools' universal masking requirement began on Aug. 18.

And in Missouri, several schools in the St. Louis area, including St. Louis Public Schools, have mandated masks for the start of school, the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* reported.

In early August, Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona urged elected officials not to let adult anti-mask politics risk districts having to shut down classrooms and buildings due to COVID outbreaks.

"I'm worried that the decisions that are being made that are not putting students at the center, and student health and safety at the center is going to be why schools may be disrupted," Cardona said at a White House press briefing, according to CNN. "So we know what to do. And, you know, don't be the reason why schools are disrupted, because of the politicization of this effort to reopen schools."

—Matt Zalaznick



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OUTSIDE ENRICHMENT

How designing an outdoor learning space can lead to new levels of student engagement and achievement.

FRESH IDEAS—Los Angeles-area school districts are creating robust outdoor learning spaces that should help students bounce back from COVID's disruptions.

Outdoor learning is magical. Moving beyond the four walls of a classroom is an activity students will likely look forward to for weeks. Connecting with natural phenomena can make stepping outside the most memorable experience of a student's time in school.

But these are not the only reasons behind districts' surging interest in building

outdoor classrooms and learning spaces. For example, outdoor learning will be a key tool in helping kids recover from the disruptions of COVID, says Shaun MacDonald Hawke, an Outdoor and Marine Science Field Study project director for the Los Angeles County Office of Education. "It's a transformative experience, and kids need that right now in an enormous way," Hawke says. "There's been a

lot of damage to kids socially."

And during the COVID era, countless studies have shown that the virus is far less contagious outdoors.

The Los Angeles County Office of Education is working with some of its 80 districts to design robust outdoor learning spaces. The agency will use some of its ESSER COVID relief funding to support the effort. "We know that a student

can learn pretty much anywhere,” says Jema Estrella, the Los Angeles County Office of Education’s director of facilities. “In today’s classrooms, certain elements have to be there to support an educational experience that can be very basic to something a lot more sophisticated.”

Here are several other academic concepts to consider when building or redesigning an outdoor classroom:

1. Equitable access to nature. Students in urban environments often have less access to parks or nature, a gap that can be narrowed by outdoor learning spaces at school, Estrella says. “In some communities, they have to walk or drive many blocks to access even just a park,” Estrella says. “In situations like that, an outdoor learning environment—an environment that is different than the four walls of the classroom—can positively impact not only the students but also the teachers.”

2. Kids can get distracted ... in a good way. Outdoors, students encounter an abundance of phenomena, from the sound of birds calling to traffic noise. When these phenomena spark students’ interest, teachers can learn to pivot their lessons rather than letting the class veer off-course, Hawke says. “Kids will get excited by and interested in real things,” she says.

Both teachers and students will learn to adapt to and capitalize on changing outdoor conditions and make that part of the intellectual exploration, Estrella adds. “It can help them discover the love of learning in themselves,” she says. “Being immersed in the natural environment with all the activity happening around you is similar to what happens in life.”

3. What about the hardware? Furniture that’s movable and flexible is essential for outdoor learning spaces because it allows teachers to shift from large- to smaller-group learning. This includes flexible seating and movable whiteboards and other writing surfaces. Outdoor classrooms also need shaded areas for extreme heat, rain or other inclement weather, Estrella says. And just like indoor classrooms, outdoor spaces need

reliable internet access as well as plenty of power and charging sources.

Blending ed-tech with nature

Long before COVID, Thousand Oaks High School in California had begun designing an outdoor classroom equipped with all the instructional technology of an indoor learning space.

Schneider Electric funded design and construction of the Sustainable Outdoor

WHERE TO FIND FREE DESIGN GUIDELINES

The Los Angeles County Office of Education has shared design guidelines for outdoor learning, which were developed with help from a partner architectural firm.

The design process should start with teachers and other educators planning for what they will teach outdoors and how they will use the space, says Virginia Marquardt, principal in charge of HMC Architects’ Los Angeles PreK-12 studio.

Here are some more keys to designing outdoor classrooms:

1. Identify outdoor learning environment goals and objectives and how they align with your school’s mission.
2. Several factors will help define the layout of the space, including student capacity and the learning styles it will accommodate.
3. A presentation of an inspiring image can generate feedback from teachers and community members.
4. Create a video for teachers to share with their students that describes how outdoor learning environments can enhance their learning experience.
5. Determine how the outdoor learning environment will be protected from variable weather.
6. Involve custodians and other facilities staff to get input on how they will maintain an outdoor classroom, Marquardt says.

Learning Environment pilot project, also known as SOLE, at the circa-1957 building, part of Conejo Valley USD north of Los Angeles. In exchange, the company will be able to market the project and have educators from other districts tour the facility.

“Going outside is not something new,” says Eric Bergmann, the principal of Thousand Oaks High School. “What’s different about this is that we’ve blended



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OUTSIDE ENRICHMENT

the best of both worlds. We're able to bring the great benefits of having technology and access to electricity and all those other features into an outdoor environment."

The classroom is covered by a roof of solar panels that provides renewable energy that will be stored in batteries, making the facility self-sufficient. A lack of walls maximizes ventilation and improves air quality. There are also plug-ins and charging stations for devices as well as a digital display. Durable outdoor furniture can be rearranged for different classes and subjects, Bergmann says. "The things our students tend to remember most once they graduate tend to be those things that are most unique to them," he notes.

While the classroom may appear STEAM-oriented, Bergmann says teachers from all subjects can use the classroom. It would, for example, provide more space for hands-on science experiments while giving art students a more expansive place to complete sketches.

"We're a 60-year-old facility, and we've been hard at work figuring out ways to bring our campus into the 21st century," Bergman says. "We now have a 22nd-century facility sitting out on our campus."

Front porch of the community

You cannot park in front of Rodriguez Elementary in San Marcos CISD, a rapidly growing community between Austin and San Antonio, Texas. That's because designers of the year-old school, who wanted its front yard and entrance to flow more seamlessly into the surrounding community, put the parking lots on the side.

Schools often serve as neighborhood hubs, and the layout has made Rodriguez Elementary "a front porch to the community," says Angela Whitaker-Williams, principal of K-12 education at architectural firm Perkins&Will's Austin Studio.

"A front porch is a place where you invite people in," Whitaker-Williams says. "It's the threshold to your door,



EQUITY & INSPIRATION—Outdoor learning spaces give students in urban environments greater access to nature and help teachers increase engagement by adapting lessons to natural phenomena.

and this is how that threshold becomes broader."

The school is located across the street from a park and shares green space with a neighboring community center. The design allows educators to include community members more easily, including parents and local entrepreneurs, in school activities.

"School districts are always looking for more community partnerships," she says. "If parents are involved, kids are more successful. If business leaders are involved, kids have greater exposure to more possibilities."

The gymnasium and cafeteria are lo-

cated at the front of the building, so students can easily spill out onto the front yard for fairs and other outdoor activities. Designers also built the school in an H-shape to create Wi-Fi-equipped inner courtyards where students can participate in outdoor learning in a less public setting.

The courtyards, which feature a community garden, large cistern and outdoor amphitheater, are designed for students to work in small groups on science, art and other projects, Whitaker-Williams says. **DA**

Matt Zalaznick is DA's senior writer.

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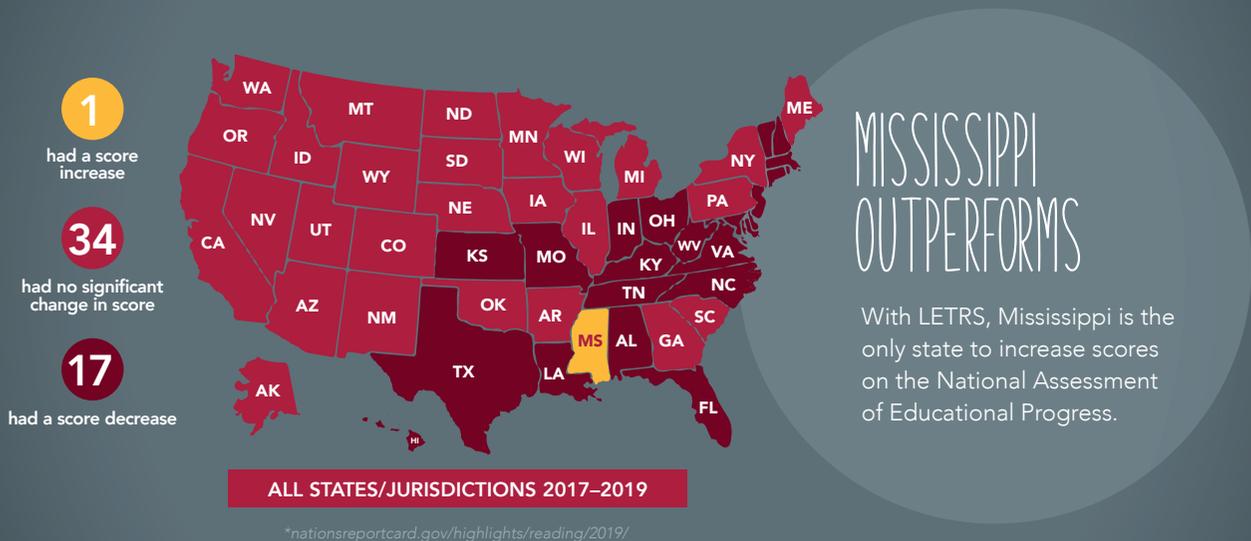
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Hillsborough County Public Schools enhances learning with innovative STEM summer program

Florida district using Camp Invention to build engagement with migrant student population

One of the largest districts in the country is finding new ways to engage and support the education of its sizeable population of migrant students through a unique program during the summer.

Hillsborough County Public Schools in Tampa, Florida, serves a student population of more than 205,000 across 250 schools, including some 4,000 migrant students, who move often as they or their family members follow seasonal employment opportunities in agriculture.

Carol Mayo has worked in the district for 29 years and is in her seventh year as supervisor of the federally funded Title I, Part C Migrant Education Program (MEP). In this role, Mayo is responsible for applying for federal grant funds and managing the programs that support the education of migrant students in the district, both during the school year and in the summer.

"We're the second-largest migrant education program in Florida. These students may have parents work in agriculture, or they may work in the fields themselves," Mayo says. "We are required by law to identify them, make sure they qualify and provide them with education resources and programming, from birth to age 21. It's a very fluid population, as some of these students come and go as they pursue work opportunities in other areas of the country."

While educating these students is challenging, Mayo says they are integrated into the general student population in classrooms and schools, using the same materials and curriculum. "The goal is always to immerse these students in the same level of academic rigor as all other students," she says.

The one exception is in the summer, during which Mayo manages and provides a supplemental summer education program just for migrant students.

Improving student engagement

"When I first started in this role, the summer program was a concern for me," Mayo says. "We weren't getting a high level of student participation and attendance, because it wasn't very engaging. The programming was more of the same as the regular school year curriculum and was focused on remediation. That made it unappealing to a lot of our students. I wanted to change that."



Mayo says she needed to find a program that was highly engaging, that integrated many different content areas including math, reading and science, while also being social and collaborative, and providing flexibility in implementation to meet the varying needs of the summer program.

"Five years ago, I attended a national conference on migrant education and went to a session that was a hands-on demonstration of Camp Invention, a program from the National Inventors Hall of Fame," Mayo says. "When I saw how engaging and collaborative it was even with adults, I knew it would be a perfect fit for our students."



“The program exposes students to state standards in reading, math and science, and provides a high degree of academic rigor while also being fun.”

Camp Invention comes to Hillsborough

The flagship summer program developed by the National Inventors Hall of Fame, Camp Invention is a STEM summer camp for grades K-6 that provides in-person and at-home activities and challenges that build confidence, collaboration and creative problem-solving skills. Each year's theme is unique and provides curriculum and materials inspired by some of the world's greatest inventors.

Mayo says she has been using Camp Invention at four different summer school sites with migrant students in grades K-5 for the past five years. “It has been a great program for us. It exposes students to state standards in reading, math and science, and provides a high degree of academic rigor while also being fun,” she says. “Students collaborate and engage in conversations while they solve problems together.”

While designed for any students, Mayo says Camp Invention is particularly useful and effective for the student population she works with. “Many of these migrant students miss a lot of school, and they can become disengaged as a result. Camp Invention brings back the excitement of learning and builds engagement. This program helps these kids to be inspired, to think about ideas and inventions, and to see themselves as having a future beyond picking crops in the fields.”

Flexible and easy to implement

Camp Invention is also easy to use and implement, which is something that Mayo says she also appreciates. “The materials provided to help with implementation are so helpful, that anyone can run the program, and everything

that you'll need is included, so we don't have to purchase any additional materials,” she says. “We have students in different grades work together on the projects, so they collaborate and help each other, which builds teamwork.”

The flexibility of the program was also important. “It's flexible enough to meet our unique needs,” Mayo says. “For example, I originally ran a six-week program, but found that many of our families moved in the summer and left after three weeks. I was able to adapt Camp Invention to just two weeks, with more targeted learning in a shorter period, while covering the same amount of material.”

The materials and flexibility also came into play during COVID-19 remote learning. Mayo says the district provided Camp Invention kits to each student this summer, so they could do the learning activities at home.

Mayo says that Camp Invention has significantly changed the district's unique summer program for the better. “In the past we struggled with maintaining student engagement and interest. But today, everyone is more engaged, including the teachers. Now I have to turn away teachers who ask to teach this program, because so many enjoy it, and the word is out that this is a great program,” she says. “The teachers learn a lot at the same time as the students. It's a great program, and I plan on continuing it every summer.”



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Lubbock ISD starts the school year strong with innovative, data-focused approach

Texas district credits leadership and data-driven culture as keys to academic growth

Administrators and educators in Lubbock ISD have found creative ways to adapt to the challenges of the pandemic—and developed some innovative improvements along the way.

The Texas district includes some 27,000 students across more than 50 different school campuses. Misty Rieber has worked as an educator in a variety of roles in Lubbock ISD for 25 years, becoming Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction in 2019.

Supporting data-driven decisions

Rieber says careful, consistent use of data has always been vital to the district's vision and strategy. "We track data very consistently, and we use it to track our students' academic progress, make projections, and help us adjust our curriculum to better support foundational skills in reading and math," she says.

As part of this emphasis on effective use of data, Rieber says the district has been relying on Istation's research-based intervention, assessment and instructional platform for over four years. "We use Istation in grades K-8, using data from Istation's ISIP assessments to progress monitor our students, to report to our Board of Education, for coaching and PLC work with our principals and teachers, and as part of our reporting for the Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA), which is a state program that compensates highly effective teachers based on student achievement and growth," Rieber says.

Reinforcing the need for immediate, intentional intervention

Post-pandemic, Rieber says the district is finding ways of getting students

back on track after the period of fully remote learning, and Lubbock educators have learned from the experience.

"Learning loss is a significant concern," Rieber says, adding that the district has taken a new look at intervention.

"When students are learning from home, teachers aren't able to intervene in the moment like they can in the classroom," she says. "The fully remote learning experience has reinforced to us the importance of conducting intervention during the school day."

Utilizing time-saving teacher resources and lessons

Rieber says the impact of COVID-19 continues to be felt in the district, and Lubbock's approach has changed in some respects as a result. "We continue to conduct the assessments that we had been doing, but the monitoring has intensified, and the conversations have changed. We're being more intensive and granular about what we monitor and measure, and what steps we take as a result. It forced us to find ways to be more efficient with our time."

Part of the adjustment has been to more effectively use the additional features of Istation. "We are relying much more on Istation's lessons now than in the past. Our teachers are already trained in how to organize students into small groups for



instruction in the deficit areas that Istation's assessments identified. But now, we have encouraged more teacher interaction using Istation's lessons, which are targeted to skill deficits. That has been very effective and helpful for us, and we've seen great growth as a result."

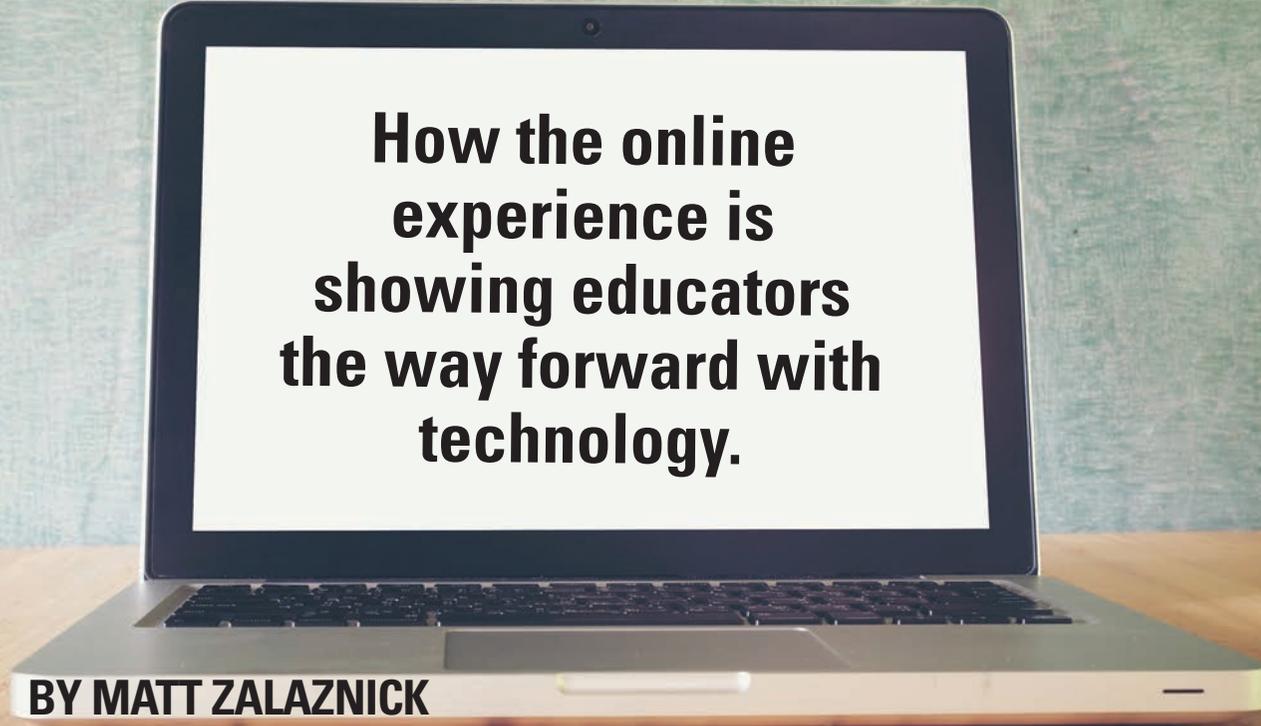
Overall, Rieber says she is feeling positive about the future, thanks in part to the resources the district has had available, including Istation. "It hasn't been an ideal situation, but we have some amazing teachers working very hard and great leadership in our district. We have to move forward, and we're taking it one step at a time."



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Digital Learning Lessons



**How the online
experience is
showing educators
the way forward with
technology.**

BY MATT ZALAZNICK

Some of COVID’s biggest challenges—such as connecting students to the internet and finding online learning’s full potential—provided key leadership and pedagogical lessons that will outlast the pandemic.

For instance, the traditional “sit and get” approach, rarely the most effective teaching strategy in face-to-face environments, also did not work well online, says Ann McMullan, the former executive director of educational technology for Klein ISD and Project Director for CoSN’s Empowered Superintendents Initiative.

“K-12 leaders need to ensure that all teachers have the knowledge, expertise and resources to truly engage all students when implementing digital learning,” says McMullan, a featured administrator track speaker at the upcoming 2022 Future of Education Technology® Conference. Conducting online professional learning in ways that model the effective strategies that teachers should be using with their students is one solution, McMullan adds.

“Digital tools can provide impactful learning data,” she says. “The need to leverage learning data and truly analyze what is working for each individual student is another skill set that K-12 leaders must ensure all teachers and administrators truly comprehend and practice.”

Here’s some guidance for administrators on how to put COVID’s ed-tech lessons into action during 2021-22.

How learning continues at home

The devices that are distributed to students matter just as much as getting those devices into their hands. That’s a major lesson educators learned during the COVID-shift to online and hybrid learning, says Liz Kolb, a clinical associate professor of education technology at the University of Michigan’s School of Education.

That, of course, brings up funding considerations. A more powerful MacBook, which gives students access to more learning features and design capabilities, can cost considerably more than a Chromebook.

What has also become clearer is that 1-to-1 programs are more effective when

students are allowed to bring devices home so they “are really fluid between school and home,” Kolb says.

Students, for example, can use devices and apps to gather information about the wildlife in their backyards. “The devices should be part of a student’s life experience as well as their school experience,” Kolb says. “One of the most important parts of learning is that it doesn’t stay isolated in the classroom. For example, if you learn quadratic equations in class, it isn’t as beneficial as if you learn to use them in everyday life, such as by measuring the slope of a ramp.”

With much more learning likely to take place online, regardless of the severity of the COVID pandemic, teachers also are more rigorously vetting apps and other digital learning resources students use at home.

They have found more accessible resources that make it easier for parents and others to help students with their assignments, says Kolb, a developer of the Triple E Framework that helps educators evaluate the effectiveness of digital tools.



Teachers also are now evaluating apps through an equity lens to better ensure they include a diversity of voices. Kidmap is one project that supports the development of inclusive apps.

“A lot of times, districts have ended up using apps that aren’t representative of the demographics of their students or their students’ experiences,” Kolb says. “Even the language used in apps that are sent home may not be recognizable in students’ own communities.”

Teachers also are pivoting away from using computers and other devices for simple drill-and-practice assignments. Digital learning is more likely to raise student achievement when devices are used to practice higher-order thinking and inquiry, Kolb says.

Administrators should also provide a research-informed framework for how teachers should evaluate and pilot tools they’re using and design lessons with technology. This includes a curriculum for developing digital literacy, particularly for students who don’t have as much technology at home, Kolb says.

Why virtual tutoring works

Administrators are launching initiatives to maximize the effectiveness of online learning.

In Ector County ISD in Texas, ESSER Covid relief funds are allowing administrators to ramp up virtual tutoring and

virtual teacher coaching for 2021-22. The district has not been able to hire enough in-person tutors or instructional coaches due to staffing shortages in the region, Superintendent Scott Muri says.

After a spring pilot program, the district has signed outcomes-based contracts with several virtual tutoring companies—which means the vendors will be paid based on the growth of students served, Muri says. “The tutors were tied to outcomes,” he says, “This made everybody pay a bit more attention to ensuring overall success.”

English-language learners, economically disadvantaged students and students in special education will be prioritized for tutoring, which will be offered to students in kindergarten through 12th grade. Students will visit school computer labs to work one-on-one with trained online tutors before, during or after the regular school day. The sessions, in fact, will run just like regular class periods in a “very structured environment,” Muri says.

Tutors will lesson plan with classroom teachers to align instruction, with a focus on catching students up in English language arts and math. Throughout the year, students, who will receive about 60 hours of tutoring, will take regular assessments so educators can closely track their progress.

Muri expects to spend several million dollars on the program, which will ac-

count for a “pretty significant amount” of its ESSER funding. The Texas legislature earlier this year decided it would no longer fund online learning.

Also in the virtual realm, Ector County administrators are building an extensive virtual coaching program for the district’s teachers.

Classrooms will be equipped with an iPad on a swivel that will track teachers as they move through their classrooms. Teachers will wear mikes and an earpiece so they can get real-time feedback from coaches elsewhere in the country.

The district also piloted virtual coaching last school year with its own staff, when COVID protocols restricted the number of adults who could be in a classroom at any one time, Muri says.

A key to working with external coaches will be providing time for them to build relationships with Ector County’s teachers, he adds. “One thing we already knew as educators is when you have a healthy relationship, it’s easier to receive feedback,” Muri says. “We want to ensure coaches and teachers develop relationships before any coaching begins.”

Making online as good as in-person

Many districts have shifted—and likely will shift—back to remote learning for portions of the school year as pandemic conditions change.

Students can learn as much or more when they are remote, but two factors must be in place, school leaders told Columbia University researchers this summer.

The first is access to high-quality, digital instructional materials that were designed to bring teachers, parents and students together. The second was when a caregiver worked with students on their remote assignments, according to the “Fundamental 4” report by the Center for Public Research and Leadership at Columbia University.

“We learned through virtual schooling that educators’ use of high-quality, culturally responsive instructional materials that are enabled by technology and educative for families can be a game-changer,” said Elizabeth Chu, the center’s executive di-

rector and an author of the report. “Instead of families being ‘passive recipients’ of instruction, it’s time for a new model in education that brings families fully into the instructional process by using high-quality instructional materials to help foster close coordination and collaboration between students, families and educators.”

The center conducted nearly 300 interviews between February 2021 and June 2021 with administrators, teachers and families from schools in Colorado, Connecticut, Michigan, Mississippi, New York, Virginia and Wisconsin.

“The adoption and implementation of high-quality curriculum materials was an essential key to turning around the district and ensuring our students could reach their academic potential,” Nikolai Vitti, superintendent at a study site, Detroit Public Schools Community District, said in the report. “The pandemic was not an excuse not to continue to ensure our students received access to these materials.”

Matt Zalaznick is DA’s senior writer.

4 Digital Tips

Columbia University researchers detailed four important ways families can continue to support students’ digital learning even after the COVID crisis ends:

- 1. Expand your dimensions:** Instructional materials have a greater impact when, beyond being aligned to standards, they are tech-enabled, culturally responsive and enhance families’ ability to guide student learning.
- 2. Coordinate co-production:** High-quality materials allow educators and families to partner in establishing and monitoring learning goals based on children’s individual circumstances, tailoring instruction to meet those goals, and celebrating success.
- 3. Focus PD on family involvement:** Support teachers in implementing high-quality materials in ways that respond to the needs of students, families and communities.
- 4. Design learning experiences together:** Create ways for families, teachers, and students to collaborate to improve learning experiences.





3 leading strategies for protecting students when school reopen this fall

74% of districts polled reported multiple indicators of increased mental health stresses among students

By Todd Miller

As schools begin to return to in-classroom learning this fall, they are faced with numerous challenges—an ongoing pandemic, fears related to acts of violence, mental health concerns and more. Together, these challenges can create myriad risks for students, faculty and teachers—and schools must have plans and documented procedures in place that prepare them to address all those risks, and more.

A recent survey conducted by Rave Mobile Safety found that 57% of respondents are “extremely or very concerned” about the possibility of a crisis putting their safety or the safety of a loved one in danger in school settings. Behind this sentiment is an acknowledgment that the social isolation and mental health pressures of the pandemic have had a tangible, negative effect on the psychological health of students.

By implementing the right policies, strategies and tools, schools can address key concerns and ensure a safe return for all.

Prioritize student mental health

According to a recent Reuters survey, 74% of districts polled reported multiple indicators of increased mental health stresses among students. Overcoming these issues will require more than simply bringing everyone back to the classroom, and schools must offer students ample mental health support to help them navigate their return.

Administrators must provide multiple resources for students to get support when they need it. While many schools plan to hire additional counselors and mental health professionals to meet

with students, there are also ways technology can extend these efforts.

For example, schools can set up anonymous tip solutions to allow for secure, private reporting. This way, students who would otherwise be afraid to share when they or their peers are experiencing mental distress, or plan to act out in violence, have an outlet to disclose critical information quickly and easily.

Technology can ensure that students have a confidential channel of communication.

Communicate regularly and clearly

Clear and consistent communication will continue to be paramount throughout the entire school year, as students, parents and faculty readjust to in-person learning and still-changing guidance amid the delta variant. Schools must lean on mass communication systems to share important information regularly and give clear instruction in the event of an emergency.

Administrators should configure mass communication systems to deliver different types of messages through various channels depending on the urgency of the situation. For example, automated phone calls and text messages should generally be leveraged for real-time, urgent updates while emails can be reserved for useful but non-urgent information.

Administrators can also target communications to specific audiences (e.g., teachers by grade, staff by building), rather than send messages to everyone en masse. Doing so minimizes alert fatigue and increases the likelihood that the right message is shared with the right recipients. For instance, if there’s a

threat of violence, notifying district officials would look different from the message that provides guidance to teachers and staff onsite.

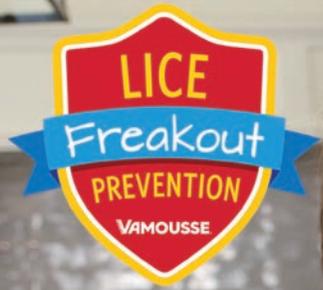
Create a school safety ecosystem

Given the challenges facing schools today, administrators can simplify their approach to school safety by leveraging technology to deploy an off-the-shelf integrated safety ecosystem through which faculty on campus can easily connect with outside emergency responders. School safety solutions like this streamline communication across school faculty, district officials, police, fire, EMS and other response teams to give real-time situational awareness as an emergency event unfolds.

For instance, mobile panic buttons offer an instantaneous way for faculty to alert first responders in the event of an emergency while also connecting to 911. If a medical emergency occurs on a sports field and a coach presses the panic button, in a connected ecosystem, the school nurse would get a notification, as well as EMS and 911. The simultaneous notifications mean that the student gets medical attention sooner.

Schools are up against a lot of challenges this coming school year. However, technology can help enhance efforts to support student mental health and safety by creating a more collaborative approach to communication and emergency response. With a strategy for school safety, administrators can focus on helping students achieve their highest potential. **DA**

Todd Miller is the senior vice president of strategic programs at Rave Mobile Safety.



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Bringing the Science of Reading into the classroom

Q&A with Dr. Scott McConnell

Q: How has the Science of Reading changed foundational literacy instruction?

For years, educators have known that strong literacy skills are critical for lifelong learning, but they've sometimes differed on how best to teach these skills. The Science of Reading has settled this argument. We now recognize the importance of helping students to "learn the code" for reading the English language, and that **systematic and explicit phonics instruction** in the early grades is necessary to assure this outcome.

Q: How does Lalilo reflect Science of Reading research?

Lalilo provides students with fun and engaging lessons focused on key domains identified by the Science of Reading: phonemic awareness, letter-sound correspondence, blending, decoding, fluency, comprehension, and more. **Lalilo's instructional sequence is adaptive**, changing to repeat lessons and strengthen skills the student has not yet mastered. Lalilo also employs the latest in speech recognition resources to provide speedy and precise feedback to students as they move through progressively more advanced activities.

Q: How does Lalilo fit into districts' existing instructional routines?

Students can use Lalilo on tablets, iPads, or computers—both in the classroom and at home. Lalilo also pairs well with other instructional

resources, giving teachers an important tool for ongoing assessment and instruction. Teachers can assign Lalilo lessons, embed related content into large- and small-group lessons, and monitor each student's progress to share information with other educators and with families.

Q: Why is Lalilo so relevant to districts' needs this school year?

While it would be a welcome resource any year, Lalilo really shines given the demands that districts face right now: the need to provide **high quality, intensive, and differentiated literacy instruction** to make up lost ground due to the pandemic. Lalilo can also be used in at-home or hybrid learning models to support continuous student learning and achievement.

To sum up, Lalilo is **engaging, personalized, insightful, and motivating**—clearly a great combination for kindergarten and early elementary learners.



Dr. Scott McConnell

Director of Assessment Innovation,
Renaissance
Professor of Educational Psychology,
University of Minnesota



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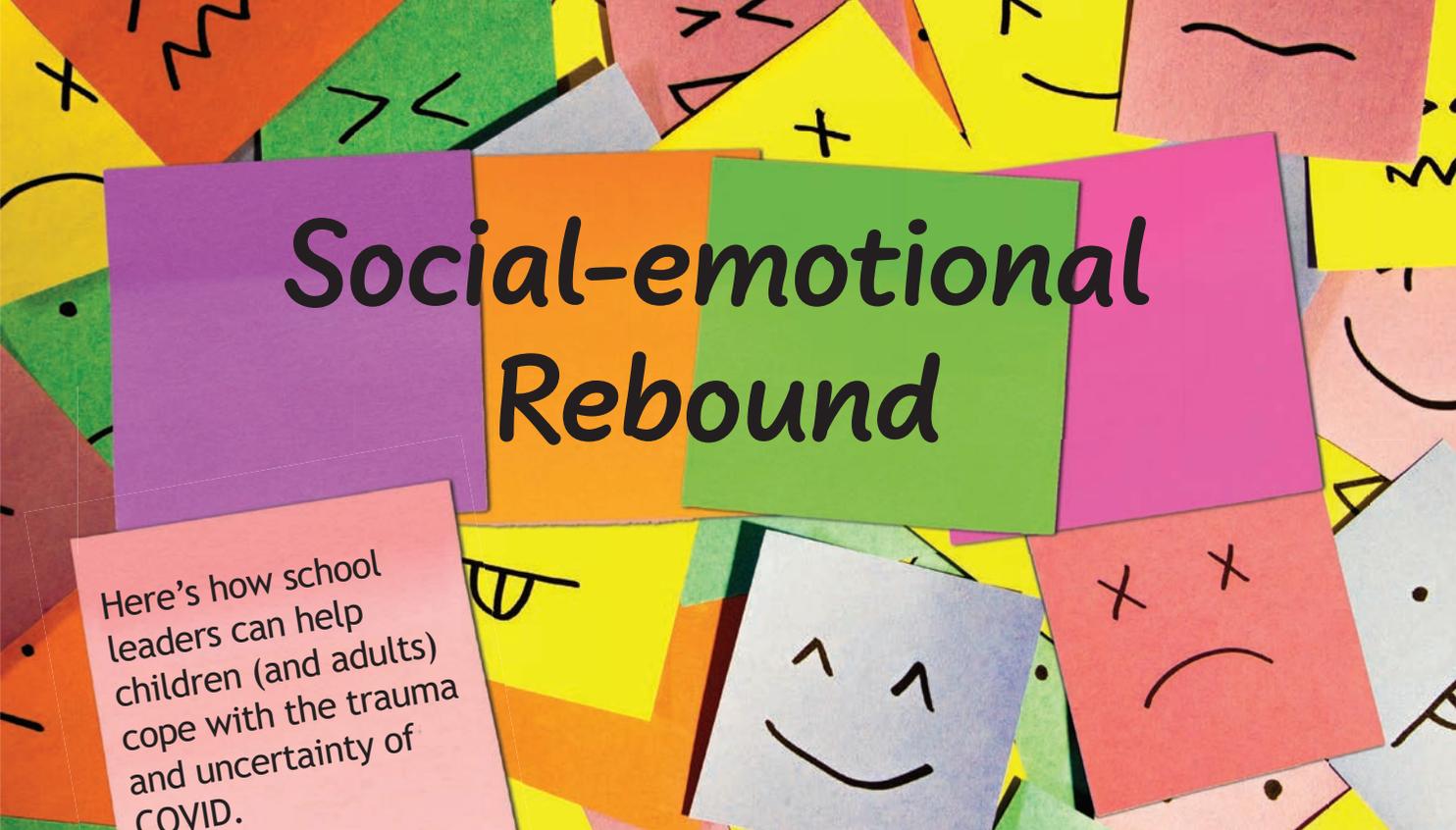
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Social-emotional Rebound

Here's how school leaders can help children (and adults) cope with the trauma and uncertainty of COVID.

By Matt Zalaznick and Chris Burt

It could take weeks or even months for students to exhibit the traumas they have suffered during the pandemic.

Warning signs, such as acting out or withdrawal, may actually lie dormant in a process of stress and healing that will be ongoing, says Alison Miller, an associate professor of health behavior and health education at the University of Michigan's School of Public Health.

"Some kids might hold it together really well in the first days or weeks of school and then fall apart later," Miller says. "The trauma might not be triggered until they have an exam or a negative social interaction. It's not going to be a one-time event; it's not going to be just clicking back into the routine."

That will require that administrators and teachers, particularly during the first half of the 2021-22 school year, carefully navigate the balance between academic and social-emotional recovery. "If you're in a community that's really been hit hard, your lift as an administrator and a teacher is going to be difficult in terms of the number of students coming with trauma," Miller says. "In all likelihood, this was true before the pandemic, and it's become more egregiously obvious and stark."

Know the signs

The nonprofit Sandy Hook Promise is concerned that, after a largely remote year, students will struggle to reacclimate to their classrooms, their instruction and their peers. They worry there could be an uptick in stress, suicide, self-harm and gun incidents. "We want to ensure that schools, adults and kids are ready for what we feel is a potential powder keg that could explode unless we take preventative measures and put supports in place right now," says Nicole Hockley, the co-founder and managing director of Sandy Hook Promise, whose son Dylan was killed in the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in 2012. "We are forecasting that there will be more violence in schools."

During the pandemic, Sandy Hook's Crisis Center has seen a 7% spike in calls reporting that a life is in danger, with the majority involving suicide, Hockley says.

Sandy Hook Promise offers several programs, such as Say Something and the SAVE Promise Club, to help schools and students reconnect and relearn social cues and how to express themselves to trusted adults. The programs are all free.

Ensuring students feel comfortable in reaching out for help, building peer sup-

port mechanisms and boosting teacher and administrator awareness are important, adds Bob Flynn, Sandy Hook Promise's national programs director.

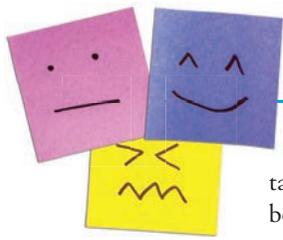
"Schools should make it a focus to build inclusive and connected communities so that students really do feel like they belong in a positive and supportive group," he says. "Because you can certainly go to school and be around all of your classmates and not necessarily feel connected."

It may sound obvious, but it's important for educators to recognize that school shootings and suicides are preventable. "It's about knowing what to do when you see it, not assume someone else is going to take care of it," Hockley says. "Don't go into this blindly and say, we're back to school, everything's fine. Say, we've got some problems, let's figure out how we're going to solve them."

'What happened to the child?'

Taking a trauma-informed approach requires teachers to treat students' disruptive behavior in non-punitive ways, says Miller, of the University of Michigan.

Teachers and administrators, therefore, need to learn their own coping



Social-emotional Rebound

skills, such as taking a deep breath before responding.

“You always have to be asking yourself what happened to the child that they are exhibiting that behavior,” she says. “When we’re in a state of trauma and anxiety, when a child is having intrusive thoughts, it’s almost impossible to pay attention to something external.”

Teachers can hone a more supportive mindset with teaching teams and professional learning communities where they can share ideas and even blow off steam. Miller recommends that teachers manage their expectations for students’ academic recovery and not rush to make up unfinished learning too quickly.

Other approaches teachers can take include diffusing potentially hostile classroom discussions around politics, misinformation and conspiracy theories, and other divisive issues.

“Try to steer the discussions around respect,” she says. “People are coming in with lots of families members having

had COVID or died. People who have had that experience might want to keep wearing masks even though the principal says they don’t have to.”

In turn, administrators should take the same approach to teachers and other educators who are also coping with the stress and trauma of the pandemic, Miller says. “Investing in relationships in a preventative way is critical; take the opportunity to share positive moments,” she says. “When things get stressful, you have a more positive basis to manage it.”

How to create kinder classrooms

This is a true story of mindfulness: Students in one second-grade classroom slammed their desks, almost in unison, every time their teachers asked them to put something away. Then, mindfulness training began.

After a few sessions, Denise A. Veres, the instructor and founder of the Shanthi Project, asked the students if they could show her what it would be like to close their desks *mindfully*. “They

all opened and closed their desks, and I never heard a sound,” Veres says.

The shift in behavior represents the value mindfulness training can bring, particularly as students return to school grappling with the isolation and ongoing anxiety of the COVID pandemic and school closures, Veres says. “The pandemic is unpredictable for everybody, and a lot of emotions come with school starting and stopping, masks or no masks, and being comfortable around people again in different situations,” Veres says. “Mindfulness can have a key place in helping everyone be in the present moment and not having those outside stressors affect what’s going on in the classroom.”

So, what exactly is mindfulness? And how do you teach it? One key to the Shanthi Project’s eight-week course, which includes two 20-minute sessions a week, is having teachers participate and eventually lead their classes or individual students in mindfulness exercises.

During each session, students work up to sitting quietly for longer periods

The University of Michigan’s School of Social Work has developed 10 core pillars for trauma-informed practices and programs:





BETTER BEHAVIOR—Students participate in mindfulness exercises, which have been shown to keep them better focused in class.

of time, focusing on their breathing. This focus helps students recognize when strong emotions are starting to bubble up so they can use deep breathing to calm themselves down.

But does it actually work? Definitely, says Mark Sciuotto, a professor of psychol-

ogy at Muhlenberg College who in 2019 studied the Shanthi Project's impact on the behavior of students in grades K-2 at an elementary school in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

Another key is for mindfulness sessions to become regular parts of the

school day two or more times a week. In the study, this resulted in a significant reduction—18%, in fact—in problematic behaviors such as hyperactivity and impulsivity, Sciuotto says. “What’s more exciting is teachers also saw an increase in positive behaviors such as kindness, gratitude, compassion and sharing,” he says. “We often think either you have these or you don’t, but really they’re skills to be practiced and targeted intentionally.”

A mistake some schools can make is relegating mindfulness to after-school programs or other outside-of-class-time activities. Mindfulness is more impactful when it’s embedded into the school’s social-emotional learning curriculum.

Teachers who’ve adopted the program have also reported gaining up to 20 to 30 minutes more productive teaching time, particularly when they’ve conducted mindfulness sessions after returning from lunch and other transition times, Veres says.

“It’s like playing the violin or playing baseball,” she says. “You have to practice it.” **DA**

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Use open educational resources to boost teacher collaboration, curriculum coherence

A first-person perspective on using OER to empower teachers and improve districts with openly licensed educational materials

By Samuel Mormando, Brian Messinger and Anthony Gabriele

Every year on the first day of class, one of the authors of this piece would ask his social studies students what they considered the most dangerous thing in the classroom. They were always surprised to hear the answer: their textbook. He wanted his students to think critically about the single perspective that the commercial textbook showed—and which it didn't. He also wanted them to think about how that one textbook too often controlled what they learned and didn't learn.

This teacher wanted to illuminate multiple perspectives for his students—but as administrators know, adopting a stack of different materials for a single class can prove difficult, given budget constraints and adoption cycles.

Enter open educational resources, or OER. OER are educational materials—from single lessons to entire textbooks—that are free for educators and students to use, customize and share. They're openly licensed, rather than carrying a traditional copyright, which makes it easy to personalize them and incorporate content that's fresh and relevant to students. You can get started by visiting oerproject.com.

Some administrators will point out that implementing OER requires increased curriculum planning up front, as well as a shift in educators' mindsets toward instructional materials. However, once teachers are onboard, the reward is significant.

For example, Garnet Valley School District in Pennsylvania, where two

of the authors have been administrators, digitized its entire curriculum by embedding OER creation and curation into its Understanding by Design curriculum planning. Garnet Valley is a high-performing district, but it was steadily losing students to virtual charter schools. One of the ways it addressed this issue was by modernizing its curriculum and educational practices.

Garnet Valley administrators wanted to avoid just using OER for the sake of digital materials, so they were intentional about using OER to boost student understanding and overall material quality. They started the curriculum writing process by vetting the effectiveness of all of the materials in use in the district. For the materials that weren't as strong, teachers worked together to find or create OER replacements.

This was the first time many of the district's educators had collaborated with colleagues from other buildings and departments. They were able to share best practices and support each other as they developed and tried out new resources. In real time, they were able to see the benefits of OER and some of the biggest OER skeptics became the biggest OER advocates.

Because teachers were able to design their curricula themselves, it gave them a sense of ownership and allowed them to support whatever formats they needed—in-person, virtual or hybrid. This was a major advantage as schools transitioned to remote learning during

the COVID-19 pandemic—educators knew where to go to find the resources they needed to quickly adjust.

Some may want to challenge the benefits OER offers educators and students, but it's clear to us that the pros heavily outweigh the cons. Some may say that the time teachers spend incorporating OER into the curriculum would cost too much. At Sewanhaka Central School District, over 80% of surveyed teachers said they never used their textbooks, so the district was spending resources on materials that weren't helpful. The district was able to allocate the many thousands of dollars saved by switching to OER to stipends for teachers on curriculum writing committees.

We've seen great success with OER curriculum at Garnet Valley and Sewanhaka Central and are working on supporting other districts as they incorporate OER as well. We know that if other districts can leverage OER, they can reap a lot of the same benefits we've seen for teachers and students. **DA**

Samuel Mormando is the Director of Technology, Innovation and Online Learning for the Garnet Valley School District in Glen Mills, PA

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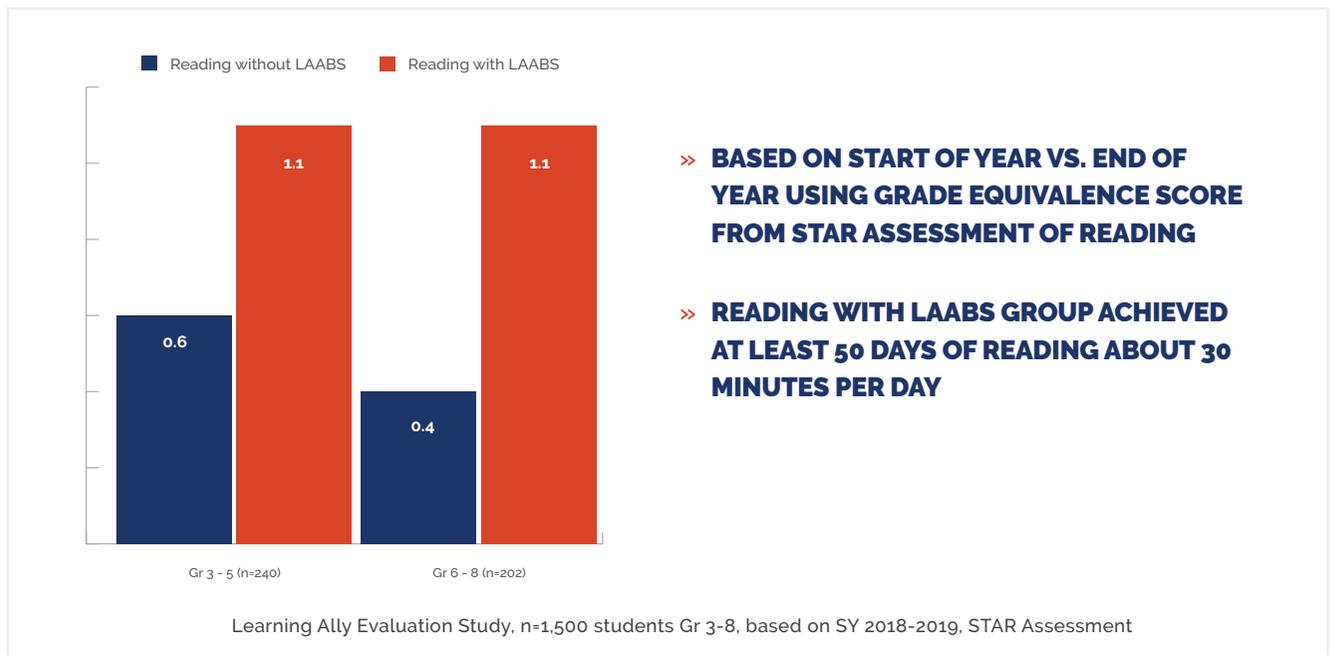
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