

DA

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November/December 2021

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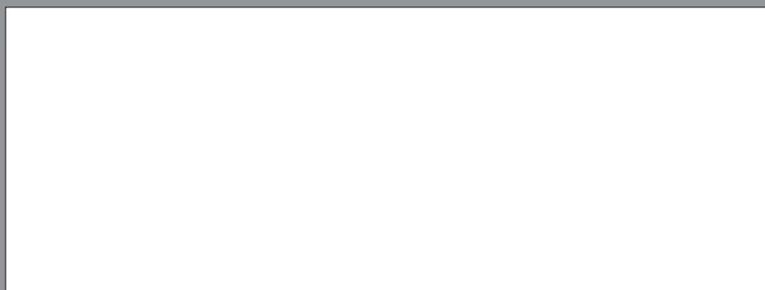
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Recommended reading

As districts monitor students' online activity for warning signs of threats or bullying, it's important to take personal privacy into account too. How much data is collected, and how it is used pose some thorny questions. We look at how districts can protect kids, and their privacy too. See Page 14

The challenges posed by the COVID pandemic have forced superintendents to take on roles that they were never trained for. From managing the public health situation in their districts – often with vocal opposition from parents and others – to making smart decisions about spending state and federal aid, the job has grown beyond focusing on educating students. We take a look at how the role of superintendent has changed for good. See Page 18.

COVID's spread in classrooms during the first half of this school year and a wave of temporary school closures forced district leaders to rethink their remote learning options. While some states have restricted remote learning, others have expanded their offerings to accommodate students who are infected, in quarantine or at higher risk medically. What does the future of online learning look like? See Page 23.

After being virtual in 2021, FETC returns live and in person for 2022 in Orlando in January. Read about what's new, get to know some of the speakers who will be participating, and find out how to register to attend. See Page 26.

Finally, don't miss our annual Solution Showcase, which brings together the latest K-12 education products and services in a special section. You'll find 50 products that address 14 different product categories, from administrative software to distance learning solutions and STEM & robotics. Find this handy section on page 30.

Eric Weiss, executive editor

Reasons to visit DistrictAdministration.com

School closings tracker: COVID-driven shutdowns

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

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Professional organizations for teachers and K-12 leaders

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Thought provoking op-eds by education leaders, solution providers

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STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION

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Lori Capullo

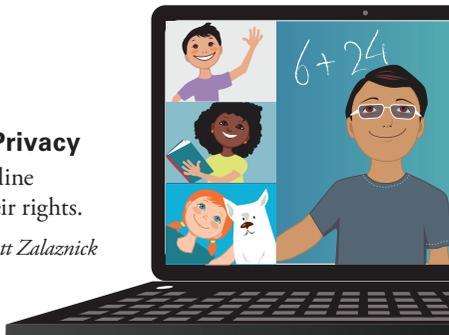
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Publisher Kenneth Kahn

EDITORIAL

Executive Editor Eric Weiss
Managing Editor Lori Capullo
Senior Writer Matt Zalaznick
Technology Editor at Large Lenny Schad
Associate Editor Chris Burt

ART

Production Director Joe Ciocca
Art Director Rebecca Eller

ADVERTISING, EVENTS AND CUSTOM MEDIA

Vice President, Event and Media Sales, Education Group
Jim Callan, jcallan@lrp.com
(561) 622-6520 ext. 8696

Sales Manager (East), Rachel Davis
rdavis@lrp.com
(678) 521-7584

Sales Manager (West), Paul Milnamow
pmlnamow@lrp.com
(847) 648-0416

Content Marketing Editor
Kurt Eisele-Dyrli

CIRCULATION AND OPERATIONS

Director of Audience Development
Dana Kubicko

LRP MEDIA GROUP

President Kenneth Kahn
Chief Financial Officer Todd Lutz
Vice President, Marketing and Communications Missy Ciocca

REPRINTS/PERMISSIONS

For more information, call (561) 622-6520, ext. 8456

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Send email address changes to:
Dana Kubicko
dkubicko@lrp.com

HOW TO REACH US

360 Hiatt Drive
Palm Beach Gardens, FL 33418
Phone: (561) 622-6520
Website: DistrictAdministration.com



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Bradley George, Transportation Supervisor
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Why homeschool growth and other enrollment shifts should concern K-12 leaders

A surge in students shifting to homeschooling during the pandemic offers yet another warning for public school administrators facing enrollment pressures post-COVID.

Homeschooling has been growing steadily for years but skyrocketed during the pandemic, according to the “Homeschooling in Uncertain Times: COVID Prompts a Surge” report by the Pioneer Institute, a public policy think tank.

The organization also offers ideas for how policymakers can better accommodate families who chose to homeschool their children.

The U.S. Census Bureau reports that the percentage of homeschooling households has doubled, from 5.4% during the 2019-20 school year to 11% in 2020-21. Among Black households, that number increased nearly five-fold, from 3.3% to 16.1% in a year.

“You didn’t have to be an expert to see the negative impact remote and hybrid classes had on learning in more traditional schools last year,” said William Heuer, who co-authored the report. “For a lot of people who had been thinking about homeschooling, the pandemic made it a good time to make the change.”

Homeschooling is legal but regulated differently in every state. In Massachusetts, for example, the curriculum parents want to use must be approved by the local school board or superintendent.

Here are the report’s policy recommendations:

1. Acknowledge homeschooling as a viable educational choice. State education departments can add homeschooling information to their websites and link to homeschooling support groups that exist in all states.

Districts can allow homeschooling organizations to make presentations at “open house” sessions for the upcoming school years.

2. Districts should support families that choose to homeschool.

Public school administrators aren’t expected to be promoters of homeschooling, the report says, but they can accommodate the practice. A number of districts let homeschoolers participate in extracurricular activities and they can also consider offering professional development courses that assist parents with homeschool instruction.

3. Encourage innovations in alternative education. Learning pods, micro-schools and learning hubs increased dramatically during the pandemic. At first, these were more common among wealthy families, but non-profits have also banded together to provide opportunities to low-income students.

4. Learn from homeschooling families. Parents choose homeschooling for a variety of reasons that range from safety concerns to individualized learning and parental involvement. A survey of local families who have recently switched to homeschooling would provide many constructive steps educators could take to improve public schools.

5. End the “socialization” myth. A mindset associating “schooling” and “socialization” has arisen as a result of COVID isolation. For some students who succeeded academically at COVID-era homeschooling but want to return to public school in person for “socialization,” there may be a misconception that schools are the main source of filling the social needs of children.

“It’s unclear how many families view homeschooling as a temporary

solution during the pandemic and how many will continue to do it,” said Jamie Gass, director of education policy at Pioneer Institute. “But after years of steady increases, it is clear that the practice is common enough to be treated as a viable educational choice.”

The authors’ recommendations include state education agencies providing direction and information for those considering homeschooling by putting information about it on their websites with links to statewide homeschooling support groups. They also urge districts to offer parents some “professional development” classes/ courses and to allow students to participate in district extra-curricular activities.

Other enrollment issues

A report released in late September found that about 240,000 students switched to public charter schools during the 2020-21 school year, accounting for a 7% boost in enrollment.

Overall, about 1.4 million students left district public schools while charter schools saw their sharpest enrollment growth in about five years in rural, suburban and urban communities, according to the “Voting With Their Feet” report by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools.

“Families are sending a clear message,” said Nina Rees, president and CEO of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. “They want more public school options. From the Pacific Northwest to the Deep South, the pandemic forced families to rethink where and how education could be delivered to their children.”

—Matt Zalaznick

Help drive family engagement

5 ways districts can improve and promote it this school year

- **Meet with families in person on a regular basis.** This gives parents and teachers a captive audience with which to exchange input and build a support network and should be enjoyable as well as informative.

- **Use as many communication tools as possible to interact with families that can't make it in person.** Working with technology such as Zoom and Google hangouts helps make students and parents familiarize themselves with technology and become more comfortable using it.

- **Create a “family playlist.”** Power My Learning (powermylearning.org), an organization of strategists that helps education leaders identify and plan what to do next, created A Family Playlist to put the student in the shoes of the teacher, allowing them to share what they've learned with their family members. The family then provides feedback to the teacher about how their student conveyed the information and their confidence in doing so. Assignments can

be accessed via mobile browser in more than 100 languages and were found in a 2019 impact study of 7th-graders in New York state to have had a “statistically significant” impact on students’ math scores that was the equivalent of four months of additional learning.

- **Assign students as mentees to school staff.** Teachers, coaches, and other school personnel can then maintain one-on-one contact with their charges and check in with them on a regular basis to see how they're doing and make sure there is accountability and communication between the student and the school.

- **Make use of resources.** A good example of one is Parent Camp (parentcamp.org), a family-school-community engagement model that was designed to build a “connected school ecosystem of caring and supportive adults” wherein the entire room is a collective expert and each person's individual perspective is important.

—Lori Capullo



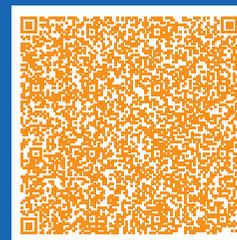
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5 essential elements of a successful superintendent-school board relationship

The volatile environment of education today, in large part because of the coronavirus pandemic, has resulted in an epidemic of superintendent-school board disputes, ranging from shout fests at meetings to physical altercations and threats. Superintendents have been resigning in record numbers for the past year, unable or unwilling to accept the brunt of the blame for policies and problems resulting from COVID-19.

If superintendents and school boards are to work together effectively, there are essential elements that must not only be put in place but prioritized:

1. Community input—including administrators, teachers, students, parents, businesses, government agencies and residents—on the development of the district’s vision. Once that vision is established, the school board should seek a superintendent who shares the same outlook, writes Alexis Rice in “Creating a Strong School Board-Superintendent Relationship.” “The critical place to start,” he points out, “is at the beginning.”

2. Clearly defined responsibilities. Because the needs of a district vary and leadership and management styles do as well, the primary duty of each school board and superintendent to determine together what each is to do and establish policies and procedures that will lead to the successful performance of those duties, according to “Roles & Responsibilities of School Boards and Superintendents.” Keeping roles clear and communication open, they state, is the key to sound and productive board and superintendent relationships.

3. Mutual respect. Since the onset of the pandemic, district leaders have had to effectively manage changes in a highly complex, politically charged and often contentious system. Executive director of the American Association of School Administrators and former

superintendent Paul Houston notes that, while many superintendents still enjoy their roles, and even the challenges that accompany them, “There is much about the current role that is dysfunctional.” He adds that the work is conducted in an environment that has become increasingly political and “downright abusive,” one reason numerous superintendents have quit over the past year.

School board members, too, are experiencing challenges, including increasing political divisiveness amongst themselves, between them and their superintendents, and having to deal with unprecedented—and continuing—state and federal influence. Redirecting their focus from the noise and working with their superintendent to avoid infighting, find common ground and execute an agenda that prioritizes student achievement over all else is of the utmost importance.

4. Flexibility and collaboration rather than authoritarianism. “Authority relationships function beautifully until the environment changes,”

says Ron Heifetz, author and founding director of the Center for Public Leadership at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government, in “Effective Superintendents, Effective Boards: Finding the Right Fit.” But confronting complex and unexpected problems calls for flexible thinking, collaboration and shared decision-making. And the more people who are involved in formulating a district’s agenda, Heifetz points out, the more that have a stake in that district’s success.

5. Prioritization of student achievement. That means being accountability-driven and spending less time on operational issues than on what’s most vital to student success. In a Lighthouse Study that compared school districts with “unusually high levels” of student achievement to districts with students of similar characteristics but substantially lower levels of performance, the boards in the higher-achieving districts repeatedly identified academic achievement as their main responsibility.

—Lori Capullo



People on the Move

Promotions, position changes and new hires in K-12



PEDRO MARTINEZ

The new CEO of Chicago Public Schools is a product of the district he now helms. **Pedro Martinez**, by his own account, rose through the system where he got his own education by starting in 2003 as a budget director. Five years later, he was promoted to CPS’ chief financial officer and subsequently was charged with supervising a network of schools on the West Side. Today, he is the district’s first Latin CEO. Martinez was the first in his family to graduate from college and chose to dedicate his life to education.

John Stanford steps into the role of superintendent of Allentown School District in Ohio on Nov. 15. A senior chief officer in the Columbus school district, Stanford previously held positions such as deputy superintendent, interim superintendent and chief operating officer over the past 15 years. In the interim superintendent role,

he started a project called “Level Up” that resulted in an 81% graduation rate that year, up 3% from when he started.



JOHN STANFORD

The Champlain Valley School District in Vermont recently welcomed **Rene Sanchez** as its new superintendent. Hired this summer, Sanchez told the *Williston Observer* he was drawn to the district because of its support of diversity, equity and inclusion, as well as its commitment to personalized learning. Sanchez previously held the post of assistant superintendent in South Bend, Ind., and before that was principal of César E. Chávez High School in Houston.



RENE SANCHEZ

Previous superintendent of the Gresham-Barlow School District in Portland, Ore., **Angela Katrise Perera** has taken over the post of superintendent of the much-larger Lancaster Independent School District in Texas. Upon accepting the job, Perera said she is excited to be the district’s first female superintendent and that doing so in a state she “considers home” is a gift.

During Perera’s tenure at Gresham-Barlow, graduation rates rose, new career and technical programs were established, and a dual language immersion curriculum was launched.



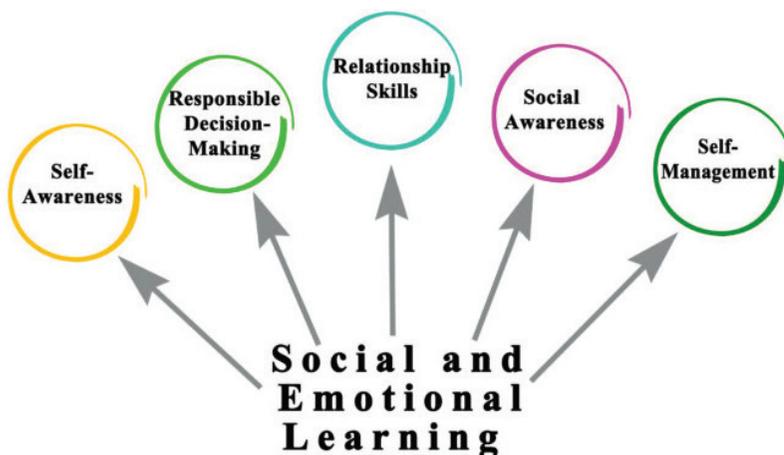
ANGELA KATRIS PERERA

Lucretia Brown, a former deputy superintendent in Pennsylvania, will serve as Virginia’s Prince William County School’s new Chief Equity Officer. Brown comes from Allentown, Pa., where she had been working as deputy superintendent for equity, accountability and school improvement in the Allentown School District. In her new role, Brown will lead the Division’s equity efforts and “sustain a culture of equity and inclusion for all students to eliminate the disproportionality between students’ groups within the highest and lowest achievement categories,” a school division press release said.



LUCRETIA BROWN

and “sustain a culture of equity and inclusion for all students to eliminate the disproportionality between students’ groups within the highest and lowest achievement categories,” a school division press release said.



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—Pathfinder principal Ceatriss Wall

Sex ed is growing more inclusive of LGBTQ+ but is the norm in only 17 states

Instruction that affirms LGBTQ+ students' gender identities is spreading but still lacking in many states, as are gay-straight alliance clubs where young people can turn for critical support.

LGBTQ+-inclusive sex-ed curricula were offered in a majority of the schools in only 17 states as of 2018, says a new report from Child Trends, a nonprofit research organization, citing the most recently available CDC data.

From 2016 to 2018, 27 states reported increases of greater than 1 percentage point in the number of schools offering LGBTQ+-inclusive sex-ed materials. Seven states—California, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, South Carolina, Virginia, and Washington—reported growth of 10 or more percentage points.

A handful of states reported declines with Mississippi seeing the most drastic decline of 17 percentage points, the report found.

The report also analyzed connections between instructional changes and state policies. As of 2020, six states—California, Colorado, New Jersey, Oregon, Rhode Island and Washington (plus the District of Columbia)—required schools to teach inclusive sex-ed curricula. Legislation or court decisions have recently repealed anti-LGBTQ+ policies in Alabama, Arizona and South Carolina.

Inclusive sex-ed curricula should explicitly address the needs of LGBTQ+ youth as a part of education about HIV, STDs and pregnancy prevention. Educators should use inclusive, non-gendered language and cover examples of healthy, non-heterosexual relationships.

Failing to provide inclusive sex-ed instruction can cause mental health problems in students and increase the stigma they face. These conditions have been linked to drug use and alcohol use among LGBTQ+ youth, higher rates

of dating violence and increased risk of engaging in risky sexual behaviors.

“Access to sexual health education that is inclusive of LGBTQ+ youth is associated with improved health and reduced impacts from LGBTQ+ stigma as well as reduced suicidal thoughts among both straight, cisgender youth and LGBTQ+ youth,” the report says.

Safe spaces for alliances

Gender and sexuality alliances or gay-straight alliance clubs give students space to discuss and learn about sexual orientation, gender identity, and other youth LGBTQ+ issues.

Studies have shown that these clubs, also known as GSAs, improve both school climates and academic outcomes for LGBTQ+ youth, according to Child Trends.

“While LGBTQ+ youth may experience stigma and discrimination related to their sexual orientation or gender identity—including higher rates of victimization, such as bullying at school and cyberbullying—GSAs can serve as a buffer by providing LGBTQ+

youth with a source of community, a gateway to LGBTQ+-friendly resources, and a marker of safety,” Child Trends’ report says.

However, only nine states and Washington D.C., report that more than half of their high schools have a GSA while some studies have found the clubs are not inclusive of students of color. Still, GSAs have been shown to benefit all students, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, and that the positive impacts extend even to students who do not participate directly in the clubs.

State education agencies can help by to school districts. Two national LGBTQ+ advocacy groups, GLSEN and GSA Network, provide resources for GSAs.

“This school year, GSAs will play a particularly critical role in serving the needs of LGBTQ+ youth—many of whom experienced poorer mental health and more stressful living situations during the COVID-19 pandemic,” Child Trends says.

—Matt Zalaznick



New list ranks 80 percent of the best elementary and middle schools

Rankings aim to put assessment data into the context of demographics and other factors

You can now add U.S. News' recently launched Best Middle and Elementary School rankings to all the other accountability pressures that have been placed on K-12 administrators.

U.S. News, best known for its headline-grabbing college rankings, rated about 81% of the nation's public and private elementary and middle schools in the directory that debuted on Tuesday.

"Unlike the high school rankings, there are no national rankings of elementary and middle schools," U.S. News said in an article announcing the directory. But it does rank some schools within districts and states: "Scoring was almost entirely rooted in students' performance on mathematics

and reading/language arts state assessments."

U.S. News says the state assessments are a sign of how well schools are educating students, including "children from low-income households and children from historically underserved ethnicities." U.S. News rankings team also says it has attempted to put assessment data into the context of demographics and other factors.

"We believe that is more useful than simply looking at test results to evaluate schools because this process resembles to a certain extent how education administrators and researchers consider school performance," U.S. News says.

The rankings are based on U.S. Department of Education data from

the 2018-2019 academic year prior to COVID's vast disruptions. The 2021 list comprises 118,332 public and private grade schools, among which 79,941 are ranked; this includes 47,325 elementary schools and 23,255 middle schools.

"For each state, schools were assessed on their shares of students who were proficient or above proficient in their mathematics and reading/language arts state assessments," U.S. News says. "Half the formula was the results themselves; the other half was the results in the context of socioeconomic demographics. In other words, the top-ranked schools are all high achieving and have succeeded at educating all their students."

—Matt Zalaznick

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10 solutions schools can champion to address a national mental health emergency

The surge in students struggling with mental health concerns over the last few years has now reached crisis levels, a coalition of pediatricians, psychiatrists and hospitals warned education leaders this week.

Children and adolescents are suffering what equates to a national mental health emergency that is being fueled by the “enormous adversity and disruption” brought on by COVID-19 and the ongoing struggle for racial justice, says the declaration issued by the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and Children’s Hospital Association.

“We have witnessed soaring rates of mental health challenges among children, adolescents, and their families over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbating the situation that existed prior to the pandemic,” the declaration says. “The inequities that result from structural racism have contributed to disproportionate impacts on children from communities of color,” they said.

Here are a few things school administrators need to know:

More than 140,000 U.S. children lost a primary and/or secondary caregiver, with youth of color most heavily impacted, the organizations say.

Rates of childhood mental health problems and suicide have been already rising substantially in the decade before COVID struck

In 2018, suicide became the second leading cause of death for Americans aged 10 to 24.

Since the COVID outbreak, emergency rooms have seen dramatic increases in visits for suspected suicide attempts and other mental health emergencies.

Treating the long-term impacts caused by soaring rates of depression, anxiety, trauma, loneliness and



suicidality will require state, local and national leaders to take innovative action to improve the access to and quality of adolescent mental health care at all levels and across all communities.

“The pandemic has struck at the safety and stability of families,” the declaration says. “The challenges facing children and adolescents are so widespread that we call on policymakers at all levels of government and advocates for children and adolescents to join us in this declaration.”

Since the COVID outbreak, the nonprofit research organization Child Trends has been sharing steps school administrators can take to support students in distress, including expanding professional development for teachers in trauma-informed care and acknowledging that some communities have been hit harder by the events of the past 18 months.

This week’s declaration covers steps that federal, state and local policymakers can take to begin to address the problem. Here are 10 solutions school administration may want to advocate for:

Increase federal funding to ensure all families and children have access to quality mental health treatment from infancy through adolescence. Particular emphasis must be placed on meeting the needs of under-resourced populations.

Address regulatory challenges and improve access to technology to give all

families have access to mental health care through telemedicine.

Fund and expand effective models of school-based mental health care, including clinical strategies and models for payment.

Accelerate adoption of models for integrated mental health care in primary care pediatrics.

Strengthen emerging efforts to reduce the risk of suicide in children and adolescents through school- and community-based prevention programs.

Fully fund comprehensive, community-based systems of care that connect families in need of behavioral health services with interventions in their home, community or school.

Fund trauma-informed care services that support relational health and family resilience.

Solve workforce shortage in child mental health by creating innovative training programs, college loan repayment, and intensifying efforts to recruit underrepresented populations into health care professions.

Increase the number of hospitals and emergency beds available by expanding “step-down programs” from inpatient units, short-stay stabilization units, and community-based response teams.

Advance policies that ensure compliance with and enforcement of mental health parity laws.

—Matt Zalaznick



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How schools can make better progress on diversity, equity and inclusion

Education has failed to move the needle on diversity, equity and inclusion over the last five years despite the attention paid to these issues, according to the racial justice nonprofit Promise54.

Compared to a study the organization did in 2016, the education sector—including schools, nonprofits and private organizations—has not made significant progress on diverse hiring, creating more inclusive climates or overhauling discriminatory systems, says Xiomara Padamsee, founder and CEO of Promise54.

“The results are really sobering. I hope it’s a call to action to do better,” says Padamsee of her organization’s just-released “Unrealized Impact 2.0” report. “We’re not close to representing the students we serve as a country.”

About 80% of the students served by the 20,000 respondents to the study were of color but only 53% of the staff in those schools or organizations were also of color, Padamsee says.

The racial gaps are even larger at leadership levels—for instance, 65% of executive team members and 67% of board members are white. And when researchers investigated school climate, respondents described a persistent anti-Blackness and bias. Black staff members continue to report the most negative workplace experiences of any racial or ethnic group.

“Black women experience the lowest levels of inclusion and equity of all women,” she says. “And Black staff

members have among the lowest rates of agreement that they can bring their whole selves to work.”

Organizations, including schools, too often “quick fix solutions” that won’t have a long-term impact on diversity, equity and inclusion. For instance, districts might hire a chief diversity officer or appoint an equity task force but those moves alone won’t lead to progress.

“The real answer, the right answer, according to the data, is how you do any of those things,” she says. “It’s not if you create a chief diversity officer position, it’s about how you create it—how much influence do they have?”

Driving DEI

The report detailed five promising practices school leaders looking to achieve true diversity, equity and inclusion:

1. Moving past random acts of DEI: While many organizations incorporate diversity, inclusion and equity into mission and vision statements, only about a third clearly articulate the benefits and even fewer define the terms. When the latter two steps are not taken, diversity, inclusion and equity do not become fully embedded in district operations.

Organizations also err when they take a sequential approach by, for example, focusing on just diversity first and later moving to inclusion and then equity. Promise54’s data show that focusing on all three is more likely to

lead to more positive employee experiences.

2. Diversifying leadership beyond the CEO: Organizations working to diversify hiring too often focus on the highest level—the CEO—and entry levels, and fail to put diverse employees into other leadership posts, the report says.

When four or more racial or ethnic groups are represented on a leadership team, those organizations make far more progress on diversity, equity and inclusion. Staff with diverse leadership teams are also more likely to agree that their organization recognizes and eliminates exclusion, the report finds.

3. Sharing power through meaningful engagement: Progressive organizations offer staff frequent opportunities to be involved in making decisions that impact them, such as by providing feedback on issues of diversity, equity and inclusion.

Another way to achieve this is by including people from diverse backgrounds in interviewing and hiring new employees.

4. Moving beyond icebreakers to authentic relationships: Organizations can support the development of trusting relationships through coaching and mentoring. Organizations should also support employees who want to form affinity groups, which are spaces intentionally designed for connection among individuals who share common identities or experiences

5. Infusing accountability for things that matter: Many organizations collect data across a wide variety of DEI-related strategies, such as the diversity of networks from which they recruit. But organizations advance when they also track equity-based outcomes, such as the rate at which diverse employees are retained, given salary increases and promoted.

—Matt Zalaznick



Missouri district finds ways to expand student access to technology

Parkway Schools relying on tools including Acer Chromebooks to boost equity

For a top-ranked school district in Missouri, the COVID-19 pandemic meant that district leaders had to find creative ways to accelerate existing technology initiatives and digital equity efforts.

Parkway Schools is one of the largest districts in the St. Louis area, with 17,500 students in 28 schools. The district has received numerous awards including 17 Blue Ribbon Awards from the U.S. Department of Education and 19 Gold Star Awards from the State of Missouri.

Using technology and data effectively

One of the keys to this success has been the district's effective use of technology, according to Jason Rooks, who has worked in the district for the past 15 years and been CIO for the past seven years.

"We have a very robust technology department for the size of the district, with about 40 employees and IT support in every building," Rooks says.

In addition, Rooks describes the district as heavily data driven. "We have a strong focus on providing all types of data to our educators to enable them to make the best decisions. We have our own custom data warehouse as well as developers and data administrators on staff."

Despite doing so much in-house, Rooks says in recent years the district has also looked for any opportunity to move platforms to the cloud. "We utilize Google for Education for student and staff email, and we use other apps including Google Meet and Google Drive heavily."

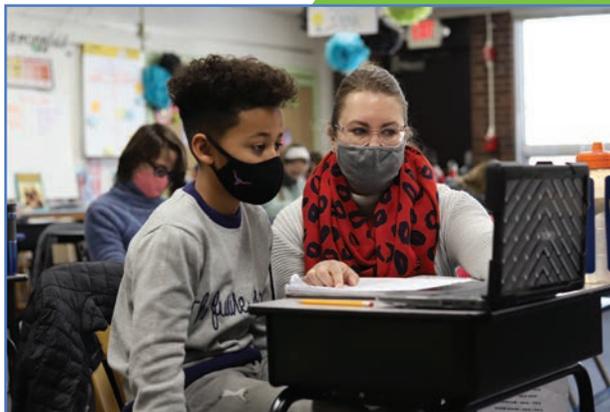
Going 1:1 during a pandemic

Parkway had also been transitioning to a 1:1 Chromebook environment over the past several years, beginning at the elementary level so that students would grow up with the devices as they advanced through school.

"When COVID-19 hit in March 2020, we had just two grade levels remaining without Chromebooks," Rooks says. "We suddenly had to ensure that every student was set up for remote learning, so we were scrambling to find enough devices, but we were able to find about 5,000 unused or unassigned Chromebooks to give to these students."

"The next fall, we were scrambling again because we wanted to start a new class of elementary students with Chromebooks, and devices were in short supply," says Rooks. "Fortunately, Acer was able to get us a supply of Chromebooks when we needed them."

Rooks says that Parkway has been pleased with the partnership. "In the past we worked with another vendor, but the durability of their devices was a big issue, as was support," he says. "Acer's devices are higher quality, more reliable and more durable."



Ramping up digital equity

Similarly, Rooks says the pandemic accelerated the district's efforts in the area of digital equity. "We had to rapidly identify and provide devices and wi-fi hotspots to students who needed them. We partnered with our counseling department, by helping them expand their vocabulary to make technology equity a topic of their discussions with students. That has helped us identify students in need."

Looking to a bright future

Rooks says he feels positive about the future of these initiatives. "We will give students the option to keep their Acer Chromebooks after graduation to take with them to college, as part of our emphasis on equity," he says. "I'm excited for the future and to continue working with Acer, and we look forward to learning how we can use technology even more effectively to benefit students."



PROTECTING KIDS—AND THEIR PRIVACY

While administrators monitor online activity for the most serious threats, they can also ensure their policies don't victimize students in the process.

Monitoring is not quite the right word to describe the responsibility educators have when thinking about students' online activity outside of school hours, says Justin W. Patchin, a co-director of the Cyberbullying Research Center.

When districts distribute laptops and tablets, they can block students from accessing certain sites or apps. They should also try to ensure the devices are being used for educational purposes, says Patchin, a professor of criminal justice at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.

But administrators must also take personal privacy into account when considering around-the-clock tracking of what students are posting on social media in their free time, he says. "Schools are better served to develop a positive culture in which students who observe concerning behavior feel comfortable reporting it to the school," Patchin says. "That way, schools can intervene as opposed to lurking in the weeds waiting for something to happen."

For example, a school could detect that a student is being bullied online for identifying as gay. Administrators should

certainly inform parents of the harassment, but what if the student has not come out to their family? That raises privacy issues.

"Administrators have to think creatively about how to adjust behavior and not make things worse for the student being targeted," Patchin says.

Two recent studies have analyzed similar concerns that also raise equity questions. Lower-income students are more likely to be using district-owned devices, making them more likely to be monitored.

Here's what the researchers behind those two reports found.



5 steps toward fairness

More than 80% of teachers reported that their schools used monitoring software to track student activity on district-owned devices outside of school hours, according to the “Online and Observed” report released by the Center for Democracy & Technology earlier this fall. Such software allows school staff to remotely view students’ computer screens, open applications, block sites, scan student communications and view browsing histories.

Districts are likely motivated by the Child Internet Protection Act, which ties e-rate funding to safeguarding students online. But administrators should look more carefully at the requirements, says Elizabeth Laird, the director of the center’s Equity in Civic Technology Project.

For one thing, the law was enacted in 2000, before social media became a primary form of communication. Laird’s organization has called on Congress and the FCC to clarify the act’s intent, particularly as schools distrib-

ute more devices in efforts to close the homework gap.

Administrators should also clarify their own goals when they consider deploying software to track for students threatening self-harm or violence against others.

Wealthier students who have their own devices may essentially be able to “opt out” of tracking outside of school, Laird warns. “While there may be perceived benefits, there are also risks that may fall disproportionately on students who are already vulnerable and need

additional barriers removed for them to thrive educationally,” she says.

More than 60% of parents surveyed for the “Online and Observed” report expressed concerns that the data collected could be used in a disciplinary context, the report says. Other teachers and parents were worried that monitoring could have unintended consequences such as outing LGBTQ+ students.

The report covers five policy recommendations for protecting student privacy:

1. Provide transparency regarding student activity monitoring.
2. Minimize data collected by monitoring software on school-issued devices.
3. Mitigate inequities arising from school-issued devices and student activity monitoring.
4. Maintain control of student data when shared with activity-monitoring vendors.
5. Build capacity within the school system and among communities on how to close the homework gap while protecting students.

“Be particular about the data you’re collecting—minimize it to only the information you most need,” Laird advises.

Several civil rights and education advocacy organizations—such as the ACLU, the Center for Democracy & Technology, Getting Smart, Hispanic Technology & Telecommunications Partnership, InnovateEDU and the State Educational Technology Directors Association—have signed onto the center’s letter calling for clarifications of CIPA’s monitoring standards.

The letter also urges policymakers to codify student privacy practices as federal funds are dispersed to provide school-issued devices. “Systematic monitoring of online activity can reveal sensitive information about students’ personal lives, such as their sexual orientation, or cause a chilling effect on their free expression, political organizing, or discussion of sensitive issues such as mental health,” the letter says.

CHECKLIST FOR CHECKING UP ON STUDENTS

When adopting monitoring technology, administrators can protect student privacy by ensuring their policies:

- ✔ Are based on methods that have been independently validated by mental health professionals.
- ✔ Define specific, clear goals for adopting a monitoring system.
- ✔ Accommodate existing school-based mental health resources and professionals who will provide support to any students in crisis.
- ✔ Have been transparently developed in consultation with experts and community stakeholders, particularly families, students and teachers.
- ✔ Set clear policies on which data are collected, who has access to them, how they will be used and when they will be destroyed.
- ✔ Establish who will review student information flagged by monitoring and who determines whether a flag is indicative of a true risk of self-harm.
- ✔ Include a robust training program for school officials responsible for handling sensitive student data.
- ✔ Set clear consequences for individuals who violate data protection and sharing protocols.
- ✔ Do not stigmatize or reinforce biases against any groups of students based on race, religion, gender, disability status, sexual orientation or other legally protected characteristics.

Source: *Future of Privacy Forum*.

Mental health misconceptions

Tracking can be effective at alerting schools to explicit statements about self-harm, such as “how to tie a noose.”

But it can also raise false positives or expose students who may be struggling with mental health issues in private conversations with counselors, says

Amelia Vance, vice president for youth and education privacy at the Future of Privacy Forum. Some technology can also be tripped up by slang, colloquialisms, and students joking around, she says.

This raises serious questions for administrators navigating online safety. “Is



it actually going to help students with these issues other than when there are really obvious signs of a need for intervention?” Vance asks. “Are you doing this in the context of a broader program?”

Flagging troubling online activity achieves little if administrators are not going to follow through with comprehensive support, she adds.

Vance’s organization offers guidance for schools in its latest report, “The Privacy and Equity Implications of Using Self-Harm Monitoring Technologies.” Administrators should:

- Ensure they have sufficient school-based mental health resources to support students accurately identified through self-harm monitoring technology.
- Develop a robust mental health response plan beyond simply monitoring students.
- Have well-developed policies governing how schools will use monitoring systems, respond to alerts, and protect student information before they acquire

More than 80% of teachers reported that their schools used monitoring software to track student activity on district-owned devices outside of school hours, according to a report released this fall.

the technology.

Policies and training are key because students struggling with mental health issues are too often labelled as potentially dangerous, Vance says. “People with mental health issues are more likely to be vic-

tims of violence,” she notes. “There are a lot of biases we all have because they’re part of a common narrative, and we may be disadvantaging students by flagging them based on conclusions made by untrained administrators.”

She adds that anonymous reporting software has proven to be highly effective in allowing students and others to identify potential threats—particularly when administrators respond with the appropriate help for the student in crisis.

And there’s another solution. “Creating trusting relationships with adults is the No. 1 way to help students with mental health issues or students who could end up being violent,” Vance says.

“The way to create trusting relationships is not by having students come to the principal’s office and saying to them, ‘We know what you did on your computer last night.’” **DA**

Matt Zalaznick is DA’s senior writer.

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How Superintendents' Roles Have Changed for Good Because of COVID-19



There is no longer a one-size-fits-all definition of the position that once could be summarized as leader of a school district.

BY LORI CAPULLO

Once a job that, for the most part, could be done during the typical Monday-to-Friday work week, the superintendent role has now become, in the words of Tina McCoy, former Superintendent of Schools in Raymond, N.H., a “24/7” gig. “I need a break that a vacation cannot give,” she said, discussing her reasons for leaving with the school board.

McCoy is certainly not the only one who felt that way over the past 19 months, since COVID upended life as we knew it. But in districts where superintendents exited, new superintendents have been installed—and many incumbents battled through the first year of the pandemic and stayed the course. Those leaders had no choice but to adapt to disruptions and difficulties, accepting the fact that an already fraught profession was becoming more so.

The ones most likely to succeed long-term are those who can do the following, in addition to the carrying out the traditional responsibilities of the job:



Master a continually shifting environment.

New demands are emerging all the time, forcing districts to create new alliances with social service agencies, task their staffs with jobs that

they're often unfamiliar with, and deal with conflicting points of view about whether to keep schools open, enforce mask mandates, continue with remote learning, and more. “The role has shifted more to being a ringmaster...where you're just constantly juggling day-to-day needs as well as trying to oversee the instructional leadership that's at the heart of the mission and vision of every school district,” noted Sandra Sherwood, Superintendent of Herkimer-Fulton-Hamilton-Otsego BOCES in an online forum with WKTV News with superintendents from around the country. Madison-Oneida BOCES District Superintendent Scott Budelmann adds that superintendents now must make decisions on the best way to deliver services while keeping education and safety as their top priorities. “Our supervisory focus has really shifted toward outcomes instead of just time on task,” he says.

“For me, the biggest change came in the form of communication with our stakeholders,” says Dave Deets, superintendent of Harmony-Emge School District 175 in Belleville, Illinois, and a member of the DA Leadership Institute. “Although communication has always been an important aspect of this job, I felt like this past year and a half the ability to effectively

communicate was a make-or-break. It was important that I didn't just communicate what the district was doing, but also that I was intentional about listening and getting input from a variety of stakeholder groups. In that joint effort, we were able to create plans that included multiple layers for in-person, hybrid and remote situations. I then had to effectively communicate those plans out through a variety of platforms."

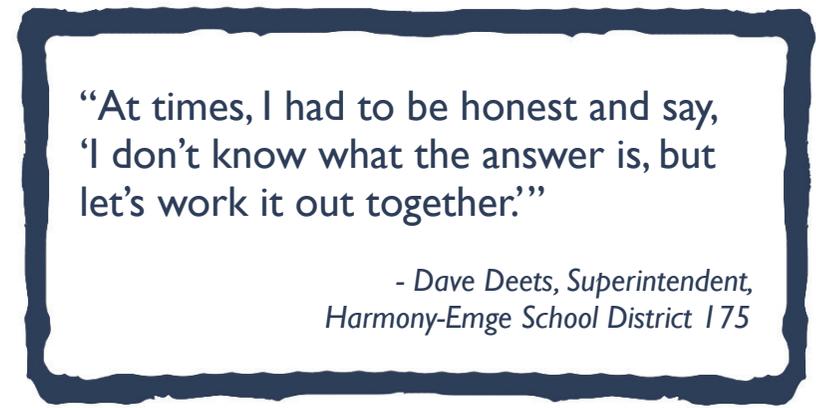
Cynthia Ritchie, superintendent of New London Public Schools in Connecticut, echoes those sentiments. "I have found myself more closely partnered with a variety of new community organizations, with various city departments, with fellow superintendents across the state, with technology specialists, and more directly with students and families as we have had more opportunities—through virtual meetings and home visits, to connect deeply with families to discuss their child's and family's health, academic, food service and social service needs."



Make critical decisions that affect the health of the staff as well as the students.

"Prior to COVID-19, my job was primarily educationally focused," Allan Cameron, superintendent of schools in Wrentham, Mass., told Salon.com. Since the pandemic, however, he says his job has "taken on a new public health dimension where I have to work with people to make decisions regarding aspects of operating a school or a district that I wasn't trained to do." Those decisions can—and often do—cause an uproar, even resulting in violence, when they don't meet the approval of school boards or the community. Cameron notes the importance of relying on experts, not his own personal ideas or opinions, to do what is in the best interest of the students. "I am not an epidemiologist. I am not a pediatrician," he points out. "I am recommending we follow [the experts'] guidance in this."

Deets also cited the importance of keeping up with student health and safety guidelines and procedures as one of his main priorities in the COVID era. "We had to let everyone know how we were keeping our kids and adults safe



"At times, I had to be honest and say, 'I don't know what the answer is, but let's work it out together.'"

*- Dave Deets, Superintendent,
Harmony-Emge School District 175*

and what our multiple layers of mitigation were," he says. "And if that wasn't enough, we had to continually update all of those plans and procedures as Illinois' guidelines and expectations changed about every two weeks. And at times," he adds, "I had to be honest and say, 'I don't know what the answer is ... but let's work it out together.'"



Be extra judicious about spending.

While districts have benefited from the state and federal aid they've received, that money is finite and must be spent carefully on programs and plans that have the most positive and permanent impact. "It's important for us as leaders to remember that eventually that money's not going to be there," cautioned Rome Schools Superintendent Peter Blake, in the same online conference. "So, anything we do implement with [it], we need to make sure that down the road we can sustain that with our own general funds as to not have to make budget cuts some day when that federal money is not there."



Support teachers unflinchingly.

Teachers have not only had to learn new ways to teach and communicate with their students; they have had to learn new technology to do so—many while dealing with their own children were attending school online. One way California's Redlands Unified School District Superintendent Mauricio Arellano showed his support, he says, is by reminding his teachers they have permission to make mistakes. "This is not the time to seek perfection,"

he said. "Things are going to fail and that's OK. It's OK to try new things and not fear. We have to find the little victories, and let people know we see and appreciate them."



Continue to build on the systems now in place that will enhance students' educations going forward.

First and foremost, that means technology. Socorro ISD Texas Superintendent José Espinoza told the *El Paso Times* that technology has played a key role in helping his district prepare students for college, careers and life—and it was a crucial part of the curricula in his district for years even before the pandemic hit. "When the pandemic hit, we were able to transition to remote learning with the strong foundation we already had with blended learning, digital learning and technology in our classrooms," he said. "The pandemic transformed how education is delivered overnight and we will capitalize on the good that has come out of it to prepare our students for a new world that is still being reinvented every day."

"The pandemic was a crisis that we cannot let go to waste," Fort Worth ISD Superintendent Dr. Kent Scribner told NBC News Dallas-Fort Worth. "It disrupted our system. It allowed us to reflect. It allowed us to understand the importance of an extended school day, extended school year, of technology. We also recognize that, with the additional dollars that we have all received from the pandemic, those need to go to the students in the greatest need." **DA**

Lori Capullo is managing editor of DA.

Reflecting on 25 years of change in K-12 math education

Q&A with **Andy Isaacs**, Director Emeritus of the University of Chicago School Mathematics Project, and Director of Revisions for *Everyday Mathematics*

Andy Isaacs retired as co-director of the University of Chicago School Mathematics Project in October 2021 after more than 40 years as an educator. Andy began his career as a fourth and fifth grade math teacher in public schools in the Chicago area from 1977 to 1985, continuing in several teaching and research positions in mathematics education at the University of Illinois at Chicago. In 1995, Isaacs joined the University of Chicago School Mathematics Project and served as an author, researcher and director of revisions for *Everyday Mathematics*.

***Everyday Mathematics* was developed by the University of Chicago School Mathematics Project and had its first editions released in the mid-1990's. How has math education changed since then?**

Education tends to swing between extremes. The 1990's were known for the so-called "Math Wars," which was an era of debate about math instruction that arose after a very progressive approach was introduced in California in 1992. There was an intense backlash to those ideas, with some groups insisting that math instruction should instead focus on fundamental skills and procedures.

In 2001 the No Child Left Behind Act was passed, which had some serious problems. Specifically, its combination of creating high standards and requiring that every child meet them was an inherent contradiction. NCLB also introduced the era of test-based accountability, focused mostly on math and reading. That also had the effect of narrowing the curriculum, at the expense of science, history, social studies, art, music and any subjects not as easily tested, while narrowing math education to basic skills and memorization instead of conceptual understanding. And these effects were most pronounced in poor and minority communities.

By 2010 it was apparent that NCLB was not effective, and that helped give rise to the Common Core State Standards. The idea behind the Common Core was that we need a more standardized curriculum across the country. There are pros and cons with the Common Core. In math, the CCSS uses the word "understand" a lot, which is good. It also emphasizes the practical application of mathematics, and it "weeded the



"If you compare math textbooks from the 1970's and 1980's to today, they are significantly better now than in the past. And I think our research project and *Everyday Mathematics* played a big role in that development."

garden" of math curriculum by removing a lot of the clutter that had accumulated in math instruction over the years, especially at the elementary level. The idea is to teach less stuff but teach it with greater understanding and application.

More recently we've seen an increased emphasis on college and career readiness, and on efforts to improve testing and assessment, such as the Smarter Balanced assessment system and the PARCC assessments.

Since *Everyday Mathematics* was first released, the pendulum has swung back and forth in education policy, but I think we've arrived at a more moderate place today that is somewhere between the more extreme positions.

Can you explain the spiraling curriculum structure of *Everyday Mathematics*, and the thinking behind it?

The development of *Everyday Mathematics* was informed profoundly by the learning sciences and used the guiding principle that instructional materials should be based on evidence and research into how children learn. That was a new and revolutionary idea in the 1980's, when the project first began.



understanding of the spiraling structure, the thinking behind it, and why it works.

Where do you think elementary math education is headed? Are you hopeful about the future of math education?

I'm optimistic, because many of the tools and instructional materials are getting better. Tests and assessments seem to be improving as well. We're making progress, and I'm confident in the future.

If you compare math textbooks from the 1970's and 1980's to today, they are significantly better now than in the past. And I think our research project and *Everyday Mathematics* played a big role in that development.

Change in education happens in two layers. On the ground level there are teachers in the classroom, doing the practical work of teaching. That tends to change very slowly. Above that is the high-level education policy chatter, which changes quickly and often, and is influenced by fads, politicians and pundits, but that seldom has much impact on classroom practice, where education really matters. And so real change is slow and gradual.

Over the next 20 years or so, I think we're going to see a lot of new and exciting ways to use technology to teach math more interactively and more effectively.

I truly believe that math is beautiful, fun, practical and interesting. Getting teachers and students more interested in—and excited about—math is one way to make the world a better place.

I taught fourth grade math in the 1970's, using a very traditional textbook and curriculum. I was always confused as to why my students didn't seem to remember nearly anything from the third grade. And then one year, I moved up to teach fifth grade with my students, and I couldn't believe how little they remembered of what I had taught them from the previous year. I always remembered that experience when I moved on to the University of Chicago to study math instruction and math education. How can we create more permanent learning, instead of focusing on the illusion that is created by short-term performance on tests?

Most instructional materials over the years have been developed through a mix of tradition and a bit of folk psychology, based on what teachers, parents and publishers think makes sense, or by just doing it the way it's always been done. *Everyday Mathematics* was different and didn't follow those traditions. It was instead based on a wealth of research that we studied here at the University of Chicago School Mathematics Project.

The spiraling structure is a perfect illustration. There is a lot of research demonstrating that more authentic, deeper learning and understanding happens when students study a concept, move on to another concept, then revisit the previous one, and continue that pattern. That spiraling approach results in more permanent, long-term learning.

At first that concept was difficult for some educators to understand. But over time, there has been a lot more



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KENNEWICK SCHOOL DISTRICT

Remote Learning Post-Pandemic

How districts are continuing to offer virtual instruction even as most schools return in person.

By Matt Zalaznick

C OVID's spread in classrooms during the first half of this school year and a wave of temporary school closures forced district leaders to rethink their remote learning options.

Remote learning options doubled in just the first several weeks of the 2021-22 school year, according to a poll of 105 large and urban school systems by education think tank the Center on Reinventing Public Education.

Some states have blocked or eliminated funding for remote learning this school year. And many remote learning

programs cannot meet the demand or provide the support services students would normally receive in school, according to the poll.

One challenge is that many states submitted their plans for ESSER spending prior to this summer's delta-variant surge when most educators expected a smooth return to in-person instruction, says Christine Pitts, a resident policy fellow at the Center on Reinventing Public Education, which is based at the University of Washington, Bothell.

"Some of those plans and policies were already outdated, and they're not

servicing the context we are in right now," says Pitts, a former teacher and administrator who worked for a district earlier in the pandemic. "Now, one of the things districts can do is be really transparent about what they're able to offer and how it's accessible."

In the near term, administrators must figure out how to provide robust instruction for students who are infected, in quarantine or at higher risk medically. K-12 leaders will also have to expand on what worked best during the pandemic to provide students with virtual options even after the pandemic subsides, she says.



KENNEWICK SCHOOL DISTRICT

Remote is no longer easier than in-person

In North Carolina, 600 Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools students had enrolled in virtual learning as of mid-August. Over the next few weeks, when the delta variant was tearing through the South, enrollment nearly quadrupled to over 2,300 elementary, middle, and high school students.

At least 29 of the districts surveyed by CRPE set enrollment caps or started waitlists for virtual options. One week into the school year, one large California district only had enough teachers to accommodate a quarter of its virtual learners, CRPE said.

San Antonio ISD this school year launched a virtual K-12 program for 700 homebound students, students with medical vulnerabilities and their siblings, and students who have suffered trauma during the pandemic.

State law bars Texas districts from requiring teachers to teach in-person and online at the same time. San Antonio brought in a third-party provider, Pearson Learning, to provide live, remote instruction.

The district also offers tutoring to further support online students. Administrators have allowed about 130 other students to participate in the virtual program even though they didn't qualify in one of the pre-established categories, Deputy Superintendent Patti Salzmans says.

While the district intends to continue the program in the spring, many families—even some whose children started the year online—have chosen in-person learning, Salzmans says.

"Students who have spent time on campus have said it is safe and we're going to stay," she says. "Our position in the district has been we know some students will succeed online but our data overwhelmingly indicates that it is not good for most of our students either academically or social-emotionally."

And some students have returned to classrooms after realizing that remote learning this school year is just as rigorous as in-person instruction.

"It is not like it was last year when we were more lenient and generous with grading," Salzmans says. "We are really going to expect them to demonstrate sufficient evidence of learning."

How to be flexible for families

In Eastern Washington, the COVID experience convinced Kennewick School District administrators to open an alternative high school-based virtual program to all students in the system.

Endeavor High School allows students to fully enroll online or blend online and in-person instruction. The equivalent of about 155 full-time students are enrolled, Superintendent Traci Pierce says.

The district is now providing options to families wary of COVID's ongoing disruptions and working to prevent students from leaving for other schools or districts that may have more flexible learning alternatives, Pierce says.

Kennewick also added an online component to a K-8 program that allows homeschool families to access district instruction. Homeschool students may take math and English at home but enroll in district P.E. and art courses, she says. "It helps break the mold of it's got to be one-size-fits-all for every student and family," Pierce says. "The last year and a half has really pushed the thinking of districts all across the country."

Endeavor allows students to move at an accelerated pace because their progress is not measured by seat time. The flexibility accommodates parents who can only help students after work and on weekends, says Matt Scott, Kennewick's assistant superintendent of curriculum, assessment and professional development.

Currently, some students have chosen remote learning mainly because of fears of COVID exposure, unwillingness to wear a mask, or other pandemic-related issues. "What we'll expect moving forward is more and more choice based on what a student needs, not what a student is going to be exposed to," Scott says. "More students will engage because it's what works best for their individual learning."

Counselors, principals and other educators at individual schools are expected to be candid with families about the expectations for online learning and the fact that students need the ability to work independently, among other skills, to be successful, Pierce adds. "We've had some families, once they've been in online

learning for a few weeks, realize it isn't a good fit," she says. "So, we've needed to be flexible and adaptable to let families return to their neighborhood school."

Hoping to build and grow

In the same region, the Pasco School District launched the PIXel e-learning academy this fall to provide synchronous online learning for students in K-8.

The state of Washington required schools to have an online option this year, and Pasco Assistant Superintendent Mira Gobel says PIXel is a COVID-era innovation that will be an option for students well into the future.

The approximately 350 students in the academy spend 70-80% of their time participating in live, remote learning with a Pasco Schools teacher who is also at home and uses the district's curriculum.

The rest of the time is devoted to independent work, teacher office hours and other asynchronous activities. The district's vision is for virtual learning to

mirror in-person learning as closely as possible, including the amount of time remote students have to interact with teachers, Gobel says.

The district has developed PIXel so the academy can also accommodate students with IEPs and its dual-language program. Administrators are now working to add "specials" such as art and music.

"Our goal is not stop doing this because COVID goes away—this is something we're hoping to build on and grow as a viable learning option for our students, families and teachers," she says. "We have some teachers who are thriving virtually—they love it."

Ways to demonstrate mastery

The COVID shift to remote instruction—when parents became their children's second teachers—has made families more discerning about how students learn best, says Amy McGrath, chief operating officer of Arizona State University's ASU Preparatory Academy.

ASU Preparatory Academy has seen a sharp increase in demand for its online platform, which district educators can use to build their own hybrid and virtual programs, McGrath says.

"Parents have become savvier since they ran little mini-schools out of their homes," she says. "Parents are going to have expectations for their schools to have flexible options, so it will be very wise of administrators to be thinking about how to spin up different modalities to retain students."

ASU Prep's virtual program, which can be offered through local districts, does not require students to sit in front of their computers for several hours a day. Students conduct experiments in their kitchens or yards or conduct interviews with community members.

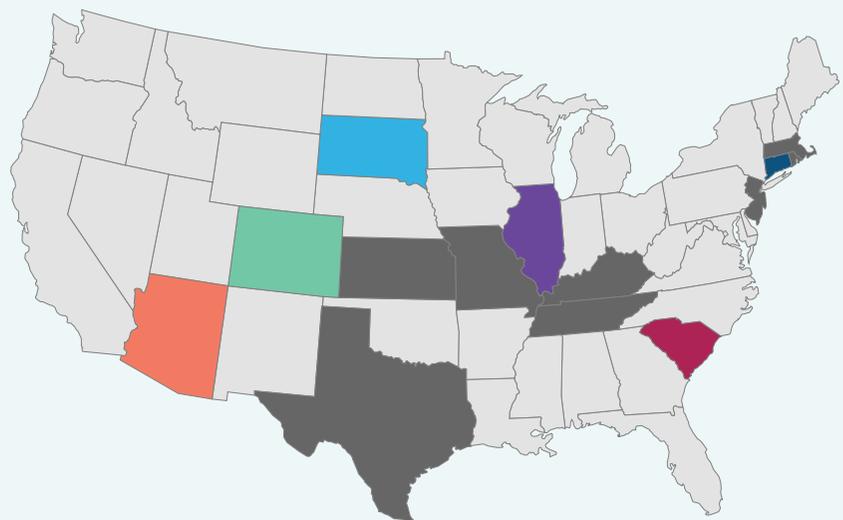
"There are plenty of ways to demonstrate mastery when you're not tied to a computer," McGrath says. **DA**

Matt Zalaznick is DA's senior writer.

How some states support remote learning plans

Eight states—Kansas, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Tennessee and Texas—had restricted remote learning to some degree in 2021-22. Others, however, are offering guidance to school administrators in developing online programs:

- Arizona legislation lets schools offer remote learning, mastery-based education, and night and weekend classes as alternatives to the five-day school week.
- Colorado established standards for online learning programs that cover multiple districts.
- Connecticut requires the state to set standards for remote learning so districts can offer high school remote learning in 2022.
- The Illinois State Board of Education has developed remote learning guidelines that cover instructional time, enrollment and requirements for synchronous instruction.



- South Dakota's guidance for long-term virtual programs urges quality instruction, alignment to state standards and use of certified staff.
- The South Carolina State Board of Education has approved 51 district-operated virtual programs, requiring that teachers are certified, schools provide live instruction, and students actively participate.

Source: Center on Reinventing Public Education.

FETC returns in person in 2022. Here's what you can look forward to

By Jennifer Womble, FETC Program Chair

As we look to next year and beyond, district administrative leaders, educators, IT staff, students, and families will apply what they have learned throughout the pandemic and work together to plan and shape the future of education. After 18 months of disruption, registration for the nation's largest independent education technology show, The Future of Education Technology Conference (FETC) 2022, has gone live with thousands of people having already signed up to the event, January 25-28, 2022 in Orlando, FL. FETC has curated the most informed technology and education experts to discuss everything from emerging tech trends, such as artificial intelligence, digital equity, big data and block chain, to cyber security and the evolving technologies.

Five new thought leadership theaters

In thought-provoking presentations, high-energy featured speakers will prepare educators for the new learning journey by integrating student produced video, game-based learning, and powerful collaboration tools to empower students to stay connected, engaged, and motivated. Five new theaters hosted on the expo floor will focus on STEM, esports, Information Technology, Thought Leadership and Technology Discovery theaters.

Inspiring keynotes

A powerful lineup of inspiring keynotes and mega speakers includes Shawn Achor, Primavera De Filippi, Kari Byron, Dr. Constance Steinkuehler, Ken Shelton and Tom Murray, along with the popular Tech Share LIVE keynote. We designed a conference experience over four days where attendees will be immersed in inspiring content, discovering skills and strategies to cultivate positive energy, creativity, curiosity,



and innovation. Our featured speakers realize the COVID crisis elevated the importance of digital. The pandemic magnified the question of what the future of learning will be in 2022 and beyond. At FETC, sessions will focus on what we know about learning, our students, optimizing technology and the complexity of an unknown future. These speakers will draw from the best of traditional approaches, innovative practices, and insights to instruct participants how to leverage digital technology to engage students in interactive learning experiences solving real life problems. The digital world enables collaboration and communication, new ways to create and share new knowledge, and opportunities to amplify, accelerate and connect learners.

Just in time workshops to build technology skills

From tech giants including Microsoft and Lenovo to specialist education suppliers, a wide range of sponsors and exhibitors will attend. With many teachers eager to sharpen their technology skills and increase student usage going forward, those with a bring-it-on attitude and aim to build on hard-earned technical skills will find over 250 hands-

on workshops to instruct every level of technology user. "FETC provides many connections and new ideas. The amount of knowledge in one conference is astounding. The Expo itself was a whole day of learning for me," says Sarah Horner, Business/Technology Teacher, Abingdon-Avon High School, Ill.

FETC will offer more than 400 sessions and workshops in 5 distinct tracks: Future of Ed Tech Administrator, Future of Ed Tech Educator, Future of Ed Tech Information Technology, Future of Ed Tech Coach and Future of Ed Tech Library Media Specialist. FETC will also spotlight best-selling author and one of the world's leading experts on the connection between happiness and success, Shawn Achor, as the opening keynote of the in-person event. In addition, the Expo Hall will host leading solution providers and give attendees the opportunity to get up close and personal with the most innovative technologies, applications and services available in ed tech today as well as recognize the District Administration EDTECH Top Product Awards 2022.

Registration for the 2022 Future of Education Technology Conference is open. For more information, visit www.FETC.org.

This FETC speaker wants us to capitalize on post-COVID ed tech opportunities

Education's immediate future requires taking full advantage of what worked during the pandemic as educators also guide students in regaining a sense of normalcy.

By Matt Zalaznick

Education's immediate future requires a balancing act: Taking full advantage of what worked during the pandemic as educators also guide students in reacclimating to their classroom routines.

That's the driving philosophy behind the wisdom that Adam Phyll—the director of technology and media services for Georgia's Newton County School System in Covington—plans to share as a featured speaker on the Future of Ed Tech Educators Track at the Future of Education Technology® Conference 2022 in January.

"We have to try to find a happy place where we can incorporate the new skills we've learned into the 'back to normal,'" says Phyll, a former

classroom teacher. "How we can take the issues that worked well, such as connectivity and getting students devices, how do we take that and strike while the iron is hot in teaching and learning?"

One example of this concept is expanding opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery by showing their creativity with emerging ed-tech tools and platforms. It's becoming critical for students to learn to create content and understand what it means to share content online, Phyll says.

Federal COVID relief funds should smooth the way for this transition as virtually every district can afford to go 1-to-1 with devices. "We've been looking for ways to leverage existing tools kids are familiar with," he says. "During the shutdown, so much original content was created—Tik Tok really took off."

Another important mindset to maintain from the COVID experience is a willingness to experiment and adjust as the needs of learners and teachers evolve. This will allow learning to continue in the face of future crises, such as hurricanes, wildfires and other natural disasters.

"Now we know we can change things and it's not going to be the end of the world," Phyll says. "We have to keep that 'willing to fail' mentality because one of the things I've come to grips with is this isn't going to be the last time we have to shut things down for something."

Educators should also be thinking about how students and families can use ubiquitous tools such as smartphones for learning. Students,



of course, can just as easily create and post videos from an iPhone as they can with a tablet or laptop.

During the pandemic, many ed-tech vendors made their platforms and products available to schools for free. Administrators now deciding how to spend relief funds will have to examine their data to see which tools worked best for student learning, he says.

Beyond the pandemic, educators have to help students reckon with the other historic moments of the past 18 months and beyond, including the #MeToo movement, the Black Lives Matter protests, and the fallout from the 2020 election, Phyll notes.

"We've been focused on COVID but we've also had a social awakening," Phyll says. "Our students want to have a voice and they want to talk about George Floyd and what happened on Jan. 6. We need to give them a platform and the skills to express themselves because they're doing it whether they're inside or outside school."

FETC Live 2022

The Future of Education Technology® Conference takes place live and in-person Jan. 25-28, 2022, in Orlando. Register at fetc.org.

Hot topics in the Future of Ed Tech Educators Track include:

- AR/VR/mixed reality tools
- Artificial intelligence
- Equity, access and achievement gaps
- Computer science & coding
- e-sports and game-based learning
- Instructional design
- Online and distance learning strategies
- Makerspaces and robotics
- Personalized learning
- Telehealth/mental health

Playful and purposeful learning

FETC speaker John Meehan will share how to take learning, not ourselves, seriously.

Students, undaunted by the virtual challenge, fail for hours on end during marathon sessions of playing Minecraft, Fortnite and other immersive video games.

However, they get a few questions wrong in an algebra class in which they succeed more often than not, and they decide they are not good at math.

Gamification, play and fun are how English teacher and instructional coach John Meehan is solving this problem of engagement in his and his colleagues' classrooms at Bishop O'Connell High School in Arlington, Virginia.

"We have to figure out what excites students and try to harness those things to create more dynamic, purposeful and playful lesson plans for our classrooms," says Meehan, who is a featured speaker on the EdTech Coaches Track at Future of Education Technology® Conference 2022.

"You're looking for action-packed teaching strategies that get students up and moving out of their seats," he says.

Meehan went viral in 2019 with a video of his Egg Dash Challenge, in which teams of students scramble to solve problems written on slips of paper concealed inside plastic Easter eggs.

"We as educators do have to take learning very seriously but we don't

have to take ourselves so seriously," Meehan says.

In his FETC talk, Meehan will describe some of those "action-packed teaching strategies" as detailed in his latest book, *Fully Engaged: Playful Pedagogy for Real Results*. Here's an overview of the concepts he will cover:

1. Game design: It starts with the motivational psychology behind how great games are designed and how to adapt those elements into classroom learning activities.

2. Transforming instruction: Game design concepts will guide teachers into transforming instruction into something that looks feel more like "the kind of learning students are doing outside of school for hours and hours," he says.

3. Innovative examples: Students can find the answers to a low-level, "gotcha" quiz about *The Great Gatsby* on YouTube to "convince" a teacher they've done the required reading. Instead, a teacher could play a 1920s jazz recording in the classroom and divide the students into small groups of flappers, mobsters, stockbrokers and other characters from the novel. Lessons could proceed like a game of Clue, with students revealing new details about the story.

By Matt Zalaznick



Or the discussion could proceed like a Dungeons & Dragons campaign, in which students read up to a point in the novel and then decide what course of action the characters should take next. The students would use evidence from the novel to defend their ideas.

4. Centering students in their learning: These types of engaging playful lessons naturally put students at the center of the pedagogy. This empowers them with feelings of being able to control their own learning, similar to what they experience playing video games, Meehan says. In turn, that mindset will allow students to risk feeling vulnerable to take chances. "Brains are hard-wired for novelty," Meehan says.

5. Is homework outdated? Very little is revealed about students' learning after two weeks' worth of homework followed by a big unit test. For one, it's easy for students to copy, cheat or find other shortcuts to complete the homework, which leaves them unprepared for the test and produces grades that might not reflect how much they have actually learned.

The Future of Education Technology Conference takes place live and in person Jan. 25-28, 2022, in Orlando.



The rising importance of library leaders in K-12 schools

FETC featured speaker Shannon McClintock Miller will lead discussions on collaboration, choice boards and leadership.

By Chris Burt

The Future of Education Technology Conference (FETC) in January features five tracks for attendees, and one that is generating a lot of interest is Library Media Specialist.

Few roles in school districts have become more dynamic, more hands-on and more vital than that of the librarian since the COVID-19 pandemic struck in March 2020. These leaders have shown unmatched flexibility in support of teachers and administrators, whether it's planning, providing digital solutions, assisting with technology or helping with instruction.

Their innovative approaches and positive attitudes have lifted the spirits of educators and families during the crisis, keeping students engaged while providing the spaces and tools, in-person and online, to help them achieve their goals.

Shannon McClintock Miller has been at the forefront of the librarian power shift, as both the Innovation Director of Instructional Technology and Library Media at Van Meter Community School District in Iowa and as an advocate for others through her work with Future Ready Librarians. An author of 12 books, including one with former ISTE president Bill Bass called *Lead from the Library*, Miller is again one of the featured speakers at FETC (Jan. 25-28, 2022 at the Orlando Convention Center). She will lead seven sessions, including a kickoff summit with librarians as well as an orientation with Dr. Roslyn Washington, the Digital Learning Specialist of Literacy at Atlanta Public Schools.

"I've presented so many times online and it's rewarding and fun, but I'm ready to see people and learn from others about all the great things that they have learned," Miller said of FETC, which will be live for the first time since

2020. "In so many schools, the librarians were the heroes. They were the ones who found ways to be those leaders in the digital space, the community space, that connection to parents and building communities, whether we were at school or online. That was so inspiring to see."

Her overarching message will be one of continued empowerment for librarians—from serving as resources on everyday tasks to being collaborative forces that can bring together a school community. One of her sessions, *Sharing Your Story, Creating a Brand and Advocating For Your Library*, will offer librarians strategies to bring their own "library stories to life."

"This is our time to shine," Miller said. "We have this huge opportunity, and that's gonna stick. Librarians are going to be seen in that leadership role. And not just being a leader within your library around literacy and a love of reading, but also integrating innovative ways through technology, through different ways of learning and through things we give our kids, like virtual field trips or connecting with an author or reading online."

Miller plans to tackle a range of other topics in those sessions, including one with Bass, now Innovation Coordinator at Parkway School District in St. Louis, on digital-age mentorship and guidance for teachers and librarians. Miller also plans to address the power of collaboration, which can "enhance learning, creativity and student voice, and develop empathy and kindness."

Two sessions that can't be missed for those looking to gain unique and fun ideas to bring back to their schools are these two-hour workshops:

- *Let's Bring Literacy To Life Through Making and Technology!*, which will dive deep into Makerspaces,



SHANNON MCCLINTOCK MILLER

digital tools and apps that can be used along with picture books and chapter books to create unique projects, and

- One of Miller's specialties: Choice Boards, Curation, Creation, Collaboration, Sharing and More! She has been one of the champions of choice boards and plans to show participants how to get the most out of them.

And there will be the opening four-hour Library Media Specialist Summit, in partnership with Future Ready Schools, which will provide an opportunity for librarians to network and learn how collaboration can be the linchpin that drives positive outcomes in schools.

"This year was a big moment for all of these light bulbs to go off throughout the school because of collaboration," Miller said. "At Van Meter, we've been 1:1 for a long time. But by the end of the year, I felt like I had raised all these little librarians, because the teachers, they understood. They were taking on digital tools by themselves. Those are the skills that we want our teachers to latch onto to be successful."

The Future of Education Technology® Conference takes place live and in-person Jan. 25-28, 2022, in Orlando.



Dear education leader,

I am pleased to present this year's Solution Showcase.

The Solution Showcase brings together the latest K-12 education products and service solutions in one easy-to-use section. This year's collection includes 50 entries from solution providers. Their innovative products have been developed in response to needs expressed by school districts across the U.S.

DA is pleased to work with these solution providers to showcase the most effective and cutting-edge products and services.

We look forward to your feedback on our Solution Showcase and I hope you will let us know if there are any products you would like to see included next year.

Sincerely,
Eric Weiss
Executive Editor

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ADMINISTRATIVE SOFTWARE

AllHere Conversational AI Chatbot AllHere

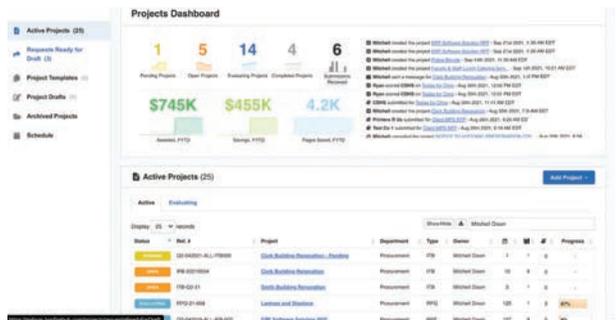
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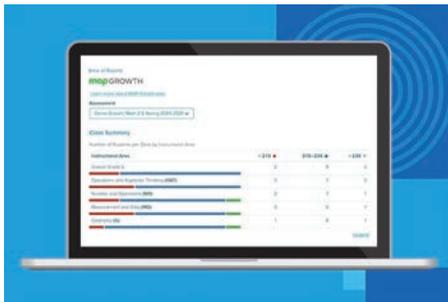


PHONAK

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CURRICULUM & INSTRUCTIONAL TOOLS

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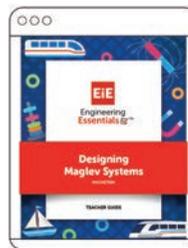


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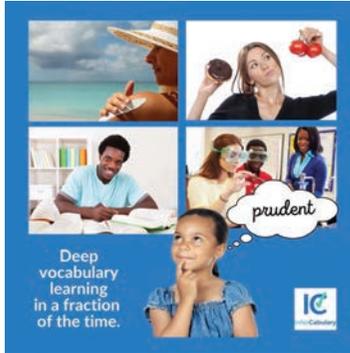


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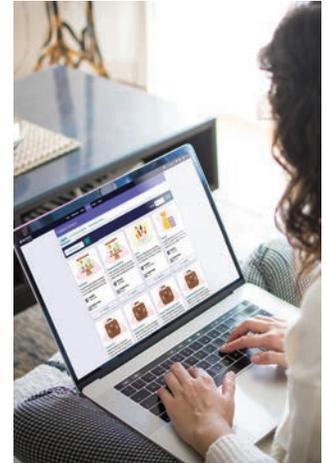
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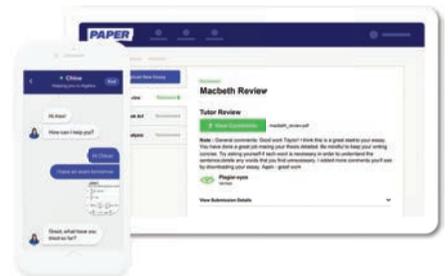
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ML2000 Series Mortise Lock Status Indicators

SARGENT Manufacturing

SARGENT's 8200 Series status indicators feature a unique and highly visible viewing window that allows users to easily and clearly see if a room is vacant or occupied. Available for use with a variety of functions in multiple colors and languages, the mortise lock status indicators are versatile for any application.



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sargentlock.com/8200indicator



HYGIENE & SANITIZATION

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nanotouch.com



HYGIENE & SANITIZATION CONTINUED ►



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cisco.com/go/education



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caselogic.com/en-us/products



HYGIENE & SANITIZATION • IT SOLUTIONS • LEARNING SPACES • PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT • SEL & MENTAL HEALTH

LEARNING SPACES

School Specialty's Learning Spaces School Specialty

School Specialty aims to support schools as they abide by CDC and local guidelines to keep both students and teachers safe. The company focuses on maintaining connection, choice, and stimulation for students, assuring a smooth transition back to the basics of learning.



schoolspecialty.com



OTIS for Educators

OTIS for Educators is an online professional learning platform with courses on how to effectively integrate technology into instruction. The state-approved, on-demand PD library and live sessions make it easy to access hundreds of courses. We are a Google for Education partner, Microsoft Training Partner, and ISTE Standards-aligned.



otispd.com



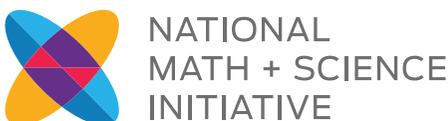
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

NMSI 365 NMSI

Based on more than a decade of experience, the National Math and Science Initiative offers a holistic, Prek-12+ suite of services that empower success for all program participants, especially students furthest from opportunity. Our NMSI 365 model includes teacher training, student supports, administrative supports and program management.



nms.org/our-programs.aspx



DistrictAdministration.com

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING & MENTAL HEALTH

SELECT 7 Mindsets

The 7 Mindsets research-based SEL program provides in-person and virtual PK-12 and adult curriculum including lessons and activities, coaching, implementation support, and professional development. The 7 Mindsets program nurtures the mindsets of both students and educators, focusing on attitudes and perspectives providing the foundation for better decision making.



7mindsets.com



SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING & MENTAL HEALTH CONTINUED ►



Move This World PreK-12 SEL Programs Move This World

Move This World is the leading provider of social emotional learning multimedia experiences for PreK-12 students, educators, and families, providing a robust and engaging evidence-based curriculum rooted in creative expression and participatory movement. Move This World has already impacted the lives of over two million students across 42 states.

movethisworld.com



Suite360 Social-Emotional Learning and Restorative Curriculum Navigate360

Suite360 is a digital Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) program helping students succeed academically, emotionally and socially. The curriculum provides students with age-appropriate lessons scaffolded by grade. The content is rooted in the five CASEL competencies and offers lessons to maintain mental health and wellbeing.

tinyurl.com/uptn9p2b



Navigate360

Navigate360 GPS: Guide to Preventing Suicide Navigate360

A holistic suicide prevention program with a balanced approach between education, compassion and technology. Developed in partnership with a leading suicide awareness & prevention expert, the curriculum and case management software helps schools improve student outcomes with comprehensive suicide awareness & risk screening solutions.

tinyurl.com/45msr7wd



Navigate360

Project Truancy and Project Behavior Project Education



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PROJECT EDUCATION

Districts need the right data tools to help teachers and parents both communicate and identify students whom may be at risk. That's why Project Education developed the only fully customizable, web-based platform that goes beyond compliance to help students get the resources they need to adapt and thrive.

projecteducation.net

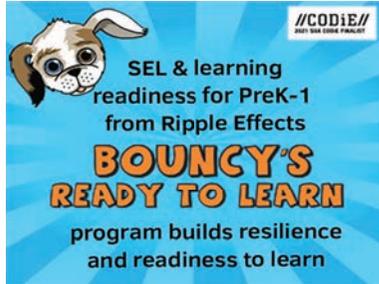
PROJECT EDUCATION

SEL & MENTAL HEALTH • STAFFING • STEM, ROBOTICS, CODING

Bouncy Ready to Learn Resilience System

Ripple Effects, Inc.

Bouncy Ready to Learn's set of physical/online materials deliver a character-driven, play-based approach to building resilience and readiness to learn for all children, grades Pre-K-2. It helps different children in different ways with comfort, caring, and play-based skill training. Bouncy is especially valuable for kids facing adversity.



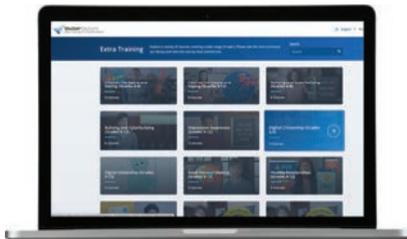
bouncykids.net



Vector Training Student Safety & Wellness Courses

Vector Solutions

Engaging video modules cover safety, wellness, and social-emotional learning topics. Customized



for grades 6-8 and 9-12, topics include: Bullying & Cyberbullying, Youth Suicide, Alcohol, Vaping & Drugs, Sexual Harassment, Digital Citizenship, Stress & Anxiety, Depression, Healthy Relationships, Good Decision Making, and more. Lesson plans included.

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STEM, ROBOTICS, CODING

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carolinayounginnovators.com



STEM, ROBOTICS, CODING CONTINUED ►



Root rt1 Coding Robot
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How to close relationship gaps during COVID for stronger school communities

It's imperative to address these new relationship gaps in order to start closing the learning gaps that the pandemic has widened. The two are inextricably linked.

Brian Grey, DA guest columnist

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound effect on student learning, and now the delta variant threatens a potential return to normalcy. With record outbreaks already occurring in schools across the country, the year suddenly looks like it could be more challenging than anticipated.

Although it's understandable to fear what might happen, we have the potential opportunity to improve our systems—not just for this year or to “make it through” COVID, but for the entire educational ecosystem moving forward. Right now, the opportunity exists to change our approach to communication between teachers, students, and families.

With the right tools in place, we can forge stronger connections and relationships to help close the gaps that have emerged since the pandemic began and embark on a new phase of what it means to be a community.

Relationship gaps and why they matter

It should go without saying that teachers and school staff have a tremendous impact on student success. A study conducted by Rand showed that “teachers are estimated to have two to three times the effect of any other school factor, including services, facilities, and even leadership.” Teachers serve as early role models and mentors, and the connections they form with students can shape a child's future.

But over the course of the pandemic, such foundational relationships have suffered: Attendance rates and enrollment numbers have plummeted, while

schools across the country worry about a surge in dropouts. And with these new relationship gaps have come not only academic setbacks but an alarming increase in youth suicides and episodes of self-harm—with the groups already most at risk for mental health concerns, including Black and LGBTQ students, more likely to be affected.

Students rely on connections to support their well-being, and social-emotional support is necessary for learning. From this perspective, it's imperative to address these new relationship gaps in order to start closing the learning gaps that the pandemic has widened. The two are inextricably linked.

The role of technology

Video instruction and email newsletters may open a line of communication, but it's time to reassess how we use technology in the mission to keep students engaged in school. When it comes to communication, simple is better—and something as seemingly basic as SMS text messaging can provide an immediate and effective way to reach kids and families at risk of falling away from their school communities.

Despite income inequalities, 97% of Americans own a cell phone, which means they can send and receive texts even if they don't have internet access or a data plan. Services can even automatically translate texts so English learners can communicate with teachers in their home language.

At the same time, the technology now exists to give school administrators

oversight over text communication without requiring them to continually monitor messages. Texts can also be exchanged while maintaining the privacy of user information to protect teachers, students, and parents while still providing the means to connect in a meaningful way.

And then there's the immediacy required to keep students and families informed and engaged in a rapidly changing environment. The average open rate for a text message is 98%, significantly higher than email, and most texts are opened within three minutes of receipt—a game-changer for communicating not only COVID-related updates but emergencies like dangerous weather conditions and school closures.

The road ahead

The situation we face today is daunting, but we have a real opportunity to narrow the relationship gaps that have emerged during the pandemic. If we recognize the importance of fostering the connections that students need to succeed—and the potential of simple, powerful communication technologies that are often overlooked—we can continue to address COVID's impact and set our communities on a course for future success. **DA**

Brian Grey is the Executive Chairman of Remind.com, the largest network of teachers, students, parents, and administrators in the U.S. Previously Brian held several leadership roles in the technology and sports media sectors, including serving as CEO of Bleacher Report, SVP/GM of Fox Sports Interactive, and VP/GM of Yahoo! Sports.



How Austin ISD uses technology to manage a 10x increase in questions during back-to-school

Leveraging the texting feature within a broader communications platform helped the district efficiently respond to a deluge of questions.

By Darla Caughey

We've entered another school year of uncertainty and adjustment due to the continuing COVID-19 pandemic, yet—in many ways—this year is no different than last. Just like 2020, there's an endless array of questions, concerns, and suggestions from our community as we return to school.

In talking with my education colleagues, the challenge is clear: School districts across the country are fielding, on average, triple the number of questions and concerns.

The influx of back-to-school inquiries can easily become unwieldy—especially in Austin ISD, where we have around 74,000 students, over 16,000 teachers and staff, and 130 schools. During last year's back-to-school season, for example, Austin ISD managed a 10-times increase in inbound communications. Everyone from students and parents to teachers and principals had critical input to share or questions that needed to be answered.

Keeping the lines of communication open between our families and schools has always been one of our top priorities. Families have an array of choices for education and, by ensuring a positive customer experience at Austin ISD, we can retain our students, families and funding.

Managing a remarkable uptick in inbound communications is no small feat and I'm proud of our staff for

collaborating to ensure our community has the answers they need—even when school buildings were closed. We didn't achieve this alone. At Austin ISD, we use Let's Talk!, a platform by K12 Insight that streamlines inbound communications.

Let's Talk! improves staff productivity by automatically routing inquiries to the appropriate team or department and removing communication silos. The unified system gives our staff a central location to collaborate—even when we made the shift to a virtual work-from-home environment—which eliminates competing or duplicative responses. We even have in-platform response templates for frequently asked questions and workflows that make it even faster for us to respond to our community.

Information silos are common within school districts, but not at Austin ISD. We know trapped information doesn't help anyone, especially not when teachers and staff are working overtime to respond to parents' questions and concerns.

We've also made strides when it comes to equity—improving accessibility, increasing engagement, and building trusting relationships across our diverse communities. Nearly 30 percent of our students are English Language Learners. To ensure their families as well as the entire community are comfortable communicating with us, our Let's Talk! form is translated into Arabic, Spanish, Vietnam-

ese, Burmese, Kinyarwanda, Swahili, Dari and Pashto.

It's also important to remember not every family has access to technology or reliable internet, and it's important to meet families where they are. Last summer, we introduced the ability for community members to reach out to Austin ISD or any of our schools via text message using the Let's Talk! texting feature.

The addition of texting has dramatically streamlined key processes—such as laptop and device distribution during back-to-school—while providing families with another way to reach out that is both comfortable and familiar. Plus, our staff can still collaborate within Let's Talk! to deliver a single, timely text message response.

There is no doubt your school community has questions—and lots of them. It's critical that students, families, teachers, staff, and your greater community have an easy way to reach out and get a timely response while ensuring already overwhelmed staff are not bogged down in replies. By using the best technology available, Austin ISD is effectively connecting with and reassuring our school community while improving our high standards of customer service. **DA**

Darla Caughey is the Associate Director of Customer Service, Employee Recognition, and Support at Austin Independent School District in Texas. She previously served as Austin ISD's Social and Emotional Learning Specialist and as an art educator.

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