PORTRAIT OF A LEADER

Excellence and equity

Balancing high performance while working to erase legacies of segregation **29**

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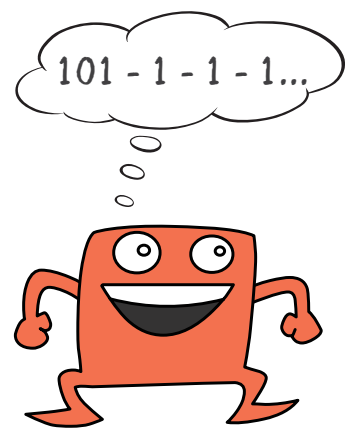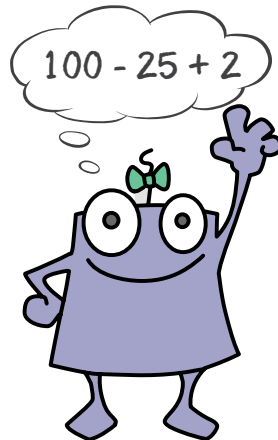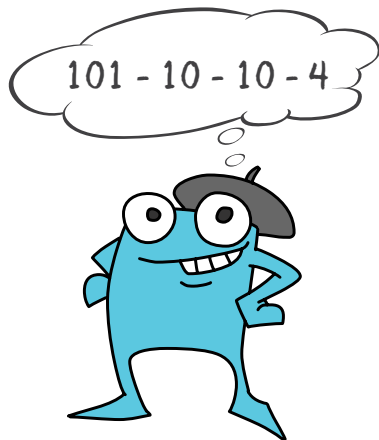
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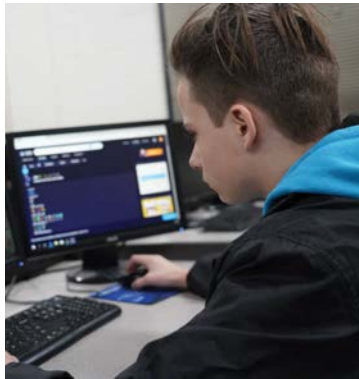
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How big districts dive into esports

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Here's how K-12 districts are supplying tech essentials and diversifying esports.

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Guiding education's air traffic controllers

Former Superintendent Ann Clark stresses the importance of purpose and collaboration for CAOs

Ann Clark, featured speaker at a recent District Administration Leadership Institute CAO Summit, learned plenty of lessons in leadership during her 35-year education career as a superintendent and chief academic officer. Clark served as CAO on her way to becoming superintendent of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in North Carolina, and considers the position the linchpin of any district.

"I refer to the chief academic officer as the air traffic controller for school districts," says Clark, who is now an executive leadership coach for The Broad Center and superintendent-in-residence at the New York City Leadership Academy. "They have to help people from all the departments see the need for alignment of initiatives in order for the student experience to be what is envisioned."

How does a CAO achieve alignment?
The chief academic officer leads the core business for a K-12 public school system, and that carries a huge responsibility. One of the keys to the role is the ability to work collaboratively with other members of the leadership team.

There needs to be an aligned, cohesive message from the district about what the instructional priorities are. If the CAO is not working collaboratively, the messages that arrive at the schoolhouse for building-level leaders and classroom teachers are confusing.

What big challenges do CAOs face?
So many districts are focused on early literacy skills and reading on grade level by third grade. Many districts are also focused on narrowing the achievement gap between different subgroups of students. And there's a huge focus on effective strategies for working with English language learners and students with special needs.

So how does a chief academic officer shape a vision that supports our gifted students, our special needs students and our English language learners? How do you deliver instruction in a very personalized way, and how do you support classroom teachers with the professional development they'll need to meet the needs of the students who are in front of them every day?

You also work with principals. What are their main leadership concerns?
A huge focus has been on meeting the social-emotional needs of students, and making sure that doesn't become one more initiative on the pile, but is integrated into teaching students every day. I'm also involved in equipping principals to support teachers in integrating the social-emotional needs of students

into the daily fabric, in and out of the classroom. Certainly, there's also a huge national focus on creating a safe, secure learning environment. Lots of principals are interested in knowing best practices for focusing on school climate, and how to recruit, retain and coach highly effective teachers.

You're also focused on teacher shortages. How are you helping school leaders tackle this problem?
Across the country, we're faced with fewer and fewer high school students going into college thinking they might pick a career in teaching. I'm working with school districts and superintendents to think about how they can build a talent pipeline, so as they're recruiting, they can show teachers all the possible pathways they can have over a 30-year career.

Teachers should think about taking on mentoring roles, becoming a coach or facilitator, and becoming a principal and moving into the central office.

I also think it's on the school districts to find ways to put the career of teaching in front of their middle and high school students. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, for example, has started an early college high school for teaching. This is something that could be done in any state in the U.S. **DA**

Matt Zalaznick is senior writer.

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Whole-child education powers healthy society

Former Superintendent Jonathan Raymond examines the importance of "equity is empathy"

Former Sacramento City USD Superintendent Jonathan Raymond doesn't put too much weight on whole-child education: just the enduring health of America's democratic society.

Raymond, now an education leadership consultant, made his case for meeting the needs of each unique learner in his book, Wildflowers: A School Superintendent's Challenge to America (Stuart Foundation, 2018). *His "Equity is Empathy" workshops at District Administration Leadership Institute's Chief Academic Officer Summits have encouraged educators to take each child's learning style into account in designing instruction.*

What are the key tenets of your approach to whole-child education?
Whole-child education educates young people's heads, hands and hearts.

It's really important that young people learn critical thinking, are creative, can advocate for themselves, can work well together in teams, and can take control of their ability to learn.

And it's really important that they can see, feel and touch what they're learning so that it's real and has meaning in their lives; so that it can help them face the challenges that exist in

their communities and in society as a whole; and so that it prepares them to help advance our democratic institutions and humanity.

How can CAOs follow the "equity is empathy" philosophy in their work?
When we're empathetic, we recognize that the best way to ensure that our young people have a sense of empathy and compassion is to educate them holistically. For some children, it's about having really challenging college and career pathways and academies. For others, it's ensuring that we have art and music in our schools. And for others, it's making sure that they have access to good college and life counseling.

It's about asking the question: "What does every child need to be most successful?"

What improvements can CAOs learn to make in their districts?
I try to enlighten them by saying this work is both external, by leading organizations, and it's internal. To do this work really well, some things need to shift inside, and that's being really clear about "What's your purpose?"' and "Why are you in this work?"

It's about asking if we, as leaders, are creating a shared vision about the changes that need to be made. And it's about having a daily ritual or practice that helps us stay focused on those

things that are moving us toward our vision and purpose.

I provide some simple tools to help them become better team leaders and listeners, and to create learning organizations that are able to think systematically but are designed locally.

What are some other ideas that would inspire educators?
So much of this work really is about asking questions. I like to use the traditional Masai greeting: "And how are the children?" It shows what they value most as a culture and a society.

For my work, it's returning to the time when progressive educators such as John Dewey, Maria Montessori and Rudolf Steiner understood how children learn and how their brain develops. They understood that education was for a much bigger purpose—that it was to prepare young people to be the next generation of stewards of democracy and society.

It ultimately starts with a question such as: "How is this good for kids?" I often say to folks I'm working with: "Imagine if we started every school board meeting with that question. Imagine if a superintendent started every cabinet meeting with that question." If we did, I think we'd be at a different place. **DA**

Matt Zalaznick is senior writer.

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The esports coach at Sedro-Woolley High School north of Seattle also teaches math based on video games in the classroom. Leveraging his students' passion for fantasy battle game League of Legends, teacher Jason Dilley's esports curriculum tasks his players with understanding the numbers behind the virtual action.

"You build weapons and armor within the game to improve your character," says Dilley, whose school is a part of the Sedro-Woolley School District. "They're learning how to gather good data, how to analyze data, and how to make histograms so they can test which weapons do the most damage in 10 seconds."

These video games and being part of a team, are helping students become more engaged in school and develop some critical soft skills, Dilley says.

"Gaming has a lot of negative stigmas, and some of those stigmas have some merit," he says. "When kids play games at home by themselves, they see negative behavior, internalize that and take it out into the world. When you have responsible adults in the room, they are teaching kids that these things are bad."

A free esports curriculum
The California-based North America Scholastic Esports Federation, formerly known as the Orange County Esports League, has developed an extensive (and free) esports curriculum.

The program, which integrates video games with several core subjects, focuses heavily on the many career paths in the rapidly expanding esports industry, says Tom Turner, the federation's chief education officer.

Video games and education start

CAREER PREP—The North America Scholastic Esports Federation's esports curriculum can be integrated into all core subjects to help students envision careers in the video-gaming industry.

with English language arts, where students can examine the narrative elements of games by reading books such as *Ready Player One* and *Ender's Game*, and then coming up with their own characters, plots and adventures.

In a bridge from ELA to career and technical education, students can begin writing a business plan for an esports team while also learning how to organize a team, develop a marketing campaign and create branding.

The esports curriculum can be used to develop an entire course or a two-week module in another class, says Turner, who's also the executive director of the Educational Services Division for the Orange County Department of Education.

And any of these academic topics can be taught to students after school of during club and team meetings.

"You may have 55 kids who want to participate, but only five can play on the team," Turner says. "You can keep the other 50 engaged by offering leadership opportunities."

'Happy, excited and doing well'
When teacher John Robertson won his first grant to start an esports team at Tipton High School in Indiana, some educators weren't convinced, he says.

"Some teachers did not think video gaming should be in school, but we've won them over because we're using it in a positive way," says Robertson, whose school is a part of the Tipton Community School Corp. "Screen time is not necessarily bad if it's used for a bigger and better cause."

In fact, the video games in the classrooms have become learning resources. For instance, in Forza Motorsport, students can repair cars. And during the upcoming semester, Robertson will teach a class on the literature and history of video games.

During play, students are also learning better gaming habits. "It can be a tough sell to say we're playing video games in the classroom," Robertson says. "But the kids are going to play games, so why not have them do it under the guidance of teachers who can show them how to be good citizens while they're doing it."

More broadly, students who were failing courses and missing school frequently have joined the team, and now have a renewed and powerful reason to improve their grades and attendance records.

"Their school spirit is on the rise because they don't feel like school is just a place to come and get homework every day," Robertson says. "It's so good to see kids who never had joy at school become all of a sudden happy and excited to be here and doing well in their classes."

—*Matt Zalaznick*

5 strategies to promote learning for students with disabilities

Students need to be able to adapt and respond to changes brought about by globalization, technology and automation to compete for the jobs of the future.

To succeed, students with disabilities will need to learn the same life skills—critical thinking, collaboration, problem-solving and self-advocacy—that their peers will need, says Lindsay Jones, CEO and president of the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD).

"Students with disabilities enter the same world as everyone," Jones says. "Their education has to include those same concepts. They cannot be segregated in separate classrooms where they don't get that opportunity."

NCLD and the Alliance for Excellence in Education recently hosted a panel discussion on designing learning opportunities with greater equity and inclusion in mind.

"We have come such a long way, but at the same time, we have to think about how education and the world are changing," says Ace Parsi, NCLD's director of innovation. The skills that students need to compete in the world have changed significantly from those needed when the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act was first authorized, he said.

To understand how learning can be designed more inclusively, NCLD asked 10 charter schools to discuss key classroom strategies for students with disabilities.

Here are five key practices identified in NCLD's report: (DAmag.me/ncld)

1. Expanded student voice, choice Districts can use Section 504 and IEP team meetings to empower students' voice and choice. Don't use IEP and transition meetings just as a bureaucratic exercise, Parsi says. Instead, build students' skills and dispositions through these processes. Use students' interests to drive learning and instruction.

2. Powerful, engaging instruction
Some students with disabilities will need explicit instruction, Parsi says. For instance, a student with executive functioning issues might have challenges organizing information; or a student with an emotional and behavioral disorder might approach collaboration in a different way. "We need to prepare our students for that reality," Parsi says.

3. Comprehensive interventions, supports
Destigmatize supports and incorporate them into response to intervention and multitiered systems of support, the NCLD writes in its report. Also, consider building small-group time into the schedule so students can practice collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Consider how to intervene and plan for interventions if students are not meeting the skills that they need.

4. Holistic measurement
Consider how assessments can be developed with principles of universal design for learning. Also consider how IEPs will measure new skills, Parsi says. Create a rubric for key skills such as self-advocacy, self-determination, collaboration, and critical thinking within students' IEP goals, the report recommends.

5. Empowering culture
Facilitate a growth mindset culture in which students see learning as a process not an end, the report states. "We need to make sure we have an inclusive culture," Parsi says.   —*Jennifer Herseim*

Districts work to accommodate twice-exceptional students

As special education needs continue to increase, a challenge for district leaders is identifying and managing accommodations and supports for academically gifted students who have learning difficulties, also known as twice-exceptional (2E) students.

It's not that educators don't want to help these students; it's that some might not even be aware that they exist, says Amy Slater, author of *Educating Twice-Exceptional Students in Compliance With IDEA and Section 504* (Damag.me/2estudents) from LRP Publications, which also publishes DA.

"Picture it as a Venn diagram," says Slater. "You have students with disabilities on one side and gifted students on the other, and the area in between is the twice-exceptional students."

With a wide range of disabilities in schools, Slater reminds educators that a special ed designation doesn't always mean an intellectual disability. For example, anxiety and ADHD may require accommodations but neither is classified as an intellectual disability. Thus, an academically successful student may also qualify for special ed.

Determining eligibility

When it comes to 2E students, educators need to be aware of Child Find requirements, eligibility determination and implementation of supports.

Most districts are already well versed in federal Child Find mandates, so the question becomes when does a gifted student with special ed needs get those supports and services, says Slater. For example, does a team need to consider the student's grades or their potential, which means considering issues such as overall education performance. Performance standards vary by state, so educators need to be familiar with local criteria.

Determining eligibility for 2E students can be tricky, says Slater. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a student qualifies for special ed if they have a disability that has been identified.

For example, a kindergartner may excel academically but can't talk without stuttering, so the eligibility team may decide that the student has an impairment that requires special ed in terms of academic interventions, and the student could be eligible for IDEA services.

State-by-state definitions for education performance and how it relates to special ed and related services vary, adds Slater.

Removing barriers to support

In regard to assessing and supporting 2E students, Slater offers a few best practices, including:

• Review Child Find qualifications with relevant staff members.

• Conduct periodic training on 2E students and Child Find requirements in general.

• Make sure evaluators are knowledgeable about 2E students because gifted abilities might mask disabilities, and vice versa.

Educators also should be aware of the potential signs of disability in gifted students (see sidebar).

When it comes to potential barriers to implementation of supports, Slater says teachers in gifted and accelerated classes may not be familiar with IEPs or Section 504 programs.

Ultimately, leaders need to remind staff of the district's obligations, and ensure that educators know they can't pick and choose what services 2E students should receive. Even if a teacher thinks it's unnecessary, they have to make that service or accommodation available, says Slater.

"There seems to be this mindset with some educators that if you're gifted, you can't have a disability," says Slater. "You can't just assume that a gifted student doesn't have a disability. Even if they perform well, there may be other factors involved."

—Ray Bendici

POTENTIAL SIGNS OF A DISABILITY IN GIFTED STUDENTS

Here are some behaviors in gifted students that could signal a need for special ed services, according to Amy Slater, author of *Educating Twice-Exceptional Students in Compliance With IDEA and Section 504*:

• difficulty with attention or focus
• difficulty with a specific subject or curriculum area
• frequent absences
• missing or incomplete assignments
• fidgeting, repetitive movements or difficulty staying still
• difficulty with transitions
• difficulty with social interaction
• behavioral outbursts
• frequent disciplinary offenses
• acts of self-harm

BeyondtheNews

Cutting into dissection alternatives piques students' interest

Faced with a lack of school lab space and a need for more in-depth medical imaging, district leaders and science educators have been seeking alternatives to real animal dissections in class.

Synthetic frogs and digital dissection tables are among the options that also help to accommodate students who opt out of dissecting real animals for ethical or religious reasons.

To maintain the physical interactivity with a dissection specimen, SynDaver Labs, a manufacturer of synthetic human and animal models, recently debuted a synthetic frog to replace the use of deceased, preserved frogs in classrooms. Last fall, nearly 100 SynFrogs were provided for students at Pasco County School District's J.W. Mitchell High School in Florida, thanks in part to funding from the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals.

Similar to a preserved frog, students can cut into a synthetic frog, experience the visual features and textures of the specimen, and extract organs and bones.

The current cost of $150 per frog might be a deterrent for districts when actual frogs only cost around $10 each. However, the specimen can be "restuffed" with less costly organs if it is not deboned. In addition to full-body feline and frog models, fetal pigs, rats and other animals are in development.

Virtual exploration

The Anatomage Table, a virtual dissection table currently in use at a couple of hundred high schools nationwide, has been used to teach human anatomy in more detail as part of career and technology courses.

The gurney-sized table offers more than 1,000 human CT and MRI

VIRTUAL WORK—Virtual dissection tables (left) and other tools allow students to explore anatomy without the mess or the ethical issues. These tools also allow students to separate and view multiple anatomical systems, such as organs or skeletal systems (below).
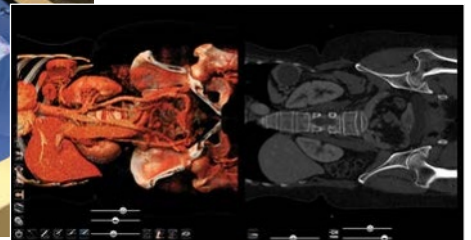
scans in addition to life-sized gross anatomy 3D images of two male and two female adults. The latest version also includes a canine anatomy virtual dissection and scans of more than 250 animal species.

Students can rotate virtual bodies; make slices to expose anatomic details; and choose to isolate specific body systems, such as the skeletal or muscular systems.

The interest in virtual dissection is especially high from students looking to enter sports medicine, physical therapy, radiology technology, emergency medical technician and medical assistant training tracks, says Jake Lehman, Anatomage's corporate sales manager.

The table's cost ranges between $50,000 and $80,000, with a number of schools able to receive grant funding to aid in the purchase.

Expanded lessons

In addition to the practical and ethical issues, alternative and virtual

dissection can offer additional learning opportunities not always available with actual specimens.

For example, Aaron Volkoff, a science teacher at Lakewood High School in Long Beach, California, uses the digital cadavers and the Anatomage case library in a health care analysis course to teach students to analyze how pathologies change normal anatomy. Students are then posed with a health challenge and must investigate what may be wrong with a particular patient and appropriate treatment options.

Anatomy tournaments in which high school student teams compete against each other on their human anatomy knowledge, make use of the virtual table. The tournaments, which began two years ago in California in partnership with the American Academic Competition Institute. Now there are nearly a dozen annual tournaments across the nation.

—*Ariana Fine*

Place-based learning models connect students to their environments

Picture the various "place-based learning" lessons you might have received if your high school had been on the grounds of the local zoo.

Students at the School of Environmental Studies (SES) in suburban Minneapolis don't have to use their imaginations—at least not when it comes to trying to save endangered mussels.

Seniors at SES, a magnet that serves 11th- and 12th-grade students in Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan Public Schools, study mussels with staff of the Minnesota Zoo each year. Then, they create public service announcements to raise awareness about the species' important role in the ecosystem, Principal Lauren Trainer says.

"The zoo knows people protect what they care about," Trainer says. "So the students have to figure out how to generate enthusiasm for mussels, which aren't cute and fuzzy."

The zoo project is just one example of place-based learning, in which educators across the country are using the natural world right outside their buildings to make learning more relevant and engaging.

Beyond the zoo, SES students study the water quality of suburban lakes and ponds. They don waders and board canoes to undertake research with city naturalists, and then analyze their findings in lengthy academic papers, says Trainer.

The students complete their time at SES with a capstone project that includes an environmental service initiative. "A lot of the time, environmental issues can be a big downer," Trainer says. "This helps them integrate hope, activism and leadership."

Creating new stories

Place-based learning can play a pivotal role in urban environments, says Ethan Lowenstein, a professor of curriculum and instruction at Eastern Michigan University and director of the Southeast Michigan Stewardship Coalition.

It can connect students to their natural environment in an era when many young people become engrossed in—and isolated by—their mobile devices, says Lowenstein, who is guiding 30 schools in Detroit, Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti in the implementation of place-based learning.

"This is especially important for students who live in poverty or who live in areas where the media is telling them deficit stories about their communities," Lowenstein says. "We're helping young people become authors of their own communities' stories, and to use math, English and science to take civic action in a meaningful way."

In Ypsilanti, for example, place-based learning has students learning ways to make their neighborhoods more resilient to flooding, which has become an increasing problem as climate change creates heavier rains. High school students studied where to plant trees, and which varieties, to help grounds crews control flooding on their campus.

"One of the strengths of place-based education is that an interdisciplinary approach is a necessary component," Lowenstein says. "We live in a really complicated era, where if you don't understand complex systems, you're not going to be prepared."

A local learning lens

Students at Oregon's Hood River Middle School live in a place where recreation is paramount. They can take place-based learning electives in which they mountain bike, windsurf and explore the region's gorges.

In the classroom, all students take a course in food and conservation science, which requires them to solve local ecological problems, often in the
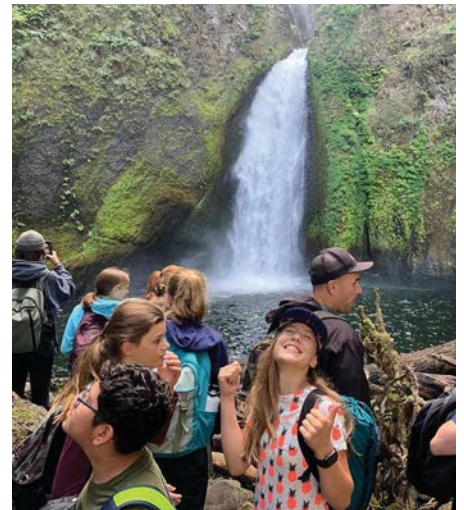
TAPPING INTO NATURAL WONDERS—Students at Oregon's Hood River Middle School take place-based learning electives in which they mountain bike, windsurf and explore the region's gorges.

school's greenhouse.

Classes have researched ways to grow food in an environment that sees extreme cold and extreme heat, says Principal Brent Emmons, whose school is part of the Hood River County School District. Students have built specialized "climate batteries" and experimented with aquaponic systems that retain heat.

Place-based learning should also incorporate the culture of a region, Emmons says.

Hood River Middle School students have studied the culture of local Native American tribes through the Columbia River Confluence Project. In English language arts, students are learning about how the region's population of Japanese Americans were taken to internment camps during World War II.

"Making learning relevant is one of the arts of education," Emmons says. "That disconnect that particularly secondary students have with finding meaning in their learning? Much of that can be solved by saying we are learning things through the lens of our community."   *—Matt Zalaznick*

HRMatters

Why do your employees stay?

Understanding the reasons can help leaders boost recruitment and retention

By Carol Patton

Among the most effective and low-cost retention and recruitment strategies for K-12 districts are "stay interviews." These face-to-face conversations between district leaders and top performers reveal why employees remain on the job and the concerns that may provoke them to leave.

"You totally miss the boat if you don't actively engage top-performing employees in trying to keep them," says Skye Duckett, chief human resources officer for Atlanta Public Schools, which supports some 8,300 employees and faculty.

Duckett says about 70% of the district's leaders conduct these optional interviews. But don't confuse them with engagement surveys, she says, explaining that surveys gather opinions from the entire workforce, including low performers whose ideas may not align with the district's values.

Build relationships

Atlanta's HR staffers train principals and other leaders to start the sessions telling top performers how much they're valued. Then, leaders ask employees what they like best about the job, school or district, and to disclose potential concerns.

Several years ago, stay interviews revealed that top teachers believed the district lacked leadership or career growth opportunities, Duckett says. So she worked with the teacher advisory council to establish career pathways and an aspiring leadership program, and then trained administrators on

> ## "Stay interviews" must be personal, authentic and focused to build relationships.

leadership development.

She says stay interviews must be personal, authentic and focused. Employees can tell if leaders are not listening or are distracted by other matters. "Stay interviews are a fancy way of getting to know your [employees] and taking good care of them as individuals," Duckett says. "It's all about the relationship."

Determine district 'perks'

Stay interviews can also help identify a district's competitive advantages, says Ben Brooks, founder and CEO of PILOT, a software-based employee coaching platform.

Why employees stay at an organization is different than administrators think, Brooks says, adding that highly valued talent may enjoy perks that are completely unrelated to their role. "Retention is highly personal," he says.

Brooks says trusted school leaders should conduct such interviews one-on-one since there's a great benefit to reading body language. Questions include: Why do you stay? What are the best parts of working here? Describe your ideal and worst workdays. If you were offered another job, what factors would likely keep you here?

Share responses with HR, Brooks says, and discuss what was learned and how the information can enhance recruitment and retention efforts.

"It could be that one teacher got to paint her classroom in different colors that inspire her and her students, which is why she stays," Brooks says. "This has to be a schoolwide or districtwide effort. Some things that pop up are factors that, more often than not, HR does not control."

To solicit buy-in for stay interviews, Brooks says HR staffers can ask leaders to consider what would happen if their top five teachers quit this month. Oftentimes, leaders assume there are only a handful of levers they can pull. But Brooks says some aspects are within their control and can help avoid that "horrific scene of highly valued employees with community and family legacy connections from walking out that door."

Apply what you learn

HR can couple information from stay interviews with results from climate or engagement surveys, says Chett Daniel, founder of K12 HR Solutions, a national K-12 consultancy in Missouri.

Conducting focus groups can provide more feedback. Daniel says some employees feel safer in a group setting because it gives them permission to speak up. He suggests framing questions in the third person, which makes the process less threatening. For example: Can you think of a reason why your co-workers might have responded this way on the survey? And apply what you learn because "retention is a bucket where right now, there's more water going out than coming in," Daniel says. **DA**

Carol Patton is a Las Vegas-based writer who specializes in human resources issues.

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TAKING LEARNING TO NEW HEIGHTS

Poway USD's blended learning and professional development environment increases student engagement and the use of education technology

NEW LEARNING APPROACHES—Collaboration in flexible seating environments is one of the main tenets of Poway USD's Voyager professional development program, which gives teachers more opportunities for small-group and one-on-one interactions with their students.

Poway USD
San Diego, California

Students: **More than 36,000**

Superintendent:
Marian Kim-Phelps

Initiative launched:
2017-18 academic year
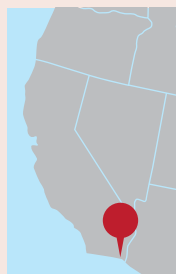
A professional development and in-class coaching program transformed ed tech use in a San Diego district, with teachers going from not knowing how to use new technology to now helping students in Google Suite while cooking dinner at home. Where random chromebooks were collecting dust, third-graders now collaborate with students in Australia via Skype.

This transformation came after the development of the Voyager program in the 2017-18 school year. The initiative focuses on implementing blended learning practices and ed tech strategies to increase student engagement and interest.

"We developed a system of support for teachers to learn how to integrate and use the latest technology in the class-

room," says Superintendent Marian Kim-Phelps of Poway USD. "Ed tech allows our students to connect with the world and engage with ideas that help them ask more organic questions."

Voice and choice

To participate in Voyager, teachers must first apply to determine which sessions they would benefit from most. "We provide 'voice and choice,' so teachers can choose what they want to learn and take it to the next level," says Phelps.

PD sessions begin in the summer and continue at various times throughout the year (see sidebar). Learning opportunities range from blended learning and station rotations to sessions where participants determine what to discuss and share their experiences.

Tech cafes focus on specialized new concepts or topics that educators have expressed an interest in learning about.

At the end of the year, teachers participating in the program set up booths at a showcase event to share their best practices and student work. "Teachers who haven't taken part in Voyager can use this opportunity to see what their peers in Voyager are doing," says Phelps.

Coaching for teachers—and students

To support Poway USD's 39 schools, the district currently employs five full-time certified tech innovation coaches who went through a rigorous application process.

"We looked for teachers who had strong instructional practices with expertise in blended and tech integration, so they had to be well-versed and comfortable with ed tech," says Phelps.

These leaders provide in-class mentoring throughout the year. Coaches monitor classes and provide feedback, teach side by side with educators, lead lessons, and share new concepts with teachers—and students.

"This way, students can decide how they learn and what they learn," says Phelps. "Students are more likely to take ownership of their own learning."

AND . . . ACTION!—Innovation coaches work inside classrooms with teachers and students to provide expertise in using digital tools and to help students share their projects with a wider audience.

Generating excitement and experimentation

The Voyager program promotes collaboration without much oversight from Poway administration.

"We eliminated a top-down model where district leaders tell teachers what to do, so educators are encouraged to share ideas organically that they are excited about," says Phelps. "Teachers feel more supported this way, and when you feel more supported, you are more inclined to try an untested innovative approach."

Similarly, Poway USD doesn't use an evaluative model, which further encourages teachers to develop and embrace new teaching methods.

"After PD, many districts have principals evaluate teacher performance and make sure they're following certain guidelines," says Phelps. "Instead, we're telling teachers, 'Hey, feel free to try something innovative.'"

—Steven Blackburn

"Ed tech allows our students to connect with the world around them and engage with ideas that helps them ask more organic questions."

— Marian Kim-Phelps, Superintendent, Poway USD

PD and coaching days

• Two full PD days in the summer

• Two 40 minutes of "embedded coaching" each month

• Two full PD days in the winter and spring

• Three two-hour sessions after school per month

• Showcase event at the end of the year

Diverse district sees academic progress in K-3 with Istation assessments

Using program resources, Bernalillo Public Schools targets instruction based on adaptive tests

Every elementary school in Bernalillo Public Schools has a data wall, where educators plot student progress according to monthly assessments. Color-coded to easily track movement from "inadequate" (red) through "on target" (green), the walls illustrate the positive impact that Istation has had in this diverse New Mexico community, says Jennifer Trujillo, district assessment and school improvement coordinator.

"The data are constantly changing because Istation assessments are adaptive, and instruction is then targeted to each student's needs," Trujillo says. "We know the ongoing assessment, progress monitoring and instruction have made a difference because scores continue to go up."

Targeted instruction and quick buy-in

The Bernalillo district started using Istation over seven years ago when the state chose it to pilot the assessments. The following year, every district in New Mexico began using Istation's Indicators of Progress (ISIP™) for testing all K-3 students. In Trujillo's district, buy-in came quickly with IT support, differentiated professional development, and a solution that helps teachers as much as it helps students, she says. For example, before Istation, teachers hand-scored assessments. They now have more time as well as access to Istation instructional resources, gaining even more efficiencies.

"We saw a big difference in test scores once we purchased the instructional component—and when students use Istation more often," Trujillo says. "You can't go wrong with more instruction that's targeted to

> **"We know the ongoing assessment, progress monitoring and instruction have made a difference because scores continue to go up."**

each student based on their level and the skills they need more support in."

Improved assessments in English and Spanish

The nationally normed ISIP™, which provide the information posted on each school's data wall, also help predict student success. Some recent results:

• English readers in kindergarten who were assessed as inadequate decreased 16 percentage points during the school year.

• English readers in kindergarten who were assessed as on target to meet end-of-year grade-level expectations increased seven percentage points during the school year.

• Spanish readers in kindergarten who were assessed as inadequate decreased 15 percentage points during the school year.

• Spanish readers in kindergarten who were assessed as on target to meet end-of-year grade-level

expectations rose seven percentage points during the same time period.

'Engaged students'

"Students are engaged, and teachers like having immediate results that can be trusted," Trujillo says. Parent reports improve communication, she adds, as reports show where students are, where they need to be, and how parents can support learning at home.

"We are constantly having conversations about the data," Trujillo says. "Teachers use it to help struggling students, and all the information is at our fingertips."

Istation

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Your Professional Development is Missing 5 Essential Components

Teachers matter

When educators at Hilldale Elementary School in Oklahoma began the professional development program *LETRS*®, Principal Price Brown immediately realized, "This is something that our teachers are missing, and I don't mean just our teachers. I'm talking teachers everywhere."

phoneme awareness and phonics lead to comprehension, teachers are left feeling ill-prepared–like riding a bike without wheels.

LETRS closes the gap in teacher training

"Going through *LETRS*, you sit there, moment-by-moment, thinking, 'I should have known this,'" said Ebony Lee, Ph.D., director of curriculum, instruction, and

You're Right

Teachers matter more to student success than any other aspect of schooling. They, not programs, teach students how to read. Yet a study of most teaching institutions found only 29 percent actually prepare teachers with all five essential components of literacy instruction, including: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.* Coincidentally, another national study found **63 percent of U.S. fourth grade students are not proficient readers.****

Learning to read is complex

Reading requires multiple parts of the brain learning to work together. Visual symbols must be connected with language. For example, the letter b represents /b/, which, in turn, distinguishes bat from pat. Brain pathways connecting speech with print must be built by every reader. Teaching reading should be based on scientific research applied to the classroom, and tailored to individuals. Without a deep understanding of the science behind how we learn to read, why we spell the way we do, or how

assessment, Clayton County, Georgia Public Schools. "It's the tool to change lives and change communities."

In Ohio, where Niles City Schools implemented *LETRS*, students reading at or above average increased from 53 percent to 89 percent within one school year.†

With *LETRS*, decades of research translates best practice into everyday classroom success, including a systematic approach to building oral and written language to improve reading instruction overall.

> "Going through *LETRS*, you sit there, moment-by moment, thinking, 'I should have known this.' It's the tool to change lives and change communities."
>
> Ebony Lee, Ed.D., Clayton County Public Schools, Georgia

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Districts of Distinction PD programs

Here are three K-12 districts that were Districts of Distinction runners up that also have developed noteworthy PD programs

DISTRICTS OF DISTINCTION

NEW EDUCATOR ORIENTATION
**Martin County School District
Stuart, Florida**
martinschools.org

CHALLENGE: Prior to 2018-19 school year, new teachers received a one-day training to acclimate them to the district. Based on feedback and declining retention rates (at least 10% per year), a stronger orientation was required.

INITIATIVE: The New Educator Orientation is a four-day training opportunity that was developed with district departments—including human resources, curriculum and instruction, and student services—and outside teacher prep organizations such as the New Teacher Center and The New Teacher Project. During the welcoming event, teachers are given school swag, enjoy breakfast and lunch, engage with district staff, learn from content experts, network, and are paid $100 per day. They also receive mental health first aid training.

IMPACT: The district decreased hires by 4% in the 2019-20 school year over the 2018-19 school year. Ninety-seven percent of new teachers responded that they would recommend the program to other teachers (new or outside of the school district). In addition, new teachers have started social media accounts to share what they learned from the orientation.

ADVICE: "Plan and organize well in advance of launching," says Heather Padgett, coordinator of professional development. "Make time to vet and review the content that is being delivered to the new teachers. Make the branding consistent, review, and provide feedback for a streamlined message in each session."

EDUCATOR GROWTH
**School District of the Chathams
Chatham, New Jersey**
chatham-nj.org

CHALLENGE: District leaders realized that professional development structures designed to support educator growth were countering expectations for student learning and ignoring the vast interests of educators and their desire to pursue their own learning.

INITIATIVE: "GO Time" (Growth Opportunity Time) is a professional development structure designed to revamp learning that also aligns with the expectations for student learning. Over the course of an academic year, educators receive a minimum of 20 hours (during contracted time) to pursue an area of interest. Teachers may work collaboratively, independently, or participate in various topics offered through the district learning lab. Professional staff are also able to participate in the program.

IMPACT: "We believe our educators are committed learners and professionals who have an inherent need to learn and improve," says Karen Chase, assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction. "By creating a structure that supports this belief system, we have shown our educators that we honor them as learners and respect their abilities, interests, and learning styles."

ADVICE: "GO Time places quite a bit of trust in the hands of educators," says Chase. "But we need to empower them by creating a model for their learning that mirrors what we know to be effective learning for students."

EQUITY FOUNDATIONAL TRAINING, Osseo Area Schools-ISD 279, Maple Grove, Minnesota
district279.org

CHALLENGE: After vendor-provided equity training ended, the district still needed to provide PD for more than 200 facilitators and 3,500 employees that would include scheduling at least 15 hours of training over two years for all job positions and roles.

INITIATIVE: Equity Foundational Training (EFT) was developed to provide a systematic approach for all district employees to develop a common language and tools to identify and respond to the impact of race and culture on learning. EFT 1.0 is comprised of three modules requiring a minimum of seven hours of PD focused on increasing knowledge of the five system equity tools and awareness of racially predictable outcomes in the district. EFT 1.5 has two modules requiring a minimum of six hours of PD focused on strengthening and applying the skills learned in the first section.

IMPACT: "The underlying beliefs of EFT are unique as the System Equity Tools are designed to explicitly address the intersectionality of race and culture," says Rev Hillstrom, director of educational equity. More than 87% of staff surveyed believe that program helps to develop approaches for having effective dialogue about racial inequity.

ADVICE: The commitments of your district must align with the consciousness and convictions that are present, says Hillstrom. Employees have to move from simply becoming aware of student racial inequities to actively implementing strategies to address those inequities. **DA**

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POWER of PLCs

By Matt Zalaznick
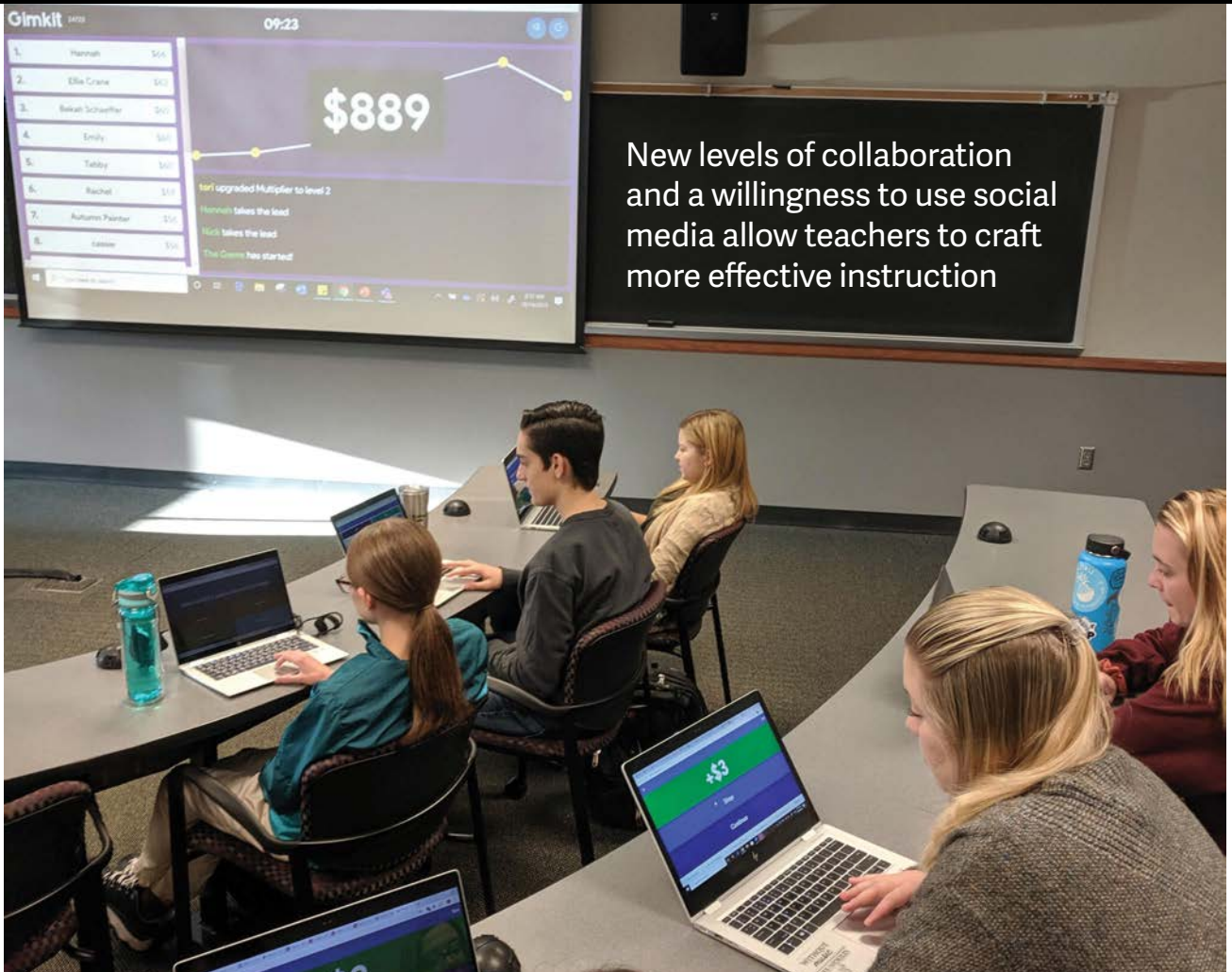
New levels of collaboration and a willingness to use social media allow teachers to craft more effective instruction

Question: Do teachers' professional learning communities (PLCs) impact student achievement?

Answer: Yes. But only when educators have ample time and space to dive deeply into data, provide one another with constructive feedback and collaborate on innovative and differentiated approaches to instruction that will impact all students, administrators and other experts say.

"We have very little teaching in

DISTRICTS OF DISTINCTION

isolation anymore," says Phillip Page, superintendent of the Bartow County School System in north Georgia. "Since our teachers have been collaborating, they've taken more of an 'our kids' approach as opposed to a 'my kids' approach."

Page is not alone in seeing results. And education experts are reimagining the PLC concept to move beyond the school building and into the globally connected world of social media and other interactive online platforms. These resources now allow teachers to create extensive global learning networks, says Torrey Trust, an associate

LONG-DISTANCE LEARNING NETWORKS—Student teachers at Grove City College in Pennsylvania are paired with and mentored online by classroom teachers from around the world.

professor of learning technology at the University of Massachusetts Amherst's College of Education.

"Where we're heading is super exciting because you're no longer limited to the PLC in your school or a professional development day," Trust says. "Online, there's a world of supportive educators—on Twitter, writing blog posts and sharing digital tools."

Safe places to share challenges

Gillian Chapman, superintendent of rural Teton County School District #1 in Wyoming, has seen the power of PLCs at work at two of her schools. Jackson Hole Middle School had slipped on some standards but improved dramatically on a 2019 state assessment after teachers in various content areas received PLC facilitator training from the state of Wyoming. These teacher leaders were then able to create safe, non-judgmental places where teachers could discuss challenges, Chapman says.

"The stress is off a little bit because teachers are not being evaluated by the folks on the PLCs," she says. "They can admit they are wondering about something or they have a concern. They can show their data without feeling like, 'Oh gosh, if I show my data my job might be in jeopardy.'"

At Colter K-5 Elementary School, leaders bring all new hires into the PLC, which then "renorms and reforms" around the new member, Chapman says.

"A lot of times, there's an unwritten rule on teams that if you're new, you don't participate," she says. "But teams work because you build on the skills, training and past experiences of the individuals."

The PLCs are key in supporting the district's Success 2022 goals, which include having all 3rd graders reach proficiency in reading and math. Grade-level and content-based PLCs meet at least once per week during time that has been built into the school day. Teachers compare students' performance on common assessments, among other data, and then share ideas for why some students or classes may have shown greater growth. PLCs make presentations to the entire faculty about once per month so other teachers are aware of each group's priorities.

Chapman's role is to give her principals flexibility to set their own schedules so they can provide time for teachers to get the most of out their PLCs.

"In PLCs, you get so many better ideas because you have a team that's in the boat with you and you're all rowing in the same direction," Chapman says.

Everyday conversations about effectiveness

Bartow County schools' PLCs meet twice per week during built-in collaboration time. A key focus is when different classes get significantly different results on common assessments, says

PLN OFFERS A PREVIEW

Here's a professional learning network (PLN) that provides a virtual look at what teaching is really like.

Student teachers at Grove City College in Pennsylvania participate in virtual co-op programs in which they are paired with and mentored online by a professional classroom teacher somewhere in the world.

These student teachers, as early as freshman year, will create an online lesson and then get feedback from the mentors in weekly meetings via videoconferencing platforms such as Facetime or Skype. This relationship allows students to begin developing a professional learning network before they even start looking for a job, says Samantha Fecich, an assistant professor of education and instructional technologist who created the program.

Students about to graduate can then leverage the PLNs they've developed through the Grove City program to inquire about opportunities in specific districts. "As freshmen or sophomores, they're able to spread their little breadcrumbs of of awesomeness across the internet," Fecich says. "And, it helps them get a sneak peak into what it's like to be a practicing teacher."

The virtual co-op relationships often changes some of the students' perspectives about education, says Melissa-Ann Pero, an English teacher at Pennsylvania's Bermudian Springs High School who has participated in the program as a mentor.

"When you want to become a teacher, you already assume what it's going to be like because you've had teachers," says Pero, whose school is part of the Bermudian Springs School District. "Here, you get to ask people in the field questions you might be less inclined to ask face-to-face." For example, Pero says she often talks to student teachers about how she created a gay-straight alliance to provide a safe space for kids at her school.

"When I first started teaching, I was told not to bring my personal life into the classroom," Pero says. "But when students get to know a little bit about you, you're real to them, you're not a figurehead. That's something I want new teacher to get a feel for—it's important that your students know you."
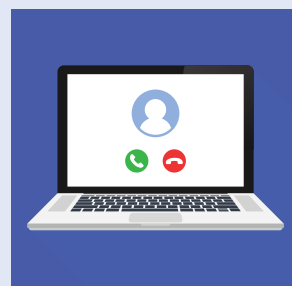
Page, the superintendent.

"We have certainly seen a more targeted focus on instruction," he says.

The PLCs are also analyzing state standards to determine which are the most important for students to achieve at the next grade level.

"States give you more standards than you can possibly teach so, instead of teachers going off in isolation and saying, 'There's no way I can teach them all,' we're asking our teachers to determine together what they believe are the essential standards for kids to be successful," Page says.

As an extension of the PLCs, teachers also hold college-style office hours twice per week to meet individually with students who need enrichment or extra help. The PLCs also design "response days" during which students have a chance to catch up on skills they have not yet mastered.

"A PLC is the best PD that you can get because teachers are having conversations about their effectiveness every day," Page says. "You're helping each other get better because you want each other to do better."

Laying foundations for inclusive classrooms

Some educators are letting Universal Design for Learning (UDL) concepts guide PLCs in being more responsive to students' learning styles.

UDL allows teachers in PLCs to look for various types of evidence to determine when different students are making progress—or when certain students need interventions, says Katie Novak, assistant superintendent of curriculum, instruction, and human resources at Groton-Dunstable Regional School District in Massachusetts.

The district's PLCs design instruction for specially designated WIN blocks (or, "What I Need") in which teachers can provide assistance or

VIRTUAL VETTING—Grove City College students create online lessons and then get feedback from their mentors in weekly meetings via platforms such as Facetime or Skype.

enrichment to students. But UDL is not merely personalized or individualized learning, says Novak, who has presented at education conferences on using universal design concepts in PLCs.

"We're now seeing a much wider variability of learners within every single class," she says. "UDL is how we design learning that works for all students. UDL is the foundation of an inclusive classroom."

Where to find 30 ideas in an hour

Technology now allows PLCs to grow into professional learning networks that transcend a school building, a district, and even states and nations. And whereas even effective PLCs can still be regimented by an administrators' priorities, online tools give teachers the freedom to explore a wider range of interests from more diverse sources, says Trust, the UMass education professor.

"It's evolved to self-driven teacher learning," Trust says. "The way we expect learning to happen in the classroom, can now happen for teachers through all the tools we have today."

When Trust does presentations, she'll show a screenshot of an educator's tweet that has gotten hundreds of responses from around the world.

"Yes, Twitter is a place where celebrities share photos of food, but it can also be a powerful learning experience," Trust says. "When I join a Twitter chat, after just an hour I end up with 30 open browser tabs with all the new resources I've looked up."

Teachers can use a tool called tchat.io (tchat.io) to follow the conversations going on around specific education hashtags, such as #edchat, #mathchat or #spedchat. Other teachers use the Voxer 'Walkie Talkie' app (voxer.com) that allows teams to meet through audio messages.

However, some teachers find Twitter is not ideal for co-constructing new lesson plans or other projects. Instead, they can move to platforms such as Google Hangouts, she says.

Of course, whether teachers are connecting on Twitter, Pinterest, Google Hangouts or elsewhere in the virtual world, they should reflect regularly on whether these resources are improving their practice, Trust says.

"If you are connecting with a PLN but haven't taken time to reflect on whether it's having a positive impact on student learning, that's a big gap," Trust says. "You might not be in the right spaces to discover the right tools." **DA**

Matt Zalaznick is senior writer.

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districtadministration.com/DOD

PDMatters

11 ways for leaders to 'unschool' school

Taking a student-centered approach increases learning (and buy-in)

By Michael Niehoff

The term "unschooling" was originally associated with the home-school movement. Now that personalized learning is becoming a pedagogy, unschooling is taking on an expanded meaning. It's about advocating a student-centered approach. It's time to redefine what we know as school to boost engagement and improve learning. Here are 11 ways to take action.

1. Ask students about everything. Staff should survey students several times per year about their learning experiences, and work to improve those experiences. Students should also provide feedback on rules, processes, hiring, schedules, facilities, course needs and finances. Students have great ideas, and we rarely consult them. If you want to have responsible students who are prepared for the future, include them.

2. Limit rules and restrictions. Schools tend to have dozens, or even hundreds, of rules. Like a good résumé, get your list down to one page. Focus on the essentials, and make sure they are based on legal obligations and common sense and/or safety.

3. Improve staff accessibility. All school personnel should be accessible. Allow, or even encourage, students to communicate in any way that works. Using social media applications will open the lines of communication, which will build relationships and lead to trust.

4. "Smart-start" your school. Many

> **If our schools are to be the hubs of our student communities, make them reflect those communities.**

students anticipate the beginning of each school year. This excitement usually dissipates as they are inundated with long talks about rules, expectations, syllabuses and more. What if that first week and beyond opened up opportunities and possibilities? What if schools focused more on what students *can* do versus what they *cannot* do? (For more, visit DAmag.me/smartstart.)

5. Expand the campus walls. Our school gates need to be literally and figuratively transparent. In addition to their teachers and peers, students should see a variety of people on campus—including career professionals, mentors and community leaders. Also, students should spend time off campus. They need work-, place- and community-based experiences not only to define their learning, but also to provide necessary context and networks.

6. Help students become leaders and facilitators. All students need to pursue their interests and career goals. They need opportunities to research, collaborate, pitch, problem-solve and more—all in an effort to create a digital portfolio of work and accompanying badges, certificates and skill mastery.

7. Eliminate bells. Haven't we

taught students how to tell time? If you need a reminder, use music or something fun. But to me, bells don't make people on time; importance, buy-in, involvement and engagement do.

8. Flip the school food paradigm and more. Our school food services need to be more like food trucks. Our classrooms need to be more like contemporary workspaces. Our administrative offices need to be more like concierge centers. It's about making our schools more inviting. When we want to be somewhere, we perform better.

9. Go big and go pro with gear. Yes, we have budget limitations. Whether it's through grant writing, corporate or community donations, or something else, we need to find a way to provide cutting-edge equipment that inspires innovation and boosts creativity.

10. Go beyond the "big game" or school dance. What if our schools offered student art exhibitions and project showcases, student film festivals, unplugged acoustic nights, and culinary competitions? If our schools are to be the hubs of our student communities, make them reflect those communities.

11. Mix it up. We know our students depend on certain levels of structure. But consider reversing the daily schedule on occasion; having lame duck days that allow students to take over the school's social media accounts; or having teachers swap classes. You get the idea.

Let's "unschool" school. **DA**

Longtime educator Michael Niehoff writes about transformational leadership and PD.

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DAmag.me/unschool

AIMING for EXCELLENCE and EQUITY

Superintendent **KATHY MURPHY** works to maintain high performance while erasing legacies of segregation

BY MATT ZALAZNICK

HOOVER, Ala.—A high-performing and affluent district in the suburbs of Birmingham, Hoover City Schools remains under a decades-old desegregation order.

Since taking over the district in 2015, Superintendent Kathy Murphy has been leading her team to convince a federal judge to lift the order that her district inherited when it broke away from the larger Jefferson County school system in the 1980s. They have worked on several fronts, from school boundaries to AP enrollment to discipline.

"We are constantly focused on how to do the work of equity better," says Murphy, who also served as superintendent of Alabama's Monroe County Schools. "We're asking ourselves what are we doing that may be a barrier to the education of children based on race."

'I got my feelings hurt'

Murphy grew up in the 1970s in the small town of Greenville, Alabama, with fleeting visions of being a gymnast or a runner, or maybe an athletic trainer or sports psychologist. But even though she grew up in a loving and supportive family, girls back then were not so readily encouraged to participate in sports or purse athletic careers.

CREATIVE CONVERSATION—Hoover City Schools Superintendent Kathy Murphy and an elementary school student discuss their arts and crafts assignment in the library.

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Also, gymnastic studios and similar facilities were scarce in rural Alabama. "I was the kid who always took my glove and threw my rubber ball against the house and got into trouble," she laughs. "And I could do backflips with the best of them."

Early on, she also came to prefer the outdoors and mechanical devices to, say, more traditionally domestic endeavors. "If my parents said 'I need you to put this chain on this chainsaw or prepare this soufflé,' I put the chain on the chainsaw," Murphy says. "I still tend to come to work on Mondays with some tractor grease under my fingernails."

When it came time to choose a career, she followed another path that she had been passionate about since childhood. "I had such a deep regard and respect for my teachers," she says. "At a young age I realized how important they were to me, and saw that as such a worthy way to spend one's life."

Murphy earned her undergraduate degree in physical education from Troy University in Alabama, and her masters and doctorate degrees from Auburn University at Montgomery. She took her first

A SOUND EDUCATION—Students rehearse at Hoover High School in the suburbs of Birmingham, Alabama.

Hoover City Schools by the numbers:

Schools: 18 including RC3 (Career Center) and Crossroads (Alternative Center)

Students: 14,085

Employees: 2,080

Per-child expenditure: $12,000

Annual budget: $168 million

Students on free/reduced-price lunch: 3,430

English language learners: 894 receiving services/1,929 identified

Graduation rate: 93.75%

Teacher retention rate: 91%

job—as a PE teacher—at Auburn High School in Alabama. She then shifted to higher education, instructing student PE teachers at West Georgia College (now, the University of West Georgia).

She got her first job as a principal at Greenville Middle School, back in her hometown, and spent nine years there. She later became principal at Greenville High School and then moved to the central office of the district, Butler County Schools, with her sights set on the superintendency. But when the job came open, she was not selected. "I was so disappointed. It was my home town, my community," Murphy says. "I had invested time and energy in making the schools a better place and I got my feelings hurt."

Crowbars and connectivity

If she had stayed in Greenville, Murphy says, she would have grown bitter, so she left her hometown again and, in 2011, landed the top spot in 3,000-student Monroe County Schools in Alabama, a

diverse district where vestiges of segregation remained in place.

For instance, she had to travel for more than an hour through two other counties to reach one of her buildings—a high-poverty school in remote Packards Bend, Alabama. All 66 of the school's students were African American.

One big challenge was keeping that school connected to the internet. "We were starting to make the transition to using computer-generated tests for some high-stakes tests," she says. "Imagine the frustration for those children when they would get on a computer and be in the process of taking a test, and having that connectivity go down and having to start over."

Murphy also was struck by the fact that when she became superintendent in Hoover, she could enter any building in the district, at any time of day, with her electronic badge. At one of her prior districts, she actually had to use keys and a crowbar to open a school

GETTING WITH THE PROGRAM — Two students tell Kathy Murphy about the code they are writing and the tasks they want their robot to accomplish.

door, she says.

These technological dilemmas reflect the pockets of poverty—and the lack of educational resources—that continue to exist in Alabama. For example, some districts still struggle to keep one month's operating revenue in the bank, while others have nearly a year of funds in reserve, she adds. "The education of children in this state in great measure is defined by zip code," she says.

How struggling can enrich students
Equity remains top of mind for Murphy

as she works to move Hoover City Schools past the desegregation order. She and her team must convince the government that all children are receiving an equal education.

Administrators are currently working to ensure all students have equal access to Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs, gifted and talented classes, and other enrichment activities.

The biggest change: Students no longer need a teacher's recommendation to get into an AP course. They can simply request a spot in the class, Murphy says.

"We know that a student who gets into an AP class, even though he or she might struggle, that challenge of thinking deeper and working at a richer level is so important," she says.

Teachers now provide tutoring and other before- and after-school support for AP and IB students. "It's a whole paradigm shift when you say not only are we going to embrace your walking through this door, but we are going to help you be successful," she says.

The district also is shifting its disciplinary approach, using positive behavioral supports in an effort to ensure that students of color are not punished disproportionately. Of particular focus has been looking more closely at why students end up in the district's alternative school—with an eye toward preventing disruptive behaviors before they occur, she says.

Murphy has placed a full-time counselor at the alternative center, and has hired more mental health specialists to work with troubled students and connect them with outside medical providers.

More teachers than are required
As the leader of a high-performing district, Murphy must also work to maintain the high academic standards to which her community has become accustomed.

Recently, Hoover opened the $20 million River Chase Career Connection Cen-

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How superintendents stay energized

School district leaders are increasingly urged to make sure they set aside time to take care of their own social and emotional needs.

Kathy Murphy, superintendent of Hoover City Schools in Alabama, spends that 'me time' felling trees, clearing brush and repairing mechanical equipment on the 40-acre farm she owns about two hours south of her suburban Birmingham district.

"I absolutely love nature," she says. "It's the place to go for calmness and peace."

Murphy once completed the Boston Marathon as a "bandit runner"—meaning she hadn't entered the race with a qualifying time, so she had to start at the very back of the pack. Now, during the work week, she tries to get a run or walk in each afternoon.

"Considering the intensity in which we work and the multiple number of balls you may be juggling at any one point in time, just stepping away in the afternoon and refreshing is really important for keeping things in perspective," she says.

ter to provide students with professional credentials so they can go to work right after graduation or enter more advanced vocational pathways in college. The center offers tracks in culinary arts, cybersecurity, health sciences, and firefighting and emergency response, among other programs.

Murphy has also used $600,000 in grant funds to dramatically expand preschool programs to several elementary schools. Previously, the district had only offered pre-K services in special education. The preschool waiting list of about 250 students now has sparked plans to create an early-learning center in the district.

Of course, high-performing districts need high-performing teachers. The district pays its educators at a higher rate than the state's salary schedule. And when the Alabama legislature enacted a 4% teacher pay increase for Oct. 1, 2019, Murphy allocated $2.4 million to make the raise retroactive to July 1.

She also pays supplements to teachers who lead extracurricular activities and academic trips. Finally, to keep class sizes small, Hoover employs 230 more teachers than the state requires for a district its size, Murphy says.

"Our parents want us to offer as much as we can, and there is an eye of scrutiny on us to get this work right," she says. "High expectations and high demands make us a better school district, make us better administrators and make us better teachers." **DA**

Matt Zalaznick is senior writer.

Watch DATV —How Kathy Murphy connects with students
DAmag.me/murphy

More coverage on leadership at
DAmag.me/leadership

CLAWS-ON LEARNING—A student decides whether he wants to hold a crawfish during an elementary school science lesson with the superintendent.

Superintendent Kathy Murphy on her favorite things:

Teacher: I had so many favorite teachers that it's hard to narrow this down. I can tell you the special sauce for making a teacher a favorite: My favorite teachers always knew me, cared about me, advocated for me, believed in me, and pushed me to do better and be better.

Childhood aspiration: I loved physical activity: Climbing trees, swinging on vines, riding my bike, and throwing/hitting/catching balls. From a young age, I wanted to teach physical education and coach sports. Becoming an administrator was something of an accident.

Pastime/hobby: I have 40 acres complete with a small cabin, which is my happy place. I enjoy working the land and enjoy the wildlife that has made my little spot of earth their little spot of earth.

Travel destination: Travel is not my preferred means of entertainment, but I have enjoyed traveling in Europe, particularly Ireland.

Food: Mexican.

Dessert: Mama's fudge chocolate icing on a white layer cake. The important ingredient is mama's love.

Book: With no hesitation, my favorite book is The Bible. It is from this book, I have learned how to live with purpose and meaning, to love and to forgive people and myself, and to know I have been called for such a time as this.

Music/song: '70s music all the way. No particular song.

Sports/recreation: I love sports, notably football, and particularly Hoover High Bucs, Spain Park High Jaguars, Auburn University Tigers and Troy University Trojan football.

Heroes/sheroes: I am beyond blessed to have been reared by two of my heroes—my dad, who is now deceased, and my sweet mother, who gets more beautiful by the day.

Quote: "The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires."—*William Arthur Ward*

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Survey finds many school phone systems are outdated and unreliable

ENA partnered with District Administration to explore the topic of school and district communications technology by deploying a survey to school administrators in the DA audience. Nearly 200 respondents participated, providing insightful findings on the types of phone systems districts are currently using, the most significant problems they are experiencing, and how confident they are in the reliability of their phone systems.

Types of phone systems, and frustrations

To better understand the current phone technology landscape in K–12, participants were asked what type of communication platform their school district uses. The majority of respondents (43%) indicated voice over IP (VoIP), while some 23% said they use an analog or traditional landline system. Another 16% said they use a combination of VoIP and analog, while 18% said they didn't know.

When asked to identify when their current phone system was installed, the majority of respondents (45%) said within the last 5 years, while 21% said 5-10 years ago, 9% said 10-15 years ago, 7% said 15-20 years ago, and 3% said it was installed more than 20 years ago. Another 14% said they didn't know.

Respondents were also asked to identify their most significant frustrations with their current phone system. **For the 39% currently using an analog, traditional system, or a combination**, the most commonly selected frustration was "Outdated voicemail or other features/ technology," at 48%, followed by "Difficult for new users to learn the system" (20%), "Our users periodically can't make outbound calls" (14%), "Inconsistent/poor audio quality" (8%), "Callers can't get through to us in times of high demand" (8%) and "Dropped calls" (5%).

Outages and reliability in emergencies

To assess how equipped district communication systems are for emergency situations, the survey asked a variety of questions around outages, resolution response, and reliability.

Respondents were asked how long it usually takes for a problem or outage to be resolved. The highest number of respondents (31%) said "Over 1 hour," while 24% said "30-60 minutes," 20% said "15-30 minutes" and 26% said "Less than 15 minutes."

What are the biggest frustrations you have with your current phone system?

48% "Outdated voicemail or other features/technology"

20% "Difficult for new users to learn the system"

14% "Our users periodically can't make outbound calls"

8% "Callers can't get through to us in times of high demand"

8% "Inconsistent/poor audio quality"

5% "Dropped calls"

"The increase in VoIP adoption for K–12 is really encouraging, but some of these frustrations including dropped calls, poor audio quality, and congested phones lines blocking inbound and outbound calls could potentially jeopardize the safety and welfare of students and staff during emergency situations," says Michael McKerley, Vice President and Chief Technology Officer at ENA.

When you have experienced an outage or other problem, about how long does it usually take for the problem to be resolved and the phones to be working again?

26% Less than 15 minutes

20% 15-30 minutes

24% 30-60 minutes

31% Over 1 hour

Reliability of cell phone signal

When asked how confident they were in the reliability of their phone system in the event of an emergency, 52% said they were "Extremely confident," but 41% said they were "Somewhat confident", and another 7% said they were "Not confident."

"Your phone system's reliability is the most important component in building an effective and comprehensive communication and emergency response plan," McKerley says. "Any outage is a safety hazard, but a majority of respondents indicating their outages last 30-60+ minutes demonstrates two things: not all phone systems, including VoIP, are engineered or supported the same, and how important selecting a service provider with proven reliability – 99.999% uptime – is."

Similarly, respondents were asked to describe the **reliability of cell phone signal** from inside their school or district buildings. 10% selected the statement "Perfect; no problems getting reliable signal for calls, from anywhere inside our buildings," while 49% said "Good; there are just a few places with poor or no signal inside our buildings." Some 27% selected "Poor; there are many places with poor or no signal inside our buildings," and 14% said "Very poor; it is very difficult to get cell phone connectivity from inside our buildings."

How confident are you in the reliability of your school or district phone system in the event of an emergency?

52%
Extremely confident

41%
Somewhat confident

7%
Not confident

How would you describe the reliability of cell phone signal from inside your school or district buildings?

10% Perfect; no problems getting reliable signal for calls, from anywhere inside our buildings	49% Good; there are just a few places with poor or no signal inside our buildings	27% Poor; there are many places with poor or no signal inside our buildings	14% Very poor; it is very difficult to get cell phone connectivity from inside our buildings
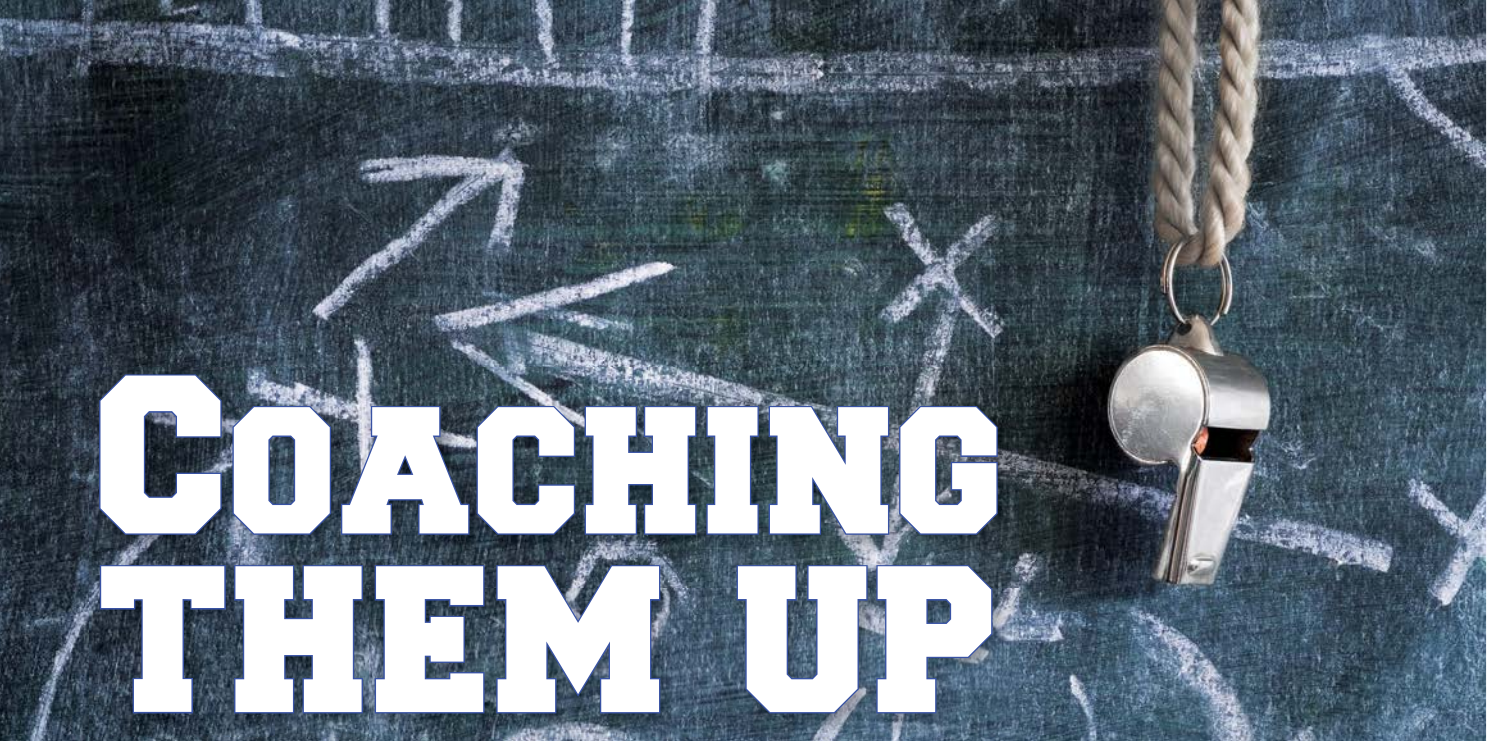
"These survey findings also demonstrate that while cell phones can play a role in emergency response, they should not be the sole communication method relied upon during an emergency," McKerley says. "In order to be fully prepared, districts need to be engaging with vendors who understand the mission–critical status of school phone systems, have multiple layers of redundancy built into their VoIP platform, and have excellent resolution response and customer support."

ENA provides fully managed, cloud-based VoIP phone systems for schools. These next-generation communication systems offer a low total cost of ownership, deliver 99.999% uptime reliability, and can include advanced features such as instant location identification with 911 calls to enhance emergency response and preparedness.

To learn more, go to ENA.com.

*Data taken from the survey of DA subscribers, "School Phone Systems," conducted in December 2019, with 191 respondents participating.

ENA SmartVoice®

Coaching them up

Supporting instructional technology coaches can help districts get the most of ed tech investments and improve student learning

By Nancy Mann Jackson

As educational technology has quickly developed and evolved, school districts and teachers have been overwhelmed with the array of options and possibilities for incorporating it into the classroom.

For many districts, the answer has been to hire instructional technology coaches—which also go by other titles, such as technology integrationists, professional development coaches or tech trainers.

In many cases, however, that strategy alone isn't working because many districts hire a "tech coach" without clearly defining what that role will involve, and without communicating to teachers about the value these coaches can bring to their classroom, says Jeffrey Bradbury, instructional technology coach at New Jersey's Westwood Regional School District and creator of the TeacherCast Educational Network.

To maximize the expertise of tech coaches and improve learning outcomes, district leaders must understand the value that these professionals can bring to the table and how to set them up for success, says Bradbury.

Support beyond tech

A recent analysis of more than $2 billion in school spending showed that ed tech represents one of the largest categories of waste in school budgets: 67% of educational software purchased for schools goes unused, according to the study.

Instructional technology coaches can help reduce or eliminate this waste. Beyond teaching instructors how to use ed tech, the good coaches help educators focus on improving their teaching.

"The best tech coaches will tell you their job doesn't have to involve technology," Bradbury says. "If a teacher is scared of turning on a tablet, I'm not going to start with technology. And another teacher may understand all about technology, but their teaching really needs work. Coaching can help in both situations."

For example, Linda Bollendorf is an instructional coach at Fleetwood Middle School and High School in Pennsylvania's Fleetwood Area School District. While she supports and assists teachers with technology, she says that's not her sole focus. Coaches can provide an invaluable resource for school leaders because they are constantly taking the pulse of the building culture, student achievement, and professional learning needs, Bollendorf says. "Wise administrators know this and work with their coaches to grow and advance their buildings," she says.

Collaborating with coaches

Although tech coaches are valuable resources, they can easily be overlooked by administration. This may happen because leaders want to keep their distance so that teachers can feel their work with coaches is held in confidence, or possibly because administrators aren't quite sure how to support or promote the coaches.

"In many cases, a district has its heart in the right place and budgets for a tech coach position, but then the person in the position is not supported so teachers don't use their expertise," Bradbury says. "Eventually, the person appears to be an unnecessary expense and they lose their job."

For instance, at Bradbury's current school, teachers understand what he can provide and come to him when they want

help or support in the classroom. But at his previous school, administrators didn't encourage teachers to take advantage of his expertise and they never quite understood how to work with him, which could be frustrating, he says.

Outside of his New Jersey district, Bradbury leads tech coach mastermind groups, which consist of professionals who want to help teachers but their districts may not be properly supporting them for success. Some also struggle with being in multiple buildings and every principal wants something different, he says.

Instead of allowing instructional tech coaches and their skills to languish without being utilized, district leaders can empower them to be more effective. That starts by clearly defining expectations—to the tech coach and to the teachers with whom they are expected to work.

For example, after observing a teacher, a principal could say, "You're doing a great job with this, but I'd really like for you to spend some time with the tech coach to improve in this other area, or add in this other type of instruction," Bradbury says.

District leaders should focus on providing communication and classroom presence for tech coaches, Bollendorf says. "Leaders need to get out and see what's going on so that they can collaborate with coaches about how the building and district goals are advancing and how to help students and teachers do their best," says Bollendorf.

Fostering innovation

Once coaches' roles have been made clear, they need ongoing PD to remain effective, just like all other school personnel. As the role of instructional tech coaching is still emerging, PD is also evolving—but practicing coaches say there are plenty of viable opportunities.

The National Future of Education Technology Conference (FETC) recently partnered with the Bagwell College of Education at Kennesaw State University to provide a new certification program for technology champions, instructional

technology coaches and others interested in expanding their professional knowledge of education technology. The certification, known as the FETC® Coaching Collaborative Powered by iTeach, will involve education about the evolving role of the ed tech coach, new strategies to implement and effective ways to make an impact in schools and districts.

In addition to attending conferences such as FETC, Edcamps and ISTE, earning EdTech badges such as Google Teacher Certification and Microsoft Innovative Educator is recommended, says Katie Fielding, technology coach at Woodbridge Senior High School in Prince William County, Virginia. "Badges like these provide your teachers with a little bit of credibility that shows they know what they are talking about when it comes to this tool," Fielding says.

While the educational opportunities sponsored by large providers is helpful, learning from other practitioners can be

equally valuable.

"Some of the best professional development I have found is on Twitter," Fielding says. "My online personalized learning network is strong and provides new ideas daily. Following hashtags such as #EdTech will get you into the community."

By keeping coaches learning and engaged, district administrators can boost teacher development and learning outcomes.

"Technology coaching is essential to the quality implementation of a district technology plan," Fielding says. "Teachers span a wide array of digital literacy. If you want the devices you are putting in students' hands to be more than a Google search or word processor, you need to show teachers how to be innovative with the tool. Coaches help foster this innovation." **DA**

Nancy Mann Jackson is an Alabama-based writer.

Best practices for instructional tech coaches
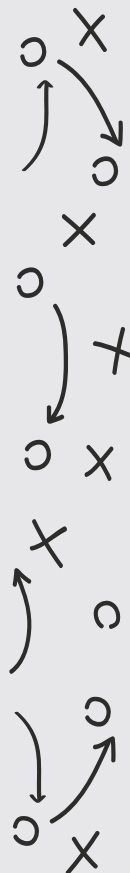
• **Prioritize communication.** Coaches need to listen to the needs of the teacher, which are ultimately the needs of the students, Fielding says. After listening, they can provide feedback or try to find a solution or enhancement that technology can provide. When they find a solution, coaches then can ask teachers what help they would need to implement it.

• **Focus on relationships.** The best tech coaches take time to get to know teachers on a personal level and understand their challenges in the classroom. "You are more likely to get a resistant teacher to try something if you have built a personal relationship with them," Fielding says. "Trust is a key part of coaching."

• **Build trust.** Coaches need to build one-on-one relationships with teachers on an equal playing field. "A teacher needs to be able to look at you as a colleague, not as an administrator, and ask for help," Bradbury says. "Coaches must make people feel comfortable with them so they can suggest things and the teacher will say, 'I've never thought of that; would you do that with me?'"

• **Develop a support system.** Bradbury reached out to every school district in northern New Jersey and asked to take their tech coaches to lunch. Through those meetings, he created the North Jersey Tech Coaches group, which holds regular meetings for sharing information and coping with job-related challenges. While a support system is important for teachers and other school employees, tech coaches especially benefit as their roles are often misunderstood and overwhelming.

Empowering districts and schools to measure progress

Marzano High Reliability Schools™ framework shows how best practices work together to improve achievement

An associate from Marzano Resources conducted a professional development workshop in 2015 with the superintendent of McKinney ISD, one of the fastest-growing districts in Texas. They reinforced the need to look at student achievement initiatives to determine what was working and what needed improvement.

"We needed to be able to capture evidence about our current initiatives, highlight areas of need, and be able to make corrections, rather than add another program or initiative," says Melanie Magee, senior director of curriculum and instruction in the Student Support department at McKinney, which has more than 24,500 students in 20 elementary schools, five middle schools, three high schools, two alternative campuses and one early childhood education center.

"The bottom line is student achievement," Magee says.

Impact on student achievement
McKinney leaders decided to use the Marzano High Reliability Schools™ (HRS) framework, which shows how best practices work together without adding new initiatives. The framework also provides indicators to empower districts and schools to measure their progress on attaining five progressive levels of reliability:
• Level 1: Safe, Supportive and Collaborative Culture

"We had a laser focus on effective classroom instruction, and tailored the framework to specific points of need, which contributed to our level of success."

• Level 2: Effective Teaching in Every Classroom
• Level 3: Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum
• Level 4: Standards-Referenced Reporting
• Level 5: Competency-Based Education

Using the framework and indicators, district and school leaders can significantly impact student achievement by synthesizing multiple complex initiatives so students can learn the content and skills necessary for success in college, careers and beyond.

Certifications lead to net gains
For three years, Marzano Resources provided PD services for McKinney's certification in the first two levels. In 2018-19, Reuben Johnson Elementary School experienced a net gain of 35% on state standardized math, reading

For more information, please visit **MarzanoResources.com/BecomeHRS**

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and writing scores, which Magee attributes to the HRS framework.

"We had a laser focus on effective classroom instruction, and tailored the framework to specific points of need, which contributed to our level of success," Magee says.

Following HRS recommendations, school leaders utilized walk-throughs to identify and highlight best practices and provide PD to further develop these practices. Instructional coaches, special education groups, counselors and a grade-level team

met semimonthly to review data, create goals and plan interventions for individual students.

'Common, shared vocabulary'
As schools now progress toward Level 3, the district model of instruction has been completely reshaped through the use of the HRS framework.

"I can now walk into classrooms knowing that our teachers have a common, shared vocabulary surrounding our best practices for instruction," Magee says. "We share

data with our staff regularly and know how to tailor our PD. That has been powerful for us."

MARZANO
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How school districts can more effectively promote student learning

Q&A with Phil Warrick, Author and Associate, Marzano Resources

What must districts achieve to ensure school effectiveness and student success?
Districts must define their missions to help all students learn. One way is establishing collaborative teams to work smarter, not harder. Another is to have a clear approach to districtwide models for teaching and learning. This provides a chance to develop skills and instructional strategies. Districts also need a guaranteed, viable curriculum and a way to measure learning. The biggest mistake that I've seen districts make over the years is doing a lot of things and not doing any of them well. Districts need to be focused on learning and must not get knocked off track by quick-fix opportunities. Districts also need to commit to what works and provide time to get better at it.

How important is it that all levels of school and district leadership are involved in this process?
It is vital for the most successful districts. District-level leadership communicates a clear vision, which is passed along to the schools and empowers leaders to understand the mission and put in place systems that help students learn. Teacher-level leadership is also important. We need to have opportunities for teachers to lead because many aspects of leadership are about action, not position. If there is a leadership structure from district to school to teachers, that is a much more effective school district.

What characteristics should K-12 leaders adopt to identify and balance these goals?
Data-driven leadership is a habit that leaders need to develop. It involves continuous data monitoring. When a districtwide instructional model is implemented, there should be data to help understand if it is working or not. Monitoring can identify a problem long before it becomes an issue.

How does the Marzano High Reliability Schools™ (HRS) framework empower districts to make these significant impacts on student achievement?
The HRS framework defines conditions of leading indicators across a school district. It uses lagging indicators, which are evidence that leading indicators are in place and working. Also, it provides quick data to watch systems and take action to fix them before they become systemwide failures. HRS identifies key areas of focus for districts and also establishes the concept of defined autonomy for schools. Defined autonomy allows schools to do different things based on their unique needs. This empowers district- and school-level leaders to monitor data and practice data-driven leadership. It also helps with long- and short-term strategic planning. Long-term goals involve gaining certification across multiple levels. The short-term focus is on leading indicators within a single level that schools need to solidify or implement before moving to the next level.

WORKING PARTNERSHIP

Building an active, working relationship between human resources and information technology departments benefits everyone involved

At the beginning of this school year, administrators in Lincoln Public Schools in Nebraska threw on the switch for a new enterprise resource planning platform.

The implementation came after more than two years of intense prep, building and production, yet there were still glitches when the system went live, including payroll discrepancies for some of the district's nearly 7,800 employees, says Eric Weber, associate superintendent for human resources.

"I'd characterize our implementation as fantastic—it went way better than we anticipated—but there have still been little things on the backside that needed to be tweaked," says Weber. "As long as you have the right people communicating and at the table, hopefully you make the right decisions."

Part of the project's success was that from the start of Lincoln's ERP implementation, the district's leaders of the human resources, business affairs and IT departments all have been involved to help avoid pitfalls.

"When you see ERPs go wrong, a lot of times it's a result of communication breakdowns and errors," says Weber. "We wanted to have this triad, this three-legged stool of leadership, and

also people who are actually doing the work, to help eliminate those errors that can happen when only one part of the organization is responsible for an ERP."

That proactive approach—which other school districts have found as well— continues to benefit all parties involved.

Building relationships

Every department in every district is going through some sort of digital transformation, says Lenny Schad, District Administration's chief information and innovation officer, and former CIO of Houston ISD. Conse-

quently, establishing interdepartmental relationships continues to be a critical challenge. "Digital transformations are forcing groups to work together much sooner and much deeper than they have before," says Schad.

The IT needs of HR department are changing dramatically, not just with enterprise technology but also in areas such as in recruitment and interviewing. "The infusion of technology is becoming really important into those processes, so having a good relationship between HR and IT leadership facilitates that," says Schad.

In Lincoln Public Schools's ERP implementation, communication between the HR, business and IT departments was a point of emphasis. In addition to sharing digital information via Google Drive, weekly standup meetings allowed the project team to report updates, discuss issues and brainstorm solutions.

"We also worked together to brand and market the ERP system so that everyone had a skin in the game in terms of ownership," says Weber.

The success of the ERP implementation has strengthened the working relationship of the departments. The district CIO now regularly participates in the HR leadership meetings.

"We don't consider purchasing or doing of a demo of any additional systems without having the CIO and IT at the table," says Weber. "Having them on board from the start means we don't have to scramble on the backside to try and make software work. It saves time and money for everyone."

Increasing efficiencies

Maryville City School District in Tennessee is a small district (5,200 students) with a very lean central office staff. Hiring takes place at individual schools, and the HR and IT personnel have an informal working relationship, says Rick Wilson, director of human resources and support services.

"'Relaxed professional' is the term we like to use here," says Wilson. For example, the district recently switched to a new ERP system to handle HR needs. IT was fully involved with the integration and implementation, and although there were no regularly set meetings, the two departments got together as needed, with any issues posted to a shared drive and addressed by the appropriate staff members.

Since the implementation, however, IT representatives have a presence at monthly leadership meetings to offer ongoing guidance and help vet new software and platforms.

> "By working efficiently, we can take the money that would go to extra employees and put it back into the schools to benefit the kids, and that's what we're here for."
>
> —Rick Wilson
> Maryville City School District, Tennessee

"We're always looking to improve our internal efficiency, and IT is a big player in that in how they can help us do that," says Wilson. For example, when HR changed over to electronic records, IT was critical in researching software and proposing a product that would work with existing systems—avoiding costly issues down the line. Other IT solutions have lightened the workload and reduced the need for adding extra staff.

"By working efficiently, we can take the money that would go to extra employees and put it back into the schools to benefit the kids, and that's what we're here for," says Wilson.

Taking the first step

In HR, the hiring process has changed dramatically over the past few years. The infusion of technology has become integral to those processes, so having a good relationship between HR and IT leadership is critical, says Schad.

For example, leaders need to consider how social media is being leveraged to promote job openings, or if videoconferencing is being used for interviews. Consider which web pages are being used for recruiting, says Schad. "The whole cultural operational switch has technology at the forefront."

An active working partnership with HR can also benefit IT in terms of having someone who is keeping abreast of the skills, responsibilities and certifications that are expected of new hires, especially given the dynamic nature of IT. And, of course, having HR involved from the start with any sort of personnel issues or incidents is critical to a positive resolution, says Schad.

Ultimately, rather than wait for these relationships to evolve, CIOs should be proactive, says Schad.

"If I don't have the relationship, I would go sit down with the HR leader and say, 'As an IT department, we're a service group, and in order for me to provide what your department needs, I need to understand your goals, objectives and areas where you're struggling,'" says Schad. "And it really starts from that perspective: 'I'm here to help, and the way that I can do that is to learn, and attend some of your meetings, so that we can work together and make sure we're aligned in whatever we're doing together.' That's the single most important thing a CIO can do."

Ray Bendici is managing editor.

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Kenneth J. Thompson
Chief Information Technology Officer
San Antonio ISD

Determining whether to store data in the cloud or on-premise can sometimes feel like choosing between two rival teams with diehard fans on both sides.

Although Kenneth J. Thompson, chief information technology officer for San Antonio ISD, expects that the days of 100-by-100-square-foot district data centers are nearing the end, he believes in a hybrid approach of both cloud and on-premise storage.

Thompson has led a five-year strategic plan that includes relocating the district's data center, redesigning local and wide area networks, and launching a new cloud-based student information and enterprise resource planning system.

The biggest shifts, however, haven't been with technology. "Changing culture has been 50% of my work," says Thompson.

Thompson was a featured presenter for DA's FETC® 2020 in Miami.

How to lead teams through the storage wars

Shoring up infrastructure and using cloud storage is critical, but shifting culture is job No. 1

How do you shift the mentality that data needs to be "touchable" or stored on-premise?

A lot of districts still operate under the impression of "I have to be able to touch it; it has to be in my environment." When we started our shift to the cloud, there was some nervousness and concern about changing or eliminating jobs. You have to show staff the value, the return on investment and the efficiency for the organization and for them. If that's not done, you're rowing the boat by yourself. Cloud computing can put us on a playing field where we have the same efficiencies as any corporation in the world. With vendors responsible for maintenance and upgrades, you can reskill your staff to use them in other ways.

What lessons are you learning as you move through your five-year strategic plan?

We have a saying among our CIOs: Friends don't let friends build data centers. I've learned that all things have to run parallel. Our data center is critical, infrastructure is critical, WAN is critical, the devices our users use are critical. Prioritizing the cloud has worked out well. We have about 30 of our applications in the cloud. But even if I had the applications up, if I didn't ramp up or true up those other environments, then it would be the same environment. It's like having a car with no gas in it. We had to do the rest to put us in a position of success.

How do you budget for the different pricing models of cloud services compared with on-premise costs?

You have to find partners. Some cloud service providers charge based on usage. One month it could be one price, and the next, it could jump to a much higher price. You need to find a partner that you can budget for and sustain. Ask about their pricing model and if they have a model that allows for predictable prices. A server might cost $5,000 to $7,000 and an average server might need to be replaced every three years, so it's important to figure out your budget and determine your cost savings for your district. **DA**

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Jennifer Herseim was a former editor for LRP Media Group and program chair for Inclusion and Special Education at DA's Future of Education Technology Conference.

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ProfessionalOpinion

A better side hustle for teachers

Moonlighting at an assembly line may help educators pay the bills, but it won't help their students learn more. There is a better way.

By Michael Driskill

Side hustles for teachers are common in many states, as recent reports have shown. In South Carolina, for instance, some 600 educators—including an award-winning teacher of the year—have worked nights on an assembly line to make ends meet.

Low pay isn't the only reason teachers are picking up extra jobs: 96% use personal funds to pay for their supplies, according to a survey by Fishbowl, an app that teachers commonly use to discuss workplace issues. The combination of low wages and a lack of professional respect is seen as a driving force behind America's teacher shortage, which is at crisis levels.

There is a silver lining. Educators are so committed to their profession that they are willing to do additional work outside their normal business hours to stay in their chosen field. This is good news because additional work for teachers is one of the main ways we can improve education in the U.S. But that extra work should boost student achievement instead of Uber's bottom line.

Taking time for analysis

Countries with high-performing education systems know that work beyond the classroom is important for student success. In Japan, for example, teachers spend many hours together engaged in a collaborative process called "lesson study." Similar to surgeons debriefing one another on complex procedures, Japanese teachers watch their peers

> **A commitment to professionalizing teaching is a key to success in many high-performing nations.**

teach and then they analyze what works and what doesn't to improve their lessons. The extra work pays off. Japan is a regular high performer on comparative international tests.

In the early 2000s, I visited Japan as a guest of the Japanese government for a program designed to improve relations and the understanding of our different education systems. At the time, I was teaching math at a large urban high school in New York City. I was surprised not only by how much time teachers spent together after instruction, but also by how the profession was viewed in Japan. It is widely considered rigorous and prestigious. Teachers don't "practice" for a couple of years before moving on to bigger and better things. Japanese educators were equally surprised to learn that in America, I was regularly asked what I planned to do next.

International studies by leading researchers—such as Linda Darling-Hammond, now president of the California State Board of Education—have shown that a commitment to professionalizing teaching is a key to success in many high-performing nations. These countries recognize that teaching is complex and teachers spend considerable time working together outside the classroom.

Creating new opportunities

How do we take the U.S. from a country where teachers can't pay the bills, and turn it into a global leader in education? We can start by creating additional paid opportunities—through stipends and other means—that allow teachers to work extra hours and tackle the intellectually demanding, reflective and collaborative work necessary to move the profession forward.

These opportunities should bring together teachers who work at the same school, and connect outstanding teachers from many different schools, as we do in the fellowship program that I lead in New York.

Finding the money for these new opportunities will be a challenge, of course, but it can be done. Policymakers can create programs and fund them using public or private sources. Either way, these efforts demand the political will to ignore quick fixes and fads in favor of slow but steady progress toward education excellence.

In the 1970s, Finland's education system was in trouble. A solution was proposed that was viewed as radical at the time: Transform teaching into a profession with prestige, similar to medicine and law. Many believed that teachers weren't up to the task.

Today in Finland, it is easier to become a doctor than a teacher, and the Finish education system is one of the world's best. We can transform education in the U.S. To get there, we need to show teachers the money and the professional respect they deserve. **DA**

Former teacher Michael Driskill is the chief operating officer at Math for America.

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