

# DA

**District Administration®**

January/February 2023

**Cyber Education**  
Students must learn about cybersecurity for it to work in the future

**The Happiness Gap**  
How to spot those students who are “less ok” than their peers

**Giving Them a Voice**  
Superintendents’ advisory councils bring students into the fold



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Every January, *District Administration's* FETC (Future of Education Technology Conference) is the culmination of a full year's worth of coordination and professional harmonizing to bring together the best and brightest edtech innovators from around the country (and beyond). And this year promises to be the best yet. Inspiring keynote speakers, engaging and valuable expert-led sessions, state-of-the-art booths and presentations, and more make for an energizing four days for everyone in the education industry, from teachers to superintendents to CTOs.

One of the main attractions is our Top Ed Tech Product Awards, recognizing the most creative and useful products available to schools today. You'll find a rundown of the winners on page 24. And if you're fortunate enough to be picking up this issue live and in person at FETC, make sure to check out not only the winners but also the finalists in addition to our roster of brilliant speakers and presenters. It's an exciting time in education and we're pleased to be able to share as much of it with you as we can. Here's to 2023 and a healthy, happy, high-tech new year.

—Lori Capullo, Executive Editor

## Talking EdTech for 2023

Here's what education leaders have been telling *DA* lately.

**“Now more than ever, teachers value their time. They have exceeded any possible expectations anyone could have in navigating a brand-new educational landscape.”**

—Bonnie Chelette, Louisiana Dept. of Education Director of Technology

**“FETC reminds me of a magic show, except that, when you leave, you can do the same magic.”**

—Craig McBain, Professional Learning Specialist

**“For most people, their formative STEM/STEAM experiences are at school. So ensuring that K-12 can see tech in all its creative, altruistic and diverse glory is paramount for inspiring folks to build tech skills.”**

—Anne-Marie Imafidon, Stemettes founder and British computing prodigy

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# BEYOND the news

## Here's what's keeping K-12 leaders up at night

*...and what's keeping them hopeful, as we move into a brand-new year.*

Which K-12 challenges are keeping your fellow superintendents and principals up at night now that COVID is no longer an all-consuming crisis? And what are public school leaders looking forward to with the pandemic no longer clouding every inch of the horizon?

Superintendent Marcella Shaw, of the Barnwell County Consolidated School District in South Carolina, has four major goals for this year and beyond: safety, academic excellence, fiscal responsibility and building community. For instance, a recent safety review revealed that not all custodians had walkie-talkies to communicate in emergencies and that trees around some schools had to be trimmed to clear views for surveillance cameras. Safety also means making all staff and students feel valued in the new district, which

**“It’s not because our staff is not doing a great job; it’s because we just can’t find the people.”**

was created by the merger of two smaller school systems in Williston and Blackville.

“If we make the district a safe space where people feel honored—where people feel like they have a voice and that they are contributing—that is a big retention strategy,” says Shaw, the 2023 superintendent of the year in South Carolina. “We are working very hard to create conditions so our folks want to come to work.”

To keep students engaged and involved, she hopes the merger allows her to reinstitute programs, such as soccer, and start new ones, like wrestling. She’s also working to launch an academy for gifted students. “We want to be recognized nationally as a rural school district that’s making a difference,” she adds. “If you have a diploma from Barnwell, I want that to be recognizable across the nation as producing scholars who are creative, critical thinkers who can be great leaders.”

### Many K-12 challenges revolve around staffing

Teacher and staff shortages are a daily concern in many central offices across the country and will seemingly persist over at least the next few years. “If you were to ask me my 15 biggest concerns, 12 of them are staff-related,” says Superintendent Jim Nielsen of Orchard View Schools in Michigan. “It’s not because our staff is not doing a great job; it’s because we just can’t find the people.”

The biggest struggle at Pitt County Schools in North Carolina has also been finding qualified teachers and other personnel, including principals, custodians, bus drivers, and teaching assistants. “For years, we’d advertise for certain positions and have 20 people apply,” Superintendent Ethan Lenker says. “Now, we only get one or two.”

Of course, it's not all doom and gloom. Nielsen and his team of educators will offer more hybrid classes for students who are more successful when they are not learning in-person full-time. The district will also introduce competency-based learning and design thinking on a wider scale as those novel approaches gain momentum. "We have them in pockets throughout the district," he explains. "And we have more success with allowing teachers to learn and develop passion and excitement about these models rather than mandating them."

In Pitt County Schools, the future will see the expansion of the district's tech academy, which will likely include housing some programs at the local community college, Superintendent Ethan Lenker says. "The questions are, how do we grow that and can we take that into a school-within-a-school model?" he says. "We're also looking at a

self-enrolling high school to be part of that program."

### Recommitting to continuous improvement after COVID

Many other leaders say they can now get back to focusing on continuous improvement after powering through the pandemic.

Enhancing personalized learning to meet the needs of every student, supporting families and keeping the community informed—as well as ensuring the district is a place where teachers and staff are enthusiastic to work—are the priorities for Superintendent Walter "Rick" Clemons and his team at Gloucester County Schools in Virginia.

"It's about never being satisfied where you are," says Clemons, Virginia's 2023 superintendent of the year. "We have had a lot of success and we have a lot of things to be proud of. But there are a lot of things that still need to be done."

By Matt Zalaznick

## The Essential Nature of Cyber Education

*Successful cybersecurity in the future depends on our students studying it right now.*

Cybersecurity, an understaffed profession that demands reinforcement as criminal actors continue to creep into America's educational institutions, just became more accessible to K-12 students.

The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency announced the expansion of its virtual K-12 cybersecurity education program CYBER.ORG Range to all 50 states, an initiative that originated in Louisiana. Teachers will be able to use the Range to guide students through a safe and controlled virtual environment where they can

practice deploying and discovering cyberattacks.

The program is funded by CISA's Cybersecurity Education and Training Assistance Program grant. Advocates are hopeful that the initiative will drive more attention to the field, adding more candidates to a traditionally understaffed workforce.

"Early cyber education is critical to our national security, and tomorrow's cybersecurity professionals are sitting in today's classrooms," says CISA Director Jen Easterly in a statement.

There are nearly 770,000 job openings in cybersecurity, a daunting statistic as districts are repeatedly exposed to ransomware attacks from malicious cybercriminal groups such as Vice Society. Advocacy for student preparation into the field goes hand in hand with computer science, a subject that has gained tremendous traction this school year.



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NEXT GENERATION LEARNING CHALLENGES

In July, a joint letter signed by hundreds of innovators in technology, including Bill Gates and Jeff Bezos, called for the national recognition of the importance of computer science education in K-12 schools as the pipeline into the profession is also rather slim.

“The United States leads the world in technology, yet only 5% of our high school students study com-

puter science,” the letter reads. “How is this acceptable? We invented the personal computer, the internet, and the smartphone. It is our responsibility to prepare the next generation for the American Dream.”

Through this new cybersecurity initiative, the barriers to entry into the field have been lowered significantly so that any K-12 student, particularly those in high school inter-

ested in cybersecurity concepts, can have a head start on their careers.

“The CYBER.ORG Range is designed to lower the existing barriers to entry into the cybersecurity field by helping ensure that all students are cyber literate and have the core cybersecurity skills,” said CYBER.ORG Director Laurie Salvail in a statement.

*By Micah Ward*

## The Happiness Gap

*10 signs that some students are less OK than others.*

The youth mental health crisis should not be news to K-12 leaders, but what do you know about the “happiness gap?”

It’s among the eye-opening revelations students themselves are sharing about the severity of the youth mental health crisis gripping the nation.

Their perspectives on happiness, suicide, bullying and whether they can get help at school are detailed in YouthTruth’s latest survey of more than 200,000 students in 20 states. The poll sought students’ insights in five major categories: obstacles to learning, the happiness gap, getting help, talking to someone, and suicide.

“Student responses show that we should all be concerned about the intersection of mental health and equity as some groups of students are especially in need of informed action,” the report says. “Youth express a collective desire—they even demand—that adults involve them in creating a more responsive education system so that they can, as one student put it, ‘find our way back to loving learning.’”

### Mental health crisis by the numbers

#### 1. Obstacles to learning

- “Depression, stress and anxiety” are the biggest obstacles to learning for secondary students at every grade level, 6 through 12. More than half of both high school and middle school students reported it as the largest barrier.

- The percentage of secondary students who say “getting picked on or bullied” is an obstacle drops from grades 6 through 12. But LGBTQ+ middle and high school students report at double the rate of their peers that bullying is a barrier.

**More obstacles:** Boys were the least likely to say depression, stress and anxiety prevented them from learning, while vast majorities of non-binary and transgender students say mental health is a major barrier at school. All secondary students say distractions at home, family responsibilities, health concerns, and personal relationships get in the way. High school students noted extracurricular commitments as a hurdle, and middle schoolers worry about having internet access.

#### 2. Happiness gap

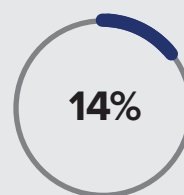
- The percentage of children and youth who say they feel happy about their lives declines from grades 3 through 12.

- There is a gender happiness

Middle school students who have considered suicide in the last year:



High school students who have considered suicide in the last year:



High school students who feel happy about their lives:





gap at every grade level: A larger percentage of boys report feeling happy about their lives than students who identify as female or non-binary.

**More gaps:** The happiness gap is a chasm for non-binary middle and high school students. There is a 47% gap in reports of happiness between these students and boys, who are their happiest peers. In all grades, only white middle school students report happiness at a significantly higher percentage than their peers. A little over half—55%—of high school students feel happy about their lives.

### 3. Getting help

- Just over one in five middle and high school students say they have seen a school counselor, a therapist, or a psychologist.

- Fewer than half of middle school students and only about a third of high school students agree their school has services or programs that help them when

they are upset, stressed, or having problems.

**More help:** White students (28%) report speaking with a high school counselor or psychologist at a higher rate than all other students (24%). Latinx students report seeking help at a significantly lower percentage (20%). LGBTQ+ students in middle and high school are far more likely than their non-LGBTQ+ peers to report seeking counseling in school.

### 4. Talking to someone

- The percentage of elementary students who say they have an adult they can talk to at school when they are upset drops steadily from third grade (61%) to fourth grade (55%) to fifth grade (50%).

- Fewer than half of secondary students—regardless of grade level, gender, race, or LGBTQ+ status—report that there is an adult at school they can talk to.

**More talk:** Fewer than 50% of secondary students in all demo-

graphic groups say they have an adult at school they can talk to when they feel upset, stressed, or have a problem.

### 5. Suicide

- 13% of middle school students and 14% of high school students say they have considered suicide in the last year.

- There is no significant difference in the percentage of youth reporting that they have considered suicide in the previous year by grade level or by race but there are “alarming” differences by gender identity and LGBTQ+ status.

**More despair:** The groups who report the highest rates of seriously considering suicide are transgender middle and high school students. “An astonishing preponderance of transgender youth report that they have felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more that they stopped doing some of their usual activities,” the report concludes.

*By Matt Zalaznick*

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# Why pursuing edtech innovation must not end with the pandemic

Districts ought to concentrate on maintaining the momentum they built during the pandemic and focus on innovation.

BY MICAH WARD

Finally, COVID-19 is behind us (for the most part). But that doesn't mean everything that was produced by the pandemic should also be left behind. Think about all the innovative solutions schools adopted to overcome such adversity, and there's still more to achieve.

"We don't want to return to normal." That's the overwhelming consensus of many district CIOs and CTOs. In the realm of education technology, the pandemic allowed schools to shift their practices to meet students where they are, and those practices are sticking.

"I'm looking forward to not having a normal year. I'm hoping that our school districts will think about their time during the pandemic and think about what worked," said Diane Doersch, senior director of Information Technology at Digital

Promise, an independent nonprofit organization committed to sparking innovation in education and a featured speaker at FETC© 2023 in January, in a previous interview with District Administration.

Dr. Kenneth J. Thompson, chief information technology and accountability officer for the San Antonio Independent School District and another featured speaker at FETC© 2023, also strives for innovation in his district, considering how much the pandemic has changed their perspective.

"I had a board member tell me, 'We don't want to go back to normal,'" he said. "The pandemic caused us to rethink the way we did our work, our processes, the way we approached things, the whole nine yards. And out of that, I don't care what anybody says, we brought some innovation, and we brought

some efficiencies."

So why stop in 2023? Districts ought to concentrate on maintaining the momentum they built during the pandemic and focus on innovation.

Featured in January's FETC conference, MaryEllen West, coordinator of instructional technology services at Gwinnett County Public Schools in Georgia, will be providing leaders with insight on how to cultivate a culture of innovation in their schools. Attendees will be able to participate in discussions and activities for "expanding curiosity and inspiring staff and students at their school."

Additional sessions will address emerging technologies and how to lead that culture of innovation, showcase effective tools for ELL students, and much more.

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*Micah Ward is District Administration's staff writer.*



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BY MATT ZALAZNICK

# A SAFE SPACE

How superintendents' student advisory councils are boosting student morale.



**S**uperintendent Robert F. Hill's student advisory council gives him a chance to do something he doesn't often get to do. "As a superintendent in a large district, you don't always get to spend as much time with students or in buildings or classrooms as you would like to," says Hill, leader of the Springfield City School District near Dayton, Ohio. "With a council of this nature, you're able to get a better pulse about what's going on. I would encourage all superintendents to explore creating this type of council."

A growing number of superintendents across the nation are launching advisory councils to give students a role in district decision-making and to hear directly from learners about their biggest concerns. Springfield City's superintendent's student advisory council was launched about five years ago and comprises students from its main high school and its smaller project-based learning high school.

"We meet once a month and we chat about what's going right, what we could be doing better and we always try to find a focus for the school year," Hill says. "As leaders, we too often tend to focus on our role as adults when we should be focusing on students and what's best for them and what they need."

Last school year, the council's project was providing hygiene products for students in the high-poverty district as well as 100% free lunch. This school year, the student leaders are planning to hold a spring carnival in conjunction with a local NAACP chapter to raise money for scholarships and other assistance. Members of the council have also been instrumental in creating a chess club, a Dungeons & Dragons club and other high school activities.

Students can volunteer to serve on the council and Hill also relies on principals for nominations to ensure the group remains diverse. "It's a leadership opportunity



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that allows them to be a voice for their classmates and the school,” Hill explains. “You really want to make sure you have a very diverse group of students because everyone has different experiences, needs and perceptions of how school is running and whether their needs are being met.”

### Student advisory councils provide a safe space

The Superintendent’s Student Advisory Council at San Juan USD near Sacramento, California, is a sign to the community that students’ perspectives are prioritized and valued by the district’s leaders and educators. “We’ve created a safe space with these students where they feel comfortable emailing me with concerns and ideas,” Superintendent Kent Kern says. “I’m here to listen and to create opportunities for change.”

San Juan USD launched its student advisory council in the 2017-18 school year and its members have tackled issues such as mental wellness, finding trusted adults on campus and enhancing student communication channels. The council, which comprises two students from each San Juan USD high school, recently launched a student podcast and social media accounts and has also created scholarship opportunities. The group is currently working on updating the district’s dress code. Highlights include:

- 2017-18: Created a survey to identify the social-emotional and academic needs of high school students.
- 2018-19: All of San Juan USD’s high schools now have their own branded app, which was the council’s solution for removing barriers to student communication.
- 2019-20: Created a “Find Your Trusted Adult” campaign to support the social-emotional needs of teens. The initiative, however, was cut short by COVID.
- 2020-21: Established a San Juan Student podcast and scholarships for graduating seniors that have awarded 40 students \$500 each over the last two years. The council also established a Student Speakers Series on how students were dealing with the impacts of COVID.

The dress code has been the council’s project this school year and last. It surveyed 4,500 students to gather their views on the dress code, how it’s enforced and whether it should be updated.

Each summer, more than 100 students apply to serve on the council and their applications are reviewed by the existing council members. “Students bring feedback, perspectives and ideas from their own experience at their high school to share with me and other members of district leadership. This has provided us the opportunity to elevate student voice and create opportunities for systemic change,” says Kern, who shared feedback from students on how serving on the council, also known as the SSAC, has benefitted them:

- “Being on San Juan’s Superintendent’s Student Advisory Council has benefitted me because it allows me to voice out our school’s strengths and weaknesses, and it enables me to represent a whole community. Since I was



Prioritizing students' perspectives on everything from mental wellness to communication is a catalyst for positive change.

younger, I’ve always strived to make a difference in my community, whether that has to do with providing resources for students or offering tutoring sessions for kids who can’t afford it. Having the ability to advocate for all students on my school’s campus ensures that the students will have supportive staff members and a safe space, which will encourage strong student achievement.”

- “I feel as if being on this council has made me care about things in my life more. Seeing everyone there actively trying to improve schooling has made me stop looking at things like ‘this sucks’ but more ‘I don’t like this, how could it be changed?’”

• “I think the most impactful aspect of this council is the group of students we have. Having the opportunity to work with like-minded people who are motivated to resolve issues and improve the school system has further inspired me to make change [happen]. Being able to share my ideas with others and hear what they have to bring to the table has helped to create the active and driven mindset that SSAC values. Without my fellow council members, it would be impossible to accomplish our goals. This council exposed me to teamwork at its finest; we are all putting our ideas and efforts into one larger goal: progress.”

• “This council has given me an outlet to share my concerns regarding the school system and environment. Prior to joining, I felt like I had no place to voice my concerns, and when I did—be it through a survey, a teacher, or even the principal—I felt as if they went nowhere. By becoming part of SSAC, my voice is not only being heard by the right people, but I am able to see development regarding the issues I bring up as well as actively involve myself in solving them.”

• “Being on the SSAC has given me a new perspective on issues at my school that I didn’t recognize before and helps me consider how we can make our schools more inclusive and welcoming to everyone.” **DA**

*Matt Zalaznick is District Administration’s senior writer.*



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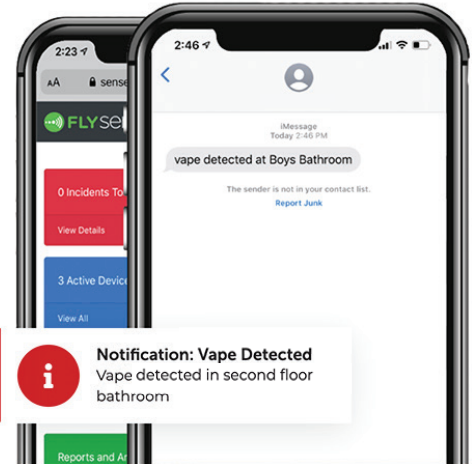
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# IT'S ALL ABOUT THE STUDENT



School leaders are putting students at the center of everything from CTE to mastery to initiatives designed to close achievement gaps.

BY MATT ZALAZNICK

**T**here's a high school in Tennessee where folks can get their dogs groomed, while another student-run business operates a branch of a local bank.

Students at Blackman High School inutherford County Schools run a dog-grooming operation as part of a small-animal CTE program. Families, staff and community members bring their canines to a specially designated back entrance to get them bathed and beautified to their specifications. The fees they pay help fund the school's career-oriented agricultural programs.

"We can give our students who have veterinary aspirations the experience to go out and start a business or work for somebody else to pay their way through college," says Principal Justin Smith, adding, "My dog visits with great regularity."

The school's current master groomer is a student who discovered his skills by cutting his own hair during the COVID lockdown. "He realized it's something he enjoyed, and it was a skill he could transfer over to some other areas," Smith explains. Of course, Blackman is just among many high schools where leaders are making student-centered instruction a reality.

## Closing opportunity gaps

Principal Robert Motley calls Atholton High School's Black Student Achievement liaison a "godsend position." Every high school in Maryland's Howard County Public School System has, like Atholton, a Black Student Achievement liaison whose sole responsibility is to monitor the performance of African American students.

These liaisons don't only work with students. They also advise teachers and collaborate with families on various initiatives, such as increasing the number of Black students in AP, honors and other advanced courses. "Her mere presence has had an impact on grades, attitudes and discipline," says Motley. "It has made a huge difference."

Every year, Motley holds an assembly to introduce Black and multiracial students to the Black Student Achievement liaison and the help she offers. Students can reach out to the liaison—by scanning a QR code—while others may be referred by teachers or administrators for assistance. The liaison is able to connect with students because she has no role in grading and discipline, though she does visit classrooms to work with students whom teachers have identified as needing interventions, Motley explains.

The liaison also works with teachers on issues of cultural competency and how to get results with specific students. Motley's school has just qualified for a Hispanic achievement liaison based on its growing population of Latinx students.

The liaison also fills another gap: The school does not have any African American counselors. "Historically, if we look at achievement gaps, that's the basis for these programs," Motley says. "It's what are we doing for students apart from everything that hasn't worked for these groups."

## Putting the right kid with the right teacher

"Custom" or "traditional" education is the choice at the heart of student-centered instruction in the Harrisburg School District in South Dakota. At the high school level, that means students can choose to work at their own pace in the core subjects of English, math, science, and social studies or they can enroll in classes that stick to a more structured pace set by the teacher, says Travis Lape, the district's innovative programs director.

"We're trying to put the right kid with the right teacher at the right time," Lape says. "If a kid really understands algebra, do they need to sit in an algebra class for an entire year when maybe they only need a semester?"

In the customized classes, students can work ahead or take a little more time in mastering skills and concepts. In math, teachers are dividing students into three



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# IT'S ALL ABOUT THE STUDENT

groups: those who are working ahead, those who are right on schedule and those who are falling behind, Associate Principal Brad Seamer adds. "And when you walk into a science class, you're likely to see four different labs and three independent projects taking place at the same time as the teacher moves around the room."

Starting next year, students will be able to choose "custom" or "traditional" for specific classes rather than for their entire schedule. This means they can take customized math and traditional English.

This approach, designed to empower students, has also filtered down to the district's middle and elementary schools, Lape points out. Middle school students have more control over scheduling their days. They can choose between small-group sessions and bigger class seminars and rotate among teachers. Teachers and administrators,

of course, monitor students' decisions and will intervene if they are making "bad choices"—such as, Lape explains, picking all the same classes as a friend. Along with academics, one of the goals is to help students begin developing time management and organizational skills.

In some elementary schools, grade levels have been eliminated in favor of grouping students together based on achievement, so teachers are working with students who are all at the same level. This prevents a second-grade teacher from, for example, having to instruct students reading at fifth-grade proficiency and those only at a kindergarten level.

And conversations play an important role in the middle and elementary assessment process. Teachers will ask students what they can articulate about their learning, looking for key "habits of mind" such as managing impulsivity, striving for accuracy, finding humor, and reflecting on their own thought processes. "When you have an 8-year-old who can articulate these things, you've created an environment of problem-solving, instead of having students just raise their hands and say, 'I don't know to do this,'" Lape concludes.

## BANKING ON STUDENT-RUN BUSINESS



For the numerically minded at Blackman High School in Tennessee, students also run a Redstone Federal Credit Union bank branch that the company built inside the high school.

There, they can open accounts, deposit paychecks, and

withdraw funds while the branch is open during lunch period. The students who staff the bank are trained Redstone Federal Credit Union employees who also earn a CTE class credit for their work.

Students receive \$500 when they sign up for online banking and use their debit card five times. This has resulted in a "massive" number of students opening accounts. "It's an opportunity to take the first step into financial literacy. It's an opportunity to start saving and spending."

Blackman is the only high school in Tennessee that has its own branded debit card, a service that is also operated by the credit union. The school earns a 10-cent contribution every time someone swipes their Blackman debit card, generating a few hundred dollars a month.

"It's an easy way for families to support the school," Smith points out. "As a public school, every little bit counts...every little bit can go a long way."

### Student-centered instruction is "the real deal"

Student-focused instruction at Holmen High School in Wisconsin is focused outside the classroom, Principal Wayne E. Sackett says. Students in Holmen's Farm-to-School Project are handling everything from growing produce to raising and processing poultry and cattle for the school's lunch and nutrition programs. They use the school's greenhouse extensively and tend to an asparagus field on school property.

Their work, part of the school's Future Farmers of America program, translates into school culinary events such as "Winner, Winner Chicken Dinner." "We have one of the most amazing lunch programs around," Sackett says. "It's giving kids real-life experiences."

Another real-life experience on offer at the high school, which is part of the School District of Holmen, is the model store that students in an entrepreneurship class run every year around the winter holidays. And they run *everything*, from the stocking and staffing of the store to marketing to human resources to negotiating with sponsors and vendors. They develop a name and logo and pick a charity or a family in need that will benefit from the store's sales, which consist primarily of baked goods and crafts. Last year, the store raised about \$14,400.

The students also develop an employee handbook, create a training program for sales staff, design an incentive program for vendors, and promote the store at school events, via social media and on local radio. "They have everything you might have in a business," Sackett says. "It's the real deal." DA

*Matt Zalaznick is District Administration's senior writer.*

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Digital Course Licensing for K-12

# Why Online Education is Vital to the Future of K-12

## Q&A with **Dr. Louis Algaze**, President and Chief Executive Officer, FlexPoint Education Cloud and Florida Virtual School

### What lessons do you think educators learned from the pandemic period?

The past several years have been nearly unprecedented; from school closures due to the pandemic, to the largest decline in reading scores in 30 years, to widespread teacher shortages, educators have had to quickly develop creative solutions to some very difficult challenges.

The pandemic taught us some new lessons, but also amplified what we already know. Specifically, that the traditional classroom model is not always effective for every student, because each learns differently. As educators, we need to ensure that families have a variety of options to choose from, including online learning, so that students can follow the learning journey that is best for them.

### What myths can you dispel about online learning?

What most students experienced during the pandemic was remote emergency learning, rather than true online learning. It was a quick solution, but it lacked the key pillars of effective online learning.

When done well, online learning personalizes learning for each student, includes both group and individual learning time, offers extensive teacher professional development and support, and enables and promotes constant communication with families.

Florida Virtual School (FLVS) is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, and our student performance data highlights the differences between true online learning and remote emergency learning.

For example, during the 2020-21 school year, FLVS student performance across grades 3-10 saw increases when compared to 2019. Plus, last school year, our students performed above the state average in nearly every subject, including Advanced Placement assessment results, with our FLVS Full Time program ranking in the top five school districts for state assessment scores. This demonstrates that when students and teachers were already accustomed to full-time online school, test scores did not decline during the pandemic period.

Another recent example is Union Virtual Learning Academy from Oklahoma, a blended learning option for students in grades 10-12. They use curriculum and courses provided by FlexPoint, and in the 2021-22 school year, the passing rate for all blended learning courses stayed at 93% or higher, with 50% of all seniors in the district taking at least one blended course.

### Why should every school or district invest in an online learning program?

Every school district should embrace flexible learning options, like online, blended, or hybrid learning, because they empower parents and students to take control of their educational journey and learn in the way that works best for them.

Rather than having all students moving at the same pace and covering the same subjects, online, blended, and hybrid learning models provide students and families with more flexibility, accessibility, self-pacing, and support. Students can move to the next lesson if they have mastered a concept or take extra time if they are struggling.

Additionally, online learning options, digital courses and digital tools can enable teachers to have more one-on-one interaction with students than was previously possible.

### What options are available to school and district leaders who are interested in developing their own online program?

There are many options for school and district leaders who are either just starting to explore online, blended, or hybrid programs, or for any who are looking to elevate an existing program.

It's important to partner with an online learning provider who not only has an engaging and interactive curriculum, as well as training, professional development, and technical support, but also one who understands the needs of district leaders.

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# WHY ESPORTS IS ALWAYS A WINNER

BY MATT ZALAZNICK

Learn how some early adopters brought the benefits to high school students despite initial resistance to the idea.

**H**igher attendance, deeper engagement and better mental health are just three of the benefits of esports to students. So, do you want to know how some early adopters of esports—also known as scholastic gaming—launched one of the first high school programs despite some initial pushback?

Kristy Custer, the vice president of educational innovation at the High School Esports League, will tell that story in her presentation, “Why Administrators Should Support Esports in Schools,” at the 2023 Future of Education Technology® Conference in New Orleans in January. She’ll also explain that esports can encompass for-

credit classes, competitive gaming and social activities. “Scholastic gaming mixes the structure of school with the fun of esports into engaging curricular and co-curricular activities that students and teachers love,” Custer says.

Attendees to FETC will find several more opportunities to expand their esports horizons:

#### **Developing the whole child through esports**

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# WHY ESPORTS IS ALWAYS A WINNER

Presenter Julie Mavrogeorge, the work-based learning and esports coordinator at Fresno USD, will detail how an esports program can anchor CTE pathways in graphic design, game design, video production, and broadcasting. Students in her district are learning video production, event planning, tournament management, shout casting and other college and career skills.

## SEL benefits of esports

**Correlating Esports and SEL Core Competencies:** Personalized social-emotional learning can be embedded into esports with the help of Generation Esports' "Gaming Concepts" curriculum. The program draws on the five SEL core competencies—self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, social awareness, and relationship skills—to motivate teachers and administrators to adopt video gaming as a catalyst for SEL. Presenter: Andrew Lombardo, account executive, Generation Esports.

## Students who never participated before...

**Esports: From Startup to Scholarships:** Last year, 200 colleges offered close to \$16 million in esports scholarships while students who had never before participated in clubs and athletics became the leaders of their gaming teams. Tami Lundberg, the chief technology officer at Fresno USD, will also show how esports motivates students to learn skills in coding, game design, shoutcasting, marketing, and communication.

## Mental health and career pathways

**It's Time to Normalize Esports in Education!:** The pandemic forced educators to find new ways to engage students, making this school year the perfect time to introduce esports, says presenter Kristen Craft, an educational leadership coach and academic esports specialist at Generation Esports. Esports can foster



post-secondary success through gaming scholarships and training for jobs in this billion-dollar industry. Craft will cover how the benefits of esports fit into K-12 education, including improving student mental health and opening CTE pathways.

## Building edtech skillsets and boosting engagement

**Seizing Academic Esports' Power to Build Ed Tech Skillsets:** Esports can open up a world of learning and other dynamic possibilities for students who have become disengaged from learning. Alan Sitomer, speaker, author and previous California teacher of the year award winner, will explain how using a research-based approach to academic esports can elevate student achievement and channel the passion for gaming into workforce-ready skills.

Other esports sessions include:

- Esports in Elementary Education
- Innovation Sports: Esports, STEM Education, & Innovation
- Implementing Esports Through Athletics vs. Implementing Esports through Education
- Put the WOW Factor Into Your Scholastic Gaming Program
- Esports: A community crafting the framework for the future!
- Esports: Beyond Gaming
- Growing A Global Community of Educators Around Scholastic Esports
- Building K-12 Esports Sustainability From Critical Stakeholders **DA**



*Matt Zalaznick is District Administration's senior writer.*





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- You **must** be present to win!

## Agenda:

- **Tuesday, January 24**
  - 2:00 PM** | The Master Teacher Model: Reach More Students with Hybrid Learning
  - 3:00 PM** | Keep Your School Safer From Digital Dangers
- **Wednesday, January 25**
  - 11:00 AM** | Bring Immersive Learning to Your Classroom
  - 12:00 PM** | Cybersecurity the ThinkShield Way
  - 1:00 PM** | Better Performance — Chromebooks Powered by Mediatek
  - 2:00 PM** | Streamline Operations for School IT Professionals
  - 3:00 PM** | Build and Manage a Safe and Powerful Sports Ecosystem
- **Thursday, January 26**
  - 11:00 AM** | Monitor, Communicate and Collaborate with Your Student Devices

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NO PURCHASE NECESSARY. A PURCHASE WILL NOT INCREASE YOUR CHANCES OF WINNING. Open to all registered attendees of the Future of Education Technology Conference (FETC) held January 24th - 26th, 2023, in New Orleans, Louisiana, who are legal residents of the fifty (50) United States and District of Columbia age 18 and over, and who are employed by any public or private educational institution entering solely on behalf of such educational institution. Starts January 24, 2023 at 12:00 PM CT, and ends January 26, 2023 at 11:00 AM CT. For Official Rules, odds of winning and prize descriptions, visit <https://esg.us/fetc-rules>. Void where prohibited. Sponsor: Lenovo (United States) Inc., 8001 Development Drive, Morrisville, North Carolina 27560.





# #Winning! These are DA's Top Ed Tech Products of the Year

Check them out in person at the Future of Education Technology Conference in New Orleans in January.

## CURRICULUM & INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY

**Voyager Sopris Learning**  
**Product: LANGUAGE! Live**

**What it is:** This comprehensive literacy intervention program for students in grades 5-12 who are two or more years behind grade level combines two instructional experiences—online and teacher-guided instruction—to reinforce the literacy foundations students need while strategically engaging them with authentic text to accelerate them to grade-level proficiency.



**Scirra Ltd.**  
**Product: Construct 3**

**What it is:** Construct 3 by Scirra Ltd. is a state-of-the-art game development software used by small game developers, large organizations (including NASA), and particularly schools. Students can create 2D and 2.5D video games with little or no prior programming knowledge. Game development software is ideal for getting students from a young age engaged in computer science and coding. A wide range of game development programs is available, each with its own unique advantages.



**SwiftGrade**  
**Product: SwiftGrade**

**What it is:** SwiftGrade is a new innovative grading app and website that saves teachers time by grading both online and paper assessments. For handwritten and multiple-choice paper assessments, simply point your camera at a student's paper to grade it. For online assessments, as soon as students submit an assessment to the student portal, the results are ready.



## FUTURE LEARNING & TECHNOLOGY

**McGraw Hill**  
**Product: McGraw Hill AR (Augmented Reality)**

**What it is:** McGraw Hill AR is an augmented reality app that provides engaging, bite-size experiences that promote deep, conceptual learning. It was created through a partnership between McGraw Hill and Verizon as part of Verizon's Innovative Learning Initiative, which supports digital equity and inclusion in education. The app is free for all schools and can be used with any curriculum.



**Edthena**  
**Product: AI Coach by Edthena**

**What it is:** The AI Coach platform uses artificial intelligence to guide teachers to self-reflect and accelerate their professional learning. When working inside the AI Coach platform, teachers have a conversation with the virtual coach, Edie, who asks teachers about their professional goals. Teachers then analyze and reflect on videos of their classroom instruction by adding time-stamped comments. As part of the conversation, they develop a short-term goal, identify a strategy for change, and commit to a timeline for implementation.



**Merlyn Mind**  
**Product: Merlyn, the AI-Powered Digital Assistant**

**MERLYN MIND**

**What it is:** Merlyn Mind is an AI technology company translating the latest advances in artificial intelligence to improve human productivity with workflow automation. Merlyn, the first digital assistant for education, seamlessly integrates into classrooms and existing edtech tools to automate everyday workflows for teachers so they can focus more time and attention on students.

## INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

**Clever**  
**Product: Clever IDM**

**What it is:** Clever IDM is an automated identity management solution that's easy to set up and can be added to Clever's core single sign-on platform. Clever IDM uses the data that school districts already have in Clever from their student information system to automatically provision, update and de-provision user accounts for students, teachers, and staff in Active Directory and Google Workspace.



**Identity Automation**  
**Product: RapidIdentity**

**What it is:** RapidIdentity is a cloud-based identity and access management (IAM) platform that Identity Automation built specifically for edtech ecosystems. There are three modules of the platform: Lifecycle: Performs full lifecycle management of digital identities; Authentication: Ensures that users who access district systems are who they say they are; and Governance: Improves the compliance and auditability of cybersecurity practices.



### Grey Trunk RFID

**Product:** Grey Trunk RFID Fixed Asset Inventory Software

**What it is:** Grey Trunk's cloud-based asset tracking system makes asset tracking and inventory fast and simple. Eliminate hours of work using RFID and barcode technology to easily find and catalog your assets. Grey Trunk's asset tracking app has it all—from mobile to web, their asset management tracking solutions allow you to take control of your fixed assets, such as laptops, Chromebooks, monitors, and more.



## LEARNING ENVIRONMENT & STUDENT SUPPORT TECHNOLOGY

### Paper

**Product:** Paper

**What it is:** Paper partners with over 450 school districts across North America to provide over 2.5 million students with an unlimited, 24/7, on-demand Educational Support System featuring virtual tutoring, writing assignment review, career and college support, after-school extracurricular programming, and other academic support tools. All of Paper's services are entirely free for students, helping close equity gaps.



### AllHere

**Product:** AllHere

**What it is:** Founded by Joanna Smith-Griffin, a former public-school leader and 2021 Forbes "30 Under 30" recipient, AllHere provides scalable, equitable educational coaching and support for families. AllHere's family support chatbot is available 24/7 by text message to help parents answer wide-ranging questions like "How is my child doing in class?" "What assignments are my child missing?" and "How can I get help with issues around mental health, well-being, transportation, housing, or food services?"



### Novel Effect

**Product:** Novel Effect:  
**Bring the Story to Life!**

**What it is:** Novel Effect is a mobile app that brings stories to life with interactive music, sound effects, and character voices that follow along as teachers read aloud from their library of physical books with their students. Learners and listeners are immersed in magical soundscapes, bringing awe and smiles that dramatically enhance the read-aloud experience.



## MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS TECHNOLOGY

### PowerSchool

**Product:** PowerSchool Unified Insights™ MTSS

**What it is:** PowerSchool Unified Insights™ offers rich analytics that provide educators with the actionable insights they need to improve student outcomes. Unified Insights delivers insights to school, district, and state education agencies with specific solutions for essential student learning (attendance, behavior, and coursework), early warning and intervention, SEL reporting, MTSS, and CCLR, as well as K-12 finance and operations, talent management, enrollment analytics, and location analytics.



### Otus

**Product:** Otus

**What it is:** Otus is an all-in-one platform that empowers K-12 educators to optimize instruction, planning, and grading by gathering and visualizing student-growth data. Otus makes every step of the learning process more efficient for teachers, administrators, students and families.



### Jetpacked

**Product:** Jetpacked

**What it is:** Jetpacked is a one-stop shop for students, educators, and families to design, monitor, and celebrate a purposeful, personalized online learning experience using their favorite digital learning programs. Using data aggregated from multiple online applications, Jetpacked helps all parties promote student agency by providing personalized goal recommendations weekly—aligned with yearly growth targets—and updated progress daily. Jetpacked transforms the chaos of multiple applications into a personalized, coordinated learning experience.



## UPSKILLING & CREDENTIAL TECHNOLOGY

### PowerSchool

**Product:** Naviance by PowerSchool

**What it is:** Naviance by PowerSchool is the leading CCLR platform that helps students connect learning to post-secondary paths. With Naviance, schools and districts enable students to discover their strengths and interests, build critical SEL skills, create actionable goals, and find their best-fit path after high school. Naviance provides tools for students and educators in schools and districts of all sizes and settings.



### MobileMind

**Product:** MobileMind

**What it is:** MobileMind

delivers a comprehensive professional development platform that facilitates district-scaled, sustainable, personalized learning while engaging educators in gamified, self-paced micro-courses. It is the only platform that allows districts to consolidate their PD initiatives from Google Workspace for Education and Microsoft to other technology, compliance, curriculum, new hire training, and more.



**The New EdTech Classroom, LLC**

**Product:** 21st Century Teacher

**What it is:** This virtual professional development program prepares educators to use technology to create more meaningful, relevant and authentic learning experiences for all learners through engaging, hands-on, personalized learning that can be accessed anytime, from any place. All of the instruction in 21st Century Teacher is delivered via professionally produced videos with embedded checks for understanding and in-app activities. Members can earn digital badges for their accomplishments and access new material as they progress in their skills.



## School culture vs. school climate

The two express separate concepts, but it's important that both be positive in your school.

BY MATTHEW X. JOSEPH

In my current reading, posts on Twitter, and podcasts, I hear and read leaders using “culture” and “climate” interchangeably as they relate to schools. Although these two terms have similar characteristics, they express two separate concepts, and I feel it is important to clarify for school leaders so as not to make that same error.

Think about this: If the teacher brings cupcakes in on Monday and puts them in the conference room with a note that says, “Have a great start to your week,” everyone is happy—it’s a happy Monday. Then she does it the next Monday. That’s a good example of how to have a positive climate: creating a mood (hopefully positive). However, it can change quickly. What if that teacher doesn’t bring cupcakes on the third Monday? Do teachers say, “Why didn’t she bring in cupcakes?” If so, you can see the climate changing.

Culture would be an email going out after the first Monday saying, “Thank you to Ms. Teacher for the treats, next week I am up... Who’s next?” Is this a simplistic way to look at it? Yes. But culture is built and then carried on, not quickly changing.

In my research, a school climate is a group of people’s collective mood or morale, while culture includes how people feel about the organization and the beliefs, values, and assumptions that provide the identity and set the standards of behavior.

My research findings are directly connected to a positive culture infusing positive motivation and, in turn,

higher job satisfaction and increased innovation. Unfortunately, some leaders do not research the most effective strategies for creating a positive school culture...but they are actually trying to create a climate by relying on extrinsic rewards—such as preferred or duty-free lunch, or think about the cupcake example. Bringing cupcakes after a weekend may help a few teachers come in on Monday, but this will not affect the culture of the building long term.

Both climate and culture impact the behaviors of the people in the school, but climate is a narrower concept than culture. Culture goes deeper to include the immediate environment and what people believe and value. Culture is a product of the relationship history in a school, while climate is a function of how current staff perceives those relationships in the present.

A school staff develops a common culture to pass on information to the next wave of teachers. In schools, new teachers arrive yearly with their own ideas about how to teach. Through their college classes and practicum, teachers have been immersed in theories of best practices and current methodologies. If the culture of their first job does not embrace these new ideas, the new teachers will soon learn that to fit in, they will need to conform. Because new teachers want to fit in and feel like experienced teachers, they are vulnerable to the school’s culture and all the unwritten rules passed

through the years of building a culture. An organization’s culture dictates its collective personality.

So, this is all well and good, but how can we move toward assisting current and aspiring leaders in looking at their own school’s culture? First, ask yourself, “What are the foundations of my school’s culture?”

A few questions I always recommend to assist with this reflection are:

- Are there collaborative relationships between faculty members?
- Do I see positive teacher-student interactions?
- Are there collaborative relationships between the school leader and faculty?
- Are there collaborative relationships between faculty members?
- Do our goals focus on learning and high expectations for student achievement?
- Are students feeling safe, connected and engaged?
- Do we have policies promoting social, emotional, ethical and intellectual skills?
- Does our school have a high level of parental involvement?

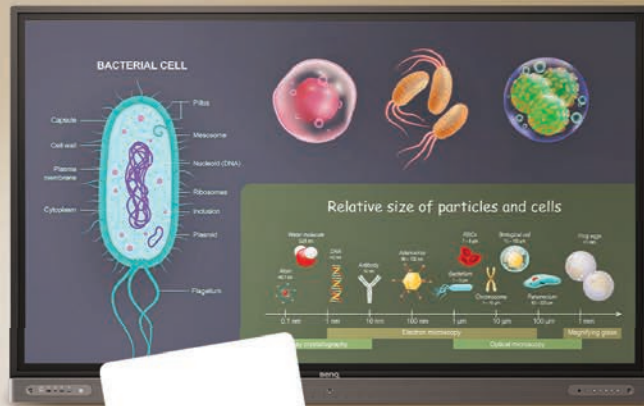
A positive school culture and climate is the basis for sustainable learning. Conversely, in a toxic school culture and climate, learning by all will not take place effectively, and what is learned may be sustainably harmful. When a school is a positive place to be, people are happy to be there, do their best, and make their best better. **DA**



*Matthew X. Joseph is the director of evaluation, supervision, mentoring, and hiring in Brockton*

*Public Schools. He is also the CEO of X-Factor EDU consulting and publishing.*

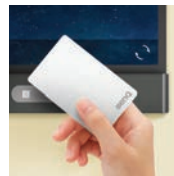
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## The Path to Super Women

The superintendent role remains elusive for females, with only 26% of the posts in the country currently held by women.

BY KATE EBERLE WALKER

Though women make up 76% of teachers in K-12 school settings, just a small percentage of women hold the most senior role in a district—the superintendent position. The imbalance of having male-led work environments for majority-female workforces places critical responsibility on district leaders to ensure that they do not overlook the unique needs and perspectives of women in the workplace.

“Throughout my career, I’ve seen several ways that women are held back from senior district leadership,” says a former principal from a Maryland school district. “I’ve personally experienced that leaders and board members will interact with me differently than the men in the room. I’ve also experienced a lack of female mentorship, which I believe prevents women from even considering moving up to the superintendent role.”

Women are well represented in mid-levels of administration, representing 78% of central office administrators, 54% of principals, and 53% of assistant principals. But the superintendent role remains elusive, with only 26% of these posts held by women. Digging deeper into the data reveals that women may be receiving less access to the cadence and types of promotion opportunities that place male colleagues on a path to superintendency.

One study of assistant principals in Texas found that women with more years of experience were still “less likely to be promoted to high school principal, and when they are, it is after a longer assistant principalship.” The Phi Delta Kappan posits that men are therefore gaining more diverse and comprehensive leadership experience because secondary principals manage large school buildings and the variety of programs that typically exist in those settings—and this experience often better translates to the superintendency position. Women, coming from instruction-focused backgrounds with younger grades, are then at a disadvantage to make it to the top role.

There are a few ways in which district administrators can elevate the women on their teams:

- 1. Learn from historical data:** Conduct a study to examine personnel data from the district. Uncover what type of leaders are receiving promotions and their corresponding paths to leadership. Dig deeper to understand the years spent in each position before being promoted and make comparisons between gender and other identifying factors.
- 2. Expand professional development support:** Consider how districts can develop skills in female leaders that are needed by superintendents or experiences that they may not have access to

while holding leadership roles in primary schools.

**3. Implement unconscious bias training:** Show supervising principals and district leaders how to conduct inclusive and empowering interviews and coaching conversations. Train them on unconscious bias that may be coming up during performance evaluations and promotion discussions.

Whether due to a lack of inclusivity or flexibility at work, women across industries are increasingly considering leaving or changing their careers. With unprecedented educator shortages and reports of declining student test scores, now is the time for administrators to make a concerted effort to retain and elevate female leaders in their districts. **DA**



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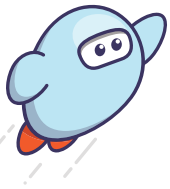
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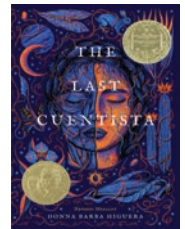
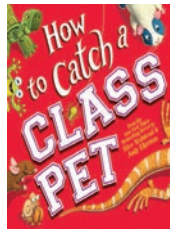
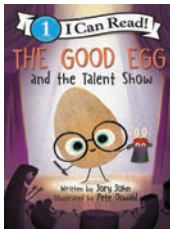
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