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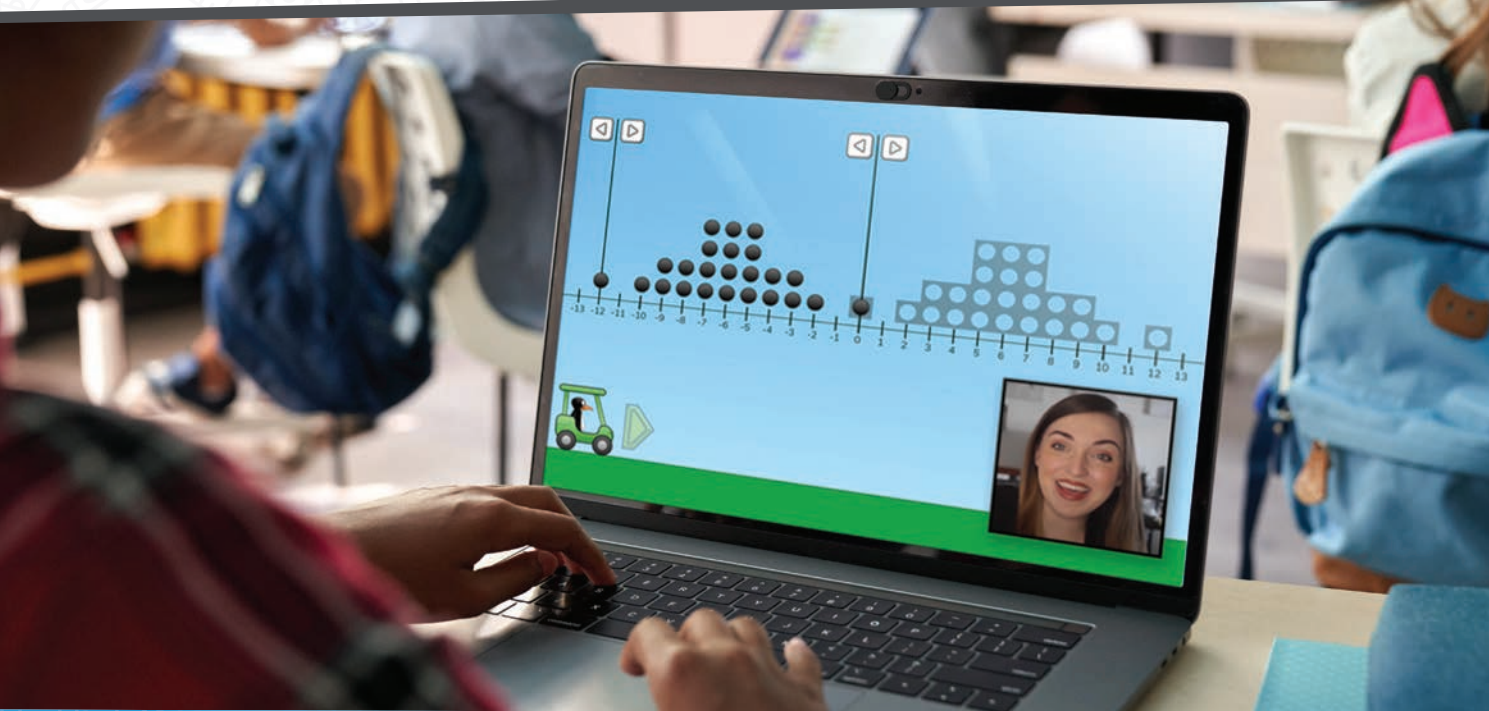


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Ongoing Innovation

As disruptive as 2020 was, now that we're well on our way to a new form of normalcy, we have a clearer picture of the positive things that resulted from that topsy-turvy year full of unwelcome surprises—in particular, a new way forward on the learning landscape.

What began purely as a necessity has evolved—rapidly—into something as fundamental to education as textbooks once were. But there's a major difference: Edtech is changing on a daily basis. The tools being developed, honed and launched to help students learn and teachers teach and drive classroom engagement seem to multiply faster than we can keep up. Our students and our educators are living in exciting times.

As we enter month three of 2023, that's just one aspect of education that's top of mind for district leaders, educators, parents, students and tech companies. With all the progress we're making comes problems to solve—cybersecurity issues, for example. Keeping our students and staff safe from the dangers that lurk online. Working to stave off cyber-attacks and data breaches. Figuring out when and how to spend ESSER funds, a conundrum unique to every state in the U.S. And that's just to name a few.

There are no simple solutions to any of these issues, but there are a lot of smart, passionate, devoted leaders out there who are giving their all to finding them. We speak to them on a daily basis. We work side-by-side with them at our Leadership Institute and our annual FETC event, which takes every bit of a full year to plan.

In this issue you will hear from them—their thoughts, perceptions, observations and ideas, as they share how they are working toward a brighter, less challenging future of education and advocating for our kids 24/7. From articles taking a look at what to expect for the rest of 2023 to shared lessons from an experienced leader to the latest on ChatGPT's detractors and champions, we have you covered.

—Lori Capullo, Executive Editor

“My life is so much richer because of the work that I do and my family’s involvement in it. We treat it as a calling.”

—Don Killingbeck, Superintendent, Hemlock Public Schools, Michigan

“If we have people working in our schools whose dream it is to become a teacher, we’re going to find a way to make that happen.”

—David Hoffert, Superintendent, Warsaw Community Schools

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BEYOND the news

Why schools are banning TikTok

Issues range from student safety to cyberattacks and beyond.

From “devious licks” to vandalizing school property, more districts are becoming aware of the dangerous TikTok trends that students can’t get enough of. But there’s more to be worried about than simply social media trends. TikTok can be a massive cybersecurity issue.

Several school districts and universities have pulled the plug and banned the use of the app amidst data privacy concerns. For example, Louisiana’s state superintendent of education recommended that the app be removed from public devices and have it blocked on school-issued devices. Alabama’s Auburn University also blocked it for all students and faculty on campus.

Dr. Nir Kshetri, a professor at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro whose research focuses heavily on international cybersecurity and international relations, says the app poses substantial risks in terms of consumer data.

“The biggest problem is its aggressive privacy violation policy,” he says. “It asks users to provide a lot of data, and if users don’t want to it asks again.” All social media applications do this to some extent, he adds, but not to the degree TikTok does.

“The most serious issue here is probably in the area of national security,” according to Kshetri. “Close to 100 million people in the U.S. currently use TikTok. In the past, intelligence officials have concluded that China is behind this large-scale hacking, like the Office of



Personnel Management in 2015 and the hotel Marriott International.”

He adds that it’s incredibly difficult to hack such large-scale companies and successfully obtain 100% of their personal data. But with TikTok, it’s different. Its default privacy settings allow the app to collect substantially more information than the app actually needs to function.

“That is the concern unique to TikTok compared to other social media websites,” he says.

In terms of cybersecurity, Kshetri recently published an article outlining some of the app’s vulnerabilities, which were identified in 2020 by the cybersecurity company Check Point.

“Check Point found that it could send users messages that looked as if they came from TikTok but actually contained malicious links,” he wrote. “When users clicked on those links, Check Point’s researchers could seize control of their TikTok accounts, get access to private information, delete existing content and even post new material under that user’s account.”

In addition to data privacy concerns, Kshetri says TikTok’s unique algorithm is especially harmful to students, both mentally and physically.

“There are a lot of cases of children trying to commit suicide and children who are hospitalized,” he says regarding some of the danger-

ous trends that have emerged from the app.


“This has led to a lot of damage to people’s health and vandalism in many schools,” he explains. “There are ‘TikTok challenges’ that prompt the student to steal something from the school or break something, and they do it.”

While schools can’t dictate what students do off campus, they can place restrictions on usage of the app within school walls, he adds. Several districts have already done so by banning the use of the app on school WiFi and school-issued devices.

Additionally, the version of TikTok that users in the U.S. use is much different than China’s, he adds. Simply put, it’s more addictive. In China, he explains, students can only spend 40 minutes a day on the app and can only view videos that are patriotic or educational, like science experiments or museum exhibits.

“Teachers and school administrators have used TikTok in some interesting, and useful, ways—such as connecting with students, building relationships, teaching about the risks of social media and delivering small, quick lessons,” he wrote in his article. “But it is not clear whether these positive effects counterbalance the potential and actual harm.”

By Micah Ward



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Suicide screenings

Research shows they are actually preventing student self-harm.

Suicide screening and other K12 interventions have faced opposition from those who argue such approaches risk inciting self-harm among students. But new research has found just the opposite—that school-based screening is a crucial tool in preventing self-harm.

The use of the Patient Health Questionnaire-9—a depression screening tool also known as PHQ-9—increased a school’s chances of identifying students at risk for suicide and getting them into some level of treatment. A questionnaire designed specifically to assess suicide risk—such as the Ask Suicide Screening Questions [ASQ] tool—would be even more effective, according to the *Journal of Pediatrics* study spearheaded by medical researchers at Penn State University.

The team screened half of the approximately 13,000 students who participated in the study. The questionnaire asks students if, in the previous two weeks, they have felt

little interest in regular activities, had trouble sleeping, staying awake or concentrating, been feeling like a failure or considered suicide or self-harm.

Students who were assessed were seven times more likely to be identified as at risk for suicide and four times more likely to begin receiving mental health counseling.

When the team used a previous version of the questionnaire that lacked the suicide and self-harm question, a substantial number of at-risk students were missed. The researchers acknowledged, however, the ongoing challenges school staff face when screening students, particularly as more extensive interventions are needed when students are identified as at-risk.

Movement on mental health

Legislation to improve school-based mental health care has been passed and proposed in several states in recent months, according to the National Council of State Legislators. A new law in Delaware requires the state’s education department to work on statewide K12 mental health education programs. Colorado, meanwhile, is now compiling statewide data on chronic absenteeism, in-school and out-of-school suspensions, and the number of school-related arrests.

The Council of State Legislators noted several other recent developments in K12 mental health care:

- Connecticut, New Hampshire, Oklahoma and Tennessee passed laws last year that required schools to print the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline number on student identification cards.
- Kentucky school districts must update their attendance policies to excuse absences for mental health reasons.
- Louisiana has created the Student Behavior, Mental Health and Discipline Task Force to examine trauma-informed services, the feasibility of school psychologist and social worker ratios and various aspects of student discipline.
- Pennsylvania now provides grants to districts to develop or adopt suicide awareness and prevention curricula, and train school employees and students to identify signs of anxiety, depression, suicide or self-harm.

Researchers elsewhere are working to improve and accelerate the training of school-based behavior analysts, counselors and social workers. The University of Oklahoma has launched “Project Rural Innovation for Mental Health Enhancement,” or PRIME—with a \$5.6 million state grant—to improve mental health care in rural schools. Increasing the number of home-grown counselors is a key goal that the researchers hope will lead to bigger decreases in suspensions, expulsions and other disciplinary actions.

“Oklahoma has some of the most diverse rural schools in the entire country,” said lead researcher Brittany L. Hott, an associate professor of special education and associate director of the university’s Institute for Society and Community and Society Transformation. “We are going to grow our own. We are going to recruit from the rural districts that we are serving.”

By Matt Zalaznick





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Learn from the experts

Here are Homeland Security's 3 top tips for beating cyberattacks.

Cybersecurity threats are now placing “an untenable burden” on schools and the students and staff members they serve. That’s the conclusion of no less an authority than the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, which offers new cybersecurity guidance to superintendents and their tech teams in its just-released “Protecting Our Future” report.

Growing cybersecurity threats are a downside of the advanced networking technologies that schools have adopted over the last few years, Homeland Security says. “This technological gain has introduced heightened risks,” the report says. “A continuing drumbeat of cyber-intrusions is threatening the nation’s ability to educate our children while also placing personal information and school data at risk.”

“A continuing drumbeat of cyber-intrusions is threatening the nation’s ability to educate our children.”



The report, produced by the department’s Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, offers cybersecurity strategies in three key areas: spending priorities, risk management and information sharing.

Combating K12 cybersecurity threats

1. Spending priorities: Focus on the most impactful steps. Leaders should concentrate on a few prioritized investments, such as deploying multifactor authentication, mitigating exploited vulnerabilities, implementing and testing backups, regularly exercising an incident response plan and implementing a strong cybersecurity training program. Then leaders can work toward fully adopting Homeland Security’s Cybersecurity Performance Goals and building an enterprise cybersecurity plan.

2. Risk management must be elevated as a top priority. Leaders are encouraged to be creative in exploring grant opportunities, working with technology providers to access low-cost services and products, and reducing their security burden by migrating to secure cloud environments and trusted managed services.

3. No K12 institution is an island. Information sharing and collaboration with other districts and solution providers are essential for building cybersecurity awareness and resilience. K12 leaders can participate in information-sharing forums such as the Multi-State Information Sharing and Analysis Center or the K12 Security Information eXchange (K12 SIX).

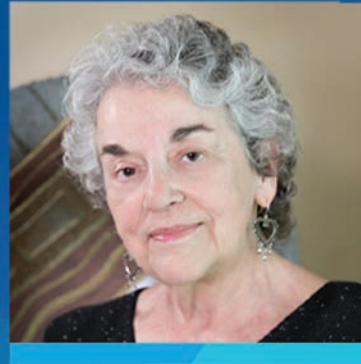
Administrators can find more strategies on the agency’s Digital Toolkit page.

By Matt Zalaznick

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A war on ChatGPT is raging

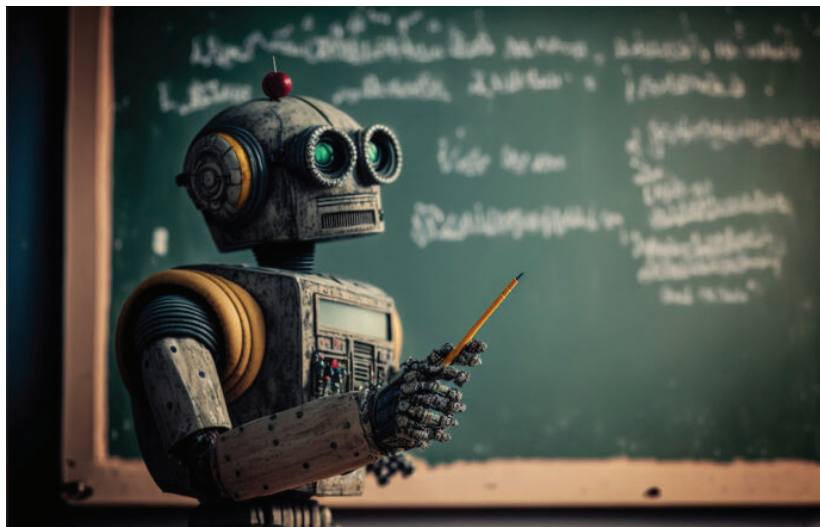
While districts in New York City and Seattle have blocked ChatGPT, administrators in Denver Public Schools are exploring how to use OpenAI's chatbot as a teaching tool.

The chatter over ChatGPT bans—from both humans and the machines themselves—is drowning out many other issues in education, but not all district leaders are rushing to silence the AI technology.

While districts in New York City and Seattle have imposed ChatGPT bans, administrators in Denver Public Schools are exploring how to use OpenAI's chatbot as a teaching tool, according to Axios. Leaders there are currently examining “what protocols we will be putting in place in upcoming semesters to prevent cheating and other misuses of this cutting-edge tech,” a district spokesperson told Axios.

Seattle Public Schools in December blocked ChatGPT and six other sites students might use to cheat: rytr.me, articleforge.com, write-sonic.com, ai-writer.com, wordai.com and jasper.ai, Axios reported. “Original thought and original work is required of students, and the concern here is that sites like this can produce content that is not original,” Seattle Public Schools spokesperson Tim Robinson told Axios.

In the Washington, D.C. region,



Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland and Fairfax County Public Schools in Virginia have both blocked ChatGPT in recent months. Using technology to learn new information “must be done responsibly, ethically and cautiously,” a spokesperson for Montgomery County schools told WTOP.com, adding that the district is also developing AI guidelines for teachers and students.

Fairfax County schools invoked the Children's Internet Protection Act because ChatGPT is “a new technology that has not yet been fully assessed for suitability of consumption by minors,” according to WTOP.

Clifton Public Schools in New Jersey and Loudon County Public Schools in Virginia have also blocked ChatGPT, according to FOX Business. “We want to make sure that our students are well-rounded, that they're not taking shortcuts,” Janina Kusielewicz, Clifton Public Schools' assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction told FOX Business. “Our teachers have

to stay on top of preventing those shortcuts so that we can teach them the right way to do things and get a complete education.”

OpenAI, the company that created ChatGPT, told TechCrunch that the company is working on tools that would allow educators to identify text generated by the program.

“We made ChatGPT available as a research preview to learn from real-world use, which we believe is a critical part of developing and deploying capable, safe AI systems,” the company said. “We've always called for transparency around the use of AI-generated text.”

Checking on ChatGPT bans

Here's a list of districts where ChatGPT has been banned (as of presstime):

- Clifton Public Schools (N.J.)
- Fairfax County Public Schools (Va.)
- Los Angeles USD
- Loudon County Public Schools (Va.)
- Montgomery County Public Schools (Md.)
- New York City Public Schools
- Seattle Public Schools

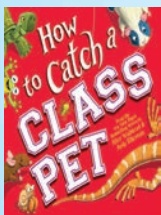
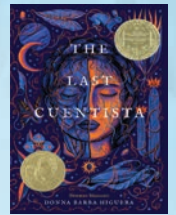
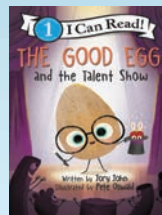
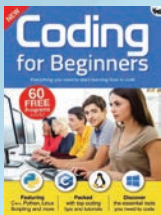
“Our teachers have to stay on top of preventing those shortcuts so that we can teach them the right way to do things and get a complete education.”

By Matt Zalaznick



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Safety first: How schools are investing in security in 2023

New data from the National Center for Education Statistics reveals that the overwhelming majority of schools have extensive security measures in place. For example, among schools with a full- or part-time SLEO or SRO, 92% of them routinely carry a firearm.

You can never be *too* safe—or perhaps you can. While some argue that hardening schools actually makes students feel less safe because they feel like they're in high-security prisons, others would rather not risk having a child walk through their doors with a weapon. And according to the data, most schools would rather not take that chance either.

In what's been an unsettling start to 2023, from a 6-year-old shooting his first-grade teacher to school closures due to violent threats, districts are more focused than ever on student safety, according to data released by the National Center for Education Statistics, a research arm of the U.S. Education Department.

Policies and procedures

An overwhelming majority of public schools have written plans that detail procedures for emergency scenarios in 2022-23. These scenarios include active shooter situations, lockdowns and shelter-in-place. And, as threats become increasingly more common, practice and preparation become an inevitable part of daily life for many students. With preparedness comes confidence, and most public schools feel “somewhat” or very prepared” to address shooting threats (92%), intruder situations (92%), bomb threats (87%), and active shooter situations (85%).

Educator training

During the 2022-23 school year, teachers have undergone various safety procedures, including how to handle emergency situations (96%), positive behavioral intervention strategies (93%), recognizing signs of bullying behaviors (84%), recognizing signs of self-harm or suicidal tendencies (84%), and crisis prevention and intervention (84%). Additionally, the majority of schools (73%) have reported providing DEI training, 65% provided training for recognizing and responding to threats and behaviors based on bias or hate crimes against minority student groups.

In terms of disciplinary action, the most common forms of punishment for disruptive student behavior

issues include school counseling (95%), stripping away student privileges (94%), losing school bus privileges due to misbehavior (82%), out-of-school suspension (69%), and detention/Saturday school (61%).

However, many schools reported facing limitations related to preventing or reducing disruptive student behavioral issues, such as a lack of alternative placement programs for troubled students (72%), lack of funding (61%), not enough training for educators in classroom management (60%), and lack of parental support for school policies (60%).

Security personnel

In 2022-23, schools bolstered their physical security measures as violent school threats became more common.: 92% of public schools either have a sworn law enforcement officer (SLEO) or school resource officer (SRO) routinely carrying a firearm. Additionally, 90% of these reported that security personnel are armed with physical restraints such as handcuffs and tasers. 65% said they also carry chemical aerosol sprays, such as Mace. Most interestingly, 52% of security personnel wear a body camera, a substantial jump from 33% in 2017-18.

Among public schools that have either an SLEO or SRO, they report requiring their security personnel to engage in security enforcement and patrol (89%), identify problems within the school and seek solutions (80%) and emergency management (79%).

However, the number of schools that have a full or part-time SLEO at their school at least once a week is quite low (12%). Comparably, 55% of public schools have one or more full- or part-time SROs at their school at least once a week, and 25% of public schools have one or more full- or part-time security officers at their school at least once a week.

By Micah Ward

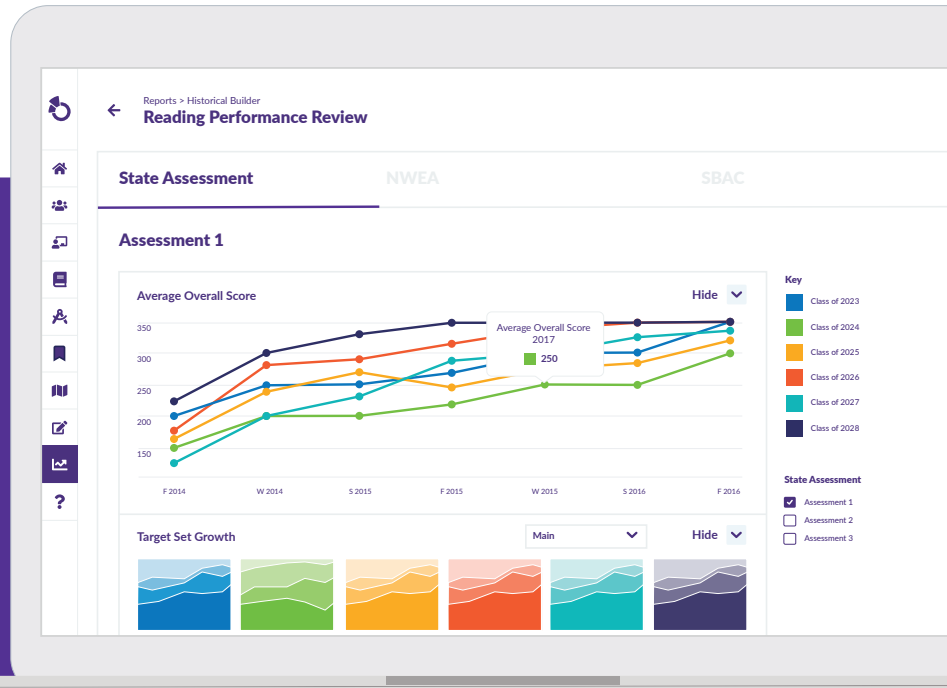




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LGBTQ students: Where do they feel safest?

Many say they actually find more comfort being at school than at home.

BY MATT ZALAZNICK

LGBTQ students feel safer at school than at home, with more than half calling their school an affirming space, according to a new national survey that covered all 50 states. This doesn't hold true in every state and, not surprisingly, students feel far more comfortable in some parts of the country than they do in others.

Overall, 55% of the 34,000 LGBTQ youth surveyed identified their schools as affirming spaces compared to 37% who said the same about their homes, according to the 2022 mental health survey by The Trevor Project, a nonprofit suicide prevention organization. A staggering 45% of LGBTQ youth said they had seriously considered suicide in the past year but, the survey found, those rates were lower among students who reported feeling safe at school or in their community.

Also troubling is that the number of LGBTQ youth who considered suicide has been rising steadily since 2020 and 60% of the young people in these communities who wanted mental health care were not able to get it.

"LGBTQ youth are not inherently prone to suicide risk because of their sexual orientation or gender identity but rather placed at higher risk because of how they are mistreated and stigmatized in society," The Trevor Project says.

Students felt safest at school in Delaware, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, California and New Mexico. They reported feeling least affirmed in Mississippi, West Virginia, Oklahoma, Alabama and Kentucky. **DA**

Matt Zalaznick is District Administration's senior writer.

LGBTQ students state-by-state

Here is the number of LGBTQ students in each state who said their school was a safe place, with the number who said the same about their homes in parentheses:

Alabama: 32% (29%)	Montana: 36% (46%)
Alaska: 38% (33%)	Nebraska: 39% (39%)
Arizona: 45% (33%)	Nevada: 38% (33%)
Arkansas: 34% (39%)	New Hampshire: 33% (38%)
California: 50% (30%)	New Jersey: 52% (29%)
Colorado: 42% (33%)	New Mexico: 50% (46%)
Connecticut: 51% (37%)	New York: 45% (38%)
Delaware: 53% (39%)	North Carolina: 41% (33%)
Florida: 43% (33%)	North Dakota: 35% (42%)
Georgia: 41% (31%)	Ohio: 37% (37%)
Hawaii: 41% (32%)	Oklahoma: 31% (39%)
Idaho: 33% (42%)	Oregon: 47% (51%)
Illinois: 43% (40%)	Pennsylvania: 42% (38%)
Indiana: 42% (40%)	Rhode Island: 42% (38%)
Iowa: 46% (40%)	South Carolina: 40% (34%)
Kansas: 33% (38%)	South Dakota: 42% (38%)
Kentucky: 32% (38%)	Tennessee: 37% (35%)
Louisiana: 34% (38%)	Texas: 43% (32%)
Maine: 47% (41%)	Utah: 36% (41%)
Maryland: 48% (32%)	Vermont: 45% (58%)
Massachusetts: 51% (39%)	Virginia: 44% (38%)
Michigan: 42% (39%)	Washington: 49% (45%)
Minnesota: 41% (45%)	West Virginia: 30% (37%)
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Is student monitoring software the best solution for child safety?

With a shortage of school counselors and incidents of self-harm and violence toward others surging post-pandemic, some school districts are interested in online monitoring services that can keep administrators ahead of the curve.

BY ALCINO DONADEL

Post-pandemic, students in K12 schools are at a higher risk of experiencing harm in and outside of the classroom. According to a new report, students have seen a 51% uptick in threats related to suicide and self-harm during the 2021-22 school year compared to the year before, and a dizzying 152% jump in incidents regarding violence toward others.

School resources are strained. The American School Counselor Association claimed per their latest report that for every school counselor there are 408 students he or she is responsible for, on a national average. The American School Counselor Association recommends a 250-to-1 ratio.

With significant jumps in incidents that involve harmful student behaviors, coupled with a substantial shortage in school counselors, it's no wonder that 83% of K12 parents, educators and administrators are worried about student mental health and violence in their schools.

"You cannot ignore the fact that students are struggling with depression. There are school shootings on what seems a biweekly basis. And there are oftentimes signs of these things," says Jack Bostian, tech director at Almont Community Schools in Michigan. "If you can take steps to protect your kids, it's worth every single penny."

As students increasingly prioritize interfacing on the internet to learn and socialize, digital safety solutions services are becoming administrators' new line of defense.

At least three different companies that specialize in online student safety attended the Future of Education and Technology Conference in New Orleans this past January. Among them were Netsweeper, Lightspeed Systems, and GoGuardian.

"What are kids doing online?" asked Ryan Keag, director of safety sales at Lightspeed Systems, at FETC 2023. "Realistically, kids are much more comfortable communicating and existing in an online world than they are talking face to face. So what kind of communication and collaboration are they having with their friends? What are they searching for online? This helps us paint a much more accurate picture of the struggles these kids have and the kind of help they need."

Schools already have CIPA-mandated firewalls that filter out dangerous websites in broad strokes, but these digital safety solutions use data-driven machine learning algorithms to categorize billions of websites, which gives administrators the ability to customize content filters to a granular level, granting them control to update keywords and content to look out for that suggest risky online behavior.

And while content filtering can shield students from harmful content out in the ether of the internet, these services also provide monitoring solutions that can detect harmful student behavior in real time, allowing administrators to react to a threat of suicide the moment it is searched on a browser, communicated via email or document, or even picked up on a chat forum. Netsweeper has

onGuard, LightSpeed Systems has Alert, and GoGuardian has Beacon, which Bostian believes is the best solution out there by far.

“If the district came to me tomorrow and told me the budget is cut and we’re getting rid of GoGuardian to save money, I would say ‘OK, here is my resignation,’” he said. “I’ve already sold GoGuardian to two different schools.”

Before Tracy Clements became the student safety subject matter expert for GoGuardian, she was a director of school counseling in a district that had a “major suicide problem.” In fact, she says, its suicide rates were 30 times the national average. She was skeptical of an online solution because she didn’t believe she was “techy” enough. When she finally relented to using the product, it only took three weeks for her to realize its use when GoGuardian Beacon flagged a student’s web browser actively planning a suicide.

“I couldn’t reach her parents, so I just drove to her house, and when I knocked on the door she remembered me from school, and I said, ‘Do you know why I’m here?’ and she just started crying and said, ‘I was about to kill myself,’” Clements remembers. “She was literally on the cusp of killing herself, and I wouldn’t have known, and I wouldn’t have been able to intervene if it weren’t for Beacon. I’m a believer.”

For Bostian’s district, GoGuardian alerted him and his team last year of over 400 instances involving mental health crises, whether it be active suicide planning, ideation, self-harm, requesting help and support, suicide re-

search, and instances involving guns and bombs, violent acts and bullying.

Aside from this service’s ability to react to a major crisis, Clements believes that the strongest attribute of this service is its ability to detect troubling student behavior “higher upstream,” that is, before it gets to such a drastic level.

“Prevention is so much less costly than intervention,” she notes.

There are still those who are fearful of the implications of a student monitoring service, citing Big Brother, for example.

Emily Spadafore, public relations manager for GoGuardian, cited that around every other student in the public education system has been touched by a GoGuardian product.

“We understand the criticisms, but we are open to having those conversations and are happy to answer any questions anyone has around specific privacy or data policies,” said Spadafore.

Still, nearly 90% of K12 parents believe school technology should be implemented in the classroom, and they are equally supportive of their school system using online educational technology to help detect signs of a student considering harming themselves or harming others.

And for Bostian, he sees the technology as a no-brainer.

“It’s required in this day and age for kids.” DA

Alcino Donadel is a District Administration writer.



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HERE'S WHAT'S IN STORE FOR EDUCATION IN 2023

What leaders have to look forward to over the next eight months.



Ask anyone and they'll tell you it's been a challenging year for both students and faculty in both higher education and K12. But like any obstacle, it can be overcome with perseverance and innovation, ultimately carrying us to the other side with hopes of a brighter tomorrow.

As for 2023, there's a lot to look forward to. Here's why.

Reflecting on 2022

"This has been a particularly challenging year for educators as they returned for their first full year post the pandemic," says Trenton Goble, VP of K12 strategy at education technology company Instructure. "Educators exerted a lot of time and emotional energy over the previous two years working to ensure students' needs were being met. The impact of students being out of school for an extended time has created challenges for teachers as they work to welcome students back to the rigors of a face-to-face learn-

ing environment while maintaining support for hybrid and remote learning opportunities."

This process, he adds, has been both taxing on students and teachers alike.

Predicting trends for 2023

Without a doubt, education technology will continue to be at the forefront of learning. The task now, Goble says, is to evaluate your district's use of it and determine what works and what doesn't.

"I think districts will continue to evaluate the efficacy of the technology-purchasing decisions that were made during the pandemic," he says. "Districts will look to streamline and optimize the usage of those purchasing decisions and focus on products that clearly demonstrate positive outcomes for users."

What's expected for K12 in 2023, he says, is increased integration and accessibility.

“We have heard from our customers that what they value most is the ability to integrate the tools they are using in a way that provides easy access for students and high-quality, actionable information for teachers that will allow them to better support their students.”

From a higher education perspective, colleges and universities will continue to set their sights on career readiness and student outcomes, both academically and emotionally.

“In our annual State of Student Success in Higher Education survey, now in its third year, career readiness remains the number one priority for students,” says Ryan Lufkin, VP of product marketing at Instructure. “Preparing students for life after graduation, whether they are traditional students, part-time students or mid-career, is still the top concern for students, faculty and administrators. This has led to an increase in education and career partnerships, with universities working hand-in-hand with companies to roll out programs preparing students for the career skills they need most.”

“Whether it’s Arizona State University and their partnerships with Starbucks and Uber, or the University of Memphis working with FedEx and Nike, students want to know there is a well-paying job waiting for them at the end of their academic journey, and colleges and universities are responding.”

Similarly, Mark Triest, chief business officer of Mod-

ern Campus, an engagement and solutions company, said higher education institutions will “pivot their thinking and actions towards non-traditional as the new traditional.” He believes that outcomes, including career pathways to jobs, will continue to grow in importance.

In the meantime, higher education institutions have done a tremendous job implementing technologies to redefine their definitions of student success to ensure positive student outcomes. That trend will likely continue.

“Colleges and universities have evolved their definition of student success beyond year-over-year retention to address factors like student mental health and overall well-being,” he says. “Technology supports that by surfacing access to resources in the same technology they’re using for their course work. Simple improvements like linking access to tutoring resources directly within a course can have a measurable impact on student success.”

As a result of the pandemic, Lufkin believes we will see continued growth in remote access to instruction for college students.

“I think we’ll continue to see mobile access to courses and course content continue to grow, with the need to develop more engaging and interactive courseware to keep students engaged wherever they are,” he says. “I think we’ll also see a blurring of the lines between high school, college and reskilling and upskilling programs into a more life-long learning approach where students can showcase their

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HERE'S WHAT'S IN STORE FOR EDUCATION IN 2023

learning achievements to prospective employers and continue to build on that beyond a traditional degree path.”

Now more than ever, students will become even more demanding of their college institutions, according to Vice President of Product and Engagement at Modern Campus Charles Parsons, especially as they battle inflation.

“Students are going to be more critical of how higher ed institutions invest in them relative to the cost of attendance,” he said. “It will take the form not just of a degree cost-benefit analysis but also how the institution invests and supports students like them and whether the broader institution reflects their personal values. This will be more pronounced for traditionally underserved populations.”

He adds that our current economic climate will require many students to delay or even reconsider their choice of schools, and administrators should prepare.

“Schools will need to invest in strategies that ensure financial and economic help is both available and easily accessible to students,” said Parsons.

Reliance on instructional technologies

As colleges and school districts tread onward through the first year of “normalcy” since the pandemic, will we continue to rely so heavily on instructional technologies as we did during the pandemic? Absolutely.

“I think the pandemic accelerated the adoption and use of technology that districts were moving toward prior to Covid,” says Goble regarding K12. “The adoption of devices and high-quality digital tools and content will remain a critical part of the classroom moving forward. Because the adoption of technology was broad and quick, I think districts will spend time determining which tools remain efficacious in a more traditional classroom environment while culling or reducing access to those that may not be as relevant.

“The skills that teachers developed during remote learning will also create new opportunities for schools to provide hybrid or remote options for students looking for alternatives to the traditional classroom. It will also enable districts to expand course offerings, especially in smaller districts, that may only make financial sense in a hybrid or remote setting.”

For college students, we’re seeing a shift to focusing on providing them with options regarding how they receive instruction, according to Lufkin.

“In higher education, hybrid and remote learning are most definitely here to stay,” he says. “Our research shows that students are now focused on choice. It’s a relatively new but major shift towards having more of a say in everything from how they attend a course, how, when and where they consume information, and the methods for grading and measuring mastery of the information being taught. All of this requires technology to create an environment educators can deliver content to support in-person or on-

line, synchronous or asynchronous learning.”

Additionally, Goble and Lufkin say this is an “interesting time” for education technology. Many barriers to access to technology have essentially been removed for both students and teachers.

“The opportunity for schools to innovate around that technology will be an ongoing challenge for educators, but it will also present opportunities for edtech providers as well,” says Goble. “I think the biggest trends will come from places that put an emphasis on students learning, engagement, well-being, and information that helps educators better meet the needs of their students.”

According to Lufkin, “Continuing to build an ecosystem of solutions that allows for seamless integration with emerging solutions and enables innovation is key.”

As colleges and school districts tread onward through the first year of “normalcy” since the pandemic, will we continue to rely heavily on instructional technologies? Absolutely.

Advice for administrators and educators

“Focus on impact,” Goble says to those on the frontlines of education. “While we know the last year has been particularly challenging for educators, many of our students are behind and need additional support. Technology can be one of those tools to help teachers address students in need... but it has to work. The adoption of technology should improve outcomes for teachers and students.”

It’s crucial to understand the importance of supporting the development of staff as they implement new technologies, he adds, which is “critical to any successful adoption.”

Now that the bar has been raised and students are comfortable with digital learning, according to Lufkin, students don’t want to give it up.

“We always say that good learning technology should disappear into the background and put educators on center stage,” he says. “So finding new and innovative ways to engage students on their learning journey is the surest path to success, and institutions that provide instructional design and support innovative approaches will see the impact on student engagement and success.” **DA**

Micah Ward is a District Administration staff writer.



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ESSER III FUNDS:

HERE'S HOW DISTRICTS ARE SPENDING THEM



Learning loss and staff recruitment and retention continue to be the two most expensive areas for districts when it comes to ESSER spending.

BY MICAH WARD

In preparation for what's been labeled as “the bloodletting” by one economist, districts small and large are strategically budgeting their COVID relief funds to ensure they're not obligated to any unnecessary spending once the funds dry up. But how exactly are districts choosing to spend this money?

By September 2024, school districts will no longer have access to their federally provided COVID relief funds, which have served as a safety net for districts in their efforts to combat issues surrounding staff retention, learning loss, transportation, you name it. If districts aren't careful, they may find themselves tied up financially with no way to pay for the things they've committed to, such as permanent pay raises for teachers.

During a recent webinar sponsored by The Hunt Institute, Dr. Marguerite Roza, director of the Edunomics Lab

at Georgetown University, broke down the four financial shocks that will be hitting districts all at once:

- **ESSER is boosting spending, but that ends abruptly in September 2024.**
 - Most at risk: Districts using ESSER for recurring financial commitments via budget backfilling, new hires or permanent raises.
- **Enrollment declines mean less revenue in the long run.**
 - Most at risk: Urban districts, districts closed longer and northern states.
- **Inflation, labor scarcity, and new hiring are driving up recurring commitments.**
 - Most at risk: Those offering permanent raises that are larger than typical and those growing their staff roles.

- **An economic slowdown would affect growth in state revenues.**

- Most at risk: Districts that are more dependent on state revenue (or in states more affected by economic slowdowns).

But for the time being, districts are using these funds to tackle the most pressing issues in education, namely learning loss, staffing and facilities and operations. That's according to the most recent data from Burbio, a data service company, which has collected data from 6,000 school districts on how they plan to allocate their ESSER III funds.

Spending overview

Academic intervention and learning loss continue to be the areas that have received the most support in terms of ESSER spending, according to the data. School staffing and facilities/operations follow closely behind.

Across the dataset:

- Academic intervention/learning loss: 27.4%
- Staffing: 24.4%
- Facilities and operations: 23.9%
- Technology: 9.7%
- Mental and physical health: 7.2%
- Miscellaneous financials: 5.6%

With this in mind, let's take a closer look at how districts are using these resources in two of some of the most prominent areas to have increased in importance since the pandemic: learning loss and technology.

Breaking down the most expensive academic interventions:

- Summer, after-school and extended school days: 4,000+ districts, totaling \$6.5 billion
- Early childhood: 275 districts, totaling \$2.7 billion
- Professional development: 2,389 districts, totaling \$1.9 billion
- Tutoring: 1,279 districts, totaling \$1.7 billion
- Instructional materials/Math/ELA: 1,000+ districts, totaling \$1.6 billion

Breaking down technology spending:

- Technology that supports learning and instruction: 1,438 districts, totaling \$2.1 billion
- Technology infrastructure and hardware: 1,559 districts, totaling \$1.15 billion
- Student mobile devices: 1,528 districts, totaling \$2.7 billion
- Virtual model/online school/distance learning: 810 districts, totaling \$972 million
- Connectivity: 1,049 districts, totaling \$885 million
- Smart panels: 393 districts, totaling \$393 million
- Security cameras/locks: 292 districts, totaling \$100 million
- Cybersecurity: 166 districts, totaling \$100 million. **DA**

Micah Ward is a District Administration staff writer.

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BY MICAHA WARD

“BE COURAGEOUS”: EDUCATION IS RIPE FOR CHANGE

The pandemic has given us a “once-in-a-generation opportunity” to drive organizational reform. District leaders must lean in and learn from those who are changing the culture of K12.

As the saying goes, change is inevitable, but growth is optional. K12 education is hungering for transformation. While we are seeing district leaders at the forefront of innovation, students and educators deserve more. Now is the time to lean in and learn from others.

Over the past several months, UVA’s Partnership for Leaders in Education (PLE) has been working on a comprehensive report highlighting some of the most successful and replicable practices that K12 district leaders have embarked on since the start of the pandemic. By studying and interviewing nearly 50 education leaders from districts of all sizes, the researchers argue that school systems and dynamic leaders must embrace change in order to succeed and create equitable educational environments.

“Transformation in education is happening, which is almost a counter-narrative to what we hear,” says Amy Dujon, director of the District Administration Leadership

Institute and co-author of a new report, “Exploring New Frontiers For K-12 Systems Transformation.” Through this research, she hopes to encourage more districts to seize this opportunity that the pandemic has given us and “be courageous.”

The intent of this research is to highlight real innovation efforts and leadership that are taking place in districts across the country to inspire and drive further transformation. While there have always been substantial inequities in education, Dujon and her co-author William Robinson, executive director of UVA’s PLE, say the pandemic exacerbated these issues to a level no one could have predicted.

For example, Black and Hispanic students were already half as likely to be proficient in reading and math compared to their white peers, according to the report. During the pandemic, they fell another four months behind in their achievement levels.

“That’s just for academics,” Robinson says. “That

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“BE COURAGEOUS”: EDUCATION IS RIPE FOR CHANGE



During the UVA-PLE Forum, district leaders, alongside UVA staff, examined the insights gained from the leaders featured in *The Next Frontier* paper, looked for breakthrough opportunities within their own districts and developed action plans to move innovation forward.

doesn't even speak to the growing mental health crisis, as well as the disproportionate number of students who graduate high school without a plan or hope for what they're going to do next. We've got to be more serious about not just the academic outcomes, but the life outcomes that we're cultivating in our students."

The pandemic has given us a "once-in-a-generation opportunity" to come together and question whether or not our current educational systems are what's best for students and teachers, he adds.

Speaking to the inequities that impact the teacher workforce, Robinson says there's a growing need to remodel current educational systems and policies in order to ensure the needs of educators are met; for instance, when it comes to teacher pay. While this has been a point of controversy for quite some time, the past few years have revealed that educators are expected to do much more than they signed up for with little to no additional compensation.

"We have staffing models that have not responded to the shifts in the workforce needs and demands," he explains. "We're still creating all teacher positions with the same exact pay structures and expectations versus creating a dynamic workforce that is flexible and responsive to different skill sets and pays in a differentiated manner and leverages talent from outside of the brick and mortar schoolhouse to compliment what teachers are doing."

Throughout their report, they highlight the work of some of the most innovative district leaders across the country who are driving organizational change in a positive direction. Broken into four inspiring chapters, innovative secondary models, far-reaching academic acceleration, creative staffing, and equitable resource reallocation, each section offers valuable insight into some of the most groundbreaking decision-makers in K12 education.

Leaders in action **Innovative Secondary Models**

When Dr. Margaret Crespo took the role as superintendent of Laramie County School District-1 in Wyoming, she asked those in her district what they desired for their students' future. As a result, three prominent themes emerged that would shape a new strategic plan: student readiness, community engagement and healthy environments. Unlike previous initiatives, this one is "living" and adaptable."

The district created pathways for post-secondary readiness by increasing participation in dual enrollment courses. However, they found that student participation in free college-level classes wasn't meeting previous expectations. According to her students, they were not enrolling in part because the schedule interfered with their high school courses. By running targeted campaigns around enrollment, the district now anticipates more than tripling participation in free college classes since its inception.

Far-Reaching Academic Acceleration

Henry County Schools in Georgia has been "laser-focused" on ensuring learning gaps are revealed and addressed as quickly as possible, according to the report. Through the leadership of Superintendent Dr. Mary Elizabeth Davis, the district has seen significant boosts in the availability of high-quality curriculum and instructional resources.

Prior to her and her team's arrival, the district saw steep declines in academic progress and confidence from the community. In response, Davis committed to an aligned system of teaching and learning with an increased focus on articulating what to teach, how students are doing, and how to address learning gaps. Through this initiative and other resources, the district has steadily outpaced other metropolitan Atlanta



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“BE COURAGEOUS”: EDUCATION IS RIPE FOR CHANGE



Dr. Scott Muri, Superintendent Ector County ISD, and Dr. LaTonya Goffney, Aldine ISD: Two innovative leaders featured in the paper for their work in advancing academic outcomes through equitable resource allocation.

districts in several areas, such as literacy, algebra and graduation.

Creative Staffing

Ensuring students have access to a diverse teacher workforce has become one of the most important aspects necessary for successful student learning outcomes in recent years. National data show that Black teachers only contribute to nearly 7% of the nation’s public school teachers, the report notes.

In South Carolina, Dr. Baron Davis, superintendent of Richland School District Two, took this issue into his own hands by becoming the first district in the state to develop and unanimously approve an equity school board policy. Launched in 2019, the “Premier 100 Initiative” aims to strategically recruit and retain 100 minority male teachers by 2024 with the hopes of providing all students with at least one minority male teacher during their K12 experience.

Equitable Resource Allocation

Enriching student experiences has become one of the most-targeted areas for Dr. LaTonya Goffney, superintendent of Aldine Independent School District. When she took the helm in 2018, she and her team set out on deep looking, listening and learning. At the start of the pandemic, she launched a dynamic strategic plan called “A New Way Forward” to allocate and maximize resources in the following areas: time, talent, tier-one instruction, and target support. Doing so would give students equitable access to high-quality resources and exceptional teachers.

Since its inception, the district has seen remarkable improvements on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness:

- 33 campuses are rated A/B, more than double compared to 2019.
- Reading levels have nearly recovered to pre-pandemic levels at the elementary level.
- Elementary and 8th-grade academic growth outpaced state averages in most subjects.

Recommendations for leaders

From their interviews, the researchers identified four primary leadership behaviors that have successfully defied traditional norms to meet the complexity and student needs of our current generation:

1. They ignite their teams toward embracing disruptive change and advancing a compelling picture of a future state.
2. They identify and prioritize clear opportunities that address critical stakeholder needs and take high-leverage, strategic risks that accelerate progress toward meeting those needs.
3. They insist on teams working differently across silos to redesign systems, staffing, and resource allocation to align with their desired future state.
4. They invest in people and support systems to learn, adapt, and execute toward the achievement of a different state, developing both core and new capabilities across the organization.

“Across all of the interviews we found that those four key leadership insights were prevalent,” Dujon says. “These are some staple leadership pieces that have to be in place in order for change and innovation to take place.”

But they can’t do it all at once, notes Robinson. All districts must first instill a sense of hope and risk-taking in their systems.

“Based on their learning from stakeholders across levels in the district and the main challenges they see, can they determine one or two opportunities for breakthrough change in their system right now,” he says. “They should organize learning, collaboration and idea generation from stakeholders across the system and then devote their resources, their budget and their strategy toward pursuing those breakthroughs and learning from them.”

Now more than ever, organizational change is at the tip of our fingers. If we don’t take advantage of this moment, cautions Dujon, we will miss our opportunity.

“I think right now the education system as a whole is really ripe for transformation,” she says. “There’s a hunger and a desire for it. People want to do things differently. And they recognize that if we don’t do things differently, there can be big trouble ahead, especially in terms of staffing and student outcomes. Now is the right time for us to get in front of it. **DA**

Micah Ward is a District Administration staff writer.



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HOW THIS SUPERINTENDENT IS HELPING EDUCATORS BECOME “LESS LAME”

In the 90s, he was one of the first teachers to integrate smartboards into the classroom. Now, Don Killingbeck is using ChatGPT to write a book and inspire teachers.

BY MICAH WARD

A competitive beard judge, world-class jumper, author, edtech leader, and, most notably, an experienced superintendent, this district leader will forever understand the importance of technology in the classroom.

Dr. Don Killingbeck, superintendent of Hemlock Public Schools in Michigan, is arguably one of the least lame education leaders out there, which will make more sense later. His district, which is home to around 1,200 students, has become the most stable, fiscally solvent and highest-achieving it's ever been. Contrary to what the national narrative would suggest, it's fully staffed. "People want to work in this community," he says.

Part of the reason is his devotion to the profession, he asserts.

"Growing up, I didn't think I was going to be a school superintendent," according to Killingbeck. "I always thought I'd drive a nice car, have a nice house and wear nice suits. But my life is so much richer because of the work that I do and my family's involvement in it. We treat it as a vocation. A calling."

Another contributing factor to the success of his district, without a doubt, is his understanding and embracing of technology. The future waits for no one. And if we've learned anything since the pandemic, edtech is here to stay.

Killingbeck has a YouTube channel devoted to the school community. It essentially serves as a library for the district, he explains. "I typically post over the shoulders," he says. "It's a real 'Mr. Rogers' entry and exit. I write and produce everything."

For example, in his holiday edition, he's cooking candy bacon with a custodian. The whole purpose is to give people an inside look into the great things the district is doing.

His innovative and inspiring use of technology in education has always been an important part of his teaching. Killingbeck earned his first master's degree from Michigan State in edtech and instructional design. And when asked if his perception of technology and edtech has changed since the pandemic, he responds, "No"—and it's a hard no.

New causal research study shows TalkingPoints improved student Math, English, and Attendance outcomes in large, diverse, urban school district

New quasi-experimental study that meets the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Tier 2 standard of evidence found outsized effects for Black and Latino students, students with disabilities, and English language learners.

TalkingPoints' commitment to research

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The challenge

Research shows that family-school engagement leads to improved student academic outcomes and wellbeing. However, systemic barriers often get in the way of effective, equitable partnerships with families. For families from under-resourced communities, family-school engagement occurs up to 50% less often — a gap that widened during the pandemic.

Approach

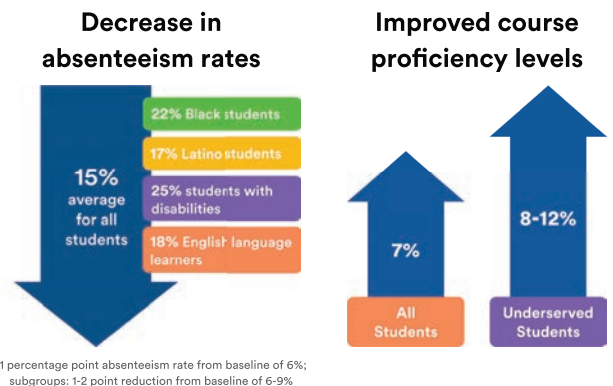
This research provides causal evidence of the impact of TalkingPoints on student outcomes. The methods used meet the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Tier 2 standard of evidence. The study examined TalkingPoints' impact on student outcomes in a large U.S. urban school district over a multi-year period, drawing from a sample of more than 30,000 students. The study analyzed student-level outcomes, including absenteeism rates, standards-based grades, and state standardized assessments. The study compared schools that adopted TalkingPoints to schools that had not yet adopted TalkingPoints.

Research outcomes

TalkingPoints partnered with a large, diverse, urban school district to study how utilization of the TalkingPoints platform impacts academic and behavioral outcomes and attendance.

The results of this causal research study show TalkingPoints **improved Math, English language arts, and attendance outcomes for all students**, with greater impacts for **traditionally underserved students**:

- Using TalkingPoints leads to lower absenteeism rates, improved course proficiency levels, and higher standardized test scores.
- Many of these improvements are more pronounced for traditionally underserved students, including Black students, Latino students, students with disabilities, and English language learners.



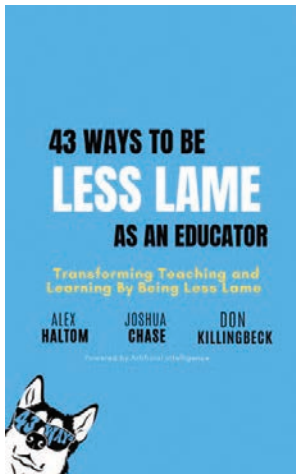
Key Takeaways

Building effective school-family partnerships makes the hard work that schools do matter more by aligning schools and families in support of students. Interventions like TalkingPoints help close learning gaps and reduce the negative impacts on student progress caused by absenteeism. Further, district leaders can improve state accountability metrics by encouraging strategies that leverage effective family-school partnerships to reduce chronic absenteeism rates.



TalkingPoints is an education technology nonprofit that supports school districts in connecting families and teachers for the success and well-being of each and every student. TalkingPoints' multilingual platform uses two-way translated communication and personalized content in more than 145 languages in order to facilitate meaningful family-school partnerships.

HOW THIS SUPERINTENDENT IS HELPING EDUCATORS BECOME “LESS LAME”



43 Ways to Be Less Lame as an Educator, powered by AI.

“As a teacher in the 90s, I wrote a grant and got one of the first for customer use smartboards,” he says. “I mean, literally, I was light years ahead. I had a projector, a smartboard and a laptop and I was able to broadcast my PowerPoint to the screen and write with a digital marker.

“So fast forward to March 12, 2020,” he continues. “The governor said, ‘You’re closed today.’ On that Thursday night, she said kids would go in the next day to gather their

stuff and come home for the next two weeks. Literally, on Monday, March 16, we were providing some sort of on-line education to our kids at home. For me, that’s what was right for our kids and our community.”

This was absolutely necessary for the success of his students. Unfortunately, he says, as he looked at the landscape across Michigan and the nation, there were students that went months, even years, with a “subpar opportunity to learn.” “I don’t think we were nailing it on March 16 when it comes to learning,” he clarifies. “But when it comes to providing something, I don’t know of any other school that was able to do that.”

Nowadays, Killingbeck is helping educators and administrators understand the importance of being less lame. Because: “Who wants to be lame?”

With the help of the artificially intelligent chatbot ChatGPT, he and his colleagues wrote *43 Ways to Be Less Lame as an Educator*. The publication has made headlines as talk around ChatGPT continues to dominate the K12 sphere, both for its controversy and its potential for greatness in the classroom. Killingbeck would tell you that educators and leaders have a responsibility to embrace AI in education or else they’ll miss their mark.

“I think we need to lean in as educators because, let’s face it, there are people out there going, ‘This is bad. It’s everything we’ve told kids not to do,’” he says. “People are going to say we shouldn’t be using this and kids shouldn’t be touching it. The bottom line is, in the real world we’ve got to be more productive. There are only 24 hours in a day. How are you going to make the most out of them? I think a tool like ChatGPT will maximize that opportunity.”

The book he co-authored with two colleagues is designed to be a “secular devotion for teachers,” he explains. It’s something they can meditate on and allow to positively influence the work they do each day.

“If you’re a teacher, one of the chapters is how to bet-

ter manage your class,” he explains. “Or, how to better manage your school building if you’re a principal. So, the idea is you focus on one of those chapters each week.”

Quite literally over one weekend Killingbeck “generated” the book with the help of ChatGPT. Of course, edits were made to add that personal, human feel. But overall, he says, the book is about 50% human-generated and 50% AI.

During an interview with *District Administration*, he couldn’t help but demonstrate some of the amazing capabilities of ChatGPT—like writing a rather catchy rap song about any given topic, for example.

“Guess how many times I’ve written a rap song,” he says jokingly. “Absolutely none! But now, I might be inspired as a student. I might be inspired to come up with some lyrics. And now all of a sudden, I might be able to do that!”

“Now, it needs to be used ethically,” he adds. “It needs to be disclosed. Nobody should be using it and acting like it’s 100% their work.”

Tools like ChatGPT bring a certain level of excitement to learning, according to Killingbeck. Before, students relied simply on their textbooks or their notes for inspiration. Now, they can ask the chatbot to write a historically accurate song or poem that catches their interest, which inevitably stimulates engaging learning.

“Now all of a sudden, a kid goes from, ‘I don’t want to learn about George Washington,’ to this level of excitement that is so less lame,” he says. “We need to own it and teach kids how to ethically use this type of technology.” DA

Micah Ward is a District Administration staff writer.



Don Killingbeck signs copies of his books at FETC 2023.

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5 leadership lessons learned by an interim superintendent during tough times

Communication, district goals, making tough decisions, knowing your values, and focusing on students helped this district successfully complete one of the very toughest school years.

BY GARTH J. MCKINNEY

In February 2021, I was appointed interim superintendent of the second-largest district in the state. The district had been in remote learning for over a year, the district leadership team was not cohesive, and numerous collective bargaining agreements were entering negotiations. All of this was with a board of education that was dysfunctional and disillusioned.

Despite these challenges, the district needed steady leadership during a challenging period. Becoming the interim superintendent after the start of the school is like being a middle reliever or relief pitcher in baseball. Both have the goal of finishing the year—or game—without giving up more runs.

I was fortunate to be able to come out of the bullpen after watching the first several innings. I had worked in the district for five years at the school and district levels so I had the benefit of understanding the climate, culture and history of the district plus had established trusting relationships with key leaders across the city.

Then as the 2020-2021 school year was ending, I was not selected as a finalist for the permanent superintendent position. I was hurt, angry, and disappointed. As the process fell apart and there was only one final-

ist remaining with no central office experience, I was approached by the board president and again asked to serve as interim superintendent for the 2021-2022 school year. Although the process was flawed and I believed I was not adequately recognized for my work, I accepted the position to again help the district rebound from a few years of inadequate stewardship.

Going into a complete school year allowed me to be the starting pitcher, complete with a designed game plan and advanced scouting on the possible challenges. But even with the best laid plans, the school year was like no other. The possible “return to normal” was abnormal at best with challenges never seen before in public education.

Adventures of an interim superintendent

The following are lessons learned from leading during difficult times that include an emphasis on communication, district goals, making tough decisions, knowing your values, and focusing on students:

1. Communication is key

First, communicate often and in multiple ways. From February until August 2021, the district moved through various transitions not just with instructional models

but also fluctuating public health guidelines. So weekly and monthly communication became critical to inform district employees, parents and guardians, and students on key changes in remote, hybrid, and in-person learning, public health guidelines and COVID-19 numbers as well as testing.

We refined weekly COVID notifications that informed the district community of the number of cases and changes in district protocols. I began a district update after each and every board meeting to quickly share key motions and decisions in a timely manner. I also held focused and efficient meetings with over 50 principals and directors so they were all informed, could ask questions, and received information first before sharing with the district and community.

During the 2021-2022 school year, we built upon this work by adding monthly family engagement events, visits to school faculty meetings, monthly articles in the local newspaper, and school presentations at board meetings. In the end, an end-of-communication survey showed parents felt they were receiving timely information about the school district.

2. Align work to impact the classroom

For the first time in four years, together with the district leadership team, we developed four district goals to provide clarity and alignment. The four goals focused on student achievement, social-emotional learning, family engagement, and health and safety. These goals aligned to our strategic plan as well as our reopening plan along with numerous requests for ESSER funding.

These goals were presented and approved by the board of education. Then throughout the year, I presented information on these goals to school faculties, parents, and constituents, and asked for feedback

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during the year from our school principals and district directors. While we certainly had to adapt to unknown circumstances and challenges, these goals provided a focus for the year and a means for evaluating curriculum, instruction, teaching and learning, funding, and professional development.

3. Be ready to make tough decisions

Be prepared to make tough decisions due to unexpected challenges. After the holiday recess and surge in COVID-19 cases, our ability to staff buildings and provide adequate student supervision was collapsing. After hearing concerns from building principals on student safety and potential liability, the district needed to respond.

Working with the district leadership team, we began working towards a hybrid option but needed to quickly develop new policies, acquire funding, and consult with union leadership. Even after completing these steps, the team advised to close schools for three days to allow time for staffing to recover. These days would be made up at the end of year as snow days so no instructional time would be lost.

With no other options, I decided to close school for three days. I shared this information with the board president, communicated to the district and community, and then responded to several media and press inquiries. Given that we were also in the middle of negotiations with the teachers' contract, some believed it was an organized walk-out by teachers.

I ended up drafting a statement and releasing information that it was due to the COVID holiday surge and not a result of collective bargaining. Over the next few weeks, our staffing recovered and we were able to not cancel any further school days due to lack of personnel.

4. Remember your core values and principles

During the past year and a half, there were numerous situations and decisions that tested my values, principles and resolve. From public health guidelines and masking to negotiations and personnel situations, standing by my own personal convictions were important.

From resolving grievances to applying progressive discipline, I worked to be fair but firm in reinforcing district policies and expectations. Over the year and a half, I disciplined and terminated employees, ensured compliance with a USDOJ agreement, and coordinated a district response to a USOCR claim.

I also ensured that observations and evaluations were complete for employees. By June 2022, I completed evaluations for my direct reports which had not been done for the past seven years. Finally, one mentor taught me to shield and protect the people I lead so I was subject to numerous unfair and vocal attacks, but this allowed the district leadership team and school leaders to continue the important work.

5. It's all about the students

While dealing with all the problems and challenges above, I worked to support student growth. One example was the rapid development of a program to support at-risk students. Together with community partners, we developed a program for at-risk students that included academic support, transportation, and mental health support along with breakfast and lunch to support them out of school as well as transition them back to school.

I had monthly lunches with students at the schools and dropped in the lunchrooms to speak to teachers as well. I also attended PTO meetings, school faculty meetings, and community/Rotary events. In January, when staffing was challenging,

I spent a week at a middle school supporting the faculty and students.

These examples demonstrated a visible and committed presence which teachers and staff appreciated.

Learning about myself

I again was approached to serve as the superintendent, even after accepting another position, and I respectfully declined and stuck with my plan of exiting the district. Then in mid-May 2022, the board of education named a new superintendent. All in all, the collective experience of serving as the interim superintendent for a year and a half allowed me to learn about myself, my leadership, and the challenges of serving as the key leader of a school district.

In conclusion, being an interim superintendent during a pandemic was quite challenging but these five lessons can serve as a solid foundation for those leading during these interesting times. Communication, district goals, making tough decisions, knowing your values, and focusing on students along with teamwork, collaboration, a sense of humor, and consistent self-care helped our district successfully complete one of the very toughest school years. **DA**



Garth J. McKinney is the assistant superintendent for curriculum and human resources at Milton Public Schools in

Massachusetts. He has worked at many levels in education, from classroom teacher to school administrator, all the way to district superintendent. He was named New Hampshire Teacher of the Year in 2013 and his written work has been featured by Learning Forward, and he has been a presenter at the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) annual convention.

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How technology supports student well-being while relieving teachers' burdens

Responsible use of data collection can aid teachers and increase overall student wellness.

BY DANIELLE MYERS

Education benchmarks were far from the only thing affected by the ongoing pandemic—more notably, student well-being and mental health have significantly deteriorated. The Institute of Education Sciences says 70% of U.S. public schools have experienced an increase in students seeking care at school, and only 56% of school staff believed they could effectively provide this care.

Educators have linked the increase in mental health issues to the rise in school violence, so it's clearly a factor that needs to be closely monitored. While mental health screening of children has never been commonplace, the U.S Preventive Services Task Force is, for the first time, recommending that children ages 8-18 receive an anxiety screening, while children 12-18 should also receive one for major depressive disorder.

However, educators are already overworked and underpaid, and as the teacher shortage continues, it might feel overwhelming to add the burden of monitoring student emotions to teachers' plates. That's where mental health screening and risk-assessment technology can play a role. When done correctly and responsibly, the collection and A.I. analytics of students' mental health data can help alleviate added burdens from teachers while ensuring their students' well-being.

With schools collecting this data, teachers and administrators can utilize analytics to help flag which

students may need extra support and resources. Mental health issues don't have physical easy-to-detect symptoms like the common cold and often develop over a long period, as opposed to all at once, making them easy to overlook.

Daily tracking of things like mood, activity levels, and classroom engagement, in addition to common data like attendance, can help trigger warning signs for behavioral health challenges that an educator might need to refer out. A teacher may become accustomed to a sullen, disengaged student, but if this information lives in a dashboard that easily shows changes and trends, it is easy to identify where and when intervention is needed.

One of the best things about using technology to track student data is that doing so isn't tied to students being within the walls of the building. For example, on average, teachers spend 25 hours a week in close contact with students during the school year. However, during breaks, that connection is broken completely as students spend more time with families, caregivers, and friends.

When students return to school, teachers have no understanding of their current mental state and can't quickly triage anything that might pop up. But by working with parents and using available technology, student behavior, especially on social media, can continue to be monitored, and parents can raise potential issues for educators.

Adopting this technology in schools is not meant to replace jobs. Rather, it gives staff the tools they need to effectively monitor and mitigate potential problems facing their students without adding more responsibilities and time to their packed days. However, it's important to remember that technology only works as well as the people who manage it. Both Oxford and Uvalde were said to have the technology and threat assessment policies in place but they were not properly used or activated.

As more students continue to face mental health problems and many areas across the country deal with a teacher shortage, now is the time for school districts to water two plants with one hose. Taking advantage of the available technology is a win-win for school districts, as it will ensure their student well-being is a top priority while also removing the responsibilities of their already over-burdened teachers. **DA**



Since 2008, Danielle Myers has held numerous positions within the mission-based

organization, Status Solutions. Currently, as general manager and lead evangelist, she uses her expertise in situational awareness technologies to customize solutions and spread the Status Solutions' message of leaving each situation better than we found it. Danielle's experiences in varying markets include, but are not limited to, senior living, healthcare, education, manufacturing, hospitality, and government. Danielle is a graduate of The Ohio State University and an expert on middleware integration technologies for situational and environmental awareness.



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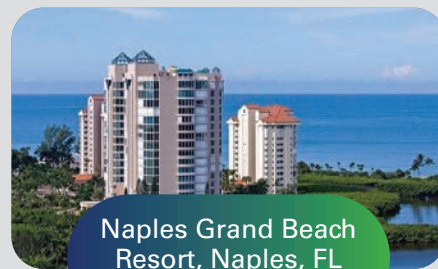
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Why 2023 should be the Year of the Teacher

Teachers need space to heal and to break the pattern of struggle to reconnect with their jobs emotionally. They also need to feel trusted and respected.

BY LOUISA ROSENHECK

The past few years have seen countless new developments in the education space, with edtech startups leveraging AR, VR, and AI into new products, and with myriad initiatives for learning loss recovery and online learning. But the key to any new tool or approach, the essential connector that brings it to life and brings meaning to learners, is of course educators.

Good teachers build relationships with their students that are the necessary foundation for learning. They facilitate learning experiences that are tailored to each individual student's needs, and they ensure that students are supported and successful. Unfortunately, this past year more than ever, it has been plain to see that teachers are in crisis. They are overworked and underappreciated, and there are no imminent improvements on the horizon. This matters not only because teachers deserve to feel fulfilled in their profession, but also because teacher well-being is inextricably linked to student well-being. When teachers are stressed and demoralized, they struggle to build strong relationships and manage the needs of all students, affecting the learning environment.

In a survey of over 1,700 K-12 teachers conducted by Kahoot!, we see that student behavior is one of the top issues faced in classrooms, with teachers describing students being disengaged and lacking social emotional and self-regulation skills due to the quarantine and remote

learning period of the pandemic. A panel at the Kahoot! EDU Meetup in March also discussed issues around a lack of administrative support, with teachers' workloads becoming unmanageable and not having time for planning, parent meetings, and all that goes into teaching outside of class time.

As teacher trainer Matt Miller describes it, teachers have had so much added to their plates during the pandemic, but now that we're coming out of the crisis, there has been no discussion of what to take off.

So what's behind teacher burn-out?

At a societal level, there is a fundamental lack of appreciation and respect for teachers, and this is often replicated with administrators and parents. Teachers don't feel respected as experts in their field and aren't given the autonomy to practice their craft, which leads to low morale and mental health issues. On an individual level, teachers have been in emergency response mode for multiple school years now, and they don't have the conditions needed to innovate and thrive. While 2022 left us with serious challenges, we can look to 2023 with some optimism about how the situation could be improved. These broad strokes paint the picture of where change needs to happen:

1. Teachers need space to heal, and to break the pattern of struggle. Teaching has always been an under-resourced,

underappreciated profession, and teachers are used to seeing their jobs as a constant struggle. Mandy Froehlich believes that this perception needs to change in order for teachers to heal and feel empowered.

- 2. Teachers need to reconnect with their jobs emotionally.** Humans deserve to feel connected to their purpose and fulfilled by what they do. This doesn't mean any job will be perfect, but teachers need to feel satisfaction in the parts of their job that are most meaningful—most often, building relationships and supporting students to succeed.
 - 3. Teachers need to be trusted and respected.** Teachers are experts in their field and have been hired for that reason, but education systems often don't provide the recognition they deserve or the autonomy they need to do their best work.
 - 4. Teachers need opportunities to play.** Playful teaching allows teachers to experiment with new methods, adjust their teaching as they go, and find joy in their work again. This approach can combat low morale and improve learning experiences for students.
- Change in these areas needs to come from various stakeholders at various levels, but with a coordinated holistic approach we can create an environment where teachers are fulfilled by reconnecting with their passion and where students are therefore also supported and thriving. **DA**



Louisa Rosenheck is director of pedagogy at the game-based learning platform, Kahoot! She also

co-founded the Playful Journey Lab at MIT.



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