DA
District Administration®
November/December 2022

Why the debate about SEL?
Much of the negativity stems from misinformation.

Made in the Shade
Why the case for solar panels in schools can appeal to everyone.

School Safety
More than 50 K-12 leaders share how they're addressing it right now.

Team TEACHING

With its built-in support system for teachers and the sense of community it fosters for students and staff, many districts are finding it to be a win-win.

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LEARN HOW pages 12–13

"When we call Transfinder support, they're very patient with us. They'll zoom all over the place and show us and that's really nice. Once Transfinder provides the instruction, the team then watches as we perform whatever task we just learned. Transfinder really helps us."

Bryan Perryman, Dir. of Transportation
River Road ISD, Texas

District Combines 'Old School, New School' Approach to Route Students

They've got the same name but that's pretty much where the similarities end. Even how they spell their name is different.

"They" is **Bryan Perryman** and **Brian Boroughs**. Perryman is the director of transportation at **River Road Independent School District** in **Amarillo, Texas**. Boroughs is the district's mechanic.

And both work together using Transfinder's **Routefinder** to build the safest and most efficient routes for the 1,350 students attending four schools in the district. About 540 students or so opt for school transportation.

"I am learning Transfinder's technology," Boroughs said. "I can actually build a route now. He's working me more and more and getting me up to speed to help," he added, referring to Perryman. "Especially at the beginning of the year, getting all the students routed, scrubbing the list, and then scrubbing the list, then scrubbing the list."

The two discussed how **Transfinder's service and support teams** have helped instruct them. They have been there whenever they faced a challenge, like removing roads from maps that don't exist and building routes for summer school when students who typically attend school in different buildings are all receiving instruction in one building.

Perryman talked about quick and helpful callbacks from support.

"Support has been very good for us," Perryman said.

"They walked me through our yearly rollover," Boroughs said, adding that he writes down notes when speaking with support. "I have a notebook when I take notes: How to delete roads, step by step, what to click and what to do. The guys are super patient with us over the phone."

Boroughs is comfortable at the computer. "I am an IT guy by trade. That's what I did for 20 years in the military before I retired," he said. "So now I'm here and it's no different. I'm working the helpdesk but you've got parents calling in."

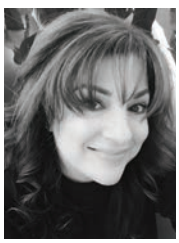
Perryman said the two complement each other.

How?

Click the QR Code to read the rest of the story.

SCAN ME

Recommended reading



Even as we race toward the holidays, there's so much more for education leaders to think about than turkey, football, shopping, and the much needed (and well-earned) respite that the time off brings. Always top of mind are students: how to continue to serve them and their needs, look after their mental and physical wellbeing, help them succeed academically—the list continues.

One thing several schools have discovered works for all of the above is shifting to team teaching and co-teaching. A built-in support system for teachers and the sense of community that results make for a winning combination that has proven to appeal to parents. "Team Teaching" starts on page 14.

And speaking of football, perhaps the most prominent political football in K-12 right now is social-emotional learning. There are those who argue that it's up to parents to help children develop these skills, while others believe teachers can, and should, help students progress in tandem with families. We examine both sides of the debate in "Overcoming resistance to social and emotional learning" on page 16.

There's plenty more, of course, as there always will be. In the meantime, do enjoy the time with friends and family that we all look forward to as we refresh and gear up for a new semester in January. You deserve it.

—Lori Capullo
Executive Editor

Talking out of school

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

"My wife and I love you all and this community that we both grew up in, and therefore the decision was a difficult one for us."

—Former Uvalde Superintendent Hal Harrell, after announcing he would be retiring

"I try to go to as many calls as I can to keep my skills sharp."

—Superintendent Lisa Witte, Monadnock Regional School District, N.H., on volunteering for her local fire department and EMT service

"We are in the people business and leadership rests on relationships. Before a leader can garner trust from those they lead, they have to stay true to their word and model integrity."

—Superintendent Jerry L. Oates, Brunswick County Schools, N.C.

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION
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Publisher Kenneth Kahn

EDITORIAL

Executive Editor Lori Capullo

Senior Writer Matt Zalaznick

Education Staff Writer Micah Ward

Technology Editor at Large Lenny Schad

ART

Production Director Joe Ciocca

Art Director Rebecca Eller

Media Production Specialist/Team Lead Rebekah Galy-Davis

Media Production Specialist Jerry Criner

Media Production Coordinator Dianna Zisman

ADVERTISING, EVENTS AND CUSTOM MEDIA

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

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

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

Content Marketing Editor Kurt Eisele-Dyrli

CIRCULATION AND OPERATIONS

Director of Audience Development Dana Kubicko

LRP MEDIA GROUP

President Kenneth Kahn

Chief Financial Officer Todd Lutz

Vice President, Marketing and Communications Missy Ciocca

REPRINTS/PERMISSIONS

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

SUBSCRIPTIONS

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

HOW TO REACH US

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

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Think like a parent: How can schools keep students safe on their devices?

Implementing technological barriers to keep students from accessing harmful content online is the school's responsibility, say not only parents but also teachers and administrators.

Most chief technology officers would agree that equipping students with personal devices comes with its own set of challenges.

As children pull away from the traditional pencil and paper, their excuses for losing their devices start to get more creative beyond "my dog ate my homework." Think: "I sold mine to a guy overseas." That was the case for one CTO who spoke with *District Administration* about the difficulties of device and inventory management in a school setting.

Looking beyond the risks of providing students with physical devices, take some time to ponder the psychological and emotional effects it might inflict as they spend hours each day staring at their screens browsing the internet.

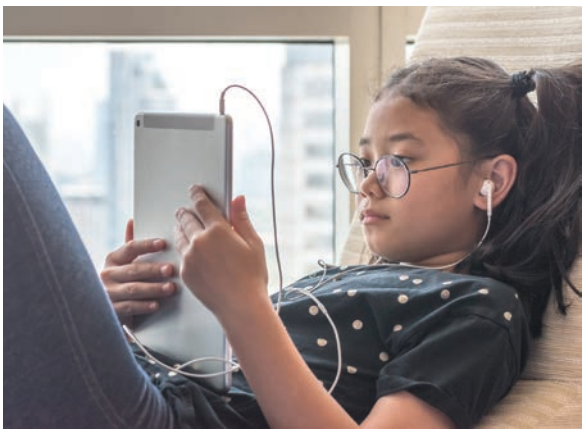
If you're thinking like a parent, you ought to feel a little unsettled. If you're a school administrator or CTO, ask yourself, "What technological barriers do we have in place to keep students from accessing harmful content online?" If your answer is none, 91% of parents would like you to take some action—swiftly.

According to a recent survey conducted by the decision intelligence company Morning Consult, nearly 2,500 K-12 parents, teachers and administrators expressed high levels of concern for student mental health, in addition to supporting online technologies to keep students safe as they use their devices.

Most respondents agree that the internet is a necessary and important learning tool for students. But their concerns indicate a need for increased online safety technology for K-12 students. Here's what the results say:

Content moderation

- The internet *should* be part of the learning process for students in K-12 schools, according to 93% of parents and 98% of teachers and administrators.
- 74% of K-8 and 68% of 9-12 parents expressed great concern about students accessing harmful content on their school-issued devices. This number grows to 80% for teachers and administrators.
- Content moderation is a must for more than 91% of respondents overall. Additionally, 95% believe it is the school's job to implement these tools.
- Technology leads to distraction. 88% of respondents say online technologies should be implemented to help keep students on track and distraction-free as they use their devices.



"These findings validate on a broad, national scale what we've long heard directly from our customers: parents and educators believe in the value of learning with the internet, and they trust schools to make the right decisions to keep students safe online," said Patricia Bothwell, vice president and general manager for safety and productivity at CoGuardian, on online safety tools provider, in a statement.

Student mental health

- Concern for student mental health is high among parents and school staff. More than 83% of all respondents report feeling a "high level of concern" for student mental health and violence in schools.
- More than 72% agree the internet plays a significant role in influencing students' decisions to harm themselves or others.
- Regarding students having unrestricted access to the internet, more than 75% agree such access is detrimental to the mental health of students.
- Online educational technology should be implemented across K-12 schools that detect signs of students considering harming themselves or others, according to nearly 90% of respondents.

The bottom line for school administrators is that parents trust their school systems to keep their children safe while they use their school-issued devices. More than 83% of those polled said they trust their schools to implement the appropriate technological barriers if it means their children are safe as they complete their assignments.

"With almost 9 out of 10 students in the U.S. now using a device as part of their daily instruction, it's more important than ever to provide schools with thoughtful and comprehensive approaches to student safety, privacy and security," said Bothwell.

By Micah Ward

Pursuing edtech innovation must not end with the pandemic

COVID-19 forced school districts to adopt fresh practices to meet the needs of their students, but there's still much more to learn going forward.

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 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 an 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.

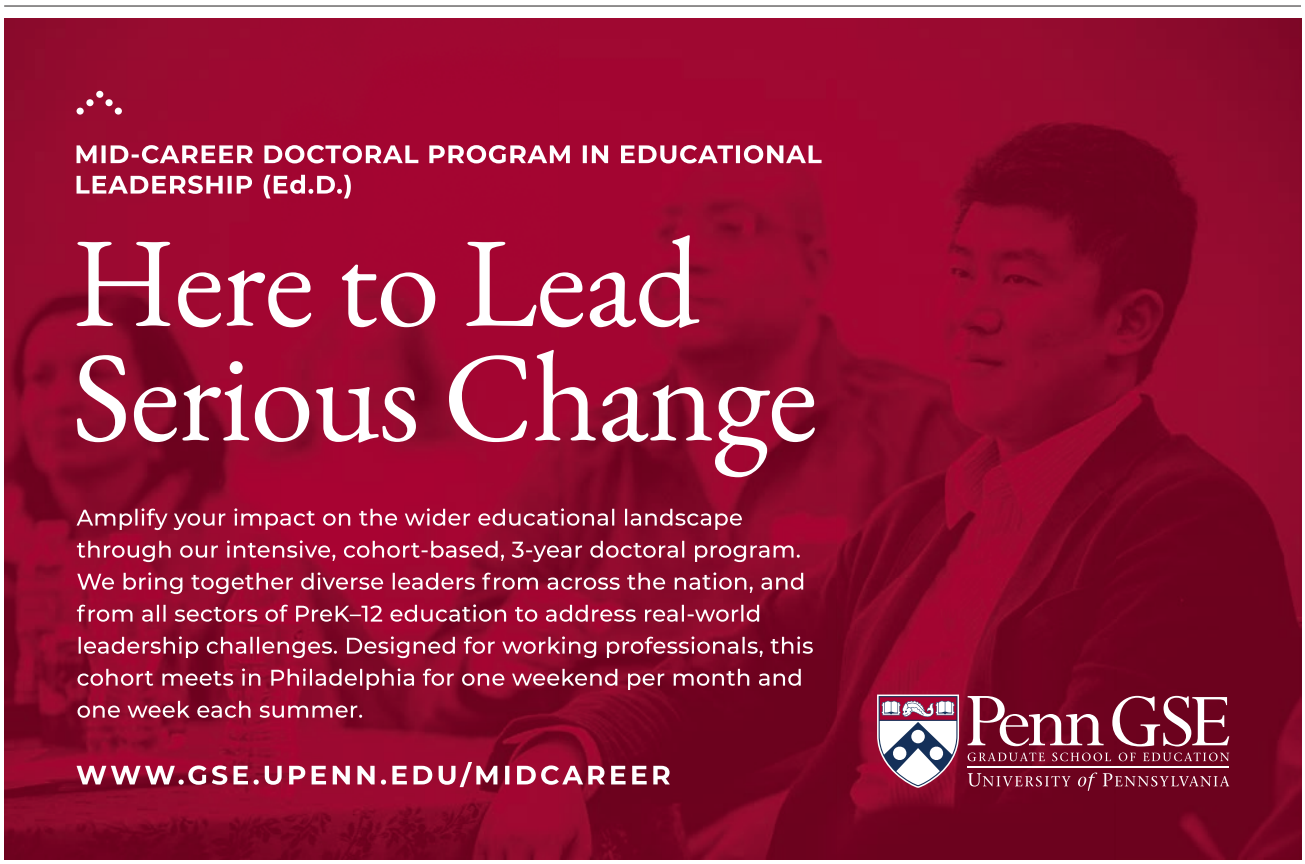
"I had a board member tell me, 'We don't want to go back to normal,'" he said. "The pandemic caused us to rethink the way we did our work, our processes, the way we approached things, the whole nine yards. And out of that, I don't care what anybody says, we brought some innovation, and we brought some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

So why stop in 2022? Districts ought to focus on maintaining the momentum they built during the pandemic and focus on innovation.

Featured in next year'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.

By Micah Ward



More than 50 K-12 leaders share how they're addressing school safety

Here's what this diverse group said is top of mind for them surrounding student safety and security.

Tackling academic recovery, teacher shortages and increasing school safety continue to be top-of-mind issues for leaders in K-12 education.

District Administration had the opportunity to gather feedback from a diverse group of over 50 K-12 employees, comprising superintendents, administrators, board directors and school employees, regarding the issues they're dealing with this school year, particularly surrounding school safety.

Here's what they had to say.

Looking ahead

Among a variety of things to look forward to this school year, most said helping students recover academically was their top priority, followed by working face-to-face with teachers and administrators. See the complete list of responses below:

What are you most looking forward to in 2022-23?

- Helping students bounce back academically: 75.51%.
- Working face-to-face with teachers and administrators: 36.73%.
- A full return to in-person learning: 34.69%.
- Holding sporting events, arts performances, and other activities: 28.57%.

Some said they were thankful to have these returned during the 2021-22 school year. However, one respondent said political pressures are keeping them from returning to normal.

"The end of communist control of the federal government allowing us to get back to some form of normalcy," one said.

School issues

When asked what issues were affecting their districts, the majority said they were dealing with staff shortages and mental health issues among students and staff. However, most of them ranked political controversies as the most pressing issue they're facing. Here's what they say is impacting their districts the most:

- Political controversies and restrictions on curriculum: 40.43%.
- The upcoming expiration of ESSER funds: 37.5%.
- Staff shortages: 8.33%.
- Learning loss remediation: 8.16%.
- Student and/or staff mental health: 3.92%.

School safety updates

As school safety continues to stir controversy and confusion for districts across the nation, it's important to understand how schools are addressing safety concerns.

When asked how often their school updates their safety plans, an overwhelming majority said they're updated at least once per year. Here are their responses:

How often does your school update its safety plans?

- Once per year: 65.38%.
- Twice per year: 3.85%.
- More than twice per year: 9.62%.

However, 21.15% of respondents specified different approaches to safety policy updates. Most commonly, they said their policies are "updated as needed" or "under constant review."

Guest and visitors

Many districts have chosen to update their visitor policies following the tragedies that occurred last school year as a result of gun violence. We asked them how they address allowing visitors to their schools.

What is your policy for guests and visitors entering campus?

- We have a strong policy that includes ID checks and required visitor passes: 84.62%.
- We have a more open campus that doesn't require ID checks and/or visitor passes: 11.54%.
- We don't allow visitors or guests during school hours: 3.85%.

In the event of a school safety threat, alerting staff and students is essential. For most schools, fortunately, it takes less than a minute, according to the survey responses.

How quickly are faculty and staff notified when a code red occurs?

- Less than a minute: 57.69%.
- Less than 5 minutes: 38.46%.
- Less than 10 minutes: 3.85%.

SROs on campus

Surprisingly, a slight majority of schools don't have safety resource officers present on their campuses all day, according to results.

Do you have school safety resource officers on campus at all times?

- Yes: 44.23%.
- No: 55.77%.

Additionally, most schools allow their SROs to carry weapons on the premises.

Are school resource officers allowed to carry weapons at your school?

- Yes: 75.51%.
- No: 24.49%.

Locked door policies

Deciding whether or not to keep classroom doors locked has become a controversial topic this school year. According to respondents, most schools keep their classrooms locked all day.

When are classroom doors required to be locked?

- Throughout the day: 53.85%.
- During emergency or code red drills only: 42.31%.
- Never: 3.85%.

Cybersecurity

Despite the growing number of ransomware attacks targeting K-12 schools across the country, less than 20% of respondents rank cybersecurity high on their list of concerns for their district. See their responses below:

On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being the highest), how would you rank cybersecurity as one of your district's concerns?

- 15.38% ranked cybersecurity at 5.
- 34.69% ranked cybersecurity at 4.
- 38.46% ranked cybersecurity at 3.
- 9.62% ranked cybersecurity at 2.
- 3.85% rank cybersecurity at 1.

The overwhelming majority of respondents said they haven't experienced any cybersecurity threats so far this year.

Have you experienced any fallout from cybersecurity issues this year so far?

- Yes: 13.46%.
- No: 86.54%.

Lastly, respondents had the opportunity to share with us what other issues their schools are facing surrounding security. Here's a sampling of their remarks:

"*Some schools are not completely fenced. There are open spots where anyone can walk on campus and avoid the office. This is very scary in today's climate of school shootings.*"

"*Funds need to be made available for smaller rural schools to improve their safety and security programs and update older buildings.*"

"*Growing number of internal threats due to the poor mental health of students and parents/guardians.*"

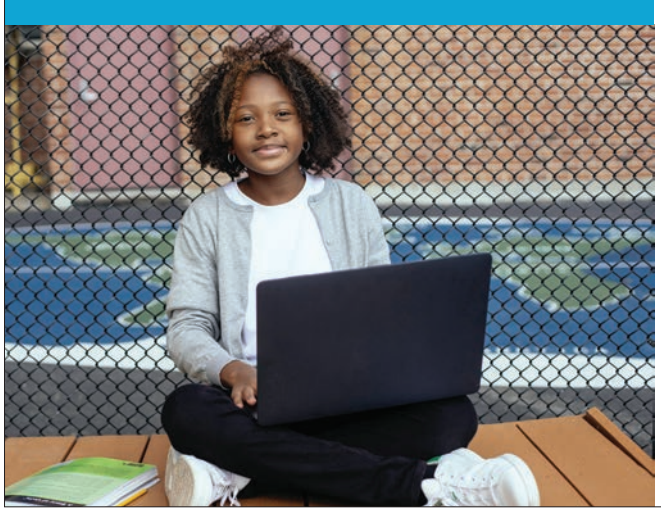
"*We have an SRO at the high school, but not other buildings. Local police do regular walk-throughs at the other schools.*"

"*Separated/divorced parents wanting to pick up child without parental access and becoming hostile.*"

"*Handling safety and security at extracurricular events, primarily athletic events where emotions run high and events can escalate quickly.*"

By Micah Ward

The safest, most reliable student WiFi solutions



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Students lack important data about themselves. Here's what they want

Fewer than half of high school students received information about whether they're on track to graduate, a survey says.

Student data plays a critical role when high schoolers make college and career decisions as they approach graduation. But many students say they don't have sufficient access to their own learning data, a new poll says.

Students said that this data—such as whether they're meeting grade-level expectations—is also essential for staying on track after the disruptions of the pandemic, according to the survey by the Data Quality Campaign and the Kentucky Student Voice Team. "Their message came through loud and clear: students want access and support to use their own data to navigate their futures," the report says.

Less than half of the students reported receiving information about meeting grade-level expectations and whether they're on track to graduate or how much academic progress they've made, the survey found. And while three-quarters of students believe they are on track for college or career success, far fewer feel like they have a complete understanding of their post-high school options.

Here are the types of information students want most, starting with what they said was most important:

1. Which high school courses I need to take to be ready for what I want to do after high school
2. Which pathways I can take from school to the workforce to earn a livable wage
3. What financial aid—including scholarships and grants—is available to fund my postsecondary education
4. Which postsecondary institutions or programs do other students from my high school go to
5. Do students from my school who go directly into the workforce find a job that pays a livable wage
6. Whether students from my school who enroll in college are prepared for college-level courses
7. How many students from my high school enroll in college, enlist in the military or go directly into the workforce

Student data deficits

A majority of students—about six in 10—say they trust their parents and teachers to help them use academic data to make post-graduation plans. But when it comes to *non-academic* data, students have the most faith in their parents by a wide margin. Still, a substantial number of students also want *more access* to counselors to help map out their futures.

Students are also interested in accessing disaggregated data about their schools and classmates, such as graduation and college-success rates based on ethnicity, race and gender. "Without access to data about their own progress, students are being left in the dark," the study concludes. State, district, and local education leaders must prioritize giving students access to data and ensuring that they have the resources to use it."

Students may not be that far off in some of their assessments. School-level data on participation and performance in CTE and career pathways is severely limited, according to an analysis by GreatSchools.org, an organization that provides data to help parents choose schools. Schools are also not regularly reporting metrics such as the number of industry credentials earned or disaggregating CTE data by race and ethnicity.

"To fulfill the promise of high-quality career preparation programming, states must undertake greater data collection, publication, and transparency efforts at the school level," the report says. "These data are critical components of evaluating the quality and equitable access to CTE and career pathways programs."

By Matt Zalaznick

How school leaders are getting innovative in the search for substitute teachers

Online training sessions and students' recommendations are helping speed up the process of filling open slots.

K-12 labor pressures have inspired one principal to turn to an unconventional source for substitute teachers: her students. Mary Fulp, principal of Colony High School in Palmer, Alaska, has been handing her business cards out to students in hopes they help recruit potential subs.

"I tell them to give the business cards to people who they think would be a good person to work in our schools," says Fulp, Alaska's 2022 principal of the year. "We have to do things differently to get people into our classrooms."

Fulp will of course vet and interview the substitutes suggested. But her effort is about more than filling vacant positions as schools everywhere need additional staff to support students as they rebound from COVID's emotional and academic disruptions. "Even if we're fully staffed, we're not fully staffed based on the needs we're seeing," says Fulp, whose school is part of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District near Anchorage.

And finding new subs is another way to get community members invested in her school. "These are helpful connections for what we're going through, with the public perception that schools can't be trusted or that we're indoctrinating kids," she says. "When we reach out and partner with them, it's powerful. We want them to be a part of the solution."

New tech trains substitute teachers

Other district leaders are turning to technology to speed up the process of onboarding and training substitutes. Bossier Parish Schools in Louisiana now gives substitutes access to an online training session when they get fingerprinted, says Connie Miller, the district's technology staff development facilitator.

The video-based training is focused on classroom management but doesn't require subs to pass any kind of quiz. "We want them to know there's an avenue for them," Miller says.

The process, along with a raise in pay for substitutes, has enabled Bossier Parish to keep more subs in the systems to cover classrooms this school year. That means full-time teachers have regained lesson planning and collaboration time because they aren't having to fill in for absent colleagues, Miller says. "We want teachers working together on their off time, not covering a class," she adds. "We don't want them to have to take their lesson planning home."

Custodians, transportation staff and other district personnel are using the same training platform, which was developed by Vector Solutions. "We're doing way better than the last two years," Miller says. "Our subs are coming in; teachers are leaving plans and the students know what to do when they go in the learning management system."

Pay raises and new laws

Many other districts are also raising substitute teacher pay to keep classrooms covered. Dorchester School District Two in South Carolina recently raised daily pay for substitutes who are certified teachers to $150 from $125. Non-certified substitutes will earn $125, up from $90, WCSC reported.

Strongsville City Schools in Ohio has hired a group of substitutes for the entire 2022-23 school year. The subs are not covered by the district's collective bargaining agreement with teachers but are guaranteed work every day of the school year, Cleveland.com reported.

And it will soon be easier to work as a substitute in California. Subs will no longer have to take a proficiency test or complete any coursework to prove they have basic teaching skills under a law that takes effect on Jan. 1, 2023, EdSource reports. A bachelor's degree and a background check are still required to get the state's emergency 30-day substitute permit.

By Matt Zalaznick

Where does your school rank among the best high schools in the country for 2023?

A North Carolina public high school secured the number one spot, while Illinois produced four separate top 10 schools.

It's that time of year when we look at some of the best-performing high schools in the nation. One state has top bragging rights, considering it takes up four of the top 10 spots in the list of public schools.

Niche, a rankings and review site, just released its rankings for the top high schools in the country for 2023. According to their list, the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics earned the number one spot for public schools. In addition, Illinois, specifically the Chicago area, produced four top 10 public high schools.

Here are the rankings for the top public schools, private schools and school districts in the U.S. for 2023:

Top 10 Public Schools

1. North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics in Durham, North Carolina
2. Payton College Preparatory High School in Chicago, Illinois
3. The Davidson Academy in Reno, Nevada
4. MA Academy for Math & Science School in Worcester, Massachusetts
5. Northside College Preparatory High School in Chicago, Illinois
6. Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy in Aurora, Illinois
7. Thomas Jefferson High School for Science & Technology in Alexandria, Virginia
8. Maggie Walker Governor's School in Richmond, Virginia
9. High Technology High School in Lincroft, New Jersey
10. Whitney M. Young Magnet High School in Chicago, Illinois

Top 10 Private Schools

1. Phillips Academy Andover in Andover, Massachusetts
2. Harvard-Westlake School in Los Angeles, California
3. Choate Rosemary Hall in Wallingford, Connecticut
4. Phillips Exeter Academy in Exeter, New Hampshire
5. Groton School in Groton, Massachusetts
6. Trinity School in New York, New York
7. St. Mark's School of Texas in Dallas, Texas
8. The College Preparatory School in Oakland, California
9. Commonwealth School in Boston, Massachusetts
10. The Nueva School in Hillsborough, California

Top 10 School Districts

1. Adlai E. Stevenson High School District No. 125 in Lincolnshire, Illinois
2. Glenbrook High Schools District 225 in Glenview, Illinois
3. Great Neck Public Schools in Great Neck, New York
4. Jericho Union Free School District in Jericho, New York
5. Syosset Central School District in Syosset, New York
6. Roslyn Union Free School District in Roslyn, New York
7. New Trier Township High School District No. 203 in Northfield, Illinois
8. West Lafayette Community School Corporation in West Lafayette, Indiana
9. Palo Alto Unified School District in Palo Alto, California
10. Eanes Independent School District in Austin, Texas

By Micah Ward

Where home internet access is still lagging after race to connect students

Students still need faster connections and up-to-date devices to do remote work.

The urgency around getting students connected to home internet is ebbing somewhat as most districts move past the pandemic. At the beginning of the 2022-23 year, nearly half (45%) of public schools said they were still providing internet access to students at home, according to the latest analysis by the National Center for Education Statistics.

That's a decrease from earlier in the pandemic when 60% of principals reported distributing Wi-Fi hotspots or other devices to connect students at home, according in the Center's 2020-21 survey. In a separate poll, 70% of K-12 IT leaders said they were sending hotspots home in 2021, according to CoSN, the Consortium for School Networking.

This fall, more than half (56%) of schools are providing students with internet access somewhere other than their homes, such as in a library or school parking lot. "Schools are aware of digital disparities and are working to reduce them," said Chris Chapman, associate commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics, which is part of the Department of Education.

Perhaps not surprisingly, almost all schools (94%) are giving laptops or tablets to students who need devices. About three-quarters of public schools continue to train students in digital literacy, with most also providing additional, specialized instruction to English learners and students with individualized education programs or 504 plans. About a quarter of schools are teaching digital literacy to families, the Center finds.

Home internet access hurdles

The decline in schools connecting students is likely occurring because more families now have internet access via discounted services or other means. But gaps remain around geography and insufficient bandwidth.

Because almost all students use video when learning remotely, a substantial number still need higher connection speeds and up-to-date devices, according to CoSN's 2022 Student Home Connectivity Study, which was released this summer. These limitations are particularly problematic in rural areas, regardless of a student's economic status, the analysis found.

The FCC's household bandwidth baselines—25 Mbps of download speed and 3 Mbps upload speed—are now inadequate because, in most families, multiple students are accessing the internet at the same time on both personal and district-owned devices, COSN warns. Families need a minimum of 25 Mbps of download speed *per student* and 12 Mbps of upload speed to support current usage demand, the organization says.

"School districts must ensure that students not only have high-speed bandwidth to the home but that the student receives dedicated high-speed access *within* the home," CoSN says. "Student households must have a sufficient router to support the number of users and devices."

District leaders should work with internet service providers to help families acquire up-to-date routers and to place network extenders in areas with poor signals. Educators can also take the very simple step of educating families about the best spot to place routers in the home and how to maintain the devices.

And to reduce strain on district networks, IT staff should strictly enforce user authentication of students so outsiders cannot access school WiFi, CoSN recommends.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, about 40% of schools are not helping students with home internet access this fall and about a quarter are not providing access at other locations outside school.

By Matt Zalaznick

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Team TEACHING

Can this increasingly popular model of instruction reenergize the profession?

By Matt Zalaznick

School leaders who are shifting to team teaching and co-teaching are reporting improvements inside and outside their classrooms. And those benefits are being felt by students, teachers and the wider school climate, says Sean Cassel, assistant principal at Seneca High School in New Jersey's Lenape Regional High School District.

"Co-teaching keeps teachers engaged by allowing them to have a built-in support system," Cassel says. "Having someone to help with all the things that go into good planning and teaching can be just enough to help teachers keep their feet under them."

One particularly effective approach to team teaching is pairing first-timers with more experienced educators to develop mentoring relationships that, hopefully, will reduce the rate at which new teachers leave the profession. "Co-teaching helps to create a sense of community that really can't be replicated elsewhere," adds Cassel, who oversees special education at his high school. "If administrators could do this even for one period a day, that may help increase the collaborative culture in a school."

Team teaching in action

There are as many as six adults at work in each "learning studio" of about 120 students at Kyrene de las Manitas Innovation Academy in Tempe, Arizona, says Principal Sarah Collins. Leading each team is a teacher executive designer—or TED—who works with two other certified teachers and several teaching students recruited from Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University. "That's a really excellent ratio for a public school," says Collins, whose school is part of the Kyrene School District, which covers parts of Phoenix and Tempe.

Each learning pod comprises students from at least two grades, combining K-1, 2-3, 4-5, and 5-6-7. That allows teachers to personalize learning by forming groups of students who are working above grade and those working, rather than having one teacher serve a class of students who are at various levels. "Teachers don't have to teach to the middle," she says. "Students are getting instruction at the exact level they need."

The teams, which consist of different numbers of students based on the subject being taught, also allow children to form trusting relationships with more adults

ALL TOGETHER NOW—Classes can be divided into two large groups or students may work at stations between which teachers rotate.

than they would if there was just a single teacher in their classroom.

One unique element at the academy is that student teachers are paid a $12,000 stipend if they commit to working five days a week. Student teachers more regularly work three days a week, unpaid, Collins explains. The model is cost neutral because 120 students would traditionally require four certified teachers. Assigning three teachers to each team allows the school to pay the student teachers.

Team teaching has also made the academy a popular school of choice in the region just as the building's enrollment was declining. About 35% of its students chose it over their home school within the district while about 20% come from outside the district, Collins points out. After the academy piloted the model, parents convinced the school board to add a seventh and an eighth grade to the school so their children could continue in the learning pods.

While it's too early to measure academic progress (team teaching launched this year), social-emotional surveys of students in the program have shown increases in self-sufficiency, self-regulation and overall satisfaction at school. "We want to deploy educators in unique ways to reinvigorate the teaching profession," she says. "And we want to reimagine learning to keep up with where our students are at and where they're going."

An age of multidisciplinary instruction

At Seneca High School in New Jersey, Cassel tries to keep co-teaching pairs together year-to-year, particularly when the team has worked well together. Achieving this requires administrators to collaborate. "This is challenging when we build our high school's schedule but if keeping these pairs together helps them to continue to grow—which ultimately helps our students—then we prioritize their schedules in the planning process," Cassel explains. "This takes support from the other supervisors as they plan their teacher's schedules."

> **"Teachers don't have to teach to the middle. Students are getting instruction at the exact level they need."**
>
> — Arizona principal Sarah Collins

The two-person teaching teams use different models within their classes based on the lessons and learning objectives. Stations, where students in smaller groups rotate between both teachers, have proven effective when the educators have become comfortable working together. Other times, a class is divided into two larger groups.

Co-teaching and team teaching have been particularly effective in special education and with English language learners because teachers can give individual students more attention. Team teaching has also allowed the school to create multidisciplinary courses by, for instance, combining math and science classes such as calculus and physics, which, Cassel says, "were meant to be taught together." In the humanities, English language arts and social studies teachers can team up to cover their content from wider perspectives.

"In the education world, resources are limited—both monetary and human," Cassell concludes. "So when we get the opportunity to have two adults in a room who are trained teachers, we get the chance to give more students attention in ways that one teacher simply cannot do alone." **DA**

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

Overcoming resistance to social and emotional learning

"The negativity out there is around a lot of misinformation and misunderstanding," says one expert on the matter.

By Matt Zalaznick

There are no controversies over the all-in approach to social and emotional learning at Alexandria City Public Schools in Virginia. SEL, which has been equated with indoctrination by some conservative groups, has been so widely embraced in Alexandria City that district leaders have added an "A" for academics to the acronym.

Since students returned to in-person learning, at least 30 minutes of each school day—at all grade levels—have been devoted to "SEAL" activities. "Everyone is openly embracing the importance of social-emotional learning," says Wendy Gonzalez, the district's chief of teaching, learning and leadership. "It's not something to be hidden—our principals talk about it and our students look forward to it because they want more time to talk things out."

SEL focuses on community building and self-regulation in Alexandria's early grades and shifts to conflict resolution and maintaining healthy relationships in high school. The SEL activities, some of which have been developed by Alexandria City's educators, are also being embedded throughout the academic day beyond the 30 minutes dedicated solely to social and emotional learning, Gonzalez says. For instance, an English teacher might use a community circle to discuss emotions stirred up by a difficult topic that has been raised in a book that the class is reading.

"We see it as a complete K-12 continuum," she explains. "And we needed *not* to let SEL happen just by chance—our children are energized and getting to where they love to talk and share."

But some districts now facing resistance to their social-and-emotional learning programs in the wake of the political battles over masks, critical race theory, and social justice. This pushback is one reason several leading education organizations launched the Leading With SEL coalition in September.

"The negativity out there is around a lot of misinformation and misunderstanding," says Shelley Berman, the lead superintendent for social-emotional learning at AASA, The Superintendent's Association, which is a member of the new SEL coalition. "Schools do social-emotional learning no matter if we intend to or not, so it's better to do it consciously rather than unconsciously."

Some of the uproar is being caused by politically motivated members of special interest groups who do not even live in the districts they are challenging, adds Justina Schlund, the senior director of content and field learning at CASEL, an organization that is one of the pioneers of SEL in schools and the facilitator of Leading With SEL. "The vast majority of parents support social and emotional learning," she points out. "The controversy is a little bit manufactured and it's distracting from the actual work that parents want schools to focus on."

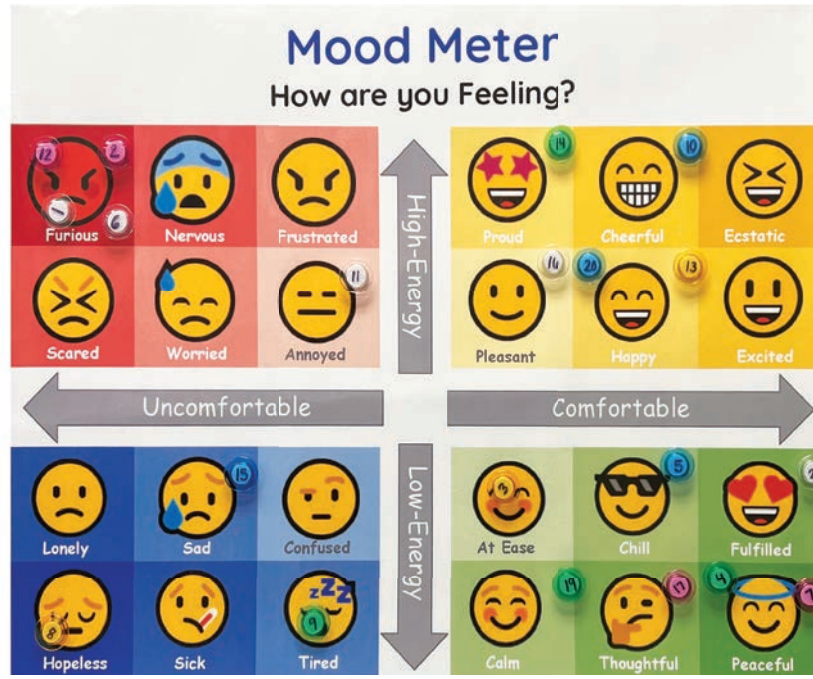
Administrators can pave the way for social and emotional learning by creating a graduate profile. Many districts are taking this approach to detail the skills—both academic and interpersonal—that students should have developed by the time they complete high school. School leaders should also make time to connect with parents who *aren't* showing up to school board meetings. "If SEL is a mystery, more districts and schools can make it clear to families

what it looks like day to day in classrooms and schools, that it's time for teachers and students to connect," Schlund explains. "They can make it really clear by inviting parents in to see that."

Berman advises leaders not to get embroiled in debates about social and emotional learning. Instead, they should articulate to their communities how SEL guides students in developing critical, future-focused social skills and creates a school culture where all students feel they belong. "SEL is a gift we're giving to students and families," says Berman, the former superintendent of Jefferson County Public Schools in Kentucky and the Eugene School District in Oregon. "We have to stand up for the right work because you can't actually have a great deal of success without doing it."

The anti-SEL political campaigns appear to be a coordinated attempt to strip local control away from the district and building leaders and their teams, Schlund adds. "It's an effort to ban social-emotional learning in schools that have been doing the work really well and in partnerships with their communities," she says. "It's sad and dispiriting that they're trying to use education as a weapon against something like SEL that has long had bipartisan support and the support of an overwhelming majority of parents."

Because academics are integral, social-emotional learning is called "SEAL" at Alexandria City Schools, says Wendy Gonzalez (center), the district's chief of teaching, learning and leadership.



A "mood meter" helps younger students in Alexandria City Schools process their feelings and learn self regulation.

"Soft skills" are hard to develop

One misconception that community members may have about SEL is that it is just the "fluffy stuff," says Francesca Sinapi, the equity, access and engagement officer for the Hillsboro School District outside Portland, Oregon. "These 'soft skills' are hard skills to develop," Sinapi says. "Self-awareness, responsibility—that's what going to get you a job and what's going to get you fired."

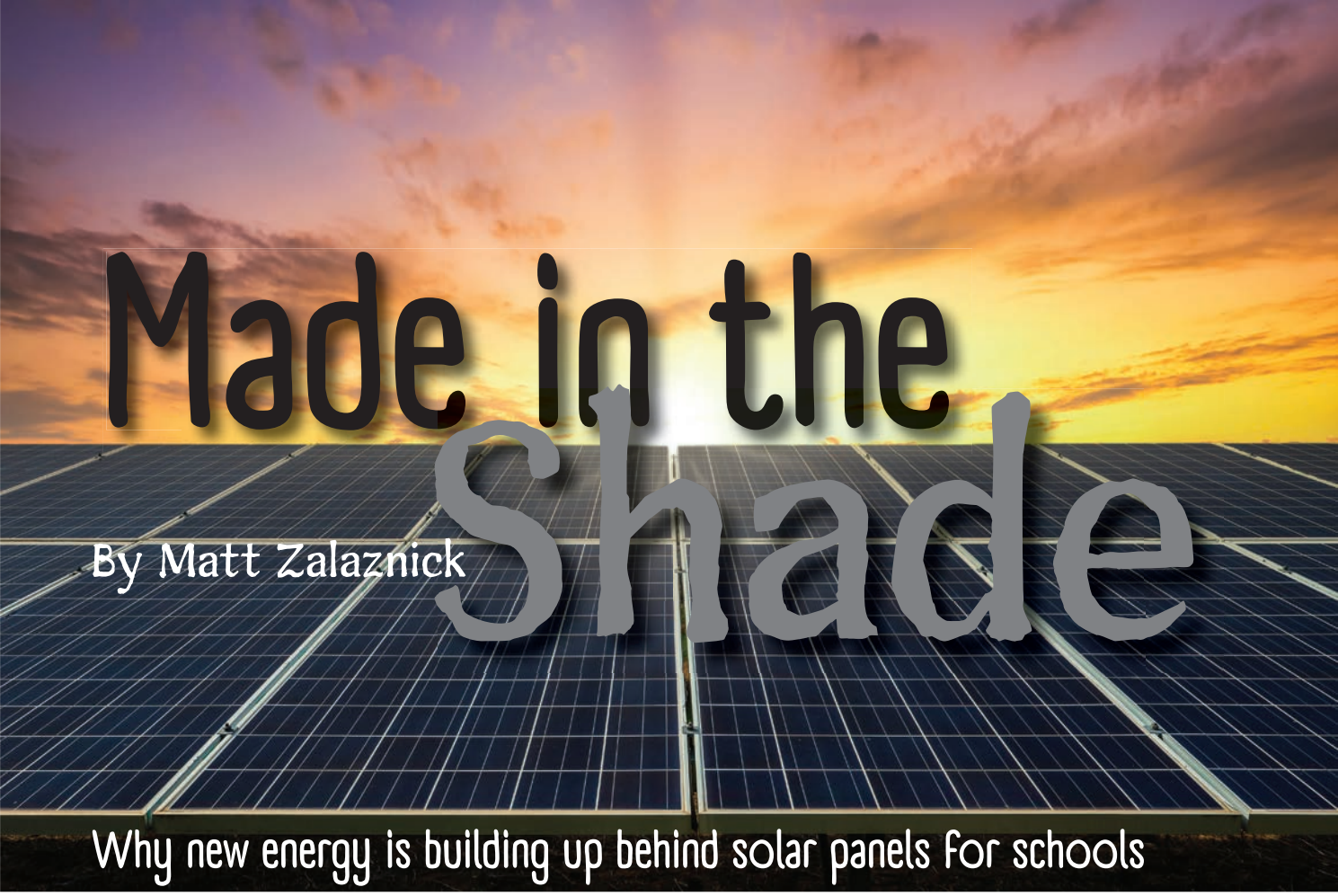
Sinapi and her team, who now oversee all district SEL activities, take every opportunity to explain the concept to parent and school committees, at professional development sessions and at other events. "You can't be a district that says you are equity-focused without having social-and-emotional learning," she adds. "And you can't be an SEL district without looking through an equity lens to ensure everybody is being built up and nurtured as a valued asset."

Like in many districts, teachers in Hillsboro's early grades start the day with an SEL-based morning meeting. Teachers are now building CASEL's five core competencies—self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making—into their instructional standards and lesson plans.

In high school, SEL—particularly relationship skills and responsible decision-making—has become the focus of advisory periods. Teachers can more intentionally build relationships with students and emphasize the importance of community while also allowing space for the student voice, says Xylecia Fynn-Aikins, a secondary-level universal support teacher.

The prioritization of SEL is also benefiting the district's educators because they are now getting to know their students on deeper levels than ever before. Teachers are now more aware of students' backgrounds, cultures and support systems, Sinapi adds. "You can't say 'I'm a great science teacher but I'm not into that relational stuff,'" she says. "How great a teacher are you if you don't know who's in front of you? If you don't know their lived experiences?" DA

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



Made in the Shade

By Matt Zalaznick

Why new energy is building up behind solar panels for schools

The case for school solar panels is one that can appeal to all community members, despite their varying political views and interests.

At Robbinsville Public Schools, New Jersey, newly installed solar canopies at the high school and middle school are conserving energy, providing new learning opportunities and saving money, Superintendent Brian Betze says. "The education and environmental benefits are really powerful," Betze says. "Sending both messages out to the community helped us sell it—and we're saving tax dollars."

The solar kiosk on Robbinsville schools' website allows students, educators and community members to track energy generated and other environmental benefits. The kiosk measures the number of trees saved and the level of carbon emissions that are being offset.

There were no upfront costs because the panels were installed by an outside company that is selling energy back to the district at a deeply discounted rate that will save about $100,000 to $150,000 annually. After 15 years, the district can buy back the panels or remove and replace them.

Betze says the panels also came with aesthetic benefits and other seasonal conveniences. "They look great—they have a really cool, *Star Trek*-y look to them," he says. "And when it was 90 degrees this summer, we had staff and student parking under the canopies saying thank you for cooling off their cars."

Not just for wealthier districts

The amount of solar power being utilized at K-12 schools has tripled since 2015. Overall, about one in 10 schools now use solar energy, says Tish Tablan, director of Solar for All Schools at Generation180, a clean energy nonprofit. Energy is generally the second biggest expense after staffing in most school districts, she adds.

Most of those installations are financed and owned by a third party, which means there are no upfront costs and schools get discounts on energy rates that can be set for decades. "Our data shows that solar is not just a technology for wealthy school districts—rural to urban to underresourced, they're going solar," Tablan explains. "Nearly half of all public schools with solar are eligible for Title I."

Many of the districts incorporate their solar energy systems into instruction, particularly in career and technical education. Tuscon USD in Arizona built solar canopies over school gardens to introduce students to the field of agrivoltaics to research how various plants grow in the shade of solar panels.

"If all K-12 schools in the US were completely powered with clean energy, that would reduce carbon emissions equal to closing 16 coal-fired power plants," Tablan says.

School solar panels in the shade

Shade for basketball games and free car charging are among the many big benefits of newly installed solar panels at the Los Gatos Union School District near

San Jose, California. The district has nearly finished installing solar arrays on and around all five of its buildings, Superintendent Paul Johnson says.

The panels, which cost the district nothing up front, are owned and maintained by a private company that will charge the school system a fixed, below-market electricity rate over a 20-year contract. The solar arrays will generate enough energy to power 250 homes annually and save the small district about $3.6 million in funding that can be redirected to teaching and learning. "If more schools could participate in something like this, just imagine how it would help our environment on a massive scale," Johnson says. "We have five schools and it's all of those homes. There could literally be thousands of homes worth of energy provided."

One of the solar arrays was built over a blacktop area where students play basketball and hold a bike rodeo, all in the shade. Other canopies cover parking areas, and the energy generated allows teachers and other staff to charge electric cars for free. Students also have access to data that will allow them to track energy and cost savings for STEM assignments. The district's use of clean power is roughly equivalent to taking 275 gas-powered passenger vehicles off the road each year, Johnson says.

And when California's recent record-setting heat wave sent temperatures soaring to an unheard of 111 degrees in the Los Gatos, the solar panels were able to keep the district's air-conditioning units cooling classrooms at full strength.

Setting your long-term energy strategy

Some district leaders are incorporating solar power into the HVAC upgrades they are making in the wake of COVID's heightened air quality concerns. Hotter weather across the country is also driving a growing number of districts to use American Rescue Plan relief funds to install air-conditioning.

Money saved on renewable energy can leave districts with more funds for ventilation and other infrastructure improvements, says Jordan Lerner, a West Coast regional director at Schneider Electric. "Districts are now using their schools for longer periods of time and in different ways," Lerner explains. "We're definitely seeing communities that didn't feel like they needed AC looking at portions of their buildings where they now want it."

Federal renewable energy tax credits have recently been extended to public and tax-exempt agencies, which means there is more funding than ever before to install and own solar power systems. School administrators, with outside help, should make comprehensive energy and HVC plans rather than taking on projects one at a time, he recommends. "The places that have seen success are doing it in an intentional, phased approach, where the most pressing needs are handled first and equity is provided across districts," Lerner says.

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The Solution Showcase brings together the latest K-12 education products and service solutions in one easy-to-use section. This year's collection includes 50 entries from solution providers. Their innovative products have been developed in response to needs expressed by school districts across the U.S. DA is pleased to work with these solution providers to showcase the most effective and cutting-edge products and services.

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

Sincerely,
Lori Lawrence
Managing Editor

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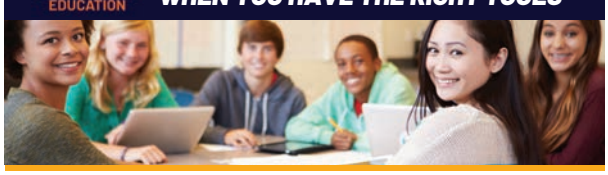

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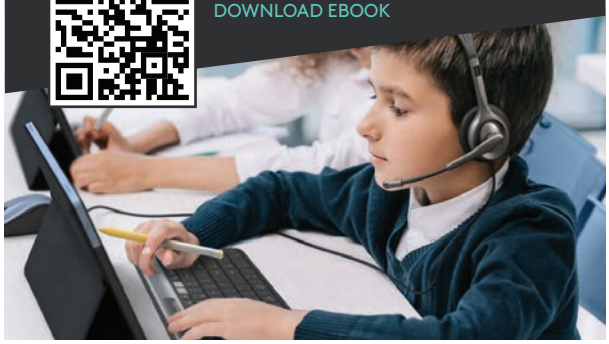

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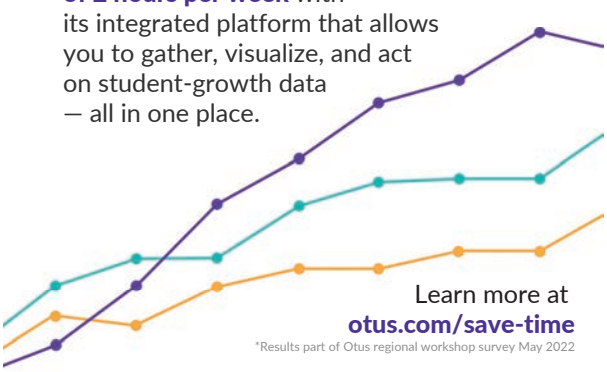

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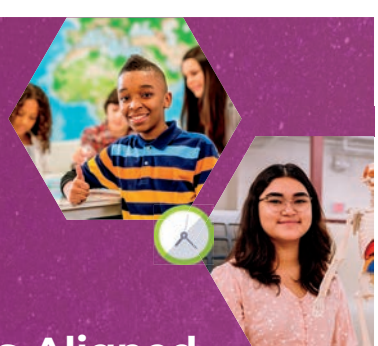

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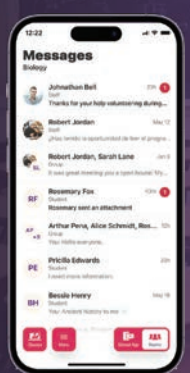

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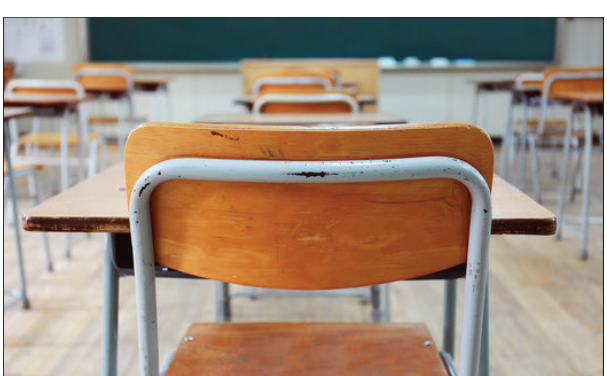

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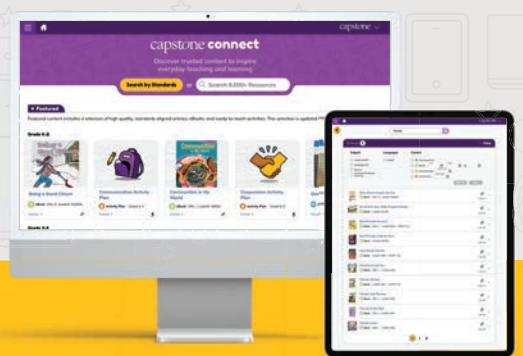

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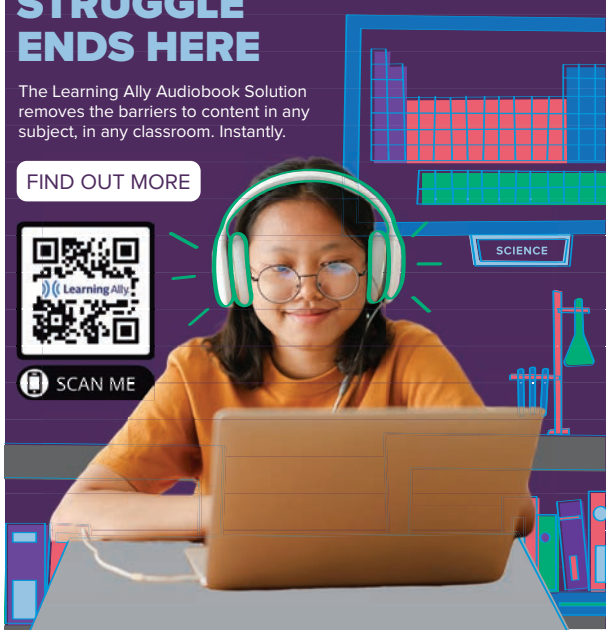

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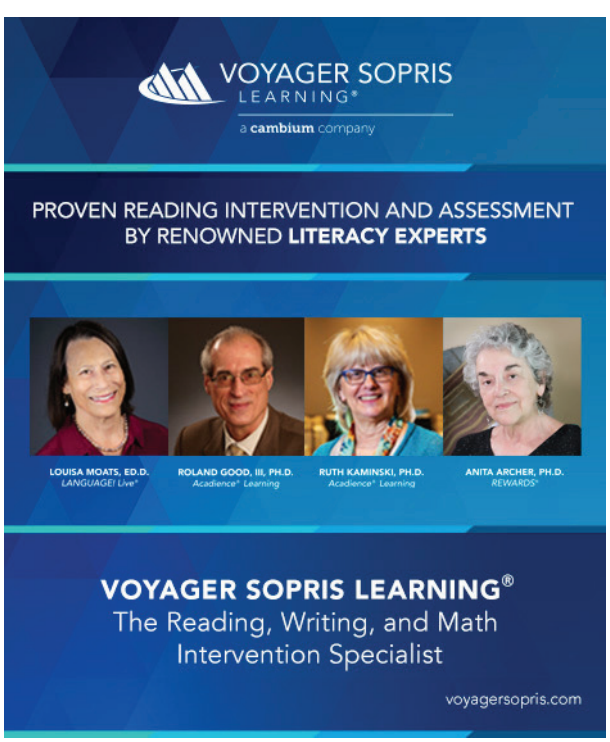

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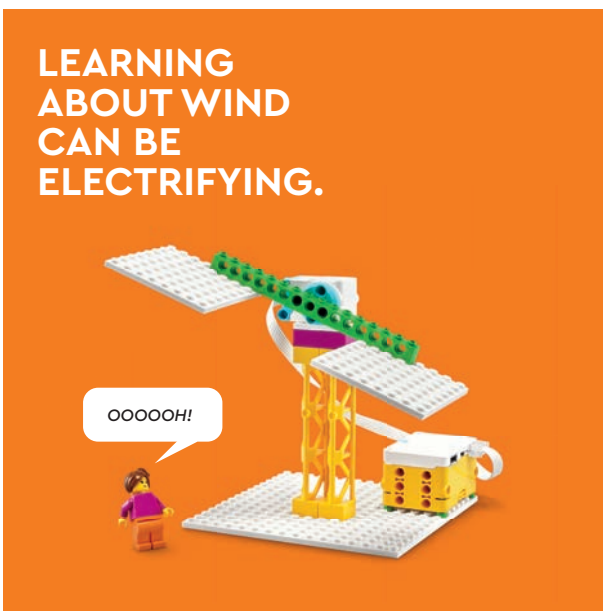

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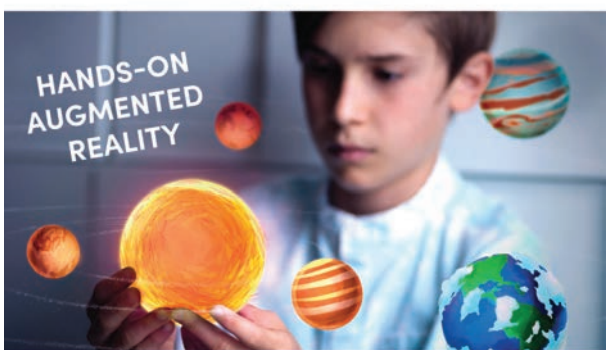

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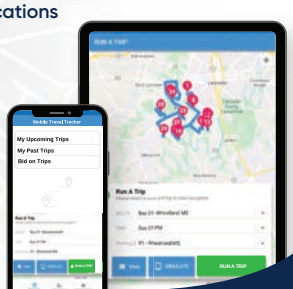

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A SNEAK PEEK AT WHAT JANUARY HOLDS

Next year's Future of Education Technology® Conference will host over 600 workshops and sessions for attendees.

By Micah Ward

Next year's Future of Education Technology® Conference (FETC®) is just around the corner, and it's shaping up to be a robust one.

Every year, the event brings together dynamic and innovative educational leaders for an intensive, highly collaborative exploration of new technologies, best practices and pressing issues. Participants and attendees can also expect a change of scenery this year, as it's being held at the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center in New Orleans in January.

FETC© 2023 will feature sessions and workshops in five tailored tracks:

- Future of Ed Tech Administrator
- Future of Ed Tech Information Technology
- Future of Ed Tech Educator
- Future of Ed Tech Library Media Specialist
- Future of Ed Tech Coach

Attendees will have the opportunity to sit in on hundreds of sessions and workshops. Here are some highlights:

LEADERSHIP LESSONS ON MAKING LEARNING STICK: BLENDING CREATIVE THINKING & ED TECH

As part of the Future of Ed Tech Administrator track, attendees will learn how to integrate technology into education programs to increase engagement among students and create meaningful learning.

EMOTIONAL QUOTIENT + TECHNOLOGY: THE SECRET BEHIND SUCCESS

As part of the Future of Ed Tech Administrator track, attendees will learn how to integrate technology into education programs to increase engagement among students and create meaningful learning.

20 TIPS TO TRANSFORM ASSESSMENT AND TAKE ACTION

As part of the Future of Ed Tech Educator track, participants will examine how digital tools offer a special benefit for students as teachers expand student opportunities and options to share learning. In addition, they'll learn strategies for collecting and analyzing data to assist educators in taking making decisions through instructional pivots and interventions.

THE SECRET TO BUILDING A POWERFUL TECHNOLOGY TEAM

As part of the Future of Ed Tech Information Technology track, featured speakers will discuss how to build a powerful, dedicated and committed technology organization.

DEVELOPING DIGITAL DETECTIVES: INFORMATION LITERACY IN THE AGE OF ALGORITHM

As part of the Future of Ed Tech Library Media Specialist track, the session will dive into ways to teach people about how algorithms work and provide strategies for disrupting control over the content that influences our opinions, identities and relationships.

"FETC 2023 will host the most diverse group of leading experts from around the country, energized with new skills and knowledge learned from the experiences of the last few years, to provide the highest quality program we have ever produced filled with all-inclusive concurrent sessions and deep dives in hands-on workshops," said Conference Chair for the Future of Education Technology® Jennifer Womble in a statement. "FETC is leading the way by providing the industry's highest quality professional training." DA

Expectation management for IT leaders: Defining what, and when, to expect after COVID

After the pandemic, IT plays a greater role in teaching and learning, leading to new leadership challenges.

By Lenny Schad

This is the first in a series of thought leadership columns focused on the role of IT leaders in education.

The role of technology in education has forever changed because of the pandemic. IT is now an integral component of how teachers teach and students learn. With this new role comes new leadership challenges as IT departments transform their processes, procedures, and support models.

There is often one leadership practice that is often overlooked or not well understood: expectation management. Neglecting to set and manage clear expectations has the potential to undermine the behavior, actions and results within a team, but it can also negatively impact engagement, relationships and teamwork

So, let's break this down to the basics. An expectation is a belief about what will happen in the future. Those beliefs are what guide our behaviors. Take a moment to think about this. If our beliefs about the future guide our behaviors, it isn't hard to understand why a lack of them can be so disruptive.

If we reflect on the past and the disruption the pandemic caused, we must have an appreciation and understanding of three organizational realities:

An expectation is a belief about what will happen in the future. Those beliefs are what guide our behaviors. It isn't hard to understand why a lack of them can be so disruptive.

1. **Current state.** Do you as a leader understand at a strategic level the current state of your organization from a people, process, and technology perspective? Without this understanding, it will be very difficult to establish realistic and accepted expectations.
2. **Organizational fatigue.** There is no doubt we are all dealing with it. If we don't account for this reality and make appropriate adjustments, the changes we want to implement will fail.
3. **Organizational capacity.** If, as leaders, we understand the current state and have accounted for organizational fatigue, we will be much more realistic about the number of changes we want to make as the new

school year unfolds. If we don't consider the current state and organizational fatigue, the likelihood of trying to do much and exceeding the capacity of the organization increases significantly.

This brings us to another key element when understanding expectations: the three stages of change.

Current state

This state is like that old pair of slippers or your favorite T-shirt. It is comfortable and well understood, but most importantly, it is *familiar*. For employees, current state is how they have been successful and shown their value to the organization. For example, the way a teacher has taught students in their classroom, or the way our teams have provided support for staff onsite.

Transition state

This state is chaotic, disorganized, and frequently changing. It's a very emotional state for employees who are full of fear, anxiety, anger, frustration, and confusion. Now, I want you to think about the emotional elements identified that are related to the transition state. At any given time, your employees could be experiencing these same emotions in their personal lives. As a leader, you must embrace the fact that in our current environment there are many additional factors that can impact your employees' emotional state other than what needs to get done at work. The Transition state is where we are today, and it is where we have been since the pandemic first impacted our school systems.

Future state

This state is what your employees have been told the future will look like. It is supposed to be improved and where promises of better days occur. The future state and what your employees envision is completely dependent on what the messaging around this new frontier has been, who is delivering this message, and how consistent, honest and timely it has been. For your employees, the future state is also very personal. Everyone will be thinking about the future state and deciding if it is where he or she wants to be personally and/or professionally. It is these internal conversations that will cause the most apprehension. The future state is unknown, and we all must accept that fact.

As you can see, setting expectations is more than just stating what you want to happen. As leaders, we must pause and endeavor to understand the three organizational realities. We must also embrace the psychological aspects of how our employees behave and the resulting actions they will take. Remember, expectations are beliefs about the future and our beliefs are what guide behavior. We have been and continue to be in the transition state, which is chaotic and uncertain. Our organizations are at capacity as well as fatigued, and your team needs to see a light at the end of the transition tunnel. As a leader, are you defining the future state?

In part II of this series, we will outline how as a leader you can effectively manage expectations. **DA**

Lenny Schad is one of the most prominent voices in K-12 technology leadership, is District Administration*'s chief information and innovation officer and technology editor-at-large.*

3 ways district leaders can recover from long-term pandemic disruptions

The key strategic priorities hinge on talent, communication and support.

By Ryan Imbriale

While students are back in person this school year, districts continue to struggle with the long-lasting effects caused by the pandemic, including chronic absenteeism and teacher turnover. As a former district leader for Baltimore County Public Schools, I know how difficult it can be to navigate these issues in "normal" times and can only imagine how challenging it must be for district leaders to navigate the seismic shifts that have taken place.

That's why my team at PowerSchool worked with district leaders to create an Education Focus Report, with the goal of recentering PK-12 conversations. We started with what's most important to school districts and understanding how the pandemic changed district priorities. The report was built by examining 25 district plans, discussing priorities with 75-plus education leaders and conducting an online survey of 3,500 district leaders and educators. With tapering enrollment trends and doubled rates of chronic absenteeism nationwide, it was no surprise that three of the key strategic priorities were:

- Attracting and retaining top-notch educators
- Strengthening communication between educators, students, and their families
- Ensuring whole child supports

Knowing that many district leaders are focused on these key priorities, here are three tips to help district administrators tackle these issues this school year.

1. Create a consistent and ongoing learning path for educators. Educators want to feel supported and have professional learning opportunities for growth. When asked, educators said the most effective types of professional learning are centered around collaboration and sustained learning.

One way to support teachers and provide sustained learning is to give them a clear and consistent growth path by:

- **Asking educators what learning, and support is needed.** You'll find many teachers want to focus on the same area and can invest in ongoing professional development on that topic vs. a one-off training that may not be as useful to their needs.
- **Understanding the difference between training and professional development and investing in each differently.** Training fills a knowledge gap, while professional development looks to the future. Invest in creating ongoing and sequential professional learning opportunities that create community for teachers.

2. Make communications with students' caregivers easy and accessible Nine in 10 educators agreed that parent and family engagement can help reverse recent enrollment declines. As a parent myself, I understand the importance of partnering with my child's teacher to ensure they are on track, but as a busy professional, I need the communications to be as easy and accessible as possible. This can be achieved by:

- **Meeting caregivers where they are.** Understand what forms of communication the families in your community have access to. Caregivers may have an email address but never look at it. A call or text might be a more effective form of communication.
- **Investing in a learning management system.** An LMS ensures caregivers have 24/7 access to their children's course content and grades and provides a simple way for educators to communicate updates.

3. Weave whole child supports into everyday teaching. Seven in 10 educators said their district is just beginning or in the process of providing professional learning to support whole child learning. Historically, academics and social-emotional learning have been running on two different tracks. We need to bring them together.

Weave whole child supports into everyday teaching by:

- **Understanding your students' needs.** If a student is depressed, they likely aren't focused on the math problem you are teaching. You need to understand their personal needs to keep them engaged. Edtech solutions can provide information on the whole child from their grades to mental health flags.
- **Providing opportunities for collaboration.** Over the past two and a half years, children were more isolated than ever and providing collaborative opportunities will help them learn how to work together and build the social-emotional skills they may have missed out on.

Hopefully these insights and tips can help you navigate this school year after two-plus years of challenges and disruptions. DA

Ryan Imbriale will present two sessions at the Future of Education Technology® Conference, Jan. 23-26, 2023, in New Orleans: "Rethinking Instructional Design Going Forward" and "In Today's World, Being a Competent Digital Citizen is Essential."

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