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After a summer of ever-changing plans forced by COVID-19, most districts have now reopened, whether in person, online or both.

The decisions school leaders have had to make—trying to balance the concerns of parents and teachers; the sometimes conflicting, sometimes absent guidance from federal, state and local officials; and the real need to get students learning again vs. the health risks to our children and communities—have been exhaustive and exhausting.

During these unprecedented times, *District Administration* has had one overarching goal: Give superintendents and district leaders the best information possible to help in making those decisions.

As the school year progresses, DA will continue to highlight success stories and cautionary tales, tap into our deep bench of expert contributors for thought leadership, and stay focused on the issues that emerge as the year rolls out.

Here's wishing you a safe and successful school year.

—Eric Weiss, executive editor

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Virtual learning specialists get to work

A group of educators in Mountain View Whisman School District is taking the pressure of creating online lessons off of teachers.

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School mental health program staff must recognize that COVID has hit Black, Latinx and Native American families harder.

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Our plan to increase opportunity for people of color

Four ways administrators can commit to accelerating outcomes for all students through growing and developing male educational leaders of color

By Harrison Peters

Black people are tired. We're hurt. We're depressed. We're angry. We are losing hope while wondering, will the world we exist in ever allow us to live? As Black professionals and Black men leading some of the nation's largest and most diverse school districts, we can't afford for our hurt and exhaustion to give way to hopelessness.

As more white people educate themselves about our experience, they'll learn that it has, cruelly, demanded that we live two lives. Black professionals are required to speak, walk, sit and engage differently to allow our white colleagues to feel comfortable around us. Frankly, we've been forced to do this our entire life. As students, starting in elementary school, we learned to mask our lived truth from our academic experience. The unconscious influence of racism and implicit bias not seen by white teachers and classmates required living in accordance to a *white standard* in order to survive.

Education, many are led to believe, is the path to a better future. But individual education on its own is not a guaranteed ticket to justice. Too often, our trajectory in the classroom is tied to someone taking an extraordinary interest in helping us individually. For those of us who are fortunate, it's like winning the lottery. However, despite the kindness and generosity, we still struggle to gain access and opportunity in light of the systemic barriers we face. We can't ask another generation of Black kids to hope and pray they win the lottery and find a mentor who can open doors for them.

In its purest form, public education is perhaps, our only hope of taking down the pandemic of institutional racism that threatens Black lives. For 20 years, Men of Color in Educational Leadership (MCEL) informally convened to allow male leaders of color to engage in open and honest dialogue. Since

Black teachers are nearly 50% more likely to leave teaching than their white colleagues.

2017 MCEL has been a national education and advocacy group of superintendents and executive leaders focused on accelerating outcomes for all students through growing and developing male educational leaders of color. To make that extraordinary opportunity more ordinary, MCEL is calling on education leaders to join us and commit to the following:

1. Identify, develop, and elevate more Black leaders.

With less than 4% of school and district administrators being Black males, administrative decisions are being made through a monocultural lens. Unconscious racial bias in administrative decision-making results in lower expectations for students of color and increased rates of disciplinary action. Black leaders need to be elevated to the decision-making table and they need support in finding their strategic voice as they advocate for students of color.

2. Call out and address racism in education. Structural racism is prevalent and that too often drives Black teachers out of the profession. In any given year, Black teachers are nearly 50% more likely to leave teaching than their white colleagues.

3. Set expectations for anti-racist school culture. Use your leadership position to clearly state your vision of anti-racism. Work to ensure all principals, teachers, paraprofessionals, custodians and office staff are anti-racist. Provide training to give staff tools and strategies to combat racism.

4. Increase support for leaders of color. Increase networking opportunities for educational leaders of color. Networking provides a powerful system of support for all leaders and is especially critical for leaders of color. The unconscious bias in mainstream America is explicit racism in Black America. We believe our leadership can change this dynamic. We are asking our true allies, especially those with power and influence, to join MCEL in committing to these actions.

Black people will not fix racism. Nor should we. And as hard as it is to feel hopeful as Black men in America at this moment in history, we are heartened that we are working in the one institution powerful enough to force every other institution to change.

Learn more about MCEL at mcelleaders.com. DA

ABOUT HARRISON PETERS:

Currently superintendent of the Providence, Rhode Island, Public School District, Peters is a former elementary school teacher, a middle and high school principal, and a senior leader in such large, diverse school districts as Chicago Public Schools and the Houston Independent School District. Most recently, Peters served as the deputy superintendent and chief of schools for Hillsborough County, a public school district in the greater Tampa area that serves more than 206,000 students.



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10 surprising changes likely coming to school sports this fall

Traditions give way to safety measures for high school athletes, coaches and fans

As school districts wrestle with implementing reopenings—whether online, in-person or hybrid in format—nearly every state athletic association has a plan for when its seasons will begin.

Alabama opened football practice in late July. California delayed all athletics until at least December. Texas allowed some sports programs to begin in early August but required the larger programs to wait for September. Florida pushed all school football games back to mid-September.

Regardless of when student-athletes return to action—many are at the mercy of local health department decisions and heeding guidance from the CDC—surreal scenes will play out on and off the football fields, volleyball courts and even golf courses.

“Clearly, sports will look different this year,” Bernard Childress, the executive director of the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association, said at a meeting in July. “We have to be flexible and understand that we’re in a unique situation. We’re trying to make the best decision for young people.”

Like many other states, officials from the Ohio High School Athletic Association have been out front in trying to relay resources, information and guidance to member schools, even using the hashtag #IWantASeason. It has worked with several national governing bodies, including the United States Tennis Association and United States Golf Association, in drafting recommendations for the upcoming season. But officials admit that with the pandemic situation rapidly changes,



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NEW RULES—While soccer players can’t be socially distant on the field, changes off the field will include bigger benches and sidelines as well as less interaction.

even this advice may quickly become outdated.

Some of the proposed guidelines from state associations are eye-opening and historic, especially for staff, parents and athletes used to seeing athletics operate a certain way. Subtle traditions that have lasted 50 years or more are set to disappear.

Ohio, Maryland and Arizona have some of the most thorough guidelines for schools looking to safely start up play in 2020. Here are 10 recommendations that they and other state associations are proposing:

1. Hands-off rituals. Players across all sports should avoid handshakes, hugs and high-fives. That includes the customary tradition of golfers offering handshakes at the first tee and football pre-game handshake after the coin toss. Athletes should also avoid multi-player celebrations after goals, points and touchdowns.

2. Ball cleaning. Any ball being put into play or new ball being used should be sanitized. Football officials typically play a big part in spotting footballs after downs. Instead, as the OHSAA notes, they may use beanbags to mark those spots while offensive players bring the ball into the huddle

and then spot them. Tennis players should return balls to opponents by using their rackets or feet and not picking them up with their hands.

3. Distancing on the court and on the field. The OHSAA advises that doubles tennis players “coordinate” to promote social distancing on the court. Although many other sports such as soccer and football can’t physically distance on the field, expect to see bigger benches, bigger sidelines and less interaction off the field—including during timeouts.

4. No sharing. In its Phase 4 Return to Play plan, the Illinois High School Association’s Sports Medicine Advisory Committee is asking that all athletic equipment, from lacrosse helmets to catcher’s gear to hockey pads to simple scrimmage “pennies,” be worn by only one individual and not shared. For equipment that may be shared—weights, bats and sticks, for example—should be sanitized before each use.

5. Staying in their lane/side. Cross-country competitors are likely to see staggered starts and possibly staggered finishes, depending on the course to avoid large gatherings. As some spots on trails can be narrow, the OHSAA is recommending widening areas to more than 6 feet. In

volleyball, the customary switch of sides and benches before a deciding set likely will not happen. The California Interscholastic Federation is recommending swimmers remain 6 feet apart with no lane-sharing.

6. Beverages and food. Depending on how “open” each state and their schools are, it is unlikely that concessions will be open during games initially. On the field, players will be expected to bring their own drinks and have them labeled, including water bottles. Any food brought in must be prepackaged for individual use.

7. Fewer referees. In a recent survey of 20,000 officials, *Referee Magazine* noted that 40 percent of referees ages 65 and over are not comfortable officiating during the pandemic, while a third of those between ages 25 and 34 also expressed concerns about returning. That said, many officials in Georgia say they are will-

ing to return as long as there are protocols and safety measures in place, such as sanitizing supplies, to protect them. Events in states where COVID-19 is more prevalent could see far fewer officials.

8. Off-limits locker and weight rooms. These confined spaces can be a strong breeding ground for airborne and surface transmission. Many associations and doctors are recommending limited use of the facilities for players and especially older staff members. Some are closing them altogether while waiting for local public health department clearance.

9. Student waivers. Athletes and parents may be asked to sign waivers that outline their acknowledgement that they will act responsibly in keeping themselves, coaches, officials and competitors safe by

following mandates. Some of those agreements may include additional measures to mitigate any potential virus spread, including COVID-19 testing.

10. Empty stands. The South Bend School District in Indiana is one of a number that is not allowing spectators at any athletic events this fall. Fans in Texas will be allowed to attend games wearing masks—but crowd capacity will be limited to 50% or less, and possibly less depending on the district.

—Chris Burt



MORE ONLINE: DAmag.me/sportschanges

Student athletics update sites

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Fact from fiction: Lessons in identifying fake news

It can happen to the best students.

An honors student diligently doing research for an assignment stumbles onto a website with information that appears credible.

Lured in by the presentation and the spin of headlines and text, a seemingly sound resource is simply an example of “fake news.” And yet, because of a lack of editorial judgment, the student presses on.

Chris Salvagio and Alexis Rhyner, teachers at Cienega High School in Vail, Ariz., say this misinformation is ensnaring even top students who operate in the digital-first age, where creative fiction replaces fact and where that content can be created and disseminated in minutes.

“I’m working pretty exclusively on teaching media literacy in the very beginning of my class and also focusing on how they shouldn’t let the curiosity get the best of them,” Rhyner says. “Curiosity is so important, but also it can be pretty dangerous if you end up on a rabbit hole that you don’t check as often as you should.”

Rhyner and Salvagio joined Turnitin’s Patti West-Smith as well as Gordon Crovitz and Steven Brill, co-founders of NewsGuard, for a spirited discussion on “Fighting Fake News: Teachers, Technology and Truth” in a recent webinar.

Educators can get support in teaching to identify legitimate news from Turnitin, a company that presses for academic integrity, and NewsGuard (newsguardtech.com), which monitors the trustworthiness and transparency of more than 4,000 news sites.

“We have to talk to students very clearly about what is acceptable and what isn’t acceptable, with very concrete examples that are relevant to their world,” West-Smith says. “Sometimes we get into a habit of defaulting back to sort of where our generation lives. And

when we do that, it’s hard for students to make that immediate connection to what is happening for them.”

The misinformation that’s out there Crovitz and Brill, who have extensive backgrounds in media and journalism, say fake news is prevalent across the web. Their organization aims to determine the credibility of information that sites, search engines and platforms present—with red and green alerts for each, as well as “a nutrition label” that has “nine specific criteria” for sorting out overall trust scores.

According to Brill, a rating label typically goes through six sets of eyes—not algorithms. Decades ago, the task was much easier. Now, the prevalence of bad information combined with the stealthy nature of certain sites can make it less apparent.

Teachers may include .org sites instead of .com sites on a syllabus. While some of those sites might appear reliable, those that pose as “charity organizations” may have other missions, particularly if funded by political action committees, Brill said.

NewsGuard also assigns items a reliability score (0-100), providing a learning opportunity for both instructors and students.

Applying media literacy in education

The examples Rhyner and Salvagio cited in misguided approaches by students came in high school, long after those students had formulated their own strategies for research. Instead of sourcing several sites, they might look at gleaning information from ones comfortable to them.

West-Smith, senior manager of teaching and learning innovations at Turnitin, said the discussions about media literacy needs to start much sooner. “If we start to talk to students



PETER DAZELEY/GETTY IMAGES

about academic integrity and source credibility in middle and high school, we’ve missed the boat.”

She emphasized the importance of educators to recognize who their students are and how they are approaching their work.

“Our students really live in a different environment when it comes to content creation,” West-Smith said. “They have tools at their hands that can allow them to create videos and podcasts and memes and any kind of publication you can think of, and then with a click of a button, they can publish that to the world. So, they really view content creation quite differently than previous generations did.”

Lessons in media literacy will be essential as students continue to operate in remote learning environments, said Rhyner, who is concerned about students grasping proper research and sourcing strategies as well as having access to a device the whole day.

“Media literacy is much more than media literacy,” Salvagio said. “It is also political literacy. ... Students have to be literate in history. They have to be literate in psychology. They have to be literate in all kinds of disciplines. It’s really difficult to teach nuance because even if they’re literate in all these [areas], they still want to kind of grab it for an answer.”

—Chris Burt

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How students can run robotics missions remotely

Robotics has become a popular hands-on STEM project in many schools, but two educators in California this summer figured out how to let online students send their robots on adventures back in the classroom. A pair of summer school educators for Compton USD, Jose Gonzalez and Darleen Perez, covered the floor of a classroom with a huge map of Latin America.

Students, all of whom connected

remotely via Zoom, had to research and answer questions about Latin American current events, history, art and geography, and then program their robot to embark on a mission from one country to another. For example, students tracking COVID throughout the region would have to crunch the numbers and coordinates to program their robot's journey from Argentina to Central America to Cuba, says Gonzalez, director of 21st century learning at Bunche Middle School in the district.

Cameras mounted on the robot and through the room allowed students to watch the mission take place. "We wanted to design projects they could do at home in the digital format that integrated technology and 21st learning skills," Gonzalez says.

Gonzalez and Perez bet that interactive robotics would engage students who hadn't been as captivated by the more traditional style of instruction employed when schools shifted to online learning in the spring. "We found that if we gave students opportunities to inter-



SUMMER TRAVELS—Remote students in a Compton USD middle school sent robots on educational missions on a room-size map of Latin America.

act with each other and to create something engaging, we would keep them in the program and willing to learn," he says.

Navigating the map required using the points of the compass and converting inches into degrees to ensure the robots reached the correct destinations.

The summer classes were sponsored by the University of California, Irvine's Gear Up program.

"Students participated more than they had during the first round of COVID online learning," Perez says. "They didn't realize how much they were learning or how much math went into it." —*Matt Zalaznick*

Other tech projects offered to participating Compton USD students

- Make a TikTok video to describe a Latin American dance style
- Create stop-motion video about a Latin American artist or art form
- Produce an iMovie trailer about an activist or politician.
- Create an app, quiz or game related to COVID in the Keynote app.
- Use Book Creator to write an ebook on an indigenous population.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Survey: 'Overwhelming' student need ahead

Social workers in low-income and minority communities are sounding the alarm that districts will not be able to meet students' basic needs this fall without more funding. What's required is a nationwide, rapid-response initiative that also provides schools with guidance in reopening during the latest surge in COVID cases, according to a University of California, Los Angeles survey of 1,275 school social workers.

The professionals told researchers that "an overwhelming number" of students and their families are struggling with food, housing, healthcare and transportation, says the study's co-author, Ron Avi Astor, a professor

of social welfare at the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs. "The national dialogue on reopening schools is not focused on this right now, but the social workers are telling us loud and clear that meeting basic human needs for a large number of students is the big issue schools face in the fall."

The report calls for additional state and federal funding that would allow schools to hire "a massive number" of social workers, nurses and psychologists to go to work in the hardest-hit schools.

The report also envisions a national technical assistance center that would help school leaders share effective strategies. "The reality around this virus is

changing day to day," Astor says. "We can't just have one plan at the beginning of the year and wait until the end of the next year to find out it didn't work."

The recommendations are aimed at avoiding a "lost generation" of students, Astor says.

In an additional report, school social workers said they were able to shift services online, though more than two-thirds did not believe virtual counseling could work long-term.

And many social workers said they were unable to connect with some of their students.

Access the report at [DAmag.me/sswreport](https://www.dmag.me/sswreport). —*Matt Zalaznick*



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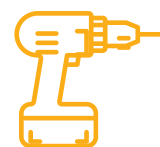
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Using synchronous classes to engage English language learners

Synchronous class sessions will be key for keeping English-language learners engaged when they participate in online learning this school year.

One reason: Real-time sessions better allow teachers to build community with their students, says Tomás Galguera, a professor of education in the Online MA in Educational Leadership program at Mills College in Oakland, Calif.

“Synchronous meetings are really important, especially with students for whom it would be easy to simply drift away,” Galguera says. “If you have community, if kids realize they are a part of the group, it makes it more likely students will come back to the class.”

Real-time meetings also let teachers take the important step of blurring the line between the academic and the social. This can be achieved, for example, by playing music or TikTok videos, he says.

Teachers can incorporate memes and other forms of multimedia that appeal to students.

Suggestions for synchronous lessons

In a lesson on wearing masks to prevent COVID, teachers might let one group of students make a presentation on TikTok and have another group use PowerPoint or GoogleSlides.

The class could then compare the two, and then figure out how one type



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of presentation could be converted into the other platform.

“The idea of grabbing content and changing genres is a really useful exercise in terms of language development and making distinctions between the content and the form,” Galguera says.

Teachers should consider recording tutorials ahead of time that students can watch whatever they want, he suggests. Students can also be asked to produce their own language tutorials, and then classes can edit the videos as a group.

“Make sure you create opportunities for language development that are thoughtful and purposeful,” he says. “It shouldn’t be just talking about a chapter in the book. There are different ways of doing things with language online.”

Embracing ‘bilingual’

K-12 teachers should also move past the entrenched habit of siloing by only focusing on one language at a time. The concept of “trans-linguaging” posits that languages can be taught in tandem.

“We’ve created this notion that we can’t teach you math until a

student learns English, but you can learn English while you’re learning math,” Galguera says. “We can do away with that notion of two separate languages.”

Administrators can help by providing teachers with professional development in using social media such as TikTok and other ed tech tools that create connections with students.

During a live session, teachers might use some of the time to break students into smaller groups. The idea is to check into these groups—not to instruct, but to observe whether students understand the topics they are working on, Galguera says.

Another tactic is holding office hours for meetings with individual students.

And finally, Galguera would like to see schools stop using labels such as English-language learner that emphasize a student’s deficiency.

“We have in our country this monolingual norm that says if you don’t speak our language you’re deficient,” he says. “Let’s just call these students, students—rather than calling them bilingual.”

—Matt Zalaznick



TOMÁS GALGUERA, a professor of education, Mills College (Calif.)

How data and district report cards can aid schools' COVID recovery

Tracking data on the successes and failures of online learning will let educators make quick improvements as schools and students adapt to greater levels of remote instruction. The Data Quality Campaign (dataqualitycampaign.org) has released a series of resources for developing short- and long-strategies for the COVID recovery.

“State and district leaders need information to shine a light on how students and teachers are doing during online learning and to identify what is and isn't working,” says Data Quality Campaign President and CEO Jennifer Bell-Ellwanger. “Leaders already have data and can start on these efforts to improve transparency through report cards and research today.”

Diving into the data

One report stresses the importance of K-12 leaders having data and research to guide spending decisions as state and district budgets feel the pinch of the COVID recession. This report calls on state leaders to:

1. Prioritize investing in their data systems to quickly gather information from the communities they serve.
2. Mobilize research partnerships to answer more complex questions.
3. Adapt the state's existing research system or invest in new tools that identify best practices in the current education landscape.
4. Begin the long-term, multistep process of building effective research infrastructure.

These strategies can also help district leaders communicate their decisions to parents and the public.


Report cards amid COVID


The second resource urges state leaders to release this school year's district report cards, despite the COVID disruptions. The campaign says report

cards remain the “most direct and transparent” way to answer questions about education systems as they embark on the road to recovery. This batch of report cards should provide a higher level of context to help educators and the public understand the adjustments

districts were forced to make when all instruction moved online.

State leaders must also make it clear to parents and the public how the report cards will be used to inform decision-making in the months ahead, the Campaign says. —*Matt Zalaznick*



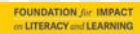



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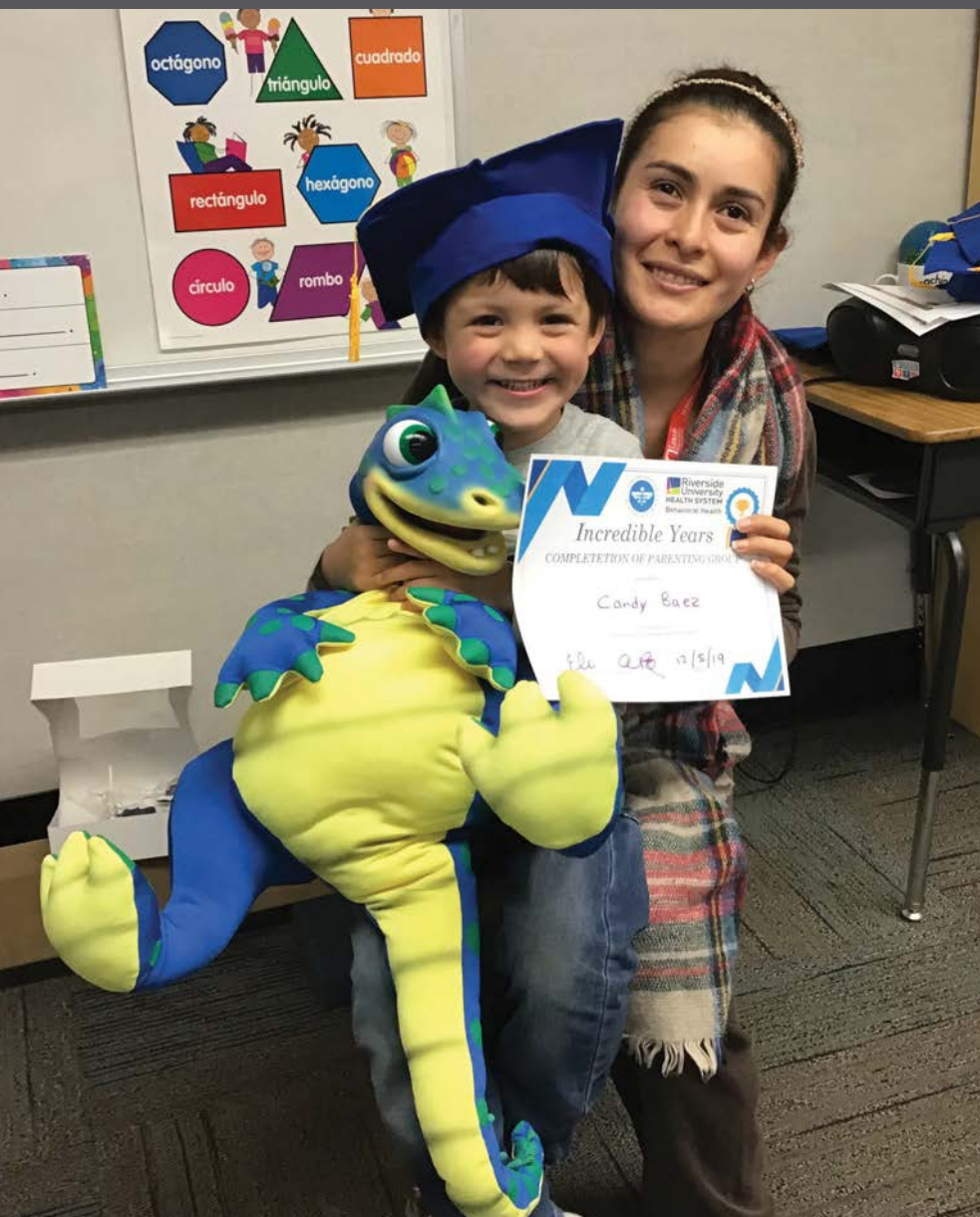


SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Category winner: Jurupa USD 16

Feature: Essential SEL 20

Category finalists 24



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SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

BRINGING STUDENTS TO SCHOOL IN A BETTER STATE OF MIND

Jurupa USD gives students a healthy start with early childhood behavioral supports

By Matt Zalaznick



TIME TO SHARE—Jurupa USD’s extensive system of mental health supports begins in the early grades, with morning meetings and restorative circles where students can talk about their feelings and teachers can check on social-emotional well-being.

Jurupa USD Riverside County, California

District size:
**Approximately
19,000 students**

Superintendent:
Elliott Duchon

Initiative launched:
2013



Getting a healthy start in school can improve the entire trajectory of a child’s education.

An unmet need for mental health care in Southern California motivated Jurupa USD leaders to develop a system of behavioral supports that begins with prenatal care and continues with counseling through high school.

“We feel our students are much more ready when they come to school,” Superintendent Elliot Duchon says. “It’s a truly wraparound model that begins with kids before they’re born and follows them and their families through graduation.”

‘Obstacles don’t have to be limits’

In the 2014-15 school year, the county’s mental health agencies were able to assist just 15 Jurupa USD students. Because

of the behavioral health program, the district generated 811 referrals in 2018-2019.

The support begins with prenatal home visits to pregnant mothers and then continues with music classes and other activities for parents and preschool children.

The district also funds mental health consultations for Head Start and preschool students who are eligible for Medi-Cal, the state's Medicaid program.

Jurupa USD leaders say the backbone of the initiative is a central referral system that steers families to the support they need, including when it's more care than the district's program can offer.

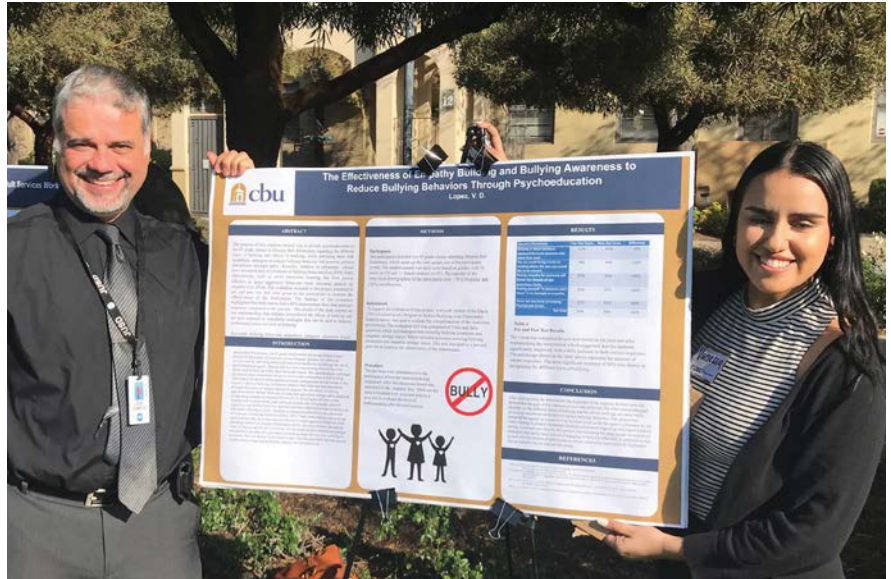
Administrators in other districts wanting to duplicate Jurupa's behavioral health supports should start by building a similar referral system, Duchon says.

Jurupa USD has also partnered with local colleges and universities, which provide social work interns to conduct some of the counseling under the supervision of licensed therapists.

Since the program's inception, the district has leveraged \$400,000 in annual grant funding to serve more than 500 students, ages 0-5, each year. The program has grown to 15 licensed clinicians who provide more than \$1 million in services to students and families.

The program has also expanded into districtwide counseling for students of all ages whose families qualify for Medi-Cal, Duchon says.

"Many kids have obstacles, but the obstacles don't have to be limits," Duchon says. "A major way for children to get over these obstacles is to build a sense of self confidence and self-efficacy."



ALL IN FOR MENTAL HEALTH—Mental health care has become a community-wide effort for Jurupa USD leaders, who have partnered with California Baptist University and other colleges and organizations to expand district counseling services.

Increased anxiety, pre- and post-COVID

Jurupa's USD free-and-reduced lunch rate is 80%, and the district also serves many undocumented students.

Even before the coronavirus outbreak, educators were seeing a sharp increase in anxiety, including in students worried about their family's immigration status.

Since the outbreak, the district has provided more counseling to students concerned about applying and transitioning to college during a pandemic, Duchon says.

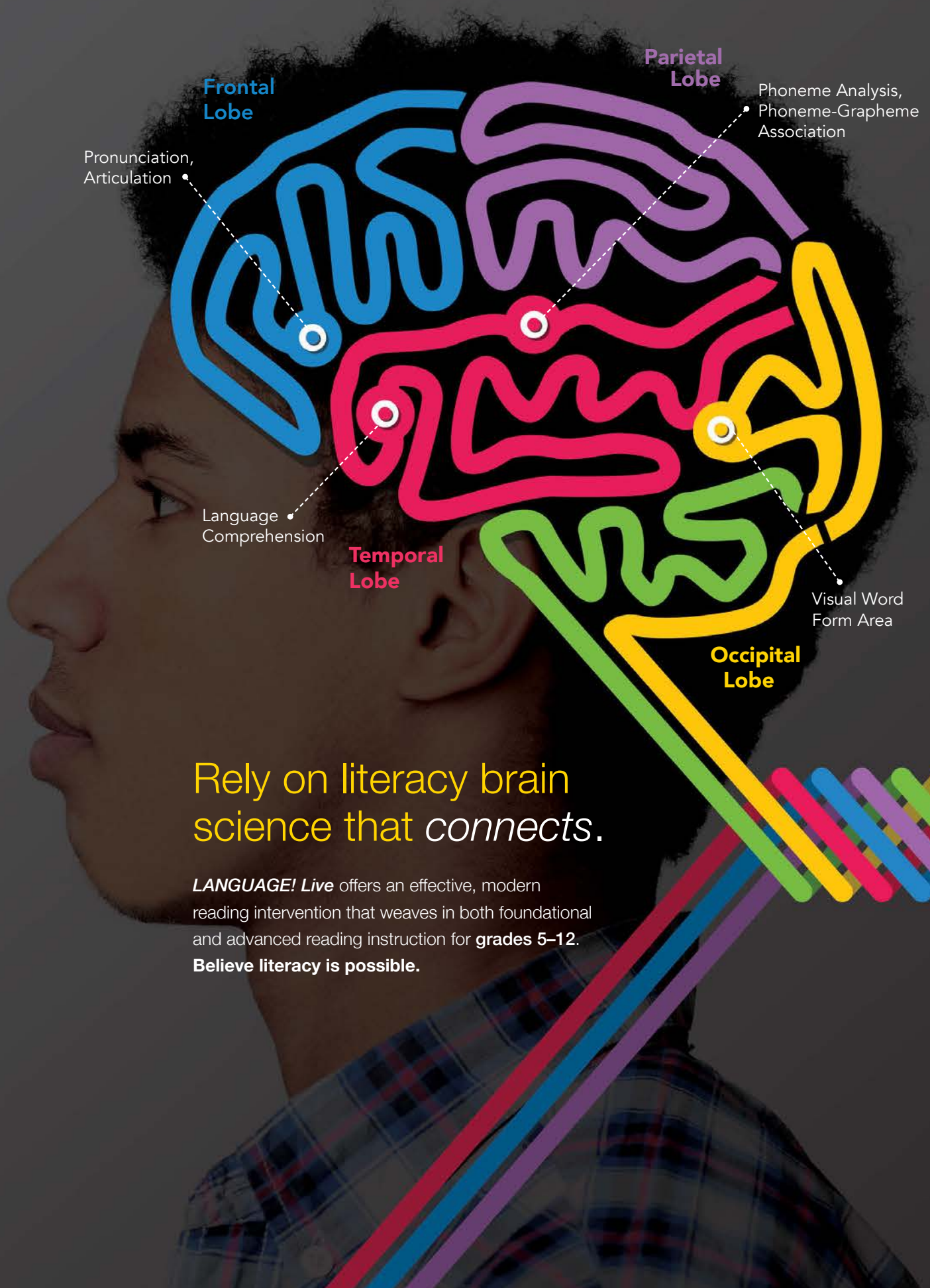
The district's services have also expanded into food banks and clothing closets," says Jose Campos, the architect of the program and the district's director of parent involvement & community outreach. "We look at what we need to develop so everybody has learning without limits." DA

Matt Zalaznick is senior writer of DA.



"Many kids have obstacles, but the obstacles don't have to be limits."

—Superintendent Elliott Duchon



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Essential SEL

Why social-emotional learning will be a priority for districts during the first few weeks of school

GETTYIMAGES.COM/WESTEND61

As educators restart learning this new school year, the focus should be on the social-emotional wellbeing of staff and students, not on immediately making up for lost learning.

That's a guiding principle being promoted by educators and other experts who say everyone needs to process the emotions and traumas experienced over the last several months before instruction can resume effectively.

"We don't want to start the year off by testing students, we want to start the year off by connecting with students," says Ebony Lee, assistant superintendent

for curriculum, instruction and assessment at Clayton County Public Schools outside Atlanta.

Lee, and many of her colleagues in K-12 leadership across the country, say reestablishing relationships between students and educators will be the priority for the first few weeks of school.

Lessons from Hurricane Katrina

Some conversation may be controversial as teachers and students from different ethnic backgrounds share their experiences of COVID, the killing of George Floyd and other pressing issues, says Ralph Simpson, deputy superin-

tendent for school leadership and improvement at Clayton County Public Schools.

"I would hope that our teachers and educators encourage children to be open-minded, to be critical thinkers and to not just look at an issue from one perspective," Simpson says.

The district created school-level teams to serve as SEL coaches for teachers as classes resume, says Lee.

Research done in the wake of Hurricane Katrina showed that students struggled when schools focused too quickly on remediation, rather than on social-emotional needs, Lee says.

SEL will extend into the curriculum as well. In a marriage of STEM and social studies, for example, students this year will study the disparate impact COVID-19 has had on people from different ethnic groups.

“The global pandemic has taught us that we have to prepare students for the unknown, and the way to do that is to create thinkers,” Lee says.

‘We’ve got to go slow to go fast’

Administrators in Naperville School District 203, where SEL has been entrenched in the curriculum for years, focused first on professional development for teachers.

The goal was to help the educators manage their own stress and recognize the trauma they had experienced during the pandemic, says Christine Igoe, assistant superintendent of student services in the suburban Chicago system.

Educators practiced techniques to help students cope with stress and



SEL IN SCHOOL OR AT HOME—The Committee for Children’s Second Step SEL programs have evolved to include remote and hybrid learning options for students and educators.

trauma. Making students feel safe and comfortable as they meet their new teachers has been the district’s priority while reopening classrooms, Igoe says.

That includes holding more intentional morning class meetings where

students and teachers can discuss challenges they’re facing, how they’re feeling and other emotions, Igoe says.

Building these types of routines while helping students become more adept at using technology will also smooth the

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9 ways to boost social-emotional learning

CASEL and the Committee for Children's Second Step program are two of the leading nonprofit providers in helping schools integrate social-emotional learning. Here are some SEL tips for administrators and teachers in the new school year from Mylien Duong, a clinical child psychologist and senior research scientist at Committee for Children (tips 1 through 5), and Karen VanAusdal, senior director of practice at CASEL (tips 6 through 9):

- 1** Build connections with students through morning meetings and other interactions.
- 2** Don't speed up instruction right away to tackle learning loss.
- 3** Give students voice and choice over some assignments and class activities.
- 4** Be honest and up-front with students if they ask about whether schools will have to close again or other sensitive issues.
- 5** Allow educators time to cope with their own anxieties and regulate their emotions.
- 6** Have principals contact every staff member to discuss online learning methods and the issues educators are contending with at home.
- 7** Hold "restorative circles" where staff can talk about the pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement, the presidential election and other issues.
- 8** Ask administrators to help educators add anti-racist pedagogy to the new school year's curriculum.
- 9** Train non-instructional staff to help children cope with stress and anxiety.

transition, should any of the district's schools have to return to online learning full-time.

"We've got to go slow to go fast," Igoe says. "I could teach algebra on the first day but if I don't have kids who feel safe, I'll have to reteach it in two or three weeks when they're ready to learn it."

Student voice boosts SEL

Among the social-emotional stressors for staff and students in East Saint Louis School District #189, the coronavirus "has just been one more thing," says Tiffany Gholson, director of parent and student support services.

Students suffer the trauma of living in a city with one of the highest murder rates in the nation. Nearly two-thirds of them live below the poverty line and they all eat free lunch.

Over the past few years, the district has placed nurses and truancy/homeless specialists in every school. In addition, its schools have reached the recommended ratio of one social worker for every 250 students.

Heading into the new school year, administrators will further integrate SEL into everyday learning, including an expanded bullying prevention curriculum and cognitive behavioral therapy for students in greater distress.

Allowing students to have a voice in the daily lives is another way to improve social-emotional health. The district's Peace Warriors program, which began last year, encourages high school students to learn and practice the principles of peaceful nonviolence inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King.

"Most of our Peace Warriors have experienced a tragic loss in their own families," Gholson says. "Now, they're reaching out to others to try to intercede and mitigate the violence." **DA**

Matt Zalaznick is DA's senior writer.



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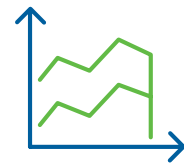
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Districts of Distinction social-emotional learning category finalists

DA honors five K-12 districts as Districts of Distinction runners-up for SEL initiatives

By Melissa Ezarik

MISSION EXPLORE

Malverne School District, N.Y.

www.malverne.k12.ny.us

CHALLENGE: With students being pulled out of class for reading or math support, special education services and therapies—as well as new standards and state expectations for all—the needs of many were not being met. Students weren't getting the creative and social outlets that they needed, including instruction in the social emotional learning competencies.

INITIATIVE: Mission Explore has redesigned the school day for K-5 students to have nine periods. With new courses and more play time built in, students and teachers are thriving. Students are communicating better, experiencing natural social opportunities, developing conflict resolution strategies, exploring technology and receiving academic supports. The emphasis is on developing the whole child.

IMPACT: Teachers have more time to collaborate and the morale in schools is at an all-time high. Teacher and student attendance has increased, while student discipline has decreased. Teachers saw a spike in student teamwork, independent conflict resolution and sportsmanship.

TRAUMA RESPONSIVE SCHOOLS

Upshur County Schools, Buckhannon, W.Va., upshurschools.com

CHALLENGE: District leaders wanted to improve the ability of educators to better understand how trauma often leads to school failure, truancy, suspension or expulsion, dropping out, or eventual involvement in the juvenile justice system. The overall goal: create a culture of respect and support in schools. In Upshur County, the poverty rate is 22.7% (compared to a national average of 12.3%), and

mental health obstacles, apathy and the lack of parental involvement is crippling to school culture and student engagement.

INITIATIVE: Schools are incorporating many interventions to reduce the negative impacts of trauma. Besides trauma-responsive trainings, the district organized a 2019 conference, Handle with Care, with training for the whole community.

IMPACT: More than 500 people attended the conference. The district also work with police and local agencies, placing community health care centers in most schools.

REIMAGINING MIDDLE GRADES

Broward County Public Schools, Fla., browardschools.com

CHALLENGE: Many middle and high school students, a survey showed, felt bored and disconnected at school. Leaders at the district, the sixth largest in the U.S., wanted to re-engage students and improve academic success.

INITIATIVE: Staff at all 44 middle schools got training in project-based learning (PBL) models coupled with a focus on social-emotional learning. The goal: fundamentally change the middle-grades experience to support engagement and achievement. Principals collaborate on how to make PBL more successful.

IMPACT: A survey of trained staff showed that 84% had implemented one or more project during the school year and 98% said their students had positively benefited from participation in PBL. Nearly three in four planned to implement PBL in the coming year.

SYSTEM OF CARE

Hampstead School District, N.H. hampsteadschools.net

CHALLENGE: Officials had identified a need to refine programs, update facilities and create strategies that proactively

address students' educational risk-taking, emotional well-being and physical safety.

INITIATIVE: A multi-tiered System of Care was developed to respond to students' social-emotional needs. A committee selected a screening tool, wrote descriptions of the delivery of the tiered supports, identified the personnel responsible for delivering those support, and determined related professional development. A rubric was developed to measure students' acquisition of social/emotional skills.

IMPACT: Staff are showing a great understanding of building relationships with students, which positively impacts the classroom environment and the whole school.

COMING FULL CIRCLE - SEL, PBIS AND RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

George I. Sanchez Charter School, Houston, Texas, www.aama.org/george-i-sanchez-charter-school

CHALLENGE: Teachers felt that lack of a constructive culture and climate was the No. 1 problem, with discipline being at the forefront of issues. Students had many behavioral needs, but services to support them were delivered compartmentally. Recidivism continued.

INITIATIVE: The school aligned SEL programming with trauma-informed and restorative practices embedded in a previously-established PBIS initiative. A comprehensive SEL program is being implemented as direct instruction. Wrap-around services—including extensive and individualized academic, social and emotional supports—are helping students overcome barriers to ensure they are on a path to success in career and life.

IMPACT: Math and ELA test scores are up and discipline referrals and out-of-school suspensions are significantly down. School climate surveys found a 52% satisfaction rate from students and staff, up from 10% prior to the initiative. **DA**





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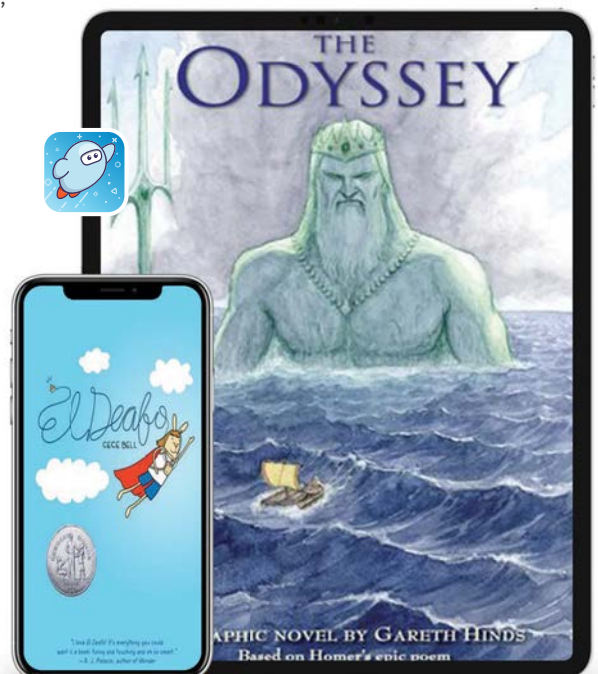


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How multisensory learning motivates young readers



Q&A with **Vera Blau-McCandliss, Ph.D., Vice President of Education and Research, Square Panda**

Why is it important that young students learn in a multisensory environment?

Humans naturally perceive their environments in a multisensory way. As we grow, develop and learn, we make use of these multisensory inputs to confirm and influence our behavior. When you try to cross the street, you both see and hear if a car is coming, for example. To apply that in a school setting and how students learn, there's a similar principle at work. For example, when a student first learns how to read, they learn to match letters to sounds and written words to spoken words. That's a multisensory task, because they are connecting the visual and language areas of the brain at multiple levels. Having more than one sense involved helps students to reinforce connections, enhance perceptions and maximize their learning.

How does early phonics instruction impact young students?

In its most basic form, learning to read is mapping a sound system onto a symbol system. Early phonics instruction helps the child to crack that alphabetic code. Once they can fluently match letters to sounds, they are well on their way to becoming good readers. Most adults tend to take reading for granted and think that it's easy to learn. But from a neuroscience perspective, it's a huge accomplishment.

What does it mean for a learning game to be adaptive, and how can that motivate and engage students?

Decades of research have supported the idea that kids are more motivated to learn when the content is just right for them in terms of difficulty and pacing. Adaptive games can present the right amount of information at the right time, walking students down a learning path. Students need to be challenged, but the content needs to be in a zone where it is not overly challenging (which causes frustration), and it is

“From a neuroscience perspective, learning to read is a huge accomplishment.”

not too easy (which causes boredom). Having content in that zone has been shown to be optimal for learning. This is why we make sure that our products are adaptive.

How can school districts support parents as they try to keep their child's education on track at home during COVID-19 school closures?

I have so much admiration for how school administrators are adapting to this situation. Communication is so important. It's crucial to make sure parents have the information they need to be good facilitators and understand the learning goals. Parents are asking, what exactly does my child need to know and by when? How do I know if they are on track?

Most parents understand there is so much to figure out and want to be supportive. Administrators are being so creative in this situation.



To learn more about Square Panda, go to squarepanda.com

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District seeing significant gains from supplemental early literacy program

Mountain View Whisman School District expanding use of Square Panda after successful pilot

Situated outside of San Francisco, the Mountain View Whisman School District (MVWSD) has a highly diverse socioeconomic student population. Of the district's 5,344 students, 35 percent are socioeconomically disadvantaged and 24 percent are English language learners, with some 50 languages represented. Academically, early literacy had been one of the district's most significant challenges.

In 2018, MVWSD Chief Academic Officer Cathy Baur was introduced to Square Panda, a multisensory, phonics-based early literacy tool that builds foundational reading skills. "I'm always careful when introducing new technology in our schools, but when I saw how it worked up close, I thought simply, 'I wish I'd had this when I was teaching,'" Baur says.

Neuroscience-based, multisensory system

Square Panda is a research-based, multisensory phonics learning system inspired by the science of reading. The Square Panda Literacy System enhances any classroom tablet with a library of learning games, digital and print books, and a set of 46 physical Smart Letters that works with a Bluetooth playset to add a kinesthetic element to literacy learning. Each student's gaming journey can be different, driven by an adaptive learning engine that provides the right level of challenges. Teachers can monitor progress and identify instructional opportunities.



"Square Panda is a great tactile, multisensory way for our youngest students to build their letter and word recognition skills."

Pilot program shows promising results

MVWSD administrators first tested Square Panda in a pilot with kindergarten classes across five different schools, with 136 students in the test group using Square Panda playsets and another 204 serving as a control group. All students were tested on letter sounds immediately before and after a 12-week intervention period.

When it came to the 60 students identified as "struggling" prior to the pilot, there was a 13 percent gain in the number of students who moved up to "standards met" status. Of the 280 students who tested at grade level or higher prior to the pilot, an additional 7 percent moved up to "exceeding standards."

"Seeing improvements in these scores correlated with the use of Square Panda, in addition to other classroom efforts, was obviously very exciting," says Baur. "In addition,

we noticed other positive impacts. Some teachers used the games to help build social-emotional skills, by allowing students to trade letters as they played," Baur says. "Highly distracted students could focus at length on the games. Teachers discovered they could use Square Panda as an incentive for other classroom activities."

Looking to the future

MVWSD Superintendent Ayinde Rudolph says he was impressed by the results after the pilot program, and by how quickly students advanced. "Square Panda is a

great tactile, multisensory way for our youngest students to build their letter and word recognition skills. Students gain skills at a faster rate," Rudolph says.

MVWSD is now in the second year of a three-year research partnership with Square Panda, and is expanding to all kindergarten classes district-wide, while also beginning to use it in pre-K and special education classes. "We are highly encouraged by the first year's results," Baur says. "Our partnership has been very fruitful."



To learn more about Square Panda, go to squarepanda.com
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STUDENT VOICE STANDS UP

BY MATT ZALAZNICK



How educators are giving students the power to alter instruction and get involved in causes in and outside school

Student voice has had a big impact on diversifying the Springfield Renaissance School’s curriculum since coronavirus forced the students online.

Students told teachers and staff in a virtual “voice” session this spring that books celebrating diverse cultures and identities were only assigned “in pockets,” says Principal Arria Coburn, whose school for grades six to 12 is part of Springfield Public Schools in Massachusetts.

“Students were very articulate in saying that we need to do more,” says Coburn. “They said talking about race and equity and inclusivity sometimes feels like just a special edition of the curriculum.”

While some districts have been steeped in student voice for several years, the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matters movement has given more urgency to these efforts.

Building positive adult relationships

In Chicago, students as young as elementary age learn to organize around a cause, build civic leadership skills and forge partnerships with adults.

This learning takes place within the nearly 200 student voice committees that have been created by Chicago Public Schools educators over the last several years.

The committees have tackled issues as wide-ranging as community activism and equity in online learning to school-uniform requirement challenges, says Cristina Salgado, the district’s senior student voice specialist.

On the dress code front, “it wasn’t that students hated the uniforms but that buying khaki pants were an extra expense and then the pants got dirty and some students didn’t have washing machines,” Salgado says. “The adults began to understand—it wasn’t just kids complaining.”

Assembling diverse committees is one reason the district offers “Student Voice 101” training to help the adult advisors who work with the committees understand how to empower young people and encourage students to get involved in various forms of activism.

“It’s not enough to go to teachers and ask them to nominate someone because what ends up happening is the ‘best’ students get nominated,” Salgado says. “We have to do our due diligence to make sure we are creating committees that are representative of all students.”

Students involved in the committees have become more active in causes in their communities and have also gotten their classmates involved in local issues, such as the census.

EDUCATION ADVOCATES—The nearly 200 student voice committees created in Chicago Public Schools have gotten learners of all ages involved in community activism and causes such as equity in online learning and school dress codes.



COLLABORATION SKILLS—Students in Chicago Public Schools (left) and Arizona’s Pendergast Elementary School District (above) learn to build positive relationships with adults when they are asked to give input on various educational and social issues.

“For me, it’s not always about the end product, it’s about what students learn along the way,” Salgado says. “The more they build positive student-adult partnerships, the more we will see change because adults will begin to practice not making rash decisions.”

‘Not an add-on or an afterthought’

Student voice has had a significant impact on diversifying the curriculum and altering the dress code in Maryland’s Howard County Public School System.

“Student voice is not an add-on or an afterthought—it’s a proactive part of how we’ve shifted education in Howard County,” says Superintendent Michael Martirano, a former high school class president. “We have to constantly check in with students to ensure we are meeting their needs.”

Students have been instrumental in updating the curriculum with books and reading lists that more fully represent the district’s diverse ethnicities. Working with administrators, students are reviewing and making suggestions on improving the district’s equity and inclusion policies, an effort that has taken on more immediacy since the death of George Floyd and the ensuing anti-racism protests, he says.

The Howard County school board also has a student member who has engaged classmates on social media and collected feedback. And school board members now frequently ask whether student voice has been heard before making decisions on various issues, Martirano says.

“There’s a high level of student voice in many of the policies that impact our students,” he says. “I encourage it in everything we do.”

taking any action is worse than not asking them at all, says Coburn, the Springfield Renaissance School principal.

“When student voice is shared but not used, it makes students feel disempowered,” Coburn says. “I try to make sure that what they share, we are able to put in place.”

The Springfield Renaissance School has a high school student voice group that works on race and equity. It has tackled issues like Latinx representation in the curriculum and the use of racial slurs by opposing teams in sporting events.

Coburn has also worked with the school’s teachers to remove barriers to student voice and using language that gives students more control.

“We’re clear that we’re not *giving* them voice,” she says. “Students have always had voice. We just need to move out of the way.”

During school closures, Coburn says she has been meeting with students virtually. Students have *continued on page 32*



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How students' words create change

When a student is willing to express concerns or difficult emotions, educators should capture the conversation in a written narrative. Then, the teacher should ask the students' permission to read it at a faculty meeting or in class, says Rebecca Coda, an educational consultant and former K-12 administrator.

"Students' actual words are what create change," says Coda. **"Kids have phenomenal ideas."**

Individual teachers can promote voice by making "social contracts" with their students that spell out, for example, how a class will resolve conflict, suggests Coda.

When working with educators, however, some have expressed concerns that student voice equates to giving up control.

"You're not giving up authority—you're saying, 'I'm willing to listen, and if what you share is going to make us better at learning, then we're all in,'" Coda says.



LISTENING TO THE LEARNERS—Superintendent Michael Martirano of Maryland's Howard County Public School System says he has worked to include student voice in many district decisions.

encouraged their classmates to share feedback on social media and via email.

As voice has played a more prominent role in schools, students have reported in surveys that they feel a stronger sense of belonging and involvement in the school community.

Eighth-grade activism

The members of the Superintendent's 8th Grade Council in Arizona's Pendergast Elementary School District get a behind the scenes look at how schools and education operate.

They have role in planning annual budgets, attend education conferences with district leaders and help organize the system's annual kick-off extravaganza, Superintendent Lily Matos DeBlieux says.

"I mentor them all year," she adds. "They're my ambassadors in the school."

In addition, the council's members provide DeBlieux with plenty of insight into how their classmates are feeling, including their concerns about reopening schools during the COVID-19 outbreak.

"They know more than we do," DeBlieux says. "They tell us the way they want to learn and why something's effective."

The council members also spread

awareness about the district's hotline for students in crisis and are involved in their school's Speak Up Stand Up Save a Life club. The activity addresses bullying, drug use, the LGBTQ community and other social-emotional issues that impact students.

DeBlieux chooses two eighth-graders from each of her 12 schools to serve on the council. The students are initially nominated by teachers and must complete an interview process that includes members of the outgoing council.

The council elects two of its members to serve on the district's school board. These two students give reports to the board about various district matters.

Another one of DeBlieux's priorities for the council is to get the students, about 80 percent of whom come from low socio-economic families, thinking about college.

"Kids are not only resilient, they are honest, and they know what's best for them" she says. "But they need to know they are just as capable of being leaders in this world and going to elite universities. It just takes someone to believe in them." **DA**

Matt Zalaznick is senior writer of DA.

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New survey explores makerspaces, project-based learning and 3D printing in K12

District Administration partnered with Ultimaker to develop and deploy a survey of school administrators in July 2020, exploring the use of makerspaces, project-based learning and 3D printers in schools. Some 209 respondents participated from school districts around the country.

Makerspaces and innovation labs

When asked if their school or district had a makerspace/innovation lab, or provided maker activities or programs, 66% said they did. **Some 79% of respondents whose schools do have makerspaces or innovation labs said that these spaces also included the use of 3D printers, and 97% of the respondents using 3D printers in their makerspaces said that their use had enhanced student learning.**

Does your school or district have a makerspace/innovation lab, or provide maker activities or programs for students?

no
34%

Yes
66%

Do you think your use of 3D printers has enhanced student learning in your makerspace or maker program?

Yes,
definitely
40%

Yes,
somewhat
57%

no
3%

Does your makerspace/innovation lab and/or maker program include the use of 3D printers?

Yes
79%

no
21%

Use of 3D printers

Overall, 75% of respondents said that their school or district is currently using 3D printers for learning in some capacity. When these respondents were asked if they would describe their 3D printers as a good investment that has positively impacted learning, some **97% said yes, with 53% of them selecting "Yes, definitely."**

Of the respondents currently without 3D printers, 59% said they thought their school or district would be purchasing and using 3D printers for learning in the future.

Some 95% of all survey respondents said that they viewed 3D printing as a technology that can enhance curriculum and better prepare students for college and future careers.

Does your school or district currently have 3D printers used for learning in some capacity?

no
25%

Yes
75%

Would you describe your 3D printers as a good investment that has positively impacted learning?

Yes,
definitely
53%

Yes,
somewhat
44%

no
3%

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TECH ACCESS POINTS

Four best practices for more equitable internet access in the new school year



Whether a district is open to in-person learning at the start of the school year or not, educators are preparing for the strong possibility that this year will include at least some period of distance learning for all. That means a need to continue taking action to ensure every household has access to the internet.

“The biggest barrier districts face when preparing for the fall is making

sure that all students have access to online learning with a dedicated device at home,” says Strategic Problem Solver and Team Leader Jack Lynch of EducationSuperHighway, a nonprofit that connects American public schools to high-speed internet. “It is crucial that schools work toward regaining the millions of hours of learning that were lost in the past few months and to deliver online learning to all students.”

Here are four practices for finding

out who is without home internet access and fulfilling that need.

1. Be wary of surveys

At the start of the pandemic, many districts sent surveys to families to identify which students needed web-enabled devices, but they received mixed results or only heard back from 30 percent or less.

“Families get surveyed all the time, especially in the last few months, so there are many who are feeling survey

FULFILLING THE NEED—Educators in Wake County, N.C., identified about 10,000 students who lacked internet access. Activate Good, a local nonprofit, stepped up. A team of 140 community volunteers worked alongside 70 district staff volunteers to get more than 10,000 AT&T Wi-Fi hotspots prepped for distribution to students’ homes.

fatigue,” says Lynch.

Districts that have the resources or the manpower can call families directly or physically visit them at home while practicing social distancing. Meanwhile, school leaders with a student information system that supports customization can change the default data fields to categorize student information based on whether certain families have devices at home.

In North Carolina, the Wake County Public Schools System had not gone 1-to-1 by the time the pandemic struck, so administrators reached out to families to identify where to send available devices for use during the closure.

“We will have to change our language going forward when asking whether families have a device or not because many who said ‘Yes’ did not necessarily have access for the entire day,” says Chief Technology Officer Marlo Gaddis. “We found out very quickly that some families only had old computers that had not been updated or, for households with numerous children, only had one device for all of them, which became a scheduling nightmare as teachers tried to schedule Google Meets with their students,” adds Gaddis, who shared strategies for narrowing the digital divide in classrooms and homes at FETC 2020.

2. Purchase solutions on behalf of families

Many districts have worked to connect families with internet or hotspot providers for free or inexpensive services. “But most programs are super difficult

to navigate for families,” says Lynch. “Some providers communicate through snail mail, request information that many families are hesitant to provide such as social security numbers or offer discounts that families still can’t afford or will not prioritize over food, for example.”

School districts can make purchases on behalf of all families and aggregate the demand using various strategies. “If you are a single buyer for many households, companies can usually provide better rates and streamline the process,” says Lynch.

3. Rely more on internal teams

K-12 leaders who decide to take the initiative by collaborating with solution providers or government entities should still be wary.

Vallecitos School District, a small rural school system outside of San Diego with limited access to networks and cell towers, needed stronger Wi-Fi and broadband for students and teachers when the governor closed schools. The district did not immediately purchase any equipment since the state had promised to deliver supplies promptly to rural districts. But those supplies never arrived.

Luckily, the district had already set up access points at various outside locations, including on the property of a teacher who originally did not have internet. “One of my teachers only had so much bandwidth she could use, so she began driving to a mountaintop where she did have access and worked out of

her car,” says Superintendent Maritza Koeppen. “Eventually she ended up coming to the campus and working out of her classroom.”

Another teacher who had originally planned on installing internet at her home once she retired had to start the process earlier. “Installing the internet took her awhile since the company didn’t want to send their representatives into people’s houses, so she had to set it up herself,” says Koeppen.

Koeppen also spent a lot of time setting up hotspots from a provider she later realized didn’t offer them for free. She made sure to find out the costs immediately from the next vendor she selected. Her choice provides three months of free access, which began in time for the fall.

4. Prioritize initiatives

At the beginning of the pandemic, many districts adopted free solutions to help with the transition to online learning as well as to improve instruction in this new environment. But this created more challenges for many districts, including Santa Fe Public Schools.

“The influx of new technology was overwhelming since it required a ton of coordination, which distracted us from finishing the projects to help keep the lights on like getting the LMS set up,” says Chief Information and Strategy Officer Thomas Ryan, who spoke on the topic of leading effective change during DA’s FETC 2020 event.

“Districts need to create a high-level governance team that prioritizes every new initiative and reprioritizes existing practices,” he adds. “This might involve pausing processes that might have been crucial before the pandemic if they do not help with creating successful strategies for the fall.” DA

Steven Blackburn is an associate editor at DA.

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School-based Childcare Providers Have a Critical New Role to Play Amid Pandemic



Interview with Dr. Mark Rothschild, CEO & Founder of Right At School

How has COVID-19 changed the role of school-based enrichment programs?

The pandemic has changed the nature of before and after school programs in three fundamental ways:

1. COVID-19 has forced many districts to reopen on staggered or half-day schedules, leaving parents with limited childcare options. As such, on-site enrichment and childcare are no longer just happening before and after school. In some cases, childcare providers are operating all day to accommodate these hybrid schedules and provide enrichment opportunities for students right on campus.
2. It has never been more important to ensure that your district's childcare partners are fluent in Social-Emotional Development and Trauma-Informed Care. After an emotionally challenging spring and summer, many students are struggling to readjust to the expectations of school life. Childcare providers like Right At School, with SEL-rich curriculum and experience supporting vulnerable students, can smooth the transition back to school.
3. Like schools, enrichment providers have implemented rigorous new health and safety protocols, from physically distanced curriculum to increased sanitation, temperature checks, etc. Right At School was one of the first childcare providers to adopt such policies, jumping into action in March 2020 to provide full-day camps for the children of first responders and essential workers across the country. Maintaining safe physical distancing throughout the pandemic has inspired us to develop new, safe activities that keep kids healthy and engaged without sacrificing the fun factor.

“Maintaining safe physical distancing throughout the pandemic has inspired us to develop new, safe activities that keep kids healthy and engaged without sacrificing the fun factor.”

How can parents afford the increasing costs of childcare?

We're in a difficult environment, to be sure. Even with COVID-related changes like higher staff-student ratios and enhanced safety procedures, we're able to keep parent fees at less than \$6 per child per hour. These costs can be offset further by state subsidies, local grants, and even employer childcare benefits.

Who provides school-based enrichment services?

Districts should look at all the options—some schools operate successful in-house programs, while others partner with local government or community-based groups. Still others choose to partner with professional enrichment and childcare providers like Right At School. Every day, we provide full day camps and before and after school programs to 40,000 children across the U.S.





A principal's perspective on leading through a pandemic

6 ways to embrace change through strong school leadership

By Robin Coletrain

The closing of schools in March was very surreal and unsettling. COVID-19 rocked the world and changed the reality of schools in general and the concept of leading in particular. Leading and operating in challenging and unpredictable circumstances is the norm for school leaders, but the COVID-19 pandemic came crashing down with little time to prepare or plan.

The world as we had known it was disrupted and replaced with remote learning and a myriad of additional challenges. As the virus numbers continued to rise, the death of George Floyd shined a bright light on social justice and the role that education plays in equality and equity. With the reopening of schools swiftly approaching, more than ever before, strong school leadership is essential.

Change is coming. Here are a few tips to embrace the change.

1. Communication is key. Communication is critical now more than ever. This is not the time to operate in a vacuum. It is important to consistently check in with teachers to see how they are doing and to keep them abreast of any updates. Likewise, communication with students and their families is equally important. Leaders must meet all stakeholders where they are through a variety of digital tools.

2. Health and safety are priority. A major component of strong leadership is looking out for the physical and mental well-being of teachers and students. The pandemic has made painfully clear that students and their families depend on schools for a multitude of needs.

Schools and educators want strong leadership to ease fear, confusion and uncertainty.

The importance of building relationships goes back to the age-old saying, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." While curriculum, formative assessments, and learning loss are important, we must remember to "Maslow before we Bloom."

3. Ask questions. Good leaders ask thought-provoking questions and open up space for others to think through decisions and develop answers. No one has all of the answers, and in the midst of a pandemic, there are no definitive answers to many of the questions being posed at this time. However, being curious and posing the right questions can yield the conditions for growth and innovation.

4. Navigate with empathy. Empathy is one's ability to understand and share the feelings of another. Eric Shenger, award-winning principal and best-selling author states, "It is easy to knock people down. Building people up is at the heart of empathetic leadership." Without a level of empathy, it is challenging to build a team or inspire loyal followers. Leading with empathy, especially during these times, will lead to more opportunities for teachers to share successes and concerns with colleagues and leaders and more collaborative relationships between teachers, parents and leaders. It also allows greater student voice.

5. Give support. Teachers are working under a crush of more per-

sonal and professional stressors than ever before. Support can look like time, resources and professional development opportunities. Sometimes support is listening, allowing teachers to try new things, modeling and showing compassion and empathy. Leaders must determine what resources are readily available and what resources must be acquired. As reopening plans are being developed, support should look like involving teachers in the discussion and decision-making process.

6. Exhibit strong leadership. The pandemic has caused leaders around the globe to simultaneously balance unplanned circumstances and plan for change. There was no template, no guidelines and no precedent for leading through a pandemic. Since the onset of the pandemic and the social justice movement, principals have learned valuable lessons to guide practices.

While no one is able to predict the future, countless lessons have been learned thus far to transform teaching, learning, and leadership. Schools and educators want strong leadership to ease fear, confusion and uncertainty. Because of the pressures to reopen schools, principals should not miss the opportunity to create the kind of educational system that serves ALL children. Now more than ever, it is critical for principals to accept the enormous responsibility and demonstrate courageous, strong leadership. **DA**

Robin L. Coletrain, an educator for 22 years, is principal of W.A. Perry Middle School in South Carolina. She is the 2020 South Carolina Middle Level Principal of the Year and can be followed on Twitter at @RobinColetrain.





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Emerging from the pandemic, we must teach personal finance

Why financial literacy lessons increase both knowledge and sound behaviors—but support from more education and state leaders is needed

By Tim Ranzetta

The lack of personal finance education in American high schools is tragic, and the most important course most of us have never taken is about to become all the more critical as we emerge from the pandemic.

Reading, writing and arithmetic have been staples of American education and essential to living and working. So no one questions the need to teach these subjects in school.

Most American high schools require four years of English and three years each of science and history, all of which require reading and writing skills. And high schools also require four years of math.

Interestingly, personal finance used to be taught in schools. Grainy videos from the 1940s provide evidence that educators once felt this subject was imperative to consider oneself “educated.” Something happened along the way.

Now, the need for personal finance education has become more urgent, as our world becomes more financially complex, and families struggle with credit debt, emergency funds and retirement savings.

So, why are only five states in the U.S. equipping students with the financial skills they need by ensuring that *all* students take a semester-long personal finance course before they graduate? Already crowded with courses and lacking trained teachers, naysayers will often question the value of such a course too.

However, more and more research confirms what teachers have known for

As the health crisis subsides and the focus shifts to economic recovery, state leaders must commit to improving the financial capability of the next generation coming of age.

years: finance education works. A new meta-analysis finds that financial education improves both financial knowledge and behaviors. In this study, researchers from the U.S. and abroad examined personal finance programs in 33 countries and their effects on more than 160,000 students.

The effects on personal finance knowledge are similar to those found in studies of successful math and reading interventions, and the effects on behaviors are similar to anti-smoking and energy conservation efforts.

Other recent research on finance education has found its positive effects in increasing credit scores, reducing loan default rates, increasing student loan repayment rates, reducing usage of payday loans and increasing bank account ownership.

A wake-up call

So, how are we doing as a nation? We are No. 6 in a recent study of 15 countries, behind Estonia and Poland.

If we are serious about being No. 1, state leaders have to get on board. They should follow the lead of teacher advocates across the country. These passionate and committed

educators have succeeded in getting more than one thousand high schools to ensure all students receive finance education.

One exciting new development can be found in Prince George’s County in Maryland, the 22nd largest school district in the U.S. Its leaders are committed to ensuring all students take a one-semester personal finance course.

The pandemic should be the ultimate wake-up call for legislators. As the health crisis subsides and the focus shifts to economic recovery, state leaders must commit to improving the financial capability of the next generation coming of age.

The financial struggles experienced in millions of households today is not of their own doing. Millions of people have lost jobs through no fault of their own. It also was not their fault that in high school they didn’t learn about auto loans, credit cards, college loans and many other financial issues.

Whatever the new normal looks like, states must support high schools in making personal finance an integral part of the curriculum. They must provide the resources to hire and train educators to deliver these essential lessons.

Policyholders and school officials must act now. Let’s aspire to ensure that all students leave high school with the financial skills and behaviors they need to thrive in the future. **DA**

Tim Ranzetta is co-founder of Next Gen Personal Finance, a Palo Alto, Calif., non-profit that provides free curriculum and professional development for high school personal finance teachers.





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Meeting increased SEL needs despite tight budgets

Three things administrators should do and two that they shouldn't

By Nathan Levenson

With many schools reopened, in-person or online, students are returning with increased social and emotional needs. They may be anxious about the pandemic, have experienced the loss of loved ones or be living in difficult economic circumstances. They likely have a heightened awareness of social injustices. That's on top of being behind academically.

What's a school or system leader to do? The answer is not to just pile more work on counseling and special education staff or run out and buy a new program. Instead, it's time to do things differently and treat staff time as invaluable.

As a former superintendent and advisor to districts around the country, I've seen three approaches work well when social and emotional learning (SEL) needs are high and resources are tight.

What to do

1. Invest in relationships. Making sure students know that at least one adult in school knows and cares about them goes a long way toward lowering anxiety. Helping teachers form strong relationships with students through a "structured" process—specific, guided and easy-to implement—is key.

Adding structure to the advisory period, commonly used in secondary schools, means giving students a say over which teachers they are placed with and giving teachers clear, simple protocols to use during the period. Don't just add the time to the schedule and hope teachers will make the best of it.

Similarly, SEL structure can be built into the schedule if schools have teach-

There are times when individual counseling is the best way to go, but it shouldn't be the only option in schools.

ers lead "extracurricular" clubs of their choosing, during the school day. This allows them to bond with students. Both options can work in remote, hybrid or in-person settings. If schools are meeting in person for at least part of the week, teachers can be scheduled to regularly have lunch with small groups of students.

2. Reimagine counseling services.

Another cost-effective way to meet SEL needs is to leverage the power of small-group counseling. When I was superintendent in Arlington, Massachusetts, I hired a substance abuse counselor and asked her how many students she could see working half time. She asking if I meant how many groups she could run. The question surprised me. While small-group counseling for youth is common, individual counseling is still the norm in schools. There are times when it's the best way to go, but it shouldn't be the only option. She could see many more students in small groups—and students would benefit by getting more counseling time and by learning from peers. We moved in this direction, served our students well and served three times as many students.

3. Treat a counselor's time as precious. Process mapping will streamline meetings and paperwork and free up special education and counseling staff to provide more direct support to students. On average, these folks spend more time in meetings and doing paperwork than

working with students. For the most common processes, such as creating an IEP, list each step in great detail. Then, for each task, assess whether it and everyone involved is needed. Is doing the task or joining the meeting more valuable than meeting with students? In some districts this process has doubled the amount of counseling provided by existing staff.

What not to do

Avoid doing what might feel right at first but actually can be counter to your goals. These include buying a new off-the-shelf SEL program. Such programs will be hard to implement in a year when in-person training and instruction are limited, and teachers are already stretched thin.

Also don't assume that programs in place are working. Measure their impact. I recently talked to a superintendent who used a purchased program to address SEL. I asked how they knew the program worked. It was research-based, she responded. The district hadn't assessed for success, just assumed success. A student survey revealed the program hadn't made students feel more connected to adults and more explicit protocols for how the time was spent were needed.

Student SEL needs will be at a record high this fall, but carefully structured approaches monitored for success can make a world of difference for kids in need. **DA**

Nathan Levenson, a former superintendent, is the author of Six Shifts to Improve Special Education and Other Interventions (Harvard Education Press). As managing director at District Management Group, he has led efforts to improve equity and outcomes for students in more than 200 school districts.





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