

# DA

District Administration®

November/December 2020



## KEYS TO BATTLING TEACHER BURNOUT

Essential support actions to take 22

### **"Good job!"**

Why new teachers may not know  
how to praise students effectively 4

### **Their future is growing**

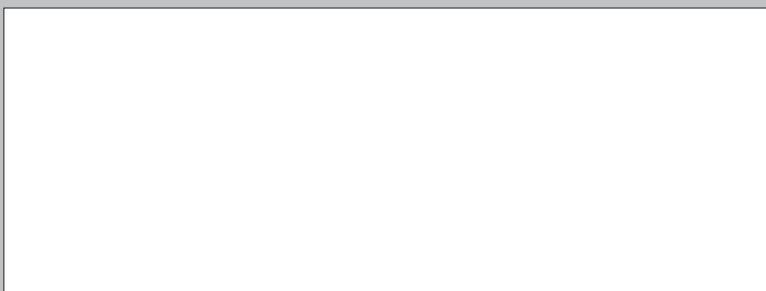
Students gain farming skills while  
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## Recommended reading

As educators have had to adapt to new demands posed by remote and hybrid learning, teacher burnout is a serious problem. Pivoting to remote instruction, overcoming students' learning loss, the addition of non-classroom duties, and the anxieties of COVID in general have stressed teachers and principals, some to the point of considering leaving the profession. We look at the root causes of burnout and steps district leaders can take to improve morale, reduce stress and retain more educators. See page 22.

On the STEM scene, we highlight a school in an economically depressed region of Georgia where students run a working farm, producing food for the community while gaining agricultural industry skills. The program includes STEM-based activities, gamified strategies for competition, and real-world interactions. Read more on page 30.

We take a look at new approaches leaders have discovered to provide academics and social-emotional support in the virtual world. This roundup of innovations in online academics and SEL offer ideas for your district to consider, plus inspiration to spur other ideas. See page 37.

Finally, don't miss our annual Solution Showcase, which brings together the latest K-12 education products and services in a special section. You'll find 30 products that address the following categories: administrative software; curriculum and instructional tools; dining; distance learning solutions; facilities, safety, and security systems; IT solutions; STEM, robotics, coding; and virtual care. Find this handy section on page 42.

—Eric Weiss, executive editor

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### Overcoming barriers

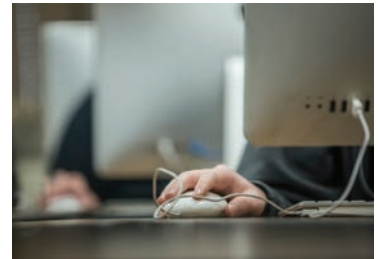
6 strategies for solidifying SEL partnerships

[DAmag.me/selpartner](https://www.district-admin.com/selpartner)

### Coding challenge

9 ways to expand computer science equity in high school

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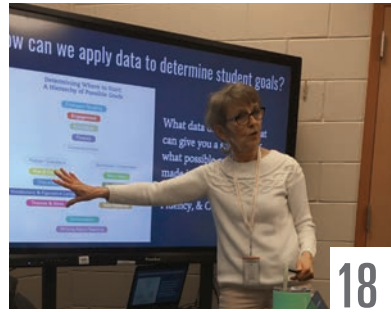
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Publisher Kenneth Kahn

## EDITORIAL

Executive Editor Eric Weiss  
Senior Managing Editor Melissa Ezarik  
Senior Writer Matt Zalaznick  
Technology Editor at Large Lenny Schad  
Associate Editor Chris Burt

## ART

Production Director Joe Ciocca  
Art Director Rebecca Eller

## ADVERTISING, EVENTS AND CUSTOM MEDIA

### Vice President, Event and Media Sales, Education Group

Jim Callan, [jcallan@lrp.com](mailto:jcallan@lrp.com)  
(561) 622-6520 ext. 8696

Sales Manager, Rachel Davis  
[rdavis@lrp.com](mailto:rdavis@lrp.com)  
(678) 521-7584

Sales Manager, Amy Olimpo  
[aolimp@lrp.com](mailto:aolimp@lrp.com)  
(267) 566-5276

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  
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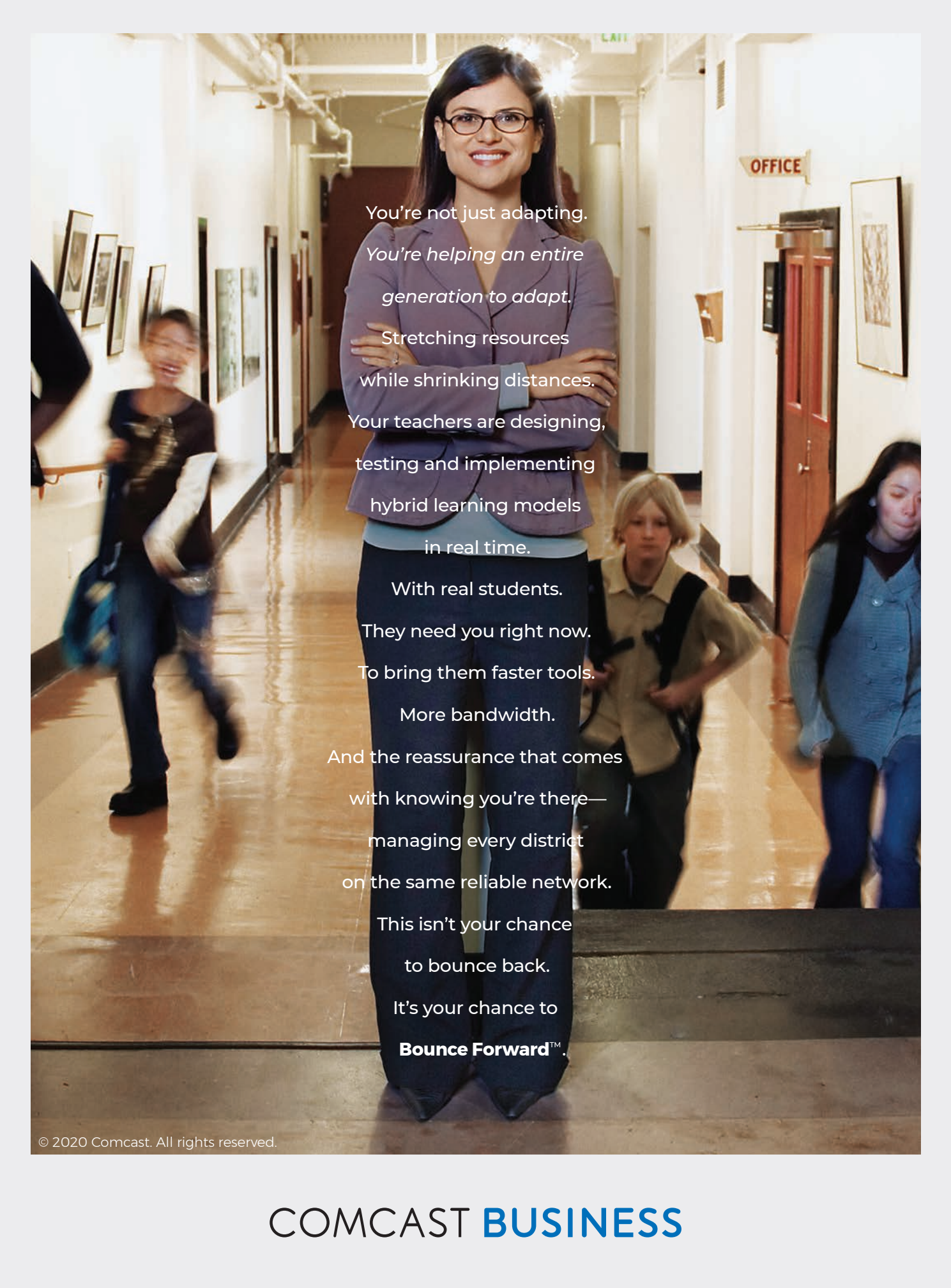
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## SUBSCRIPTIONS

Send email address changes to: Dana Kubicko  
[dkubicko@lrp.com](mailto:dkubicko@lrp.com)

## HOW TO REACH US

360 Hiatt Drive  
Palm Beach Gardens, FL 33418  
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# More praise, please, in teacher prep

## *Teacher education programs lack lessons on positive behavior reinforcement*

The good news: Elementary teacher preparation programs are making progress on including training related to classroom management. About half of these programs now turn to classroom management strategies that are strongly rooted in research, according to a National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) report. That's an increase of 26% in the number of programs doing this, compared to when NCTQ first began measuring this area in 2013.

The not-so-good news: In the analysis of five specific evidence-based classroom management strategies considered universally effective (regardless of student age of the subject being taught), only about one-quarter of programs mandate practice and feedback on "reinforcing positive behavior," which has the most research behind its efficacy.

In other words, new teachers are not being prepared to praise students effectively.

The report, "2020 Teacher Prep Review: Clinical Practice and Classroom Management" ([DAmag.me/nctq](http://DAmag.me/nctq)), includes data on training provided by more than 1,000 elementary teacher prep programs in managing a classroom, as well as in efforts to assert quality control in clinical practice experiences.

Previously, the predominant approach to classroom management instruction was establishing classroom rules and planning great lessons, said NCTQ President Kate Walsh in a statement. The thinking was that such efforts prevent student misbehavior. But, she added, "as any teacher can attest, engaging classes alone are seldom enough."

At least one state considered a leader in teacher preparation and evaluation of teacher candidates, Missouri, has opted not to include reinforcing positive behavior as a favor, notes the report. The omission of emphasis on student praise may be the result of

concerns that it will reduce students' self-motivation to learn.

### **Effective, and ineffective, praise**

Research has shown that praise, when used well, improves student behavior and also increases self-motivation. For example, a student who struggles to focus in class may feel destined to fail and stop trying to do well. With sincere praise from a teacher on sustained effort on a project, the student will feel capable of succeeding in school.

Studies have also shown that when students are praised effusively for something they can already do or that represents less than best effort, they don't get the benefits of the praise. Not using praise well can even result in students believing their teacher doesn't think they are capable of improving.

Effective praise, the report explains, is highly specific, focuses on the student's actions, and targets a behavior the student is in the process of improving.

### **Mentor teacher selection challenges**

The NCTQ data also reveals issues in the selection of classroom mentor teachers. While more than two-thirds of elementary teacher prep programs make sure their elementary teacher candidates are observed frequently, only 3% require



the classroom mentor teacher to be both effective with student learning and skilled in mentoring other adults.

College programs face an obstacle in adopting more rigorous screening of mentor teachers: tradition. Programs traditionally defer to school districts in the selection of mentors, and schools typically allow any classroom teacher to volunteer for the mentor role.

The report acknowledges the major impact COVID has had on what happens in schools, including on clinical practice and classroom management training for aspiring teachers. Remote teaching environments don't allow for practice of classroom management strategies. But because the basic principles of quality clinical practice and classroom management still stand, related training is critical to the success of aspiring teachers. —*Melissa Ezarik*

## **What educators need to be taught about classroom management**

- How to establish rules and routines that set expectations for behavior
- How to maximize learning time by managing time, class materials and the physical setup of the classroom, and by promoting student engagement
- How to reinforce positive behavior by using specific, meaningful praise and other forms of positive reinforcement
- How to redirect off-task behavior through unobtrusive means that do not interrupt instruction and that prevent and manage such behavior
- How to address serious misbehavior with consistent, respectful and appropriate consequences

*Source: National Institute for Excellence in Teaching*

# Report: Teacher shortage 'worse than we thought'

Because multiple factors are causing the nation's teacher shortage, it can only be reversed with comprehensive, long-term solutions, according to a new report.

The shortage "is large, growing, and worse than we thought," warns the latest report from the Economic Policy Institute's "Perfect Storm in the Teacher Labor Market" series.

Causes of the shortage include "low relative pay, poor working environments, uneven opportunities to grow professionally, and the weak prestige of teaching," the report says.

The shortage could worsen as district leaders try to reduce class sizes for a growing student population and more teachers reach retirement age, the report points out.

Raising salaries is the first step in easing the shortages that are hitting high-poverty schools harder. Teachers are looking for salaries that match those of similarly educated professionals, the report says.

Targeted raises are also needed to close "substantial gaps" between salaries in high- and low-poverty schools.

Administrators should work to nurture stronger learning communities to elevate teacher voice and strengthen their sense of belonging,



the report says.

School and district leaders should also expand career development supports that strengthen teachers' sense of purpose and effectiveness.

Vacant positions, however, do not reveal the full impact of the teacher shortage.

School leaders must identify the number of teachers who lack the credentials associated with highly effective teaching and determine whether that number has been growing or decreasing.

Policymakers should also compare the number of highly qualified teachers in more affluent schools to the qualifications of educators in higher-poverty schools.

The full EPI report can be found at [DAMag.me/shortage](https://www.damag.me/shortage).

—Matt Zalaznick

## Impact on student learning

An Economic Policy Institute report (see above) notes that the teacher shortage isn't just a crisis for the teaching profession; it impedes student learning as well. High-poverty schools are more likely to be impacted by the shortage, and this exacerbates existing opportunity and achievement gaps that are driven by underfunding, concentrated poverty and inequality of resources.



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# Building physical activity into instruction

Health experts recommend students get 60 minutes of physical activity a day. In the current environment, most are lucky if they get close to that.

Instead of enjoying lengthy periods of recess on playgrounds and fields, millions of students have been confined to home spaces under virtual or hybrid models and sit in front of computer screens for hours. Even those who have in-person learning environments have had play time reduced.

Ensuring students are still moving involves the integration of physical activity into classroom instruction. Taking even a 2- to 5-minute breather for stretching, a scavenger hunt or a mini dance party can be the elixir students need to maintain their overall health and be more productive.

“Physical activity doesn’t take away from instruction time; it can really help enhance it,” says Kate Holmes, co-director of Springboard to Active Schools ([schoolspringboard.org](http://schoolspringboard.org)), which is a part of the National Network of Public Health Institutes and Health Resources in Action.

Plus, in this COVID-confining environment, it can be a powerful tool



JOHN MOORE/GETTY IMAGES

to bring students together and reduce stress, anxiety and social isolation, Holmes adds.

### Springboard of support

Springboard to Active Schools, funded through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Healthy Schools, aims to keep students healthy and active during the pandemic.

Its latest resources include a series of ideas and tips for getting even the most

fickle and sedentary students out of their chairs.

One cue card, for example, shows how students can turn simple Q&As into physical activities when educators ask them to stretch and move their arms and legs in different positions while providing responses, or when answering true-or-false questions.

“We really wanted to choose activities that would be flexible so instructors can pull them out whenever they need a quick break,” says Elena Bengochea, program associate at Health Resources in Action. “I know a lot of teachers are teaching in hybrid kind of situations. We wanted to give them different kinds of activities that they can use wherever they are.”

Her organization notes that any physical activity integration should start by: 1) creating a culture of physical activity; 2) ensuring approaches are equitable and inclusive; 3) adhering to health and safety protocols; and 4) following the national guidance.

For teachers that means being inclusive, knowing demographics of students, whether they have the physical space at home to pull off certain activities and whether or not social distancing can be done in a class setting. Teachers should also be mindful of students with disabilities, who may be able to participate in certain activities but not others. Educators should encourage caregivers working at home with students to get involved.

“For most students at most schools, getting 60 minutes of physical activity through team sports or 60 minutes of PE or 60 minutes of recess every day is not realistic,” Holmes says. “Rather, it’s about all of these pieces coming together to help students. ... And then beyond that, supporting students to be physically active for a lifetime.”

—Chris Burt

## 9 ways to get students moving

1. Model healthy behavior by participating in physical activity with students.
2. Communicate with parents and caregivers about the importance of physical activity.
3. Ask students to share their physical activity ideas.
4. Mix it up with different movements/exercises, and vary the time of the activity.
5. Play music to decrease stress and anxiety.
6. Be mindful of different abilities and provide alternatives.
7. When doing virtual learning, keep in mind where students are physically located.
8. Notice patterns of student participation and work to include those who are struggling to get involved.
9. Use classroom physical activity as an opportunity to build community.

Source: *Springboard for Educators*



# Suicide prevention shifts to meet COVID-era needs

Creating a suicide prevention task force is one of the most important steps school leaders can take to protect students who are contending with the added stresses posed by COVID and the racial justice movement.

Such a task force can focus solely on student mental health and well-being, while other administrators and staff tackle pandemic challenges such as online learning and potential quarantines, says Rich Lieberman, a nationally certified school psychologist and lecturer in the Graduate School of Education at Loyola Marymount University.

“We look at suicide prevention through two lenses. One is a development lens: How are elementary kids different from teens?” says Lieberman, the former suicide prevention coordinator for Los Angeles USD. “The other is the cultural lens, providing for the needs of students of color who are facing disproportionate impacts from COVID, who are on the other side of the digital divide.”

A task force should also focus on other high-risk groups, such as students in the LGBTQ+ community and those who have been treated previously for mental health problems. In addition, its members can spearhead initiatives that address anxiety and depression in school staff and parents.

The most recent data from the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey, collected in 2019, show that nearly 9% of high school students attempted suicide within a 12-month period while nearly 16% had made a plan for a suicide attempt.

Nearly 37% of students admitted to feeling sad or hopeless for two weeks in a row, says Scott Poland, a professor at the College of Psychology at Nova Southeastern University in Florida

and an expert on suicide and school violence.

Other research shows that only one in four students who attempted suicide seek help.

“States that survey middle school students are coming up with similarly alarming data,” Poland says. “The scope of this problem is quite pervasive and schools have a key role in partnering with community mental health providers, as well as parents, in trying to turn this around.”

## New standards for suicide prevention

Administrators can look to new legislation passed in many states that set standards for suicide prevention in schools, Poland says.

Some of these laws require schools to establish comprehensive suicide prevention and intervention programs, while other laws mandate teacher and staff professional development.

This year, the challenge for many administrators has been adapting suicide prevention programs to the virtual space, particularly considering the number of students who struggled to connect to online learning, Lieberman says.

Teachers must redouble their efforts to build relationships with their classes to spot warning signs in things students might write on an online assignment that indicate frustration or hopelessness, Poland adds.

Finally, it’s critical that a suicide task force keep data on the effectiveness of a district’s prevention initiatives. Such information will also help administrators win grants for these programs.

“We have to talk about what works, and what doesn’t work and what we can do better in the future,” Poland says.

—Matt Zalaznick



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# Making the shift to solar power

The switch to solar power in Arkansas' Batesville School District had two big benefits: more affordable green energy and a big raise for teachers. The \$5.4 million project—backed by a local energy utility and launched in 2018—was the state's first K-12 solar installation.

A 1,500-panel array was installed in a district field, while another 700 panels now cover the canopy where high school and junior high school students arrive and depart each day.

It's likely to save the district \$4 million over the next 20 years, said Superintendent Michael Hester during a Solar Tour webinar hosted by Generation 180, a renewable energy nonprofit.

Consequently, the district jumped to No. 1 from fourth for teacher pay among the five school districts in its county, Hester said.

"We were looking for money to attract and retain teachers," Hester said. "This last year we gave them the largest raise in the school district's 140-year history and we're looking to match that again in the next two years."

Batesville is now in the second quartile in the state for salaries, after having been below the state average.

Entegrity, the power utility, started the project with an energy audit that helped district leaders make the case for the solar, which required a change in state law to allow the school board to approve a property tax increase without a public vote.



**GOT IT COVERED**—About 700 solar panels cover the arrival and departure canopy at Batesville School District's junior and senior high school.

Alongside the solar installation, the district also replaced more than 600 lights with LEDs, and installed more energy-efficient windows, HVAC systems and thermostats.

### Solar power during a crisis

Twin natural disasters in December 2017 provided the momentum Santa Barbara USD leaders needed to move toward 100% solar power. A massive wildfire followed by a catastrophic mudslide that killed 26 people brought life in the California city to a halt.

In the aftermath, schools served food and provided other connection points for the community, Laura Capps, president of Santa Barbara

USD's board of education, said during the webinar.

The district now plans six solar microgrid sites that will provide 94% of its energy and keep the power on during future emergencies.

"Our schools really should be a safe haven during times of disaster; they're our neighborhood cornerstones," she said. "If we can keep the lights on when there are power outages or climate-related extreme weather events, which we know are exponentially on the rise, it will be better for the entire community."

Capps, who spearheaded the project, began by researching solar initiatives in nearby school districts, including some in lower-income areas. "It's a stereotype that this is a luxury," she said. "This isn't just for fancy schools; this is for every school."

Santa Barbara USD administrators also plan to devote energy savings to teacher salaries and instruction, particularly to its literacy programs, Capps said. "The more we save on electric bills, the more we can put that money back to the betterment of our children." —*Matt Zalaznick*

## Solar school stats

- Solar schools: 7,300+ (5.5% of K-12 schools)
- Districts with solar: 1,300+ (16%)
- No. of students attending a solar school: 5.3 million (9% of K-12 students)
- Growth in solar capacity at schools in the past 5 years: 139%
- Growth in number of schools with solar: 81%
- Top five states for solar schools: California, New Jersey, Arizona, Massachusetts, Indiana
- Solar installed at schools that is funded and owned by a third party: 79%

# Working toward high attendance in online learning

Getting students to show up for virtual classes has been challenging for many reasons. Here's what three school districts have done to help ensure students attend and engage in remote learning sessions.

## Everett Public Schools (Wash.)

Online learning attendance in Everett, near Seattle, has rebounded since the district was one of the first in the nation to go fully remote in March. Educators have redoubled their outreach to parents while classroom teachers have brought a new level of commitment to keeping students engaged, says Superintendent Ian Saltzman.

Teachers check attendance daily and regularly contact families.

"Attendance is so much better than it was in May and June," Saltzman says. "It's extremely difficult for kids and it's extremely difficult for educators, and the energy I've seen from our teachers has been amazing."

District leaders hold parent universities and monthly virtual meetings with parents to gather feedback. It was after a parent suggestion that schools put in place a six-hour school day with built-in breaks, Saltzman says.

## Pharr-San-Juan-Alamo ISD (Texas)

During the first six weeks of mostly-online instruction this fall, the attendance rate has hit 97.1%. One reason for the boost in attendance, compared to spring, is that district leaders hosted enrichment camps during the summer, Superintendent Jorge L. Arredondo says.

Teachers were able to connect with parents to distribute computer devices, textbooks and other curriculum materials.

Teachers also hold daily advisory periods to identify any challenges students are facing in connecting or following the online curriculum.

"We're finding better ways for students to be engaged," Arredondo says. "Teachers can provide more interventions and support through different platforms, and if students miss class, they can watch recorded lessons. If they didn't understand something, they can watch it again."

## Anoka-Hennepin School District (Minn.)

Superintendent David Law has been using his social media channels (including @dlawsuper on Twitter) to showcase activities in his classrooms, which are operating at 50% in-person capacity this school year. And while he believes his efforts have helped attendance in the suburban Minneapolis district to surge to about 99%, overall enrollment has dropped about 3%.

One reason is that some families have transferred students to private schools are offering full in-person instruction. Other families have chosen to homeschool their children during the pandemic, he says.

This has cost the district about \$10 million in funding, Law says.

Elementary school students are assigned to an online teacher who does daily check-ins and attendance. In upper grades, Law says, the first 25 minutes are synchronous, which allow teachers to do headcounts.

—Matt Zalaznick



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## Rethinking leadership by developing underused skills

Why a leader's typical leadership style may not be effective in this moment—and how to experiment with new approaches

By Michael Moore

The demands and conditions of K-12 leadership have transformed nearly overnight, driven by the pandemic, its economic impact and racial justice protests. In the face of these challenges, I have noticed that the most effective leaders have moved away from their traditional approaches and are trying new leadership skills.

At this point in our careers most of us have tools, skills and attributes that we're confident in and get rewarded for. And we're hesitant to drop those tools even when they're not effective in the moment. Our skills and attributes are preferences. We learned them early in life; they worked for us, others admired them and over time they became what we think of as our leadership style. As we created this style, we left some skills and approaches behind.

The good news is that each of our well-developed skills points to a complementary, underused skill that we can develop. But first, we need to pause to think about why our typical approach may not be effective, and then experiment with a new approach that will likely be uncomfortable at first.

### Leadership polarities

For each of the following leadership polarity pairs, your preference may be on one side or the other. Notice that you're likely to have a strong response even to the descriptions themselves, believing that one end or the other of the polarity is better. The question, though, is: "When is it better?" Whenever your go-to approach isn't working, try moving toward the underused and underdeveloped end of a polarity that you've noticed.

#### ABOUT MICHAEL MOORE

*A leadership development and talent consultant, Michael Moore specializes in principal supervision and the improvement of leadership training programs. He has more than 40 years of experience as a K-12 educator and has served as a teacher, a high school principal, and a superintendent of schools. Moore can be reached at michael@increaseconsulting.net. Follow him at @IncreaseLeaders.*



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More online: Six ways to improve leadership effectiveness

### Are people able to predict what your response will be to a question or problem?

**1. Act-Plan.** When you face a new challenge or have an exciting idea, do you prefer to move immediately to action or do you prefer to first develop a step-by-step plan?

**2. Think-Feel.** When working with others, do you focus on their ideas or on their feelings? When making a case to others, how much do you say about your thought process or your feelings?

**3. Confident-Modest.** Because we have responsibility for children and large numbers of people, K-12 leaders need to have what the military calls "command presence." But beyond that, this polarity asks: Do you always present that you're sure of yourself and your decisions, or do you present as open to new ideas or questions?

**4. Just-Compassionate.** Are you willing to make exceptions in the interest of equity or fairness? Do you often appeal to policy or rules? Do you worry that an exception will be seen as a precedent?

**5. Answer-Ask.** When someone approaches you with a question or dilemma, what's the first thing you do: Ask a question or give an answer? How does it feel to say, "I don't know?"

**6. Solution-Problem.** How often do you stop and consider the root cause of a problem before proposing solutions? How easy is it for you to immediately create a solution no matter how difficult the problem is?

**7. Facilitate-Direct.** How often do you facilitate group discussion while consciously holding back your own suggestions? How accountable do you feel for the decisions made by your teams? When a solution needs to be implemented by many people, how do you engage with them upfront?

**8. Flexible-Consistent.** Under what circumstances are you willing to reconsider a decision? Are people able to predict what your response will be to a question or problem?

**9. Spontaneous-Reflective.** How often do you ask for time to think about a problem before responding? How often have you felt the need to go back and correct a misunderstanding or to apologize?

I encourage you to think about your preferences, celebrate how well they have served you, and then experiment with new behaviors and approaches. **DA**



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# Why comprehensive threat assessment is vital to an effective school safety strategy



Q&A with **Dewey G. Cornell, Ph.D.**, Clinical Psychologist and Professor at the University of Virginia, and **Todd Wagner**, Managing Director at Navigate360

## What are some key elements of a comprehensive school safety strategy?

**Wagner:** Leadership and establishing a culture of safety are at the top of the list for me. School safety is composed of a giant checklist of integrated technical, mechanical and cultural factors, but people seem to make the biggest difference. Our kids grew up in a digital era like no other. We need to adapt to their struggles and identify ways to help them through social/digital channels. They need passionate people willing to lay down new policies and programs that reach these children and give them a voice.

## Why are an increasing number of schools and districts using tip lines to be alerted to threats or concerns?

**Wagner:** Passionate leaders have been quick to recognize the value of prevention. I often refer to an adage that says, “If you want to know what is happening in your community, just ask a teenager.” The U.S. Secret Service Analysis of Targeted School Violence studied 41 incidents of targeted school violence and found that most of the attackers communicated a prior threat to their target or communicated their intentions to carry out an attack. In many cases, someone observed a threatening communication or behavior but did not act, either out of fear, not believing the attacker, misjudging the immediacy or location, or believing they had dissuaded the attacker. School safety organizations that have aligned their efforts with these findings are better at identify-

ing trends and have a knack for staying out in front of big issues. To focus on prevention, schools are learning to create a culture where students feel safe sharing their concerns. When you frequently receive multiple tips from multiple people about the same issue or concern, you know you’ve created a successful program.

## How effective are tip lines as part of a school safety strategy?

**Wagner:** Tip lines are massively successful when passionate people are comfortable asking kids to engage in a “safe to say” culture and respond to tips 24/7/365. Nearly every tip line has prevented loss of life in one way or another. We hear about suicide prevention weekly, and often daily. We receive calls to thank us for playing a role in preventing tragedies like Columbine or Parkland. The work we do—and the culture we promote—is incredibly emotional. Tip lines can and will prevent the unthinkable, but they need people. Schools can’t just buy an app to fix a broken culture.

## What are the most common concerns reported in tip lines?

**Wagner:** Over the past five years, suicidal ideation, drugs and bullying have been the top three. Unfortunately, this is not surprising when you consider the suicide rate by adolescents and young adults is up nearly 60% from 2007 to 2018, one out of every five students report being bullied, and there is more stress than ever—it’s literally an epidemic.

---

**“The work we do—and the culture we promote—is incredibly emotional. Tip lines can and will prevent the unthinkable, but they need people. Schools can’t just buy an app to fix a broken culture.”**

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### **Why is threat assessment so vital to the effectiveness of tip lines, and school safety in general?**

**Cornell:** Once schools know about a threat, they must be prepared to assess the seriousness of the threat and then respond promptly with a strategy that keeps everyone safe and resolves the underlying problem or concern. It is essential to have a fire alarm to let you know there might be a fire, but you need an effective fire department to investigate and put out the fire.

### **What is a behavioral threat assessment team, and what role can this team play in schools?**

**Cornell:** Every school needs a behavioral threat assessment team to evaluate the seriousness of any known threats, and to take appropriate action. Threat assessment teams are multidisciplinary groups with expertise in administration, educational services, law enforcement, and mental health. They help schools identify and coordinate services for troubled students before their problems escalate into violence. Prevention must start long before an incident occurs. They also help school authorities avoid overreacting to student misbehavior and guide them to make fair and equitable decisions about disciplinary consequences. Threat assessment complements and enhances the school’s existing student support services

in areas such as mental health counseling, special education and bullying prevention.

### **What has research found about the impacts of using threat assessment in schools?**

**Cornell:** Over the past two decades, our controlled studies have found that schools using the Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines (CSTAG) can respond safely and effectively to student threats of violence. CSTAG teams can direct educational and mental health services to troubled students, keeping students in school and avoiding excessively punitive responses and racial disparities in disciplinary consequences. In schools using CSTAG, there are reductions in school suspension rates, teachers report feeling safer, and students report less peer aggression and bullying.

### **What role should technology play in school safety?**

**Cornell:** Technology gives us useful tools for gathering and sharing information, and can facilitate collaboration and professional judgement. However, we need adequate investment in professional staff and staff training to make best use of technology. Despite the persistence of shootings in our communities and a few schools, schools overall have grown much safer over the past 25 years.





## 100 school leaders identify the biggest challenges this year

District leaders in consensus on the top four ideas needed to educate students amid the current climate of chaos

By Mara Rodriguez

As the 2020-21 school year began, K-12 educators nationwide were facing the greatest challenge of their careers: safely teaching students in a climate of chaos and disruption while simultaneously dealing with fallout from a truly unprecedented spring term.

My colleagues at Curriculum Associates spent the last few months talking with more than 100 district leaders about their hopes and concerns. For many, the distance-learning experience from the spring was as instructive as it was trying.

Administrators found many reasons to be optimistic about the coming school year, including increased student independence in self-led learning; a greater interest in how data can support them; and a focus on personalized instruction.

We also asked them to consider the tools they need right now to support successful learning. Following are four ideas that emerged for what educators need:

### 1. A multigrade understanding

Teachers are supporting more students who are further behind than in years past, even as they address a dizzying variety of student needs. Nearly every child, even those previously working at grade level, will be missing some skills.

Teachers need student diagnostic data to inform their current instruction strategies. To be actionable, however, this multigrade map should provide many more details than the assessment data we've used in the past. Knowing that a fifth grader hasn't mastered fifth-grade reading standards is important, but it provides limited instructional insight.

### Focusing on the most critical prerequisite skills is key to engage every learner with grade-level work.

Data will need to dive deeper into domain- and skill-level diagnosis, painting a clear picture of what students can do and what steps are needed for their success.

### 2. Attainable, ambitious students goals

When we track students to normative goals based on historic averages (such as "average" or "50th percentile growth"), those students tend to hover around the average indefinitely. And when they experience a significant disruption in their learning and continue to grow at average rates, they "stick" at performance even further below grade level. Every learner should have growth goals that put them on a path to grade level, even if that destination isn't reachable within one year. Goals need to be attainable, but also have to be ambitious if we are going to help them ultimately reach grade level.

### 3. Plans for balancing prerequisite and grade-level learning

More students are missing the critical prerequisite skills for this school year. But all students need grade-level skills to be successful in the long run. Yet there won't be enough time to make up for lost learning from the spring and cover every grade-level skill. A two-step approach—tackling prerequisites, then moving on to grade level—simply won't be possible.

Teachers need one strategy for melding prerequisite skills and grade-level

learning that helps them hone in on the select prerequisites necessary to access grade-level learning.

### 4. Instructional programs that hit high marks for quality and ease of use

Students lost instructional opportunities in the spring. And they'll likely lose more this year, since some schools will have less than 180 days of instruction at their disposal. With greater deficits and less time to intervene, it's critical for our students' success that we make the most of every instructional minute.

Instruction quality clearly matters in addressing this challenge. Beyond a high bar for quality, instructional resources need to be: 1) adaptable to delivery for both in-class and remote learning; 2) flexible enough to adjust course if school schedules change throughout the year; and tied to data, reflecting the needs of individual students.

Leaders won't have the option of compromising on quality of instruction or ease of use. Both are necessary for the daunting tasks teachers are facing.

The good news is that while the scale and the circumstances have changed because of the pandemic, these needs aren't entirely new. Educators serving large populations of at-risk students and meeting the needs of migrant students experience similar challenges every fall.

Shining a light on these needs can help educators focus on creating supportive classrooms virtual and real, and leveraging best practices and tools that help all students succeed. **DA**

*Mara Rodriguez is the director of educator success at Curriculum Associates. The full report can be found at [DMag.me/cawhitepaper](https://www.dmag.me/cawhitepaper).*



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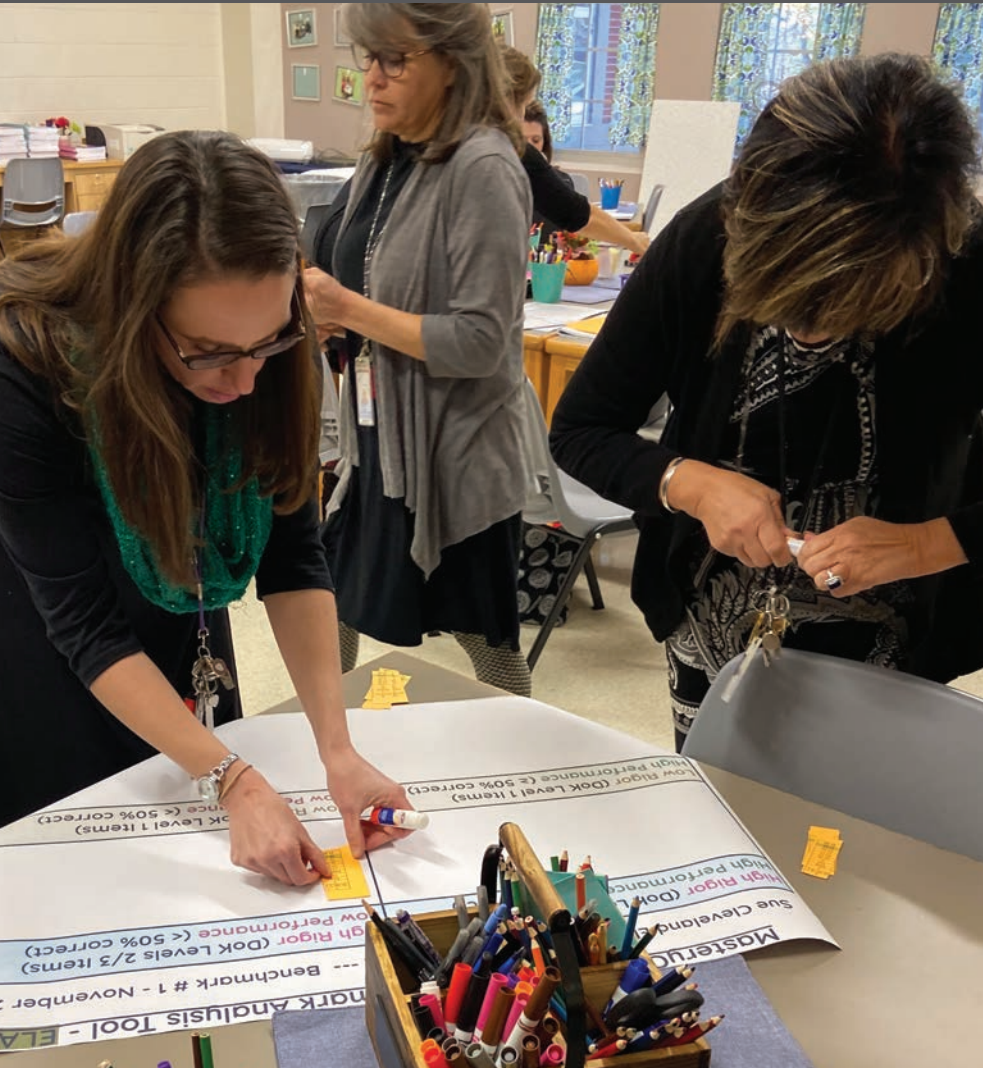


# LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

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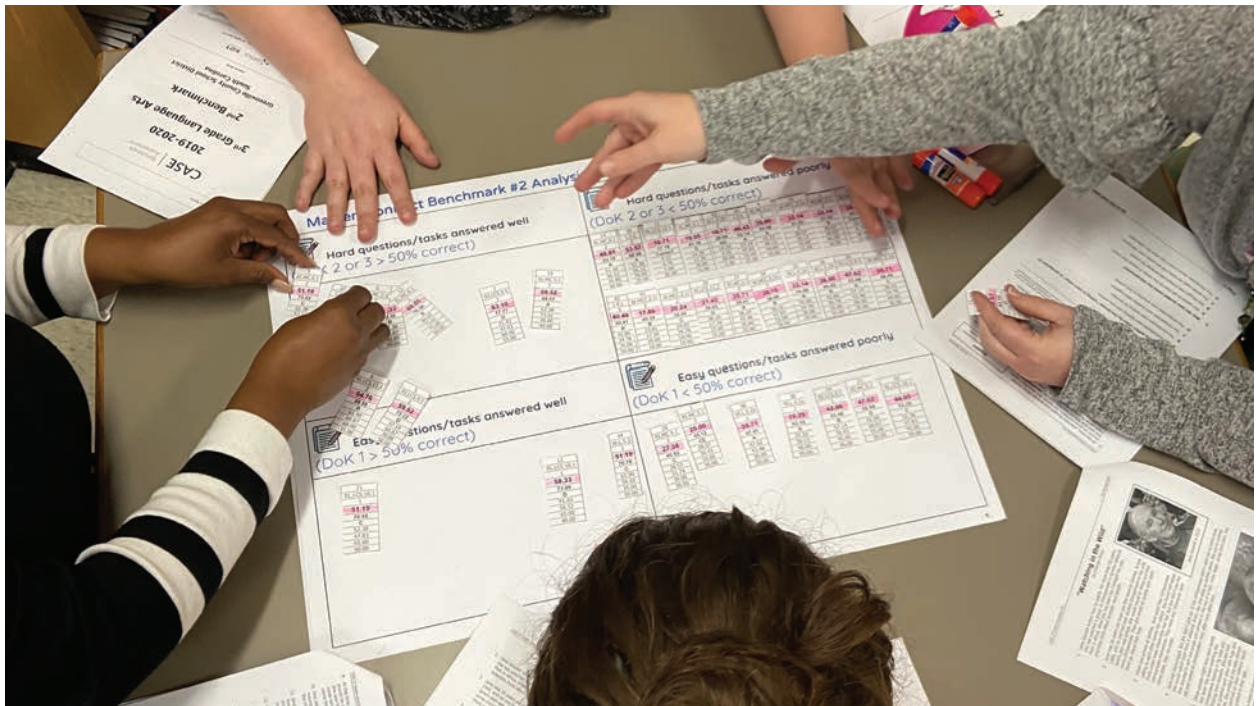


**LEADERSHIP  
DEVELOPMENT**

# HOW COACHING IS NARROWING ACHIEVEMENT GAPS IN SOUTH CAROLINA

High-poverty schools accounted for most of the Greenville County schools that were not meeting expectations

By Matt Zalaznick



**COMPREHENSIVE COACHING**—Greenville County Schools instructional specialists work closely with teachers over a two- to three-year period to develop more student-centered instruction and close achievement gaps.

## Greenville County Schools

District size:  
**76,000 students**

Superintendent:  
**Burke Royster**

Initiative launched:  
**2017-18**



Simply improving third-grade math scores is not a sufficient goal for Superintendent Burke Royster and his team in Greenville County Schools in South Carolina.

Greenville’s administrators take a far more targeted approach to school improvement through their “Focused School Support” professional development and teaching coaching initiative.

“Focused School Support,” launched in 2017, is this month’s DA Districts of Distinction winner.

“We’re not just saying we need to improve eighth-grade math or third-grade ELA,” Royster says. “We’re targeting within the subject, within the grade level, down to the teacher’s classroom. We might have five teachers in a subject at a certain grade level, and some are doing a stellar job while some are not.”

The purpose of the program is to help teachers improve their craft, not move them out of the district, say Royster and Assis-

tant Superintendent Jeff McCoy, who oversees the program. “Our whole goal is not to get rid of teachers,” McCoy says. “Our whole goal is to get teachers to be the best they can be.”

**‘No one feels singled out’**

Administrators first took action when they determined that—based on test scores—high-poverty, Title I buildings accounted for most of the district’s schools that were not performing as expected.

“We had particular schools where we were not making the progress we needed to make,” Royster says. “Although we certainly believe in the value of autonomy at the school level, in some places that autonomy was not working for us in moving students in achievement gap populations forward.”

The key to the program is that, once a school is identified as needing support, a full team of instructional coaches begin a two- to three-year intervention initiative in the building.

The support is multitiered and targeted, and designed to develop teacher and administrator capacity. The team holds monthly meetings with building leadership, instructional coaches and district academic specialists.

The team reviews data and then conducts ongoing instructional rounds and modeling, classroom observations and multiweek coaching cycles for teachers.

“When everyone is working to get better, no one feels singled out,” McCoy says.

To generate buy-in, administrators start work with teachers who are most eager to participate and willing to receive coaches. Those teachers then become the program biggest advocates, telling their colleagues how much they’ve learned in engaging students, McCoy says.

**‘Better than test scores’**

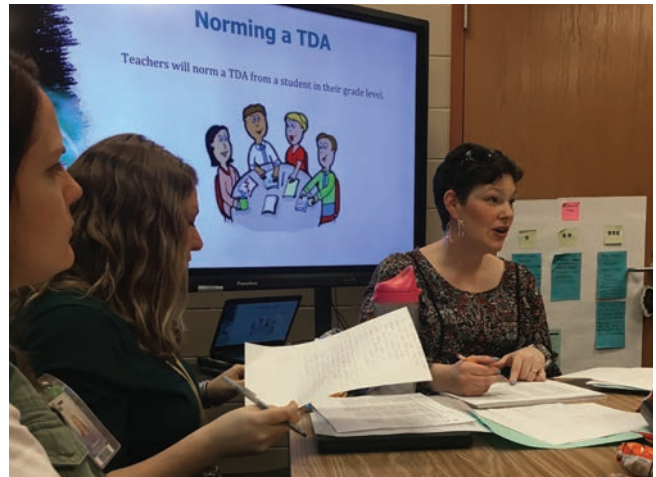
Building capacity is critical during a time when most of the nation is experiencing a teacher shortage. And Greenville’s educators are now seeing results in the schools that have participated in the program.

“When a Title I school begins to believe they can’t achieve at the same level and then they begin to grow 10, 20, 30 percentage points on state assessments, the staff is motivated to stick with the process,” McCoy says.

This shift in mindset leads to teachers setting higher expectations for their students.

“Several schools have exited the Focused School initiative and continued to post gains, showing that sustainability is possible if districts focus on building instructional leadership capacity among all stakeholders, rather than relying on monitoring and correction alone,” he says.

To replicate the program, district leaders elsewhere should on high-quality support over accountability. While difficult conversations may be necessary, a collaborative culture can be built around student-centered solutions.



Educators in Greenville County Schools have seen test scores improve since launching its “Focused School Support” initiative. Teachers have set higher expectations for students.

Because senior leaders are in schools on a regular basis, the program builds relationships between central office personnel and school-based educators.

“We want all of our students to graduate with college credits, an industry certification, or both,” Royster says. “That’s better than any test score to show students are college or career ready.” **DA**

*Matt Zalaznick is DA’s senior writer.*

## Focused School Support results

The following shows the increasing percentage of students who passed the South Carolina College-and Career-Ready Assessments in Greenville County Schools that participated in the Focused School Support coaching program.

Math	English-language arts
<b>Title I elementary #1:</b>	<b>Elementary #3:</b>
2017: 34%	2017: 36%
2018: 44%	2018: 39%
2019: 51%	2019: 54%
<b>Elementary #3:</b>	<b>Middle school #2:</b>
2017: 38%	2017: 32%
2018: 53%	2018: 33%
2019: 62%	2019: 42%
<b>Middle school #1:</b>	<b>High school #1:</b>
2017: 13%	2017: 68%
2018: 17%	2018: 74%
2019: 15%	2019: 71%

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# Diverse district seeing powerful growth with strong leadership, focus and fidelity

## Seguin ISD making literacy gains from utilizing Istation as part of strategic plan

**S**eguin ISD was facing a lot of challenges when Dr. Matthew Gutierrez first arrived as superintendent in 2017. A suburban district located outside San Antonio, Texas, Seguin serves 7,300 students, of which 70 percent are eligible for free or reduced lunch and 75 percent are minorities.

Achievement gaps had been widening and Seguin students had been falling behind academically over the previous ten years. Leadership turnover was also significant, as there had been 11 or 12 different assistant superintendents of curriculum and instruction during the same period. "There was a lot of disruption and a lack of cohesion and focus across the district," Gutierrez says.

### Creating a data-driven strategic plan

Almost immediately after starting on the job, Gutierrez prioritized the creation of a new strategic plan for the district. "Prior to my arrival, there was no strategic plan, and there had not been one as far back as anyone could remember," Gutierrez says.

One of the areas Gutierrez and Seguin administrators examined was how their schools were using Istation, particularly as a universal screening assessment in literacy. While Istation's

research-based, blended learning intervention and instruction had been adopted years prior, Gutierrez says it wasn't being used with fidelity and consistency around the district. "Some schools used it extensively, some very little or not at all."

But Gutierrez recognized an opportunity to maximize Istation's accurate, on-demand assessment data to help educators differentiate instruction. By using Istation more consistently, the district could create a data-driven culture across campuses that would help support more insightful, targeted instructional decisions. Plus, because Istation is built on the science of reading, educators had the ability to press into specific skill areas where students struggled and prescribe targeted interventions in vocabulary, fluency, comprehension and more to get them on track for reading growth.

### Ensuring fidelity, building trust

Seguin administrators developed a three-year strategic plan for the district. Gutierrez says the key objectives in the first year of the plan included improving professional development, establishing professional learning communities, and ensuring consistency when it came to using Istation. "We developed structures and systems to support using Istation as a universal screener consistently across the district," he says.

Seguin provided training for teachers and principals to help them understand how to use Istation effectively, and highlighted success stories in the district from teachers and classrooms who have used the platform and seen results. Gutierrez says these efforts were crucial to earning and building trust of teachers and principals, both in Istation and in the district's leadership and vision.



### Making progress

Today, Seguin is in year three of the strategic plan, and Istation is now being used consistently in all schools. "We've found it to be a very accurate indicator of how students are going to perform on our state assessment in reading for grades 3-8," says Gutierrez. "We use it to monitor student reading progress and to determine which interventions to implement, and also to identify enrichment opportunities for high-achieving students."

Gutierrez says that Istation has also helped Seguin parents get more involved in monitoring each student's reading progress, which became even more beneficial during COVID-19 school closures. The Seguin Board of Trustees recently set a goal of having all students reading at grade level by 3rd grade, with Istation as a key component of the strategy.

"We are finally seeing significant academic growth in the area of literacy, and that can be attributed to establishing consistent use of Istation across our district," Gutierrez says. "I'm proud of the gains we've made and how far we've come, and we are looking forward to even more progress in the future."



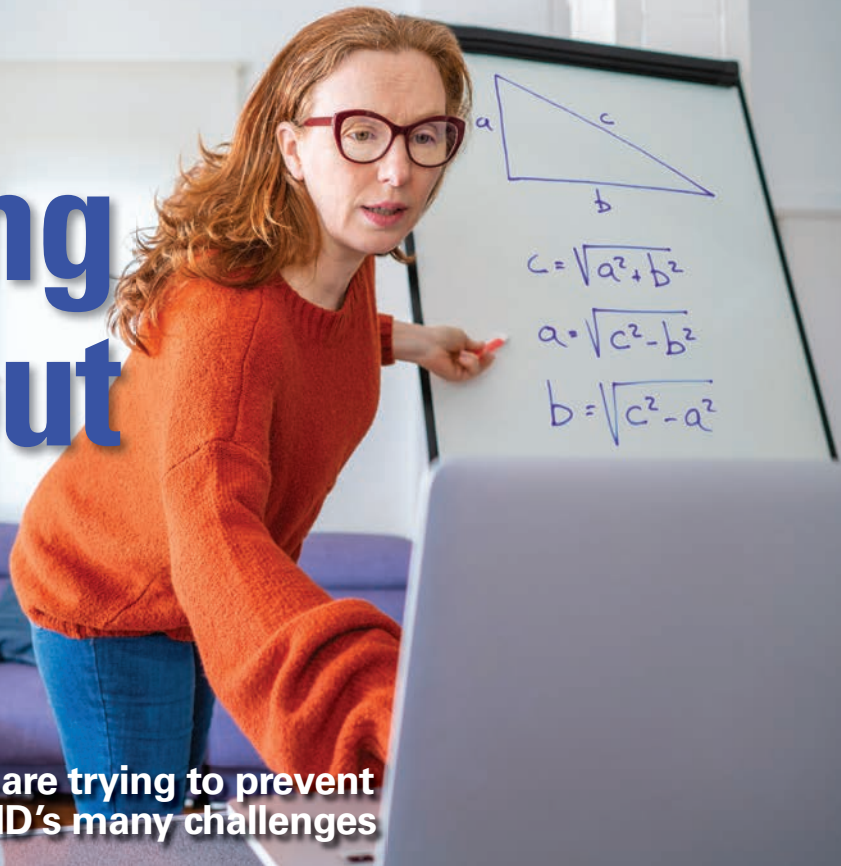
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# Keys to battling burnout



How administrators are trying to prevent burnout during COVID's many challenges

GETTYIMAGES.COM/MEDITERRANEAN

It may seem counterintuitive, but COVID has so disrupted K-12 education that building leaders and teachers could look at 2020-21 as their first year in the profession.

That's because online learning is a brand new instructional setting for most educators, says Adam Brown, assistant principal of the Renaissance Academy in Virginia Beach City Public Schools.

"The routines and rituals they had for each school year have been flipped upside down," Brown says. "Now, it's about making sure they're comfortable with the technology aspect, making sure they establish class norms for students and providing individual support as issues pop up."

This school year, it's even more crucial to celebrate teachers' success in online learning and allow them to present and share new ideas with colleagues as they explore new approaches to remote instruction.

"The key thing is to acknowledge the progress teachers are making," Brown

says. "The trap you can fall into is wanting to jump on the 20 different things a teacher can be doing better rather than focus on what they're doing well and continuing that feedback loop."

Here, educators and other experts offer guidance on preventing burnout during COVID's many challenges.

## Clarity, competence and community

What are the keys to keeping morale up during COVID and the shifts to online and hybrid learning?

Clarity, competence and community, says Chase Mielke, an instructional coach at Plainwell High School in Michigan who presents regularly on preventing teacher burnout and related issues.

"Teachers want to have clarity about expectations, competence in the strategies, and community in connecting with each other," says Mielke, whose school is part of Plainwell Community Schools.

To achieve this clarity, administrators should strongly consider creating a centralized information hub where teach-

ers—and the community—can find details on academic expectations and other matters.

"Lack of clarity is one of the biggest stress points for teachers," Mielke says. "My advice for administrators is to articulate expectations as thoroughly as possible. Don't bury information in multiple e-mails."

By "competence," Mielke means that teachers are hungry for instructional support and professional development, particularly when it comes to new ed-tech platforms used in online learning.

"One of my biggest missions is to help people give themselves permission to not do everything all at once, to not feel like they have to be masterful at this—because no one is at this point," he says.

In other words, teachers shouldn't feel like they have to become experts at every new piece of technology, at least not right away.

And when it comes to community, administrators should remember to encourage educators to have fun and



remind everyone that it's OK to make mistakes, Mielke says.

Some districts, for example, have compiled blooper reels of funny things that have happened during Zoom sessions, he says.

"A lot of the time, we think that what is critical for our wellbeing is for circumstance to chance," Mielke says. "But it's more our attitudes, actions and response to circumstances—such as giving a solid effort to getting better sleep and exercise, gratitude and mindfulness."

### One of the biggest causes of teacher burnout

Non-classroom duties, such as after-school supervision, are among the leading causes of low teacher morale and professional burnout, a human resources researcher at the University of Florida says.

Even leading a student club can frustrate a teacher if it's not something they volunteered for on their own accord, says Brian W. Swider, an associate professor in the university's Warrington College of Business. "The extent to which those responsibilities are thrust onto a teacher or strongly encouraged increases the likelihood people will leave because that's not why they entered the profession."

And during COVID, teachers are managing more non-instructional duties, such as helping online learners with IT problems, monitoring student health and sanitizing their own classrooms.

Administrators can incentivize some of these activities by, for instance, helping teachers earn certification or micro-credentials if they are asked to revise or develop online curriculum.

Teachers may also appreciate additional professional development so they feel more confident about accomplishing some of these non-instructional tasks, Swider says.

Finally, even though district leaders are facing budget constraints, pay increases always raise morale and help retain teachers.

"When the lockdowns started closing

## Some districts have compiled blooper reels of funny things that have happened during Zoom sessions.

schools, the popular narrative in media was that everyone finally recognized how underpaid teachers are," Swider says. "But after the summer, with the pressure to get back in the classroom and the talk about withholding funding if you don't return, people may have forgotten about pay."

He warns administrations that teachers—even those strongly considering leaving the profession—may remain in

their jobs until unemployment numbers improve significantly.

That could mean shortages a few years down the road.

"If a lot of your less senior, less invested teachers leave and fewer people are choosing to enter the

professions, that means there are fewer people in the pipeline," Swider says. "That's not just losing a couple of years of service from someone who chose to retire early; that's losing 20 to 30 years of teaching from someone who's never going to come back." DA

*Matt Zalaznick is senior writer of DA.*

## 3 essential moves for supporting teachers

Administrator support was one of the most important factors in maintaining teacher morale during COVID's disruptions, according to University of Winnipeg research on Canadian schools.

"Number one for administrators was providing teachers permission to not be on call every waking hour of the day," says assistant professor Lesley Eblie Trudel, who is a former K-12 administrator.

In a comparison of teacher surveys done at the beginning of the pandemic and late this summer, Trudel and her team found evidence of teacher burnout and high levels of stress.

Trudel recommends that leaders start with the following steps to reduce burnout:

**1 Focus on fewer resources.** Teachers, in some cases, are being flooded by new tech and other tools for online learning. Districts get more traction when

they start with a shorter list of resources and allow teachers to master those platforms before introducing others.

**2 Encourage professional learning communities.** PLC were thriving before COVID. Administrators should recommit to harnessing the power of PLCs that allow teachers to share ideas about student engagement, project-based learning and other initiatives.

PLCs also provide teachers space to talk about their feelings about the pandemic and the disruptions of education. "It helps them feel like they're not in this alone," Trudel says.

**3 Communicate clearly.** Administrators should provide teachers with a unified message by aligning communications across the district. Central officer leaders need to be on the same page with building principals and other leaders in providing information to teachers.



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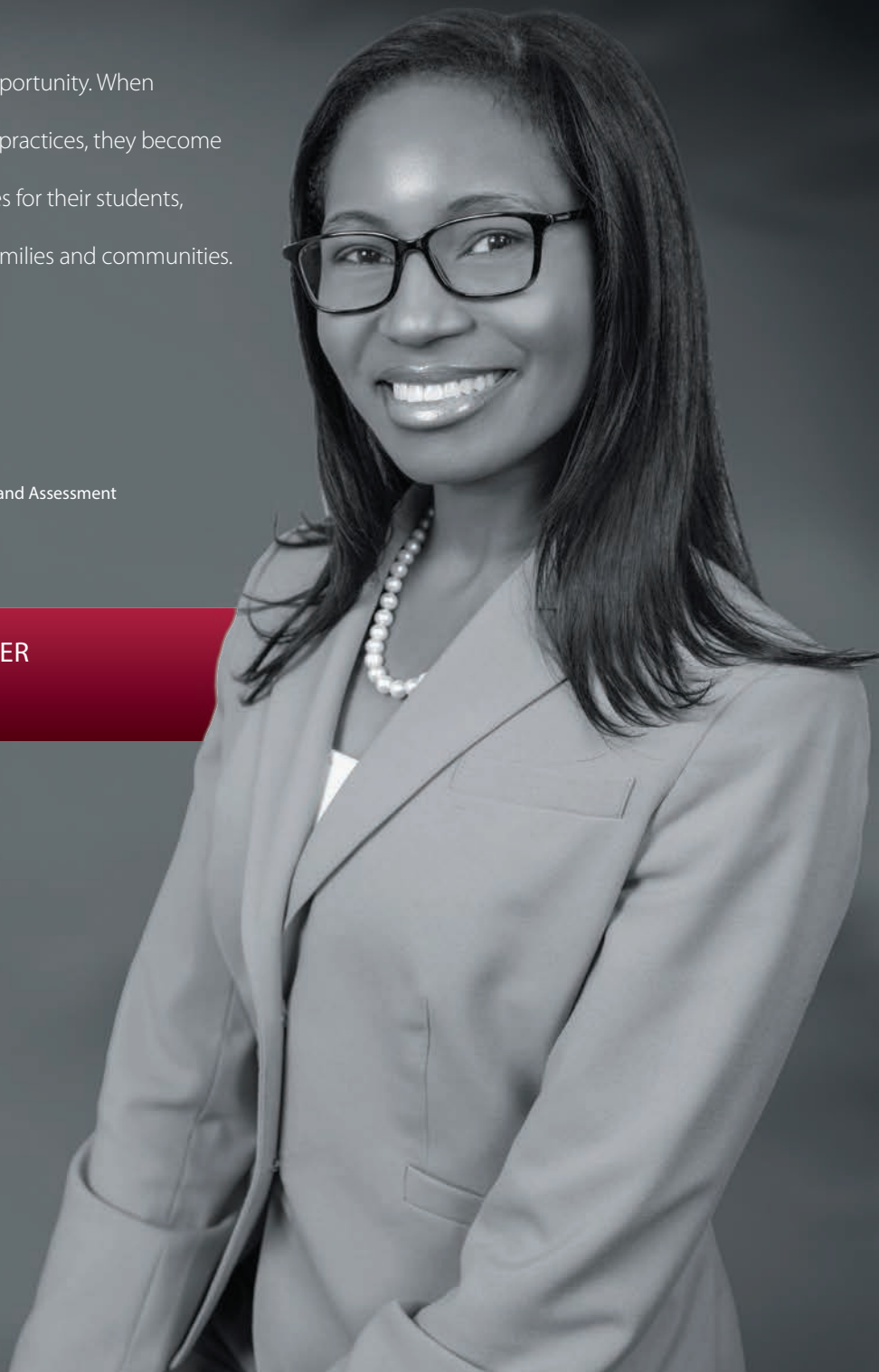
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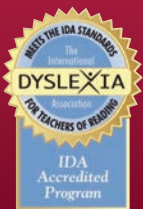
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# Districts of Distinction finalists: Leadership development

DA honors four K-12 school systems as Districts of Distinction runners-up for programs that develop education leaders

By Melissa Ezarik

## LAUNCHING LEADERSHIP ACADEMIES WITH PLAY TO TRIGGER PASSION AND DEVELOP PURPOSE

**Northshore School District (Wash.)**  
[nsd.org](http://nsd.org)

**CHALLENGE:** The expectation is for schools to utilize innovative approaches to education, but officials realized that leadership development was less than a model of innovation. Administrative meetings used a standard “sit and get” format.

**INITIATIVE:** An annual leadership event became the venue for a leadership development twist. The district recruited leaders willing to facilitate breakout sessions for their colleagues incorporating play (with inspiration from the 2021 Tony Wagner book *Creating Innovators: The Making of Young People Who Will Change the World*). Participants explore and select Leadership Academies that align with a personal passion. Team-building activities range from art stations to scavenger hunts to adult games of Hide-and-Seek to 50-yard dashes in T-Rex costumes. Dragon boat training and racing has been the culminating event. Play became the intrinsic motivator for leadership engagement and learning.

**IMPACT:** Providing choice to leaders for leadership development has positively impacted engagement and motivation. They feel empowered to guide their own learning. An embedded “Plan, Do, Study, Act” cycle within and between the sessions allows leaders to immediately apply their learning in their schools or departments.

## #CCSDILSIMPACT

**Cherokee County School District**  
(Ga.)

[cherokeek12.net](http://cherokeek12.net)

**CHALLENGE:** A downward trend in ELA scores and limitations of current

Tier I instruction created an urgency for instructional change. Shifting student demographics further required teacher growth, and an intensive implementation of a process of Rigorous Curriculum Design required an aggressive professional learning focus on instructional strategies and instructional leader development.

**INITIATIVE:** The district added an Instructional Lead Strategist (ILS) at every school, providing an Instructional Coaching certification endorsement and monthly training on district initiatives. Strategists facilitate the effective use of professional learning communities. They build teacher capacity in effective instruction through collaborative guidance and reflective practice, as well as enhance development of relationships among teachers and administrators, respond to teacher needs in real time, and create resources to bolster professional learning. CCSD values the succession of ILS into administrator positions as a talent pathway.

**IMPACT:** ELA assessments for K-8 are on an upward trend. About 3 in 10 strategists have moved into administrator positions since 2018, and 144 teachers have formally prepared to become ILS candidates.

## BUILDING TEAM CAPACITY TO LEAD CHANGE AND INNOVATION

**Elmhurst Community Unit District**  
205 (Ill.)

[elmhurst205.org](http://elmhurst205.org)

**CHALLENGE:** Administrators were leaving the district for positions elsewhere and there had not been an internal promotion at any level in a decade. The superintendent prioritized building the collective leadership capacity of the First Team (all EC-12 and district-level administrators).

**INITIATIVE:** The District took administrators to a model that emphasized growth and innovation, ensured pay was competitive with comparative districts, used the majority of available time for collaborative

professional learning, and invested in the professional learning of First Team through advanced degrees and professional associations. First Team implemented PLCs and actively cultivated a healthy culture.

**IMPACT:** Innovation is flourishing. Eight of the nine administrators hired between the 2015-16 and 2017-18 school years remain in the district; 11 have entered superintendent endorsement programs. The district has had six internal promotions.

## TRANSFORMING INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP: A SYSTEMS LOOK

**Newhall School District (Calif.)**  
[newhallschooldistrict.com/nsd](http://newhallschooldistrict.com/nsd)

**CHALLENGE:** Despite being a high-performing district, Newhall was experiencing a glaring achievement gap between various student groups, specifically English learners and students in English Only classrooms. Officials sought to develop the expertise of principals, teacher leaders and central office leaders around a researched-based instructional framework.

**INITIATIVE:** Instructional Leadership Teams (ILTs) at each site help develop and sustain a learning-focused culture. This includes defining high performance; assessing student, teacher and leader strengths; identifying next steps and plans for improvement; and continually building the capacity of teacher, school and district leaders. The Board approved a new Equity Policy. Site administrators are evaluated using the 4 Dimensions of Instructional Leadership framework and a new teacher evaluation tool is based on the 5 Dimensions of Teaching and Learning Rubric.

**IMPACT:** During the 2018-19 school year, four schools received Innovate Public Schools Awards for high performance of low-income Latino students, and the district was identified as the #1 “Outlier” district in the state based on the academic performance of white and Latino students, regardless of socioeconomic status. **DA**





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Students at Georgia's 4C Academy are producing fresh fruits and vegetables at their school, delivering it to a community in need and learning skills that can prepare them for roles in farming.

**THEIR FUTURE  
IS GROWING**





**HELPING HANDS**—A student receives some guidance on produce selection and growing from Fredando “Fredo” Jackson, executive director of Flint River Fresh who has been a key resource for the Georgia-based garden-to-cafeteria program.

Georgia growers proudly claim their soil is the best in the world. That nutrient-laden dirt combines with a temperate climate to produce a bounty of high-quality fresh fruits and vegetables year-round.

But even in this state brimming with agricultural riches, there are a few areas where that last mile gets closed off. They are the food deserts, where disadvantaged citizens lack access to affordable, high-quality commodities.

One of them is Albany. This city of 75,000 is encircled by pecan farms, yet few of its residents work in agriculture. Part of a region known as the Black Belt, families here have struggled to make ends meet. Nearly 35% hover below the poverty line. More recently, they faced a more pressing crisis—Albany made headlines this summer as one of the nation’s hot spots for COVID-19 infections and deaths.

The disconnect between the growing community and the people who live near those farms has created both economic hardships and a gap in opportunities, especially for students.

A program called GroupUP within the Dougherty County School System is aiming to change that. Instructors and students at the Commodore Conyers College and Career Academy (4C, for short) have been working on a project that not only delivers food to their community but also offers several pathways for them to break into the agriculture industry.

Students from different career tracks—agriculture, construction, marketing and others—have built their own working farm. They designed and built 40 raised-bed garden boxes. They fully irrigated them and put in soil sensors. They created two quarter-acre plots on school grounds where they have composting, honeybees and a plethora of produce.

According to the Academy’s CEO Chris Hatcher, they’ve grown and delivered more than 2,000 pounds of produce into the community during the pandemic, thanks to help from partners in the business community and local colleges.

“It really has been awesome ... and we’re kind of just getting started,” he says. “My kids have never done anything like this before.”

### Getting students on board

The 4C Academy, designed to solve community-wide problems through the collaboration of its 14 different pathways of students, has launched several unique initiatives since Hatcher (a local businessman who went through the Dougherty County system) took the reins four years ago.

Its robotics students developed a Roomba-style device that collects trash from parking lots. Its renewable energy group developed a “sun bar” that charges mobile devices. Its healthcare group created a healthy lifestyles plan that helps serve elementary schools.

Making the connection to food might be its most ambitious project. Though agriculture is part of the Georgia lifestyle for millions, it hasn’t



**SHARE:** [DAmag.me/growing](https://DAmag.me/growing)

More online: Serving up farm to school in five states: Florida, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon and Nebraska

# THEIR FUTURE IS GROWING

been a natural fit for these students, who had virtually no connection to produce and whose families are often cut off from it; more than 80% are economically disadvantaged.

“There was a grocery store about seven years ago that shut down and when it did, the access to our neighbors here in this area to fresh produce just dropped off,” Hatcher says. “So, in honing in on a problem they wanted to solve, we came onto this food insecurity piece.”

Beyond that was an even greater challenge—how to sell a project like this to a group of young students.

“What I learned about this generation is they have an attention span of eight seconds, which is down from 12, which was the generation above them,” Hatcher notes. “They’re incredibly impatient. They’re used to getting everything on

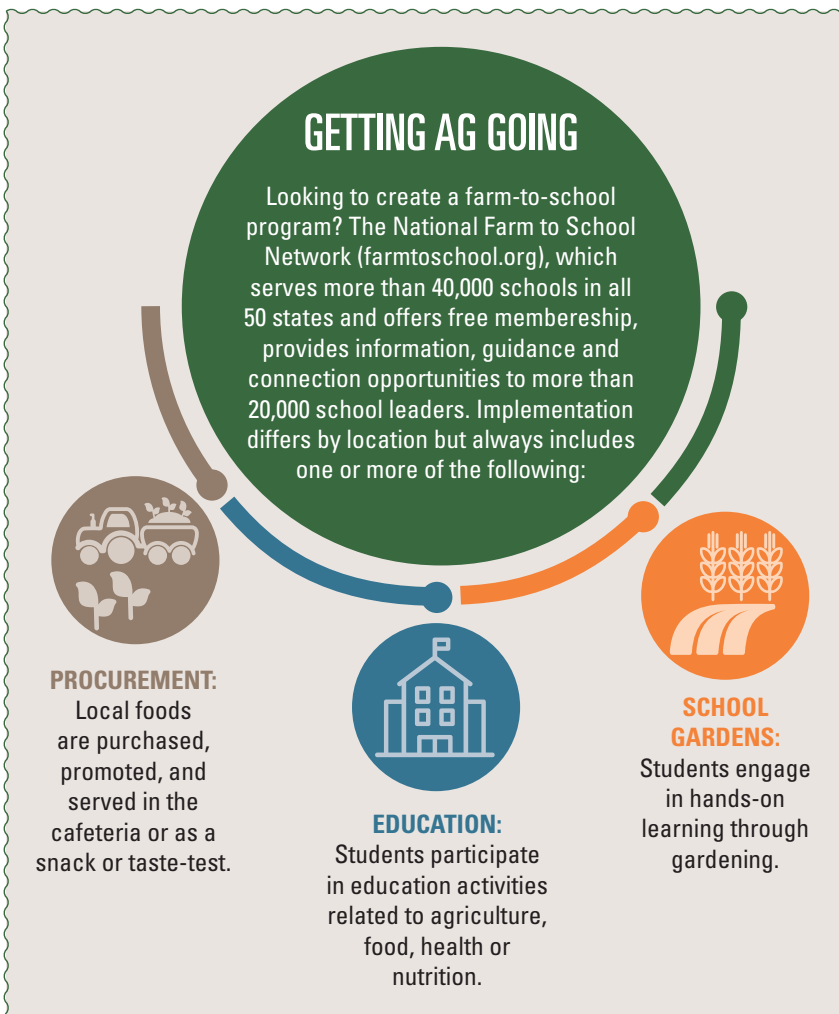
demand, from movies to music to anything from Amazon. They problem-solve with Google. A 50-minute lecture to this group is torture. So when you’ve got this directive from the business community, and you’ve got the realities of the generation over here, we started trying to figure out how we could have the most impact.”

Over the course of two years, educators developed a working farming plan based around Fridays—classroom-free project days at the Academy that feature STEM-based activities along with academic components. The program includes gamified strategies for competition, including “crop clashes” for students to earn points from various projects.

Hatcher and his team were able to secure a plot of land—converting a former football field, about 5 acres worth behind the school—and pulled together



**HEALTHY INITIATIVE**—Students at the 4C Academy get hands-on skills growing a variety of nutritious food items year-round, everything from strawberries to mustard greens to okra.



the various pathways to create a structure for growth. Guidance on growing came from a number of industry leaders, most notably Flint River Fresh Executive Director Fredando “Fredo” Jackson, who has helped bring this project and many others across the state of Georgia to life. Its Small Farmers Distribution Network, in fact, has helped supply six school districts and 40,000 students with fresh produce—more than half a million meals in total each year.

“We learned a lot from our business community: problem-solving skills, critical-thinking skills, communication skills, work-ethic skills, a lot of the soft skills,” Hatcher says. “We had three goals: we wanted to show them all about our state’s No. 1 industry; we wanted to show them how to grow and prepare fresh food; and we wanted to have every one of our projects have community impact.”

**The impact on students, community**  
Oh how they’re growing and serving. Though the pandemic forced consolidation of some areas, the students have been producing a variety of fruits and vegetables on their mini farm. They also built a mobile produce stand, complete with solar panels, to deliver fresh goods to those in need.



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# THEIR FUTURE IS GROWING

“In our fall crops, we’ve got hearty stuff like collards and mustard greens and carrots, potatoes. This summer, we grew squash, zucchini, watermelon, okra, sweet corn,” Hatcher says. “Strawberries have been a big hit. We went to the food bank and a couple of our distributors of food to get it to those who need it. We said, ‘what would you like to see more of and less of?’, so we’re sharpening our pencils to focus on what they want.”

That’s not the only project in the works. Phase II of the GroupUP plan calls for the onsite development of a commercial-scale hydroponics operation that will use robots and drone technology, guided by partnerships with Georgia Tech, Albany State and Fort Valley State universities.

“We’re going to have four different robots in our garden area,” Hatcher says. “Our IT guys are highly motivated about this ag project because now they’re going to be building a robot, a rover that will go between these crops, identifying weeds. Same thing with logistics. It’s one thing to learn about things in a textbook. But when you’ve got a time and a schedule, and you’ve got to figure out how to make it happen, it’s got some relevance to it.”

Hatcher says the convergence of three components of the program—workforce development, a wave of new growing technologies and serving the local community—have fused to provide priceless benefits for his students.

“They’re motivated by causes,” Hatcher says. “Part of our objective here is to find what’s motivating these young people to learn. If they can get behind something and see an impact, it really offers a different level of reward for students.”

Other schools or districts looking to replicate the 4C Academy approach need to be open to banking the time and getting the resources to turn this type of project into a reality. Being a part of a charter school system afforded Hatcher and his team the luxury to create a one-day window each week to make it happen.

“This isn’t the way [our instructors] are accustomed to doing things,” Hatcher says. “We had some friction. I come from

the business community and that’s just part of your world. But we got through that and now I think a lot of instructors really appreciate the structure.”

And then there is the academics embedded in the project to appreciate. He

says, “The students are learning math. They’re learning science ... without even knowing it.” **DA**

*Chris Burt is DA’s associate editor.*

## 5 FIRST STEPS FOR DEVELOPING A LASTING FARM-TO-SCHOOL INITIATIVE

Recommendations from the National Farm to School Network:

### 1. ASSESS WHERE YOU ARE AND WHERE YOU’D LIKE TO BE.

Overall goals could be centered around purchasing and serving local food in school meals, establishing a school garden, integrating food and agriculture within education and learning, or any combination of these.

### 2. FORM A TEAM AND COLLABORATE.

School food service staff, educators, administrators, local farmers and producers, students, parents and caregivers, and community organizations each have an important role in establishing a farm to school initiative.

### 3. ESTABLISH ONE OR TWO ATTAINABLE, SPECIFIC GOALS TO GET STARTED, SUCH AS THE FOLLOWING.

- Identify one existing menu item to purchase from a local farmer.
- Find a farmer or distributor to connect you to local items.
- Plan and promote a special meal featuring local foods.
- Determine training needs to assist food service staff with incorporating fresh food in meals.
- Bring a school garden planning team together.
- Identify curriculum opportunities to connect to school garden learning.
- Bring a farmer or chef into the classroom or cafeteria.
- Plan a farm field trip for students to see where their food comes from.

### 4. LEARN FROM OTHERS.

Besides the National Farm to School Network, resources could include the state School Nutrition Association, the Child Nutrition Program at a state agency (either the Department of Education or, in some instances, Department of Agriculture) and USDA’s Office of Community Food Systems Regional Leads ([fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool](https://fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool)).

### 5. PROMOTE THE PROGRAM IN SCHOOL AND BEYOND, SUCH AS THROUGH THESE PLATFORMS.

- Posters in the cafeteria or classroom
- Bulletin boards throughout the school
- School newsletters (print and electronic)
- School website
- School and PTA events
- Local media



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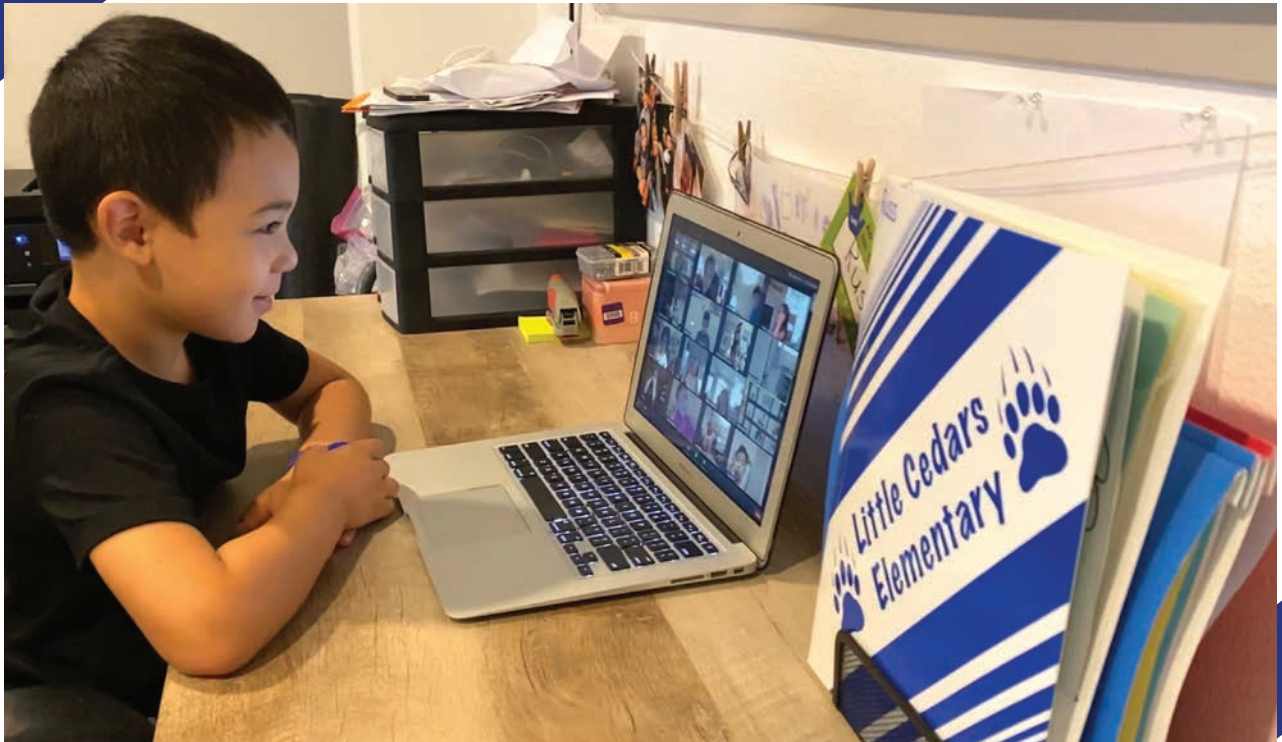
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# ONLINE INNOVATIONS



**VIRTUAL SUPPORT**—In-person SEL approaches translate well to online learning.

District leaders discover new approaches in shifting academics and social-emotional supports to the virtual world

By Matt Zalaznick

Allowing students to solve real-world problems that are relevant to their everyday lives is key to keeping them engaged in online learning.

With that in mind, educators in North Carolina's Rowan-Salisbury School System are assigning projects that students can work on outside of synchronous online sessions, Superintendent Lynn Moody says.

The district is offering ongoing professional development and has also created a library of resources, videos and instructional strategies that teachers can tap into when assigning these projects.

Students can also apply to a local Rotary Club to get funding for their projects. For example, a student could

get funding to set up a social justice website.

"The idea is to incentivize students' passions," Moody says. "When you talk about equity in a community, some students have the means to do these projects but, often the students who are closest to the need in



Superintendent  
Lynn Moody

the community are the least likely to have the funds."

Project-based learning in Rowan-Salisbury is one example among the many ways districts are innovating to shift academics, social-emotional learn-

ing and other approaches to the new reality of hybrid learning.

## How to create a virtual academy

Darlington County School District in rural South Carolina saw an overwhelming response when educators there launched a virtual academy to enhance online learning this school year.

During spring distance learning, not all students were able to interact sufficiently with teachers, says Carla Jefferson, director of the virtual academy.

Administrators were concerned that, heading in 2020-21, some students might leave the Title I district for homeschooling or other virtual schools



**REMOTE FOCUS**—Solving real-world problems keeps students engaged in learning, whether it's in-person or online.

## Where to find and share ideas during COVID

Are your students developing their own project-based learning ideas? Are anti-racism and social-emotional learning core components of your curriculum during this COVID-disrupted year?

Guiding district leaders in implementing and sharing these and other innovative instructional strategies is the goal of The Canopy (DAMag.me/canopy), a new project launched by the Clayton Christensen Institute think tank and nonprofit Transcend.

"School leaders can get access to others trying to do something really new in this moment," says Chelsea Waite, an education research fellow at the Christensen Institute who's leading The Canopy project. They can learn from others who can provide a light forward to implement student-centered and innovative models during COVID-19."

For instance, an administrator could explain how a school or district turned SEL from a small component of the school day into a core part of the curriculum, she says.

Educators can visit The Canopy website to search by 80-plus tags and practices—such as social-emotional

learning—to find ideas for how other schools are embedding the approach into the curriculum this year.

Users can also navigate the site by type of school—such as high school or charter. This site can be filtered by geography and demographics, as well.

School profiles are being built out as administrators add details about their approaches, Waite says.



**IDEA EXCHANGE**—The Canopy projects lets educators share innovative initiatives.

despite Darlington County's three-year-old 1-to-1 program.

"After COVID hit, we felt like we did a fairly good job of proving access, resources and support to students," Jefferson says. "Coming back, we knew parents would be apprehensive about sending children to school."

Jefferson and her team spent the summer providing professional development for teachers and designing the virtual academy, which opened in late August.

About 130 teachers—using a vacated elementary as one of their bases for delivering online learning—are now holding synchronous classes on a schedule that mimics a regular school day.

Time has been carved out for teachers to meet one-on-one with students and conduct small group instruction. They will use data to determine which students are most in need of interventions, Jefferson says.

They will assign offline and independent work, which should also allow students to demonstrate learning through arts, coding and other more creative methods.

"We cannot expect students to stare at a screen for six to eight hours a day," says Jefferson.

## Shifting SEL online

It's not just academics that are being re-envisioned for the virtual world.

Shifting social-emotional learning online means high school students in Maryland's Anne Arundel County Public Schools participate in twice-weekly virtual wellness blocks.

The topics for these sessions are developed by students, who this year have told administrators they want time to connect with each other and learn stress management techniques, says Ryan Voegtlin, the district's director of student services.

The 85,000-student district, which started the school year with full online learning, has infused social-emotional learning throughout remote instruction in all grades. For example,



teachers in all grade levels also sponsor virtual clubs that provide students with more opportunities to stay connected.

In middle school, students engage in twice-weekly mindfulness sessions focused on stress management and in regular “community meetings.”

“To get kids in engaged, we start with low-stakes conversations, like ‘What’s your favorite meal?’” Voegtlin says. “As they become more comfortable with each other, they develop higher-level conversational skills and the ability to talk about topics that are more challenging.”

In elementary school, students also engage in virtual community-building circles designed to teach them how to have productive conversations, he says.

At the same time, the district’s counselors and social workers have been provided mental health care via telehealth sessions.

“We have told teachers that if something concerning is going on—if a kid is not engaging in online learning, let a school counselor know to reach out to kids and parents,” he says. “When we’re virtual, we have to work a lot harder to figure out what’s going on.”

## Essentials of online SEL success

The key for administrators in developing an effective social-emotional learning program—whether it’s online or in-person—is making sure that the teachers leading it are taking care of their own wellbeing.

Though most teachers have a sense of what it takes to stay healthy, administrators can still offer daily reminders about eating well and getting enough sleep, exercise and movement throughout

the day, says Tricia Maas, a research scientist at the nonprofit SEL provider, Committee for Children.

“One part of wellbeing that’s not as intuitive is making sure you are building your connections with others,” Maas says. “When a lot of us think about self-care, we don’t think about tending to relationships.”

While in-person interaction is seen as a key to SEL, many of the core principles—such as self-care—remain the same when schools are in full online-learning mode.

Administrators should therefore continue to support teachers’ participation in online professional learning communities. These groups allow educators to reflect on their practices and share concerns and ideas.

Second, administrators can set clear expectations for online SEL with teachers, while teachers can take similar steps to establish routines with their students.

Administrators and teachers can work together to embed SEL into instruction, such as by holding virtual morning meetings so educators can check in on the wellbeing of students each day.

The next step is for teachers to collect data about SEL so they can keep better track of how students are feeling, plus determine which practices are most effective, Maas says.

“Oftentimes, folks in education think of data and see spreadsheets and numbers,” Maas says. “Data can just be asking kids every morning how they are doing and providing opportunities for feedback. Everyone is giving out data informally, all the time.”

Ultimately, COVID is forcing an “involuntarily reset” for an education system that for many years was focused solely on academic achievement, Maas says.

“It’s never been OK to ignore students’ social-emotional needs but it’s never been quite so obviously irresponsible as it is today,” she adds. “This situation is pushing the system to break free of tracks it’s been on.” **DA**

*Matt Zalaznick is DA’s senior writer.*



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# The changing landscape of college and career readiness



## Q&A with Amy Reitz, Senior Vice President of Product, Hobsons

**As schools and districts focus on the whole student and getting them prepared for college, career, and life, there is an evolving focus on career readiness. What does the landscape for career readiness in K12 look like today?**

With an increased emphasis on the importance of aligning all types of pathways to drive career outcomes for students, schools and districts are required to expose students to a broader range of post-high school opportunities besides college. While many students choose college after high school, it's not the only path worth considering. So, schools and districts now must ensure that students have the chance to explore all of their options. Additionally, concerns about higher education affordability are making pathway exploration alternatives more desirable for students.

We know that every student will take their own unique path to a career that is the best fit for them. Whatever path students take after high school—whether enrolling in a trade school, community college, or four-year institution; entering the workforce; enlisting in the military; or a combination of these—the end goal is to pursue a fulfilling and meaningful career. Ensuring that all students are career-ready when they leave high school means providing career exploration and career learning opportunities as early as middle school and throughout the high school years.

In the 2020 Naviance Student Survey, 66% of students stated they were on the path leading from high school to a four-year college and then to a career. The other sizable 34% had different plans: 12% said they would attend a community or technical college before transferring to a four-year institution; 8% planned to attend a community or technical college before entering the workforce; and 5% planned to pursue their career

through a combination of the military and college. The remaining 9% said they weren't sure.<sup>1</sup> Career readiness education and training are vital in supporting students, no matter which pathway they choose.

These same students were asked to identify the primary obstacles standing in the way of their first-choice pathway. The top responses were academic scores and finances, which is not surprising. Coming in third place was the fear of making the wrong career and/or pathway choice. There is a need to provide students with career education throughout their schooling so they can make well informed decisions about their futures and be confident in the path they have chosen.

### **How and why should we expand our definition of college and career readiness?**

Traditionally, college and career readiness in K-12 has focused on academic skills, career knowledge, and college knowledge. Students have prepared for tests, explored careers, conducted college and scholarship research, and ultimately, applied to college. While all of these steps are vital to students' future success, they are not enough.

The goal of building career knowledge is to develop career readiness by the time students graduate from high school. No matter what postsecondary path students choose, guiding them through the process of self-discovery will expand their horizons of career possibilities and help them make well-informed decisions. Giving them opportunities to explore career clusters, understand the meaning and structure of various jobs, and conduct multiple career searches will help them build a solid understanding of the training necessary to reach future goals. From there, career goal-setting

<sup>1</sup>Naviance Student Survey, 2020

## Whatever path students take after high school—whether enrolling in a trade school, community college, or four-year institution; entering the workforce; enlisting in the military; or a combination of these—the end goal is to pursue a fulfilling and meaningful career.

and specific career-fit conversations can lead to further career knowledge.

As students progress through their schooling, providing access to more career learning opportunities—such as work-based learning—can build on this foundational career knowledge. Work-based learning opportunities will help students connect how what they are learning in school today will directly impact their futures

### Why are more states requiring or providing funding for work-based learning opportunities in K-12?

There are 6.5 million unfilled jobs in the U.S. right now.<sup>2</sup> Many employers across the country report that there is a skills gap for middle-skilled jobs, with an insufficient number of applicants having the qualifications, training, or education needed to fill those roles.

Many states have recognized that work-based learning is key for preparing the next generation of the workforce and closing the skills gap. Work-based learning requirements are expanding and gaining support, with 35 states requiring and/or funding work-based learning experiences for K-12 students.<sup>3</sup>

This presents a great opportunity for schools and districts to connect learning to life. As students uncover their strengths and interests in school and begin aligning these to career interests, work-based learning provides real-world career learning experiences that will best prepare them for success in the workforce. Additionally, research shows that a blend of techni-

cal, academic, and employability skills best prepare students for fast-growing and high-earning jobs in the future.<sup>4</sup>

### Is there demand from students for more career learning opportunities? If so, what types of career learning opportunities are students looking for?

Students definitely are seeking more opportunities to explore and experience careers while in school. Many schools and districts are looking for ways to expose students to more career exploration and real-world career learning opportunities, like work-based learning, to meet their students' needs.

We asked students about their perceptions of the career learning opportunities available to them through their school. Over half of the students (55%) stated that there were too few opportunities offered in their school. Just 41% of students thought they had adequate offerings, while 4% of students stated they had more than enough. When we asked students what opportunities they wanted more access to, they overwhelmingly expressed interest in more hands-on experiences like internships, job shadows, and career field trips.<sup>5</sup>

There is still work to be done across the country to meet students' needs. The good news is that many schools and districts employ passionate educators working diligently to ensure that all students graduate high school ready to be successful in their futures. At Naviance, we continue to innovate and partner with over 13,000 schools and districts to fulfill this goal.

<sup>2</sup>US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020

<sup>3</sup>National Skills Coalition, 2017

<sup>4</sup>Orrell, 2018

<sup>5</sup>Naviance Student Survey, 2020





Dear education leader,

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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 30 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,  
Eric Weiss  
Executive Editor

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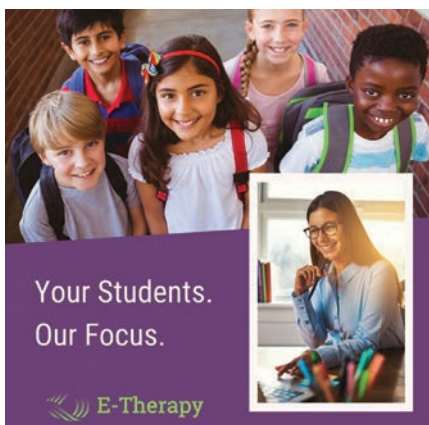
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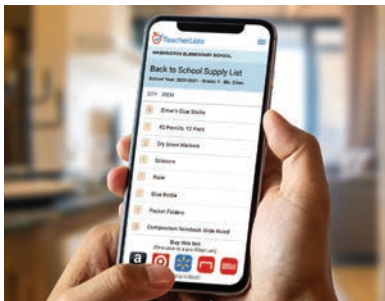


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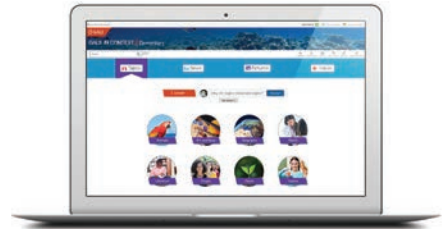


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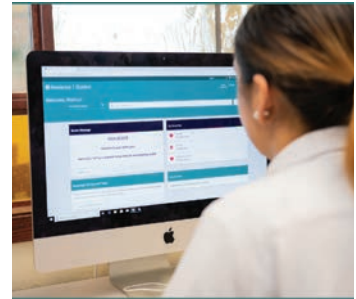


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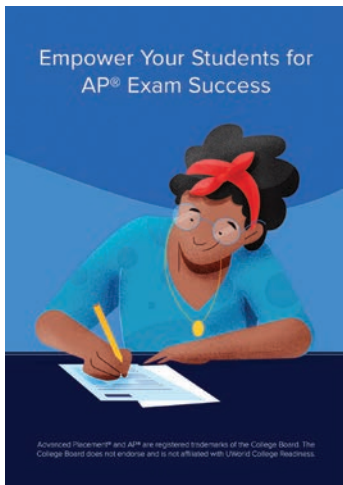
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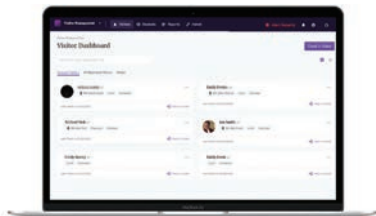
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## The ABCs of preventing and mitigating DDoS attacks

The ubiquity of remote learning platforms has put educational institutions squarely in hackers' crosshairs. Here's how to protect your network.

By Barrett Lyon

It wasn't that long ago that kids looking to get out of a big test or fessing up to the fact that they didn't have their homework ready to turn in might have pulled the fire alarm to cause total disruption and maybe, if luck was on their side, an early dismissal.

But in 2020, many classrooms are virtual, and there's a new fire alarm to take down learning platforms. Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks, where a target and/or its nearby infrastructure is overwhelmed with internet traffic, are proving just as adept in getting students out of classwork and potentially earning the perpetrator/s a sizable ransom.

### Bueller, Bueller

The recent arrest of a Miami Dade school student is just one such example of a student-initiated DDoS attack—and it's going to get worse if history is any predictor. Attackers, likely students at the moment, can easily shut down learning platforms or just as easily find a teacher's IP address to take that instructor's computer offline. Because in many local communities everyone uses a single internet provider (think Comcast or another smaller provider), it's not too difficult to envision the chaos if that falls, too.

Now, with the onslaught of low-security distance learning platforms being implemented, coupled with educators using their "security soft" home networks, it's a recipe for mischief and e-learning disaster, impacting institution levels from elementary to graduate schools. Schools are now facing the same types of threats and attacks that enterprises have, but un-

**DDoS attacks require someone who is available to respond, even on weekends, on school breaks and in the wee hours of the morning.**

like businesses, the sudden switch to new technologies means they may not be as secure as their business brethren.

The switch to remote learning has shone a light on the problems already created by tight IT budgets and while there's no going back, there are steps school IT teams can, and should, be taking to secure their classrooms beyond the four walls of their school buildings.

DDoS attacks are unique and require someone who not only knows how to respond but is available to respond whenever they occur. That means not just during classroom hours but on weekends, on school breaks and in the wee hours of the morning. It's also critical that all third-party vendor agreements are updated and that contact information, especially for your internet service provider (ISP), is at-hand.

IT teams should leverage platforms such as Google and its Google Cloud Armor to provide a more robust service layer.

Perhaps most critically, schools need a robust and comprehensive security solution. There are a handful of solutions on the market so be sure you do your homework and choose one that provides the following:

- **A real-time approach.** You need to know what's going on at the moment

it happens, not after your network has been overwhelmed. Look for a solution that leverages your routing equipment and current bandwidth to automatically remediate and lessen the cost and impact of a DDoS attack.

- **Early threat detection.** The best defense is a good offense and early warnings are among the best ways to prevent a full-on attack. You want a solution that is continuously monitoring your website traffic in order to detect potentially harmful patterns and block them before they have the chance to do damage. The right system should be capable of detecting and remediating a variety of attacks before you ever reach the point of shutting down.

- **Easy implementation.** In order for a solution to work effectively, it needs to be easy-to-use and cost-effective to implement. Solutions that are complicated or require too much onboarding pave the way for shadow IT, and ultimately, a security breach. Look for a solution that integrates easily with your existing ISP to send BGP/flowspec announcements to vendors upstream -- you want traffic blocked before it has the chance to overwhelm your network.

- **An "all clear ahead" view.** You can't protect against what you can't see. Whatever solution you choose should provide a single-pane view into traffic flow and assets across the entire network. **DA**

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*Barrett Lyon's experience and successes have led to collaboration with Tier 1 and Tier 2 carriers, as well as national security agencies in North America and Europe to mitigate and track hundreds of DDoS attacks. He holds multiple technology patents and is a pivotal subject in the best-selling cybersecurity book, Fatal System Error.*





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## While pandemic planning, don't forget about the principal

School districts must call upon principals as thought partners, collaborators and allies in the revisioning of school in the COVID-19 era.

By Erica Jordan-Thomas

When I was a principal, I would cringe every time someone made a joke about “being sent to the principal’s office.” It bothered me when people viewed me as the school’s disciplinarian. This was so far from my reality. I was my school’s CEO. I was the quarterback.

My leadership mattered—but you don’t have to take my word for it. Research shows that outside of direct classroom instruction, school leadership has the most influence on student learning. That’s true in so-called “normal” circumstances, and it’s doubly so today.

Simply put, school principals are the best-situated to ensure success during this time of crisis. Every school system in our country is creating its own blueprint for leading for equity and redefining school. Leaders are faced with complex decision-making.

Complex decisions are necessary when the context holds many unknowns, unpredictability is high and the path forward is unclear. But complex decisions are not insurmountable.

Researchers David Snowden and Mary Booth share that complex decision-making requires a probe-sense-respond approach. Leaders must adopt a stance of experimentation to “probe,” to be incredibly present to their shifting context to “sense” the path forward, and to identify the best “response.”

As school districts are doing this, they need CEOs and quarterbacks to carry the community through this unprecedented year. Here are three of the many critical hats the principal wears

that districts should leverage as they face complex decisions:

### **1. Principals are community leaders.**

Every decision a principal makes will transcend the school building into homes, recreation centers, businesses and churches. During my time as principal, our community was faced with an incident of police brutality. It sparked days of protests and a citywide curfew. I organized quickly with our school staff to partner with our students and provide them the opportunity to exercise citizenship and advocacy.

Principals in deep partnership with their community will come to know the warmth and cultural assets their community has to offer. They will also come face-to-face with inequities. For districts to address the compounded inequities unveiled by COVID-19, they must be in tune with the community’s needs and experiences.

### **2. Principals are integrators.**

School districts are dynamic systems comprised of many departments. During a pandemic, every department is faced with complex decision-making and must determine how to shift to meet the system’s needs. For every shift that impacts a school, the principal is notified.

Principals play the critical role of integrators, processing all the system’s information to make meaning for their school communities, and establishing streamlined systems of communication. School districts involving principals in strategic planning will be key in managing system dynamics toward change and away from chaos.

### **3. Principals are a compass for culture.**

As a principal, I led our school through implementing 1-on-1 technology: every

student received a Chromebook. There were many layers to the change. Teaching and learning online was new. It was my role to manage the change by setting a culture that would push us through, while providing enough support to prevent us from drowning in the process.

At the end of this school year, staff and families will look back and either think about the challenges, or think about how their school overcame them. The strategic and intentional leadership of the principal in shaping the school’s culture will make the difference—determining to what extent members of a school community feel connected.

### **Let them lead**

How can system leaders amplify the role of the principal this year? The principal’s role as a community leader, integrator, and culture compass makes them the most powerful leader within a school system and the best positioned to carry school districts through a pandemic.

School systems must lean into decentralizing power and elevate the leadership of principals in their discussions and implementation. Districts must call upon principals as thought partners, collaborators, and allies in the revisioning of school in the COVID-19 era. They will have to collaboratively set the vision and direction, then get out of the way and let principals lead. Only then will “being sent to the principal’s office” carry the same importance as “taking a meeting with the CEO.” **DA**

*Erica Jordan-Thomas, a doctoral candidate in education leadership at Harvard Graduate School of Education, is completing her doctoral residency on the Education & Society program team at The Aspen Institute.*



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