DA
District Administration®
January/February 2021

FETC 2021: VIRTUALLY INSPIRED

Fresh insights, resources and training at the first-ever virtual FETC **14**

Positive spin on remote delivery
Student ownership of projects, research **4**

Distance PD 101
How to keep learning interesting for teachers **12**

5 "sub club" ideas
Utilize substitute teachers effectively throughout COVID **28**

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Superintendents share their impactful approaches to support career readiness.
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Thought leaders drove FETC 2021

What a year 2020 was! Now, here we are with nearly a year of major disruptions to our efforts to educate America's children.

Recently, DA's Future of Education Technology Conference, virtual for the first time, saw thousands of education professionals come together for four days of insightful keynotes and many other learning opportunities. The keynote speakers brought focus to the many challenges COVID has brought, and ideas for overcoming them.

Superintendent **Jill Siler** offered a highly engaging talk about transforming leadership challenges into positive opportunities. Page 15.

Marcus Buckingham, an expert on talent at work, kicked off the conference with a presentation about what educators and administrators can do to increase their resilience in the face of today's unprecedented challenges. Page 16.

Advancing equity during the challenges of COVID was the focus of **Lisa N. Williams**, who urged educators to stay focused on advancing access for our most marginalized students. Page 18.

Eric Sheninger spoke about preparing for the unknown, and how the silver lining resulting from COVID may be that we take the necessary risks that we've hesitated on for years. Page 19.

What will the Biden presidency mean for education policies in 2021 was the topic that **Julia Martin**, Esq., discussed. She shared her predictions on everything from new funding streams to policy issues. Page 20.

Future Ready's **Thomas C. Murray** and **Brianna Hodges** looked at the four keys to effective leading and coaching in any environment that are needed now. Page 21.

Technology expert **Lenny Schad** focused on cybersecurity and the imperative that district leaders must accept a new reality: Cybersecurity is not an IT issue, it is one that needs to have shared ownership. Page 22.

Peter Gorman shared the elements of an aligned system that the highest performing school districts use to increase student achievement at scale. Page 24.

And for the first time we offered the **Top Ed Tech Products of the Year** awards. Fifteen forward-thinking companies were honored for their innovations in the education space. Page 23.

—Eric Weiss, executive editor

Reasons to visit DistrictAdministration.com

5 things for leaders to know in 2021

Economic instability and systemic racism will be two major issues superintendents will have to tackle during COVID recovery.
bit.ly/3nxa6Y0

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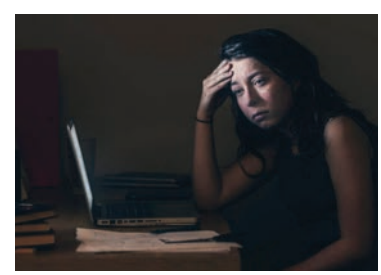

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Digital self-harm on the rise?

Troubling behavior is being red-flagged by researchers who see it occurring among middle and high school students.
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In-person trendsetter

Here's how Florida's Martin County School District provided face-to-face instruction for more than 70% of its students in a state with high coronavirus rates.
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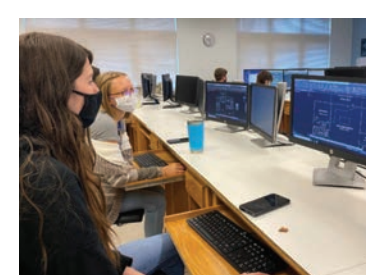

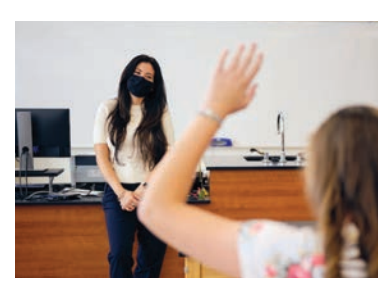

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10 COVID recovery keys

Educators can maintain rigorous academic expectations while offering students flexibility.
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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 (561) 622-6520 ext. 8696

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

Sales Manager, Amy Olimpo aolimpo@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

Vice President, Marketing and Communications Missy Ciocca

REPRINTS/PERMISSIONS

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

SUBSCRIPTIONS

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

HOW TO REACH US

360 Hiatt Drive
Palm Beach Gardens, FL 33418
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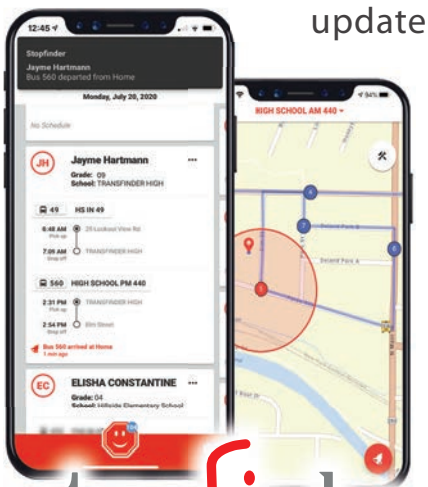

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Remote learning shift helped boost student-led learning

Report shows positive outcomes from giving students more ownership in projects, research

Students are taking increased ownership of their learning while educators and parents are embracing the tech tools and strategies helping to make that happen, concludes the final report released in Project Tomorrow's Speak Up Research Project, "Sponsoring Student Ownership of Learning." The study of more than 137,000 K-12 students, parents and educators, from Project Tomorrow and Blackboard, shows how COVID has shaped new education paths, particularly as students have been allowed to explore and research on their own.

"As the classroom shifted to the kitchen table, parents saw firsthand the power of digital and mobile tools in driving student-led learning," said Julie Evans, chief researcher and CEO of Project Tomorrow. "This research illuminates why even as we return to a more traditional in-person classroom experience, technology will continue to underpin student-led learning."

The pandemic forced educators to rethink instruction and opened the door for more student-led learning. That, researchers say, has fueled more interest from students to ratchet up their desire to learn outside of school. Students used digital tools more in the spring of 2020 than they had in the past six years.

"The path toward an educational experience highly directed by each student individually is beginning to take shape," said Christina Fleming, vice president for Blackboard K-12, adding that this research offers insights for how to harness shared experiences and "develop environments that put learners in the driver's seat of their educational journey."

PHOTO CREDIT: GETTY IMAGES, JGI / JAMIE GRILL

Giving students control of their destiny

From selecting courses to researching topics through videos, many students welcome the choice and freedom of self-pacing. As researchers note, students enjoy having "control over the what, when and how of learning."

Despite the obvious negative outcomes presented by the pandemic, favor seems to have shifted toward student-led learning among school leaders. More than 70% of principals say mobile learning "results in students taking greater responsibility for their own learning."

Parents too, having seen firsthand the development and savvy research skills being employed by their kids at home, say technology has fueled greater ownership. Nearly 50% say their child is now working on their own, compared with 33% before the pandemic.

Two-thirds of students said they appreciated being able to do a self-paced tutorial on their own and love watching how-to videos. The use of non-traditional forms of learning are piquing their interests—social media (55%), TED Talks (38%) and voice-enabled assistants such as Siri and Alexa (49%). What do they value most, according to the research? Active involvement in projects (70%), building or creating (55%) and problem-solving (49%).

Removing barriers to student-led learning

Only 18% of teachers would let students choose their own self-directed paths of learning. Researchers recommend PD to help educators to embrace the potential to increase student ownership.

In hybrid environments, teachers have had to instruct both in-person and distance learning students in a synchronous way. But that could be hampering student ownership— forcing more traditional, teacher-led instruction at times when students could be developing those self-directed skills, the report notes. Students are not often inspired to think critically in these situations or with regular "homework assignments."

By contrast, students operating in an asynchronous model may use better research skills and turn to different digital tools when given that freedom.

More than two-thirds of teachers and administrators say that digital tools "increase engagement and promote self-directed learning." As Evans points out, this lean to student-led learning is not likely to change even after the pandemic. —*Chris Burt*

Developing New and Innovative Approaches to Support Career Readiness

Leading superintendents highlight how their districts are creating greater workforce development, career readiness and real-world work experience for students

District Administration **recently hosted an online roundtable discussion with superintendents from across the country about how their districts are including workforce development and real-world work experience in their career readiness programs. The district leaders highlighted their unique approaches to supporting multiple career pathways and the importance of developing community and business partnerships to help students succeed after high school.**

HOSTED BY
Pete Gorman
Superintendent-in-Residence
District Administration

(Top) Wichita students work on an engine as part of their career and technical education coursework. (Bottom) Everett Public Schools in Washington offers students a medical and health career pathway.

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Joris M. Ray
Superintendent
Shelby County Schools
Memphis, Tennessee

Diana L. Greene
Superintendent
Duval County Public Schools
Jacksonville, Florida

Chad E. Gestson
Superintendent
Phoenix Union High
School District
Phoenix, Arizona

How do you approach career planning in your district?

Ray: We look at career planning as being important from K through 12. We start exposing students to career paths by having guest speakers beginning in elementary school. We have a transition program in fifth grade, where our students visit a career location and spend time with local leaders to help decide on what they want to pursue and narrow down their career interests.

In the seventh and eighth grades we use Naviance to do a complete career skills inventory to help students develop a four-year plan. At the high school level, we have developed a great relationship with our chamber of commerce, so students can learn from local business leaders. We also have a strong partnership with FedEx, through which 50 to 75 juniors and seniors are able to learn in internships by shadowing top executives, and have the opportunity to not only get a job there after graduation, but have FedEx pay their college tuition while they are employed.

We are so excited about our partnerships with our community, and the chance to provide students with opportunities to pursue careers.

Greene: We have multiple pathways and programs in our district to expose students to career planning. We're very proud of our work with our local chamber of commerce, which is connected to a regional collaborative partnership called JAXUSA, that works with our career and technical programs to help students learn about career pathways that are available right here in Jacksonville. We tell our students that whatever your post-secondary dreams are, we want you to fulfill them and then come back here to Jacksonville and be part of this community.

Our community knows that the better educated our students are, the more we can grow as a community. So these partnerships are very important to help our students understand the opportunities that are available to them.

Gestson: We are a high school district made up of 22 high schools. Every freshman starts by creating a "four-plus-four" plan, for their high school years and the four years after high school. One of the priorities of our strategic plan is college and career readiness, so every pathway that we built across our system could lead to either college or career.

We have robust partnerships with business and industry because that is where the expertise and resources lie, as well as opportunities for externships or internships. Just recently, we launched a massive citywide partnership between our schools, the Greater Phoenix Chamber of Commerce and some local foundations, called ElevateEdAZ, which will provide even more resources and planning for our seniors.

I often remind people that the point of college is to be prepared for a career, so everything we do must be connected to both college and career.

Saltzman: Building relationships with stakeholders is so important to this, you must engage with a broad spectrum of people. We meet monthly with business partners and work with our local chambers of commerce. We had the first student case of COVID-19 in the entire country here in our district, and we have been fully remote since March. So, it has been very challenging, but also fruitful, because of the buy-in from our community. There is extremely high unemployment in this area, so it is crucial that we get our kids to learn about careers, embrace a work ethic and work partnerships, and come back to this community.

Thompson: We built college and career readiness into our strategic plan. We've made it a priority that all our students are college or career ready, and we have policies to support that goal. For example, every high school student in our district is required to take a CTE

course and a financial literacy course, and we now have a Director of College and Career Readiness for our district.

We approach those two paths of college and career in the same way; we want our students to have the skills to be prepared for either one after high school.

What role does your state play, in terms of mandates or legislation?

Johnson: Our state has done significant work instituting policies to ensure that post-secondary preparedness becomes a focus for schools and districts across Tennessee. There is a Ready Graduate indicator that is part of our state accountability framework, which simply means that all students must take at least four early post-secondary opportunities, which could be CTE courses, AP/AB certification, or achieving an ACT score of 21 can serve as a replacement.

As a result of the policy change, school systems have been motivated to think differently about how we approach our work. At the system level, college and career readiness is part of our strategic plan, and three of our Focus Five Performance Targets are post-secondary related. It has transformed the way we approach our coursework and our partnerships with post-secondary institutions.

Daugherty: Here in Virginia, our state has prioritized not only raising academic achievement, but also improving career education. And so, our district has focused on removing all the obstacles in the way of students in dual enrollment, IB or AP courses, and connecting them to our CTE programs.

We want our students to understand how to get the best of both worlds, by getting a strong education academically but also gaining career skills that they can use in the future. We require all our schools, K through 12, to have business partners through our chambers of commerce, which have been very supportive. We've also added dual enrollment courses to our CTE programs, through nearby John Tyler Community College.

We're working to meet or even surpass those state mandates, but also fulfill the mission of our strategic plan by emphasizing with our students that they can go through our schools with strong academics and gain career skills at the same time.

How do you connect college planning with career planning?

Thompson: We are starting an internal internship program within our district, by having students intern with different school district departments like finance, operations, facilities and others. We also created an Aviation pathway that begins in middle school, where students can gain aviation industry certifications and take college courses at WSU Tech while in high school. We have a partnership with Spirit AeroSystems, which is headquartered here in Wichita, so our aviation students can interview and gain employment there right after graduation. We're trying to make these pathways lead to a successful end through these partnerships.

Ray: Our ReadyGrad program prepares students for success whether they are planning to pursue a degree or enter the workforce after graduation. Students can earn college credits and obtain industry certifications while still in high school, giving them a significant advantage when it comes to getting scholarships, internships or career opportunities. Our program has grown from 250 certifications last year when I first started as superintendent, to nearly 3,000 certifications awarded this past spring. Our governor's claim to fame was being from a college and career technical program himself, so he believes in CCTE and has provided funding. We have a relationship with

Ian Saltzman
Superintendent
Everett Public Schools
Everett, Washington

Bryan Johnson
Superintendent
Hamilton County Schools
Chattanooga, Tennessee

Merv Daugherty
Superintendent
Chesterfield County Public Schools
Chesterfield, Virginia

Alicia Thompson
Superintendent
Wichita Public Schools
Wichita, Kansas

our local Memphis Light, Gas and Water, and give students unique experiences in a variety of technical career fields. Our school board has invested heavily with an $8 million investment in this program, and it has paid great dividends.

Greene: We have created academies in some of our CTE programs, which require dual enrollment. So students are learning career skills while gaining college credit at the same time. One of our best is an Advanced Manufacturing academy, which has a partnership with Johnson & Johnson. These academies connect students with real careers and corporations that could potentially hire them, and that gives students the inspiration and motivation to work harder and raise their achievement.

Daugherty: It is so important to increase students' awareness about what college and career learning is, and what their future could hold. Too many students think that they'll do one or two things in life, but as we tell our juniors and seniors, 40% of all college students change their major in the first year. So, the question is, whichever path you take in life, how are you preparing yourself now to continue to gain knowledge?

Saltzman: We have been working to build work apprenticeships in our area. We also have seven colleges within our district's 80-mile radius, so we're trying to incorporate them into our business partnerships and build connections with them. It is so important to weave together career readiness with college readiness.

How do you rely on local business and industry to support work-based learning experiences?

Gestson: One unique partnership we have developed is with our local trade unions, which are providing paid internships. Students in our carpentry program, for example, work towards a certificate while in high school and when they graduate, are first in line for apprenticeships. We've had tremendous interest in the construction trades.

We serve primarily low-income youth and so it's important to us that if they choose a career after high school, that it is a high wage career. We also launched a computer programming high school, offering programs in coding, cy-

(L) A student in the Hamilton County Schools drives an electric car in the Chattanooga Green Prix race. The car was built by students in the eLab at Red Bank High School. (R) Students in the Duval County Public Schools gain career skills as part of the district's Culinary Arts Academy.

bersecurity, networking and software development. We have many unique partnerships within that school, some of which offer paid opportunities. We prioritize paid internship opportunities, but we also prioritize working with companies that are willing to hire our students and pay their college tuition once hired.

Johnson: We're very blessed to have an extremely engaged local business community and chamber of commerce, and an organization called Chattanooga 2.0 that spearheads our work. We launched Future Ready Institutes, which are career academy schools within schools, and we have over 19 of them in our high schools at this point. Local entities like Blue Cross, Unum, our local power board and others have provided a quarter-million-dollar funding commitment, which has been transformational. But it's not just about dollars, what is so important is their willingness to have students on site and to hire them in the future.

Our local public education foundation has had a program in partnership with Blue Cross called Step Up, through which businesses throughout our community offer internships to a couple hundred of our students every year. We're very fortunate to have a community that believes in the direction we're headed and is willing to put their resources and finances behind it.

Career has a strong meaning for us. This work is not just about finding a job, it's about pursuing a career and finding what you're good at and passionate about. We have hundreds of students participate in a wealth of internships with local businesses. We've been very fortunate to have a community that believes in this work and is willing to provide resources and financial support.

How do you market your programs?

Gestson: Through our new local community partnership ElevateEdAZ, we share an employee whose main function is developing business and industry partnerships that lead to high quality internships or externships, but particularly paid opportunities and those that offer tuition reimbursement in college. That has been the primary way we market these programs, and it has been very successful.

Thompson: We have a Business and Education Alliance here in Wichita, which has local business leaders and educators meet regularly to discuss internships, mentorships and career exploration opportunities. We have advisory committees for each of our 26 pathways that include representatives from companies and businesses interested in or related to that subject area, and we rely on them for marketing and outreach to help build our internship and mentorship programs.

Greene: The goal of our marketing is to make students aware of all the programs that are available to them. We outline all our academies, and we identify which ones are sponsored by a corporation with a goal of hiring, so students know that they could get a job in that program. We have MOU's with all our corporations that have academies in our schools. One of our best is our credit union academy, which runs real credit unions in five of our high schools, and students in that program are hired immediately after high school and the sponsoring credit union will pay their college tuition, if they choose to attend.

What challenges can stand in the way of innovative college and career programs?

Gestson: One struggle has been outdated state legislation, particularly mandates for seat time in high schools. We want to get our students off campus in business and industry settings, doing work-based learning and getting credit for it.

Across the country, K-12 education is ready and willing to think and operate differently, but some outdated policies and legislation can stand in the way. Also, there is often a misconception in the business community that they must wait until students are age 18 to have an internship. We've been using our chamber of commerce to raise awareness with businesses and enable 16- and 17-year-old students to get internships.

Johnson: We're hoping for new legislation that will change or update the requirements for

(L) A Life Force helicopter from the Erlanger Health System visits students in the Erlanger Institute of Healthcare and Innovation, a Future Ready Institute in the Hamilton County Schools. (R) Superintendent Chad Gestson visits with CTE students in the Phoenix Union High School District.

teachers and licensure for teaching post-secondary courses. High school teachers should be able to earn certification to teach Composition 101 or other similar courses for college credit. We are challenged by many students having limited transportation options, so we want to offer as many post-secondary options on campus as possible.

Daugherty: We have been working hard to get all our high schools to allow half schedules, co-op programs and partnerships to increase the number of internships available. A challenge for us has been getting the business community in nearby Richmond and Petersburg to understand the benefits of having partnerships with our co-op programs and offering internships for students. We're trying to expand our programs because we believe that every student should have an internship during their senior year, not just students in career programs.

How do you fund your programs?

Daugherty: We could always use more Perkins Act funding, especially with the recent changes to it, but most of our funding comes from our local government. It is so important that local and state governments understand the importance of adequate funding for these programs. We aren't even able to meet the workforce demands of our region, because there are so many job openings. Many states pushed college readiness for so long but neglected career readiness. In the past few years, that has begun to change because of the nature of skills that are needed in the careers of today.

Greene: We rely on Perkins Act dollars, as well as state and local funding and our chamber of commerce for financial support. Also, the corporations we partner with agree to come to the table with funding. Our mayor runs a CTE summer work apprenticeship for our students, so the city pays the salary of students in that program.

Saltzman: It's so important to have local funding for these initiatives. We also use Perkins funding, and our mayor is a big advocate for this work in our schools. We get additional funding and support from Boeing, which is nearby.

How important is it to engage families when it comes to career readiness?

Daugherty: We have become a majority-minority district in the past two years, and we now have more students receiving free and reduced lunch than the city of Richmond does. And so we're trying to help parents understand the importance of careers, not just

thinking about college all the time, but help them to realize they could get the best of both worlds by getting college credit while in a CTE program. It's a challenge, but we want to help parents understand that their child can prepare for both college and a career at the same time, and it doesn't cost them a dime.

Johnson: Parent engagement can be challenging because at the high school level, parents tend to be more concerned with extracurricular activities, clubs, sports and so on. We focus on bringing parents in, getting them involved and making these programs as engaging as possible for parents. We show them the value, and emphasize that their child can earn a great living as a result, whether that is through attending a two- or four-year institution or by going straight into a certification and a career field.

Ray: Family engagement is essential to the success of students. We know that our families desire consistent, transparent and formative communication about their child's school and district initiatives, and we always strive to meet those expectations. We created the position of Parent Ambassador for each of our more than 165 schools, to mobilize the community and get parents to understand and buy into what we're doing. We're always striving to increase meaningful family engagement and participation.

Among your district's career readiness initiatives, what are you most proud of?

Gestson: I'm proud of a lot of things in our district, but our Metro Tech High School is one example. It's a career readiness high school, but it has our highest graduation rate, highest college attendance rate and lowest dropout rate. Nationally, we know that students in CTE coursework go to college at a higher rate than students in all-AP courses. That shows the power of connecting college and career at the same time.

Greene: The connections we've made with our local corporations and government. We just passed a $2 billion referendum here for the first time ever, and I'm convinced we were able to get support for that because these partnerships helped to spread the word about the great work we're doing in our schools.

Saltzman: That we built the right business and local government partnerships so that our students can enter the workforce right here in our community.

Thompson: That we embraced career readiness enough to include it in our strategic plan so we could emphasize it as much as possible.

Ray: The $8 million investment we made in career readiness programs, which is paying off with close to 3,000 industry certifications earned by our students. Implementing Naviance was part of that investment we made.

Johnson: The engagement of our business community, and their willingness to give their time, talents and resources. And I'm so proud of our students.

Daugherty: The expansion of opportunities in career fields we've created, that we can help our community and business partners to hire qualified people, and that we can give our students the option of pursuing high-quality career opportunities or going to college.

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Keeping professional learning interesting during remote education

Administrators must create a model that is meaningful to our educators, one that will stick with them during remote learning now and in the near future.

By Eujon Anderson

Through these challenging times, educators have experienced many obstacles, from teaching either online or in a hybrid model to learning how to communicate effectively with parents for support.

As a district technology director whose passion is to support educators, I have witnessed both instructional leaders and teachers work tirelessly to make sure that student achievement is still taking place in schools. With this being said, one of my challenges has been to make sure we continue with equipping educators with what they need, which includes professional learning for remote learning.

Remote learning has brought on many opportunities for professional learning and strategies to educators. From what I can tell, educators are extremely overloaded with professional learning. Whether it is a new digital tool, learning management system, SEL program, or mental health concerns, there are PD sessions everywhere coming from everyone.

So how can we make sure that educators are getting the professional learning they need without overloading them? This is a question CTOs, technology coaches, curriculum directors, and anyone involved in professional learning may ask.

Make PD matter

We must remember to make PD matter for these teachers. In order to do so, let us revisit our current professional learning models, or look to actually creating one. The objective: Make sure we create a model that is meaningful to our educators—a model that will stick with educators during remote learning and in the near future.

A significant problem with professional learning models is the disconnect between educators because of the structure of the event. Also there may be no meaning or substance with the learning. Basically, professional learning is often treated as a one-time session, and educators are not receiving an experience that will help them grow within their classroom or profession.

In addition, these educators are expected to take back what they have learned from professional learning, achieve high expectations, and do this all during a new way of teaching, or remote learning.

The best way to create a professional learning model, that would be considered meaningful to teachers, is to actually involve them. Consider the following:

- Are we giving the teachers a voice?
- Does the schedule work for everyone's time and are we giving enough time?
- Are we creating a space for teachers to share what they know and have learned?
- Are they allowed to give constructive feedback?

At FETC 2019, I did a session called "Flipping the Staff Meeting." I opened the conversation with an image captioned as such: "The faculty meeting was a productive use of our time, said no teacher ever."

During this session, I stressed to participants, primarily administrators, that one of the major goals for professional learning is that teachers feel as if they were productive and that their time was used well. That statement is still true during remote learning, especially because of all the challenges that educators face with teaching. As administrators, we must make certain their time and efforts are well spent. The group should feel productive and that the sessions and learning are productive as well.

Create a relevant, meaningful learning model

Professional learning has to be meaningful for those participating. It is most important to have PD that is specific to their content or what they are teaching. One great way of

ABOUT EUJON ANDERSON

The technology director of Troy City Schools (Ala.) since 2015, Eujon Anderson is also an adjunct instructor at Auburn University Montgomery. His credentials include being a Google Innovator, a Google Certified Educator, a Google Certified Trainer and an Apple Teacher. He specializes in assisting schools as they begin using Google, as well as in providing professional learning for administrators and teachers on best practices, including on integrating G-Suite in the classroom. He was a featured speaker at FETC 2020.

achieving this as an administrator is to limit the concepts of professional learning. For instance, if the focus is education technology tools, keep the digital tools at a minimum and try not to overload them with too many digital tools. Get the assistance of your teachers by allowing them to bring their curriculum, lesson plans, and subject-content during the training to explain their challenges.

Allow for self-directed learning

It is important to collaborate with educators and work with them during professional learning. One of the best ways to keep educators interested in professional learning during this time is to have them learn at their own pace. This can be done by having a balance of synchronous and asynchronous methods of professional learning.

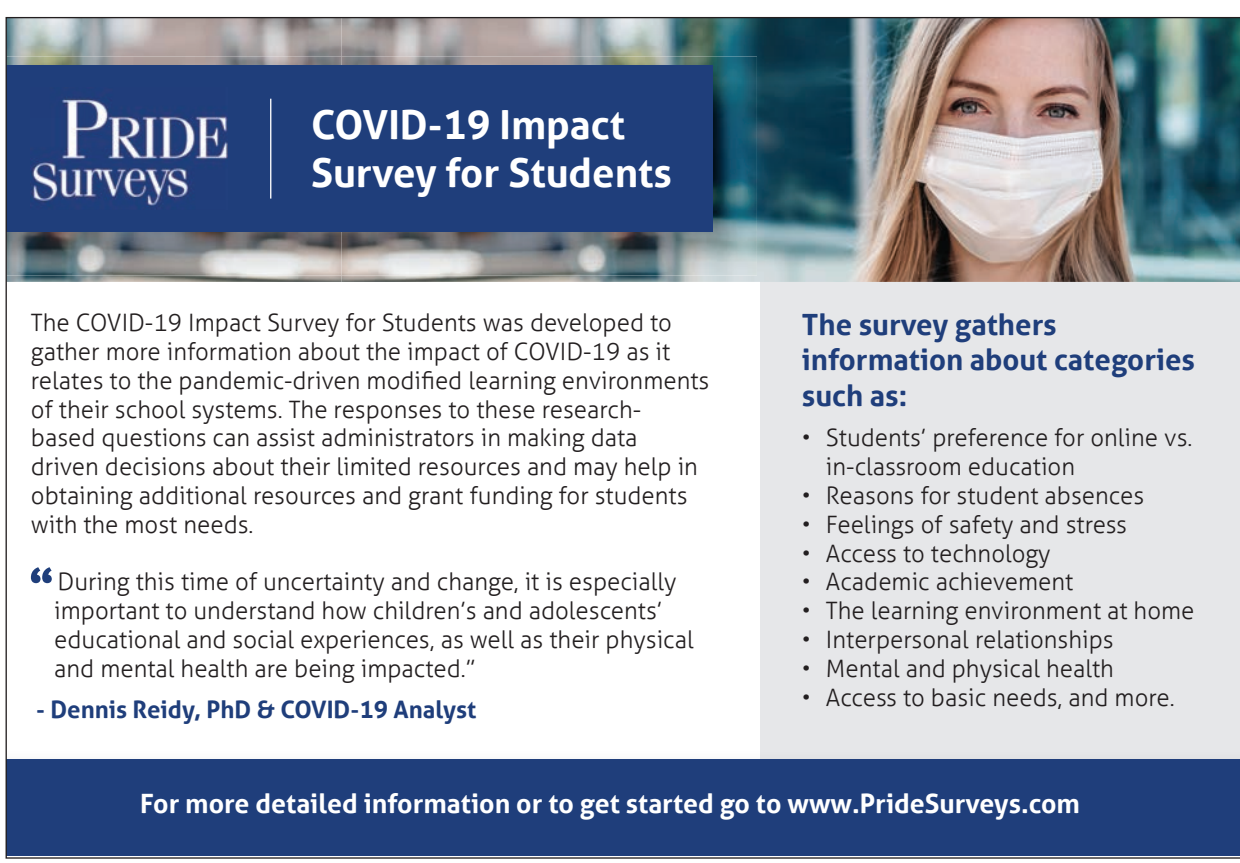
For example, some schools have created online professional learning models that are a combination of virtual Zoom/Google Meet live sessions, or recorded sessions. Tools such as Screencastify, Wevideo or Loom are great options for prerecording sessions and editing video for professional learning.

By sending out recordings of sessions, educators can learn on their own time and at their own pace. To keep the interaction interesting and more creative, consider curating these sessions with Wakelet, and also add Flipgrid to the mix to allow educators to speak their minds about what they are learning. Whatever tools you use, just remember to give your educators time to explore and learn on their time.

Educators need an environment and opportunity to share their ideas and thoughts, and to be able to help each other.

Build a professional learning community

Collaboration and growing a Professional Learning Community will always be key when creating a professional learning model that will remain effective for educators. Educators need an environment and opportunity to share their ideas, thoughts, and be able to help each other. I've seen teachers create professional learning communities to help them through learning different strategies, learning management systems, and even for encouragement during these times. Encourage these opportunities with your educators. Platforms such as Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams, or Slack are great tools to use to allow educators to collaborate. DA



FETC 2021: VIRTUALLY INSPIRED

Unusual times in education call for fresh insights, resources and training—which ed tech leaders got during the first-ever virtual conference experience for DA's Future of Education Technology Conference, held the last week of January.

In the past year, educators and administrators have had to pivot continuously to help students continue learning in spite of the COVID-19 pandemic. While in-person events have not been possible, the community of innovators, life-long learners and problem-solvers who meet at DA's Future of Education Technology Conference still got to gather this year, only virtually.

The schedule included 11 keynote sessions and more than 70 sponsored sessions with industry thought leaders and seasoned ed tech practitioners—a total of nearly 55 hours of content. Unlike with in-person conferences, attendees didn't have to choose between two great sessions but could rather participate live (interacting through chat) or watch at their convenience later.

AI-powered peer-to-peer matchmaking allowed attendees to connect through 1:1 video calls with peers facing the same challenges, whether those in the same job role or with similar interests or conference objectives. In addition, attendees mingled with their peers, plus speakers and vendor representatives, in the Networking Lounge. They could also drop in to the Relaxation Lounge for a quick wellness session, meditation, stretching break or on-demand yoga session.

Product demos have always been a highlight of FETC, and this year was no exception. Top ed tech providers led attendees through their solutions in 45-minute interactive demos featuring live chat. Raffles and swag were another part of the in-person experience recreated virtually. Attendees could browse exhibitor swag and enter various raffles throughout the conference.

They could also virtually visit Expo booths for demos and product materials, either dropping in for a casual chat or arranging a video appointment. Attendees spent time viewing the Top Ed Tech Products identified by a staff panel at *District Administration* magazine, too.

Of course, the mobile app facilitated networking and schedule building throughout the show.

The annual TechShare LIVE event drew crowds. This fun and fast-paced session featured four ed tech experts sharing the latest tools, product updates and devices for educators, learners, administrators and coaches.

Whether you attended the conference or missed out on the education and inspiration, the DA editorial team has you covered. Read on for keynote highlights.

Jill Siler

Thriving in challenging times

Superintendent Jill Siler offers five leadership strategies for coping with fear and failure.

Superintendent Jill Siler loves her job 95% of the time and believes many other education leaders share that sentiment.

Pushing through that challenging 5% when educators don't love their jobs is the truest test of leadership and courage, said Siler, the superintendent of Gunter ISD in Texas, in her motivational keynote speech at FETC.

And there have been a lot of those tests this year of COVID's disruptions—which she considers an opportunity for growth, says Siler, author of *Thrive Through the Five*.

"We had to rebuild everything from scratch and there are so many opportunities for failure," Siler said. "Failure is not just something we endure; it is the thing that can make us great."

She covered five strategies for how leaders can grow during those most challenging times:

1. Recognize that failure is part of it. The ordeals of COVID can be seen as a "season of growth" as leaders adjust to online, hybrid and other new methods of supporting children academically and emotionally, Siler said.

One of the biggest challenges has been coping with the criticism coming from outside the profession, from people who don't have a concept of the adjustments educators have had to make.

The key for leaders is not to let themselves by defined or discouraged by mistakes or missteps.

"Just because you are not moving in the seamless, straight trajectory you had anticipated or hoped for, it doesn't mean that you are not ready or equipped to be successful in your next steps," Siler said told educators.

2. Reclaim action in the midst of fear. Failure is an event that has consequences but is finite. Fear can be ever present and paralyzing, leading to doubt and inaction, Siler said.

But asking how to get rid of fear is the wrong question, because that could also mean not taking risks or doing purposeful work.

> "FEAR IS NOT THE ENEMY; PARALYSIS IS THE ENEMY. THE GOAL ISN'T TO ERADICATE FEAR; THE GOAL IS TO LEAD THROUGH IT ANYWAY."

"Fear is not the enemy; paralysis is the enemy," Siler said. "The goal isn't to eradicate fear; the goal is to lead through it anyway."

Educators shouldn't conflate fear and unpreparedness. Just because you are fearful, doesn't mean you aren't ready to take a chance, she said. Ultimately, individuals can decide how much weight to give their fears.

"When we choose action in the midst of fear, when we lead anyway, that courage is the birth of greatness," she said.

3. Reconceptualize balance and re-prioritize self-care. Expecting perfection can make it hard for a person to find balance.

"We put our real lives on trial to some picture of balance that is neither attainable or realistic," she said.

Balance, rather, can be viewed from a monthly and even yearly perspective. Individuals—particularly education leaders who may working 24/7—must carve out time to take care of their personal lives, including families and hobbies.

A key to finding balance is being able to say "no." "Decide what your highest priorities are and have courage to say no to other things," she said.

4. Realize that our actions matter. Education leaders have to carefully consider the culture they create and whether they are lifting others up and bringing joy to their organizations, Siler said. This is more challenging because the complexities of public school leadership, where not all decisions are black and white.

Even now, nearly a year into the pandemic, educators are still dealing with shifting and conflicting information, she noted. "When confronted with something messy, don't go for quick solutions. Instead, try to understand the situation from every angle."

5. Reveal your heart and lead with love. Educations leaders must prioritize the physical and emotional health of students, families and staff now and throughout the coming months.

She recalled that when she first became superintendent of Gunter ISD in 2012, she had to had to give her staff a clear idea of the district's financial problems.

"Leadership is not a scientific step by step act," Siler said. "It's an art that ebbs and flows, where we must show strength and stability one moment and compassion and grace in the next."

—Matt Zalaznick

Marcus Buckingham

Bouncing back and bouncing up

Marcus Buckingham, an expert on talent at work, shared what administrators can do to build resilience in themselves and the educators on their teams.

The pandemic has caused all of us to begin each day in kind of a blur, said Marcus Buckingham in kicking off his FETC keynote address. But how can we maintain our resilience during challenging times? As a researcher, he said, he has spent most of his career "trying to measure things in life or work that are important but that you can't count—like the engagement of your team or resilience of your team."

Results of a study of over 26,000 people worldwide conducted by his ADP Institute can help educators and others to better understand "their capacity to take on challenges, and not just bounce back but bounce up to a new plane of contribution," he said.

Resilience thermometer statements

Anyone answering "strongly agree" to most of the following 10 items would fall into the 15% of people who can be considered highly resilient, Buckingham said.

The first four are "self" statements: "I have all the freedom I need to decide how to get my work done"; "No matter what else is going on around me, I can stay focused on getting my work done"; "In the last week, I have felt excited to work every day"; and "I always believe that things are going to work out for the best."

The next three relate to what team leaders (such as principals) impact: "My team leader tells me what I need to know before I need to know it"; "I trust my team leader"; "I am encouraged to take risks."

And the final three are impacted by senior leaders of an organization: "Senior leaders are one step ahead of events"; "Senior leaders always do what they say they are going to do"; "I completely trust my company's senior leaders."

Anyone less than "highly resilient" would be vulnerable to not being able to recover from something knocking them off course.

People who had a personal COVID experience (self or a loved one getting infected), were almost three times more likely to be highly resilient compared to those who had not. And having experienced more work-related changes—positive or negative—due to COVID also increased resilience.

With leaders across many industries pushing the working world to rush back to "normal," Buckingham said it's important to recognize what people—teachers, parents, students, for example—are actually fearing. "We don't fear change. We fear the unknown," he said.

Education, the second least resilient industry

While those working in technology, finance and construction industries can tout having the most resilience, education came in nearly last; just 12% of education employees are highly resilient.

"The least two resilient industries are healthcare and education," Buckingham said. "The people we entrust our patients to and the people we entrust our children to are the least resilient."

He believes the main problem is that teachers don't feel as if they are truly on a team.

"Humans are team creatures. We suffer when we are alone," he said. "We should be asking, how do we understand what our best teams do and how do we build

ED TECH TO THE RESCUE

Marcus Buckingham, who studies talents at work, recommends putting three technologies into classrooms and schools:

1. Strengths assessments. "We ought to have some way for a student to have a language that begins that curiosity about how they learn, how they think, how they build relationships, and what drives them," he says. Delivered electronically, such an assessment must be free, race-neutral, gender-neutral and focused on the uniqueness of the child, he adds. Buckingham just finished a youth version of his Standout Assessment, geared toward ages 11 to 18.

2. Check-in tools. "We ought to have a technology that allows each teacher to check in with each student each week," he says. It would allow a student to share their priority for the week to come and what help they think they need. The teacher would see each response in an app and could respond there or through a conversation with the student. "We should tell every teacher that the simplist and most important ritual is a one-minute check-in. If you can't do that, you shouldn't be a teacher." Such an expectation of teachers would require coaching and learning tips for the teacher should to respond to students with that student's individual way of thinking and learning in mind.

3. A class engagement metric. It might be 10 questions that provide a reading or vibe of where students in a class are and how to engage them using strengths as a teacher.

new teams like our best teams, and what kind of tech should we build to support the needs of teachers, administrators and others in order to be a team environment for our students?"

Buckingham suggested that educators think of themselves as swimmers. Maybe the lane they're in is fraught with difficulty. "But the most resilient people can say, 'I do have other swim lanes, where I can make progress and can make a contribution. Can I compartmentalize so I'm not just looking at swim lane 12, with a lot of problems, but also the progress I'm making in swim lanes 3, 4 and 5?" One can catastrophize—or think about what lanes they can focus on instead.

What education leaders can do

Educators know that what's around the corner is unknown, but they want to hear what is going to stay the same. That could be who the schools serve and what its values are. Buckingham suggested that education leaders share stories, such as about teachers who manifest a certain district value. "Your challenge is not to dismiss people's anxiety; it's to take people's anxiety and turn it into confidence," he said.

School-level leaders must show they can be trusted and encourage teachers to take risks. They can also make a point to have a 15-minute check-in weekly with each teacher, asking about their upcoming priorities and how they can be supported.

This kind of check-in can have a big impact on morale. "Any time you can be seen by the person you report to, even if the person can't do anything about the challenges you face, there's power in that awareness," he said.

Educators at all levels, meanwhile, should work to find strength and love in their work. "If you want to build your resilience," he said, "use the work itself to bring strength to you."

To find out what traits make you stand out at work, take the free assessment at marcusbuckingham.com/gift-of-standout/. —*Melissa Ezarik*

"HUMANS ARE TEAM CREATURES. WE SUFFER WHEN WE ARE ALONE. WE SHOULD BE ASKING: WHAT KIND OF TECH SHOULD WE BUILD TO SUPPORT THE NEEDS OF TEACHERS, ADMINISTRATORS AND OTHERS IN ORDER TO BE A TEAM ENVIRONMENT FOR OUR STUDENTS?"

Lisa Williams

Capitalizing on COVID's equity lessons

Lisa Williams hopes rapid transformations of the pandemic will continue to reshape education.

The rapid transformations educators made to serve the most vulnerable students as COVID closed schools should be an inspiration for making the K-12 system more equitable as the virus is controlled.

Educators have engaged in intense problem-solving to reduce inequities during these challenging times—such as by putting Wi-Fi hotspots on school buses.

This mindset should not be seen simply as a response to an emergency but should persist in educators' efforts to reduce barriers to learning, said Lisa Williams, Baltimore County Public Schools' executive director of equity and cultural proficiency, in her FETC keynote address.

"I'm hopeful that ... you will take the learning from this moment, from this event, and you will be a champion for system transformation in all the ways we were able to figure things out and get it right to include more and more students—especially those most deeply and disproportionately impacted," she said.

Resisting old norms

This work begins with recognizing how long-standing inequities in education, healthcare, housing and other aspects of society have impacted students and families, Williams said in the talk, titled "Advancing Equity During the Challenges of COVID."

"Systems of advantage and disadvantage are experienced most often on a day-to-day basis as norms, as 'This is just the way this world is,' " Williams said.

The inequities exposed by COVID should motivate educators to overhaul instruction, IT and other services to better meet the needs of previously marginalized communities.

"One of the things urban equity practitioners know is that when we let a condition exist that marginalizes or excludes or underserves one group of students, the only thing that really tells us is the vulnerability that any group of students could experience," Williams said.

Educators must continue to be perpetual learners to dismantle old systems of oppression and help all students develop the problem-solving skills to navigate a world that will be diverse and shift rapidly, she added. "How do we make sure that when we get on other side of this that we don't go back to a static place that would suggest the world is not a dynamic place, that the world is not an everchanging place?"

> "WE HAVE TO GIVE OURSELVES PERMISSION TO CENTER IN OUR CONVERSATIONS AND DECISION-MAKING THE DIFFERENT GROUPS THAT ARE HAVING THE MOST STRUGGLE."

Vulnerability and invisibility

Providing access to devices, broadband services and online resources does not comprise the entire solution. Questions of overall accessibility will remain.

"I could give all of the people here a pair of shoes based on the size I wear," she said. "And there would be many who would find themselves deeply dissatisfied with this solution."

To that end, simply translating district documents into another language still might not clarify educational jargon for some parents and caregivers. Or, telling students to find a quiet place for remote instruction may not help, as not all students have a quiet place in their homes.

"It is true that all students need adequate resources and technology, but that in and of itself doesn't answer question of what about those resources we need to shift or modify to make them accessible," she said.

For instance, students of frontline workers may be experiencing more stress. And some students themselves may now be frontline workers facing a greater risk of contracting COVID.

"We have to give ourselves permission to center in our conversations and decision-making the different groups that are having the most struggle, the different groups that are most estranged from our organization," she said. "Maybe that vulnerability was invisible to us in the old world, but that vulnerability is not so invisible now."

School leaders and teachers must continue the growth process so as to learn from the responses that weren't sufficient in closing achievement and opportunity gaps. Teachers could mark students absent when they don't participate in online learning but a better solution would be to find out why students aren't showing up.

"For us to do equity work well right now, we've got to be OK with not just holding that identity that talks about our expertise," she said, "but also to bear an identity that is about perpetual learning.

—Matt Zalaznick

Eric Sheninger

Driving successful learning by embracing the unknown

Education leadership expert Eric Sheninger argues that districts must be willing to embrace change, technology and a more personalized approach.

If the past year has taught educators one thing, it is that they should be "Preparing for the Unknown."

That was the message imparted by Eric Sheninger at FETC and the title of his session, which looked at how educators must start to think differently to meet the needs of learners.

While the pandemic upended the academic experience for millions, it may have unlocked key strategies that can lead to better overall outcomes for students—namely a recognition of more personalized learning and the importance of voice, choice, pack, path and place.

"When we think about the No. 1 inhibitor of change, it's 'that's the way we've always done it', and we get comfortable," said Sheninger, an associate partner at the International Center for Leadership in Education and a former teacher. "We eventually will be in the Fifth and Sixth Industrial Revolutions. We have to be honest about where we are to get to where our learners need us to be. We can no longer say, maybe we'll use technology. Kids need digital skills. They need job-specific skills. We need to take that critical lens to our practice. The time is now to transform teaching and learning."

Although students need rigorous learning, Sheninger said they also must be allowed to tap into interests that are meaningful to them and encouraged to think critically across multiple disciplines to handle unpredictable, real-world situations. "When learning is relevant and rigorous, students will develop their own questions."

The right use of technology tools in true "learning and growth zones" can make a difference in creating a culture of learning that is equitable for students. Ensuring all kids have access to internet and devices isn't the elixir to more positive outcomes; it's how they use the devices that can be game-changing.

"The key is to give all of our kids what they need, when they need it, where they need it. That is personalization," he said. "But often what we see is all kids doing the same thing, the same way, at the same time."

> "EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IS NOT A DRIVE-BY, ONE-AND-DONE. IT'S JOB-EMBEDDED. IT'S ONGOING."

Sheninger notes how the five elements of blended learning—voice, choice, pack, place and path—can drive change in the classroom:

- **Voice:** There are so many tools out there, where kids' voices can be heard where they all can respond.
- **Choice:** Choosing the right tool for the right task. Choosing what learning activity best meets their needs. Choosing where to learn.
- **Pace:** If learning is the goal, who cares how long it takes?
- **Place:** It can be a virtual place, face-to-face or hybrid.
- **Path:** Knowing that learning is not linear, putting our kids on the right path, which is their path, which should not be the same as every other single kid."

He said station rotations, choice boards and playlists are three strong methods that both adhere to standards and offer targeted instruction that allow learners to self-regulate, work at their own pace and advance skills for the future. Choice boards in particular give students the ability to select their own paths while applying knowledge in relevant ways.

"It comes down to good instruction, good teaching ... giving kids choice, mixing it up and challenging them," Sheninger said. "Ultimately, it's what the learners do with the technology that truly matters."

Such activities also free up time for teachers to work with students who need one-on-one guidance. Time being precious, Sheninger said districts also need to advocate for their teachers to get professional learning to help improve student outcomes.

"Effective professional learning is not a drive-by, one-and-done. It's job-embedded. It's ongoing," he said. "We have to look at different layered ways that we can support educators—ongoing workshops, getting educators to amazing conferences like FETC, thinking about how we create mentoring programs."

Ultimately, that training will help drive student success.

"All kids have greatness hidden inside of them," Sheninger said. "It's the job of an educator to help them find and unleash that greatness. It's amazing what our learners can do when they are given the opportunity." —*Chris Burt*

Julia Martin

How Biden will guide schools through COVID recovery

New president will likely push for more education funding on several fronts, said attorney Julia Martin.

Title I schools, universal prekindergarten and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act could all see increased funding under President Joe Biden's newly installed administration. Biden may also provide more financial assistance to schools to compensate for state and local revenues lost to the pandemic, said Julia Martin, legislative director for the education-focused law firm, Brustein & Manasevit, in her FETC keynote speech.

And Miguel Cardona, Biden's nominee for secretary of education, will likely add momentum to the administration's push to provide guidance to districts to begin reopening classrooms.

As Connecticut's education commissioner, Cardona emphasized the importance of bringing students back to classroom in at least a hybrid format. "The Biden transition team has said they want to reopen schools for in-person instruction for at least part-time attendance by the end of the first 100 days of the administration," Martin said.

Masking learning loss?

Congress has permitted schools to suspend NAEP assessments until 2022 but Cardona, a former superintendent and elementary teacher, has also suggested that schools could conduct statewide assessments in 2021. Some education leaders and K-12 experts have argued assessments are needed this coming spring to gauge the true depth of COVID-era learning loss. Others, however, question the reliability and validity of online exams, Martin said.

Students who can comfortably take standardized tests online are those who have reliable internet access, don't have to share devices with siblings, who attend online courses regularly and feel secure about turning on web cameras, she said.

"The student who don't fall into those categories, who don't take the assessments, are the same students we are going to be worried about," she said. "There is a concern that these test scores might mask equity problems."

There would also longer-term questions about any standardized tests given this school year. "When we take assessments two and three years from now are we going to say it's a fair comparison to look at 2021 data or are we going to say that 2021 data is pretty abysmal and so comparing ourselves to that data gives us a false picture of success," Martin said.

Reversing regulations

When it comes to IDEA, Biden has said his administration would fulfill its commitment to the law, which would fund about 40% of the costs of K-12 special education. But educators await guidance on other aspects of special education.

"What constitutes a free and an appropriate public education for students with disabilities in distance learning?" she asked. "How do you measure their inclusion in the classroom when there's no classroom?"

In the early days of the administration, Biden and Cardona are likely to rescind several regulations imposed by former Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, Martin said, adding that there are too many of those rules to go through in a 45-minute keynote. DeVos resigned on January 7.

The new administration is likely to reinstate Obama-era Title IX guidance protecting students from discrimination based on for gender identity.

The Trump administration said gender identity is not protected by Title IX, arguing the law only covers biological sex. However, the Supreme Court this summer ruled the employees are protected from discrimination based on gender identity in the workplace.

In 2021, there a number of cases before the Supreme Court that could bring clarity to protections for gender identity in schools, Martin said. —*Matt Zalaznick*

WHAT DEMOCRATIC CONTROL OF CONGRESS MEANS FOR K-12

Senate and House Democrats now in Congress are likely to push for universal prekindergarten while providing other assistance to schools in the coming months.

With the Vice President Kamala Harris breaking ties in the 50-50 Senate, Sen. Patty Murray of Washington is likely to become chair of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, also known as HELP.

Murray has shown support for universal pre-K and expanded childcare credits, and also shares many of President Joe Biden's goals for education, said Julia Martin, legislative director for the education-focused law firm, Brustein & Manasevit, in her FETC keynote. "Kalama Harris is going to be in for one of the most active roles for a vice president in recent decades."

Democratic control also assures that Miguel Cardona will be confirmed as the next secretary of education.

Brianna Hodges

Thomas C. Murray

Keys to effective education in all environments

A clear purpose, empathy and a focus on equity are critical during COVID and in the future, said Brianna Hodges and Thomas C. Murray.

Strong leadership during COVID, and in any environment, requires that administrators stay hyper-focused on their "why."

Having a clear purpose was the first of the four keys to effective education leadership laid out by Brianna Hodges, consultant and advisor, and Thomas C. Murray, Future Ready Schools' director of innovation, in their FETC keynote speech, "Keys to Effective Leading and Coaching in Any Environment."

"Our 'what' and our 'how' may have changed completely this school year," Murray said. "But you know what hasn't? Our 'why' hasn't. What you said in the interview chair about why you desperately wanted the job hasn't changed at all."

Superintendents and other administrators should take time to step back and reflect on their purpose in leading their districts, supporting their staffs and serving their students, Murray said. Having a clear purpose also allows leaders to better model the approaches they hope to see their staffs replicate.

"If we're going to maximize our effectiveness, we have to model the desired outcomes," he added.

The importance of storytelling

As uncertain times continue, Hodges urged educators not to focus on the negatives or on misperceptions about their schools that may be circulating in the community or local media.

"For leading and coaching to be effective," she says, "we must connect and humanize learning through stories."

Administrators and educators should clearly communicate the efforts they are taking over the next several months. They must tell stories about their districts' identities, the innovations they are designing and their instructional initiatives.

A technique called "appreciative inquiry" allows leaders to focus on the strengths of their teams and the possibilities ahead for reimagination and innovation in education, Hodges said.

"This isn't a time for Band Aids," she said. "Appreciative inquiry invites us to create our best future by building on our best past with our best strengths and skills."

> "THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MAKING A JUDGMENT AND HAVING EMPATHY IS UNDERSTANDING THE STORY. "
>
> —Thomas C. Murray

'Believing in and building up capacity'

To be successful, leaders and coaches must establish reciprocal trust and examine every action with empathy, Murray said. That includes understanding their staffs' and students' "hidden" stories, such as medical conditions that might affect someone's performance or other challenges.

"The difference between making a judgment and having empathy is understanding the story," Murray said. "It's a person's story that defines the context in which their learning occurs."

This approach helps leaders truly get to know their teams, which, in turn, builds trust that is "born of character and competence," Hodges said.

That includes telling the truth, demonstrating respect, creating transparency and apologizing when wrong, she said. "Extending trust isn't naïve. It's trusting your staff, your colleagues and your community to perform the jobs for which they are responsible. Extending trust is believing in and building up capacity."

Equity is about lenses

Finally, equity is an essential if leading and coaching is going to be effective, Murray said.

That means ensuring that a student's personal and social circumstances do not prevent them from achieving from their academic potential, he explained.

He urged educators to ask themselves if they had empathy for "lenses," or situations, they had never experienced.

"Walk into an AP class," Murray said. "Which students are represented demographically in that class and which students are not?"

Administrators should also analyze hiring practices and whether some students are disciplined disproportionately. And they should look at the race of main characters in books that are read aloud or assigned, Murray said.

Education leaders should not settle for a return to normal after the pandemic. For instance, even after students can return to classrooms full-time, educators should think about how students can keep devices and Wi-Fi hotspots that have been distributed for emergency online learning.

As educators know, COVID did not create equity issues, it only amplified problems that have persisted for many years, Murray said. "If our habits have more resilience than our purpose, our desired impact for our students will be shackled." —*Matt Zalaznick*

Lenny Schad

District cybersecurity stories

Lenny Schad covers five gut-check questions that can help prevent future technology attacks.

Is your school district prepared to handle a cybersecurity attack, or is the plan not as fail-safe as it should be?

In 2019 alone, there were 348 cybersecurity breaches at K-12 schools. That number was likely far greater than reported, according to Lenny Schad, DA's Chief Information and Innovation Officer and the former CIO at two large school systems in Houston.

Speaking at FETC in his keynote titled "What Is Your District's Cybersecurity Story?," he said incidents such as ransomware attacks are on the rise, a deep concern given the amount of faculty, staff and students operating online during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"What we're seeing is this is not a trend that is going to slow down," said Schad, highlighting the prominent attacks on the Baltimore County and Miami-Dade systems in 2019 and 2020. "Cyber incidents have gone through the roof since start of school. We think this is a trend that is going to continue."

Using data and information from the Consortium for School Networking (CoSN) and the National Institute for Standards and Technology (NIST), he said no districts are safe from attacks.

In fact, the smaller the district, the more likely it will be to experience an intruder, either an outside agent or one operating from the inside. Schad said 39% of incidents occurred in districts with 2,500 to 10,000 students, while 18% occurred in those with 1,000 to 2,500 students.

"It doesn't matter what size of school system you are; cybercriminals don't care," Schad said. "They're looking for the areas that have the easiest ability to get access."

What are they targeting? Social media, mobile devices, software vulnerabilities, cloud computing and third-party access. Citing CoSN statistics, Schad said bad actors find different ways to tunnel in and affect devices and networks, including: phishing, which attempts to gain access to personal information; DDoS attacks, which overburden and shut down systems; ransomware attacks, which gain access and force payments; and breaches of data and Internet of Things (IoT).

> "IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT SIZE OF SCHOOL SYSTEM YOU ARE; CYBERCRIMINALS DON'T CARE. THEY'RE LOOKING FOR THE AREAS THAT HAVE THE EASIEST ABILITY TO GET ACCESS."

District leaders can work to prevent these attacks, which can take down servers, expose personal information and be a financial burden for districts. Schad offered up a framework for success along with a questions to help guide education leaders in better managing IT security.

That cybersecurity story must start with school leaders and IT leaders communicating effectively and clearly, and seriously addressing cybersecurity needs—or districts will end up experiencing one or more attacks. He says it is imperative for all stakeholders, not just tech teams, to share responsibility and be involved in sound decisions around cybersecurity, and understand costs, which should include separate insurance and legal counsel that deal specifically with these incidents. He urged leaders to ask themselves these "gut-check" questions to ensure they are both on the right path and responding to incidents smartly:

- What is our risk exposure/profile?
- What cybersecurity actions are we taking to protect the district during remote operations?
- When a breach occurs, what is our response plan (both internal and external)?
- Whom would we engage in the event of a cyber incident?
- What are we doing to address cybersecurity with our employees, parents and students?

"We need to have the mentality of when it happens, what are we going to do?" he said. "And in between now and when it happens, what are the best practices that we're putting in place? So now, let's start building your story."

From that, IT leaders can implement five steps recommended by NIST to mitigate potential attacks when they happen:

1) Identify: Create a risk assessment and management strategy.

2) Protect: Promote awareness, instill training and protect technology.

3) Detect: Ensure continuous security monitoring and identify anomalies.

4) Respond: Forge policies for communications and response when incidents occur.

5) Recover: Discuss further planning, improvements and communications.

—Chris Burt

The District Administration Leadership Academy is starting a new cohort for CIOs and leadership team, with virtual sessions taking place in April and June. More information can be found at daleadershipinstitute.com.

Honoring innovation in ed tech

For the first time this year, DA and FETC presented the "Top Ed Tech Products of the Year" awards.

The goal was to spotlight the most innovative new solutions on the market that are helping district leaders meet the ever-evolving technology needs of their schools. And given our current pandemic-related climate and widespread distance learning, we also sought to identify products that were adapted or created to address this situation.

In this first year, we received about 165 submissions. Our panel reviewed each one, narrowed the list, watched demos, reviewed and trimmed the list again before deciding on these 15 products as the best of the best.

To be eligible for the honor, tools must have been developed within the last year and generally available last fall. Submissions were judged on their innovation in the ed tech space, with particular attention to how the tools are breaking new ground, how much value they add to education, how intuitive they are for users, and whether they deliver what they promise.

The 15 winners presented their products during three sessions at this year's FETC.

—Eric Weiss

The 2020 Top Ed Tech Products of the Year winners are:

- Insights for Microsoft Teams in Education
- Bakpax
- SMART Learning Suite Software, SMART Technologies
- Synergy Education Platform, Edupoint
- Teletherapy Essentials, PresenceLearning
- Open P-TECH, IBM Corporate Social Responsibility
- eduCLIMBER, Illuminate Education
- AllHere AI Chatbot, AllHere Education
- SAFARI Montage LOR Cloud, SAFARI Montage
- Oral Reading Fluency, Istation
- Trauma-Informed Practices for K12 Schools, Kognito
- Family Playlists, PowerMyLearning
- MagicBox – Creating Personalized Learning Experiences, Magic Software Inc.
- X2VOL, intelliVOL
- Sora, the student reading app, OverDrive Education

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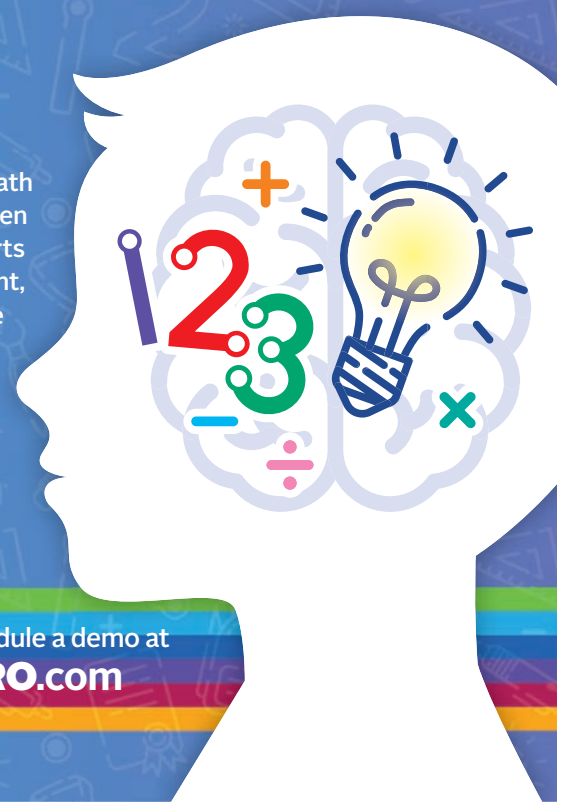

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Peter Gorman

A stronger school system through alignment

Superintendent trainer Peter Gorman shared the elements of an aligned system that the highest performing school districts utilize to increase student achievement at scale.

In opening the FETC closing keynote, Peter Gorman got right to talking about the elephant in the room. That is: "In the United States, not all students are having a great experience," he said as he shared achievement data. "We have some real challenges for some students and there are some groups that are disproportionately in an environment where they are not achieving at the levels needed, and this is a problem that we must address at scale. But I am hopeful because all children can learn," noted Gorman, who has more than 30 years of experience in education and business, including serving as Superintendent for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools.

Gorman is now superintendent in residence for the DA Leadership Institute and manager of its National Superintendents Academy.

Because data has shown that poverty doesn't closely correlate with student growth, he said, "the challenge isn't with our students. It's an issue with us, with America, with the education we are providing and the support we are providing. We've got to work together to increase achievement at scale." Gorman is also co-author of the 2020 book *Leading a School District Requires Clarity, Context, and Candor: An Aligned System to Increase Student Achievement at Scale* (LRP Publications, publisher of DA).

His call to action is an immediate one. "We've got to have urgency," he said, showing a photo of a family eating dinner. "We've got to make sure every day that when the referendum occurs at the kitchen table—and the referendum goes like this: 'How was your day at school today?'—all students answer with 'It was great!' and they can share what they learned. Right now we don't have that question and that answer at every kitchen table."

Many school districts do great work, but in isolation, he said. Individuals come to work but at the end of the day in the parking lot might say to a colleague "I did this today. What did you do?"

> "THE CHALLENGE IS AN ISSUE WITH US, WITH AMERICA, WITH THE EDUCATION WE ARE PROVIDING AND THE SUPPORT WE ARE PROVIDING."

He showed a commercial of a man clearing snow from his car as an example of work that is out of alignment. The man did a good job in his work, but as he clicks his keys to unlock his door he sees that he cleared off the wrong car. He did good work but he's desperately out of alignment.

In aligned school systems, each person's work combines with the work of another person, and you wind up with a 2 + 2 = 5 scenario.

The best districts have a set of beliefs that are about student achievement. Alignment involves moving up from those beliefs, creating a related vision and mission, and theory of action, and then ensuring policies and the strategic plan are aligned to all of these areas. From there, district leaders can ensure organizational structures, the budget, accountability systems and evaluations are also in alignment.

Technology's role

Human capital, talent and leadership really help move the ball in effective school districts. "I bet on people, not programs," Gorman said. "But I bet on programs in the hands of the right people. If the technology you're bringing in is not in the hands of an effective teacher who knows how to utilize it, it's not going to be the workaround of an ineffective teacher. A highly effective teacher with a high-quality program, or product or service, can do unimaginable things for kids to help close achievement gaps to reach new levels."

The highest-performing individuals, he added, must be provided with the tools that they need.

"If we have learned anything from COVID, it is that some of the transition we have had to make to digital, to distance learning, to utilizing LMSs, has shown we are saying and doing something are different things," he said. "We had been saying we'd been using technology all along. We have realized in many ways that we were paying lip service to this. It was never an aligned part; it was on its own."

Leaders of aligned school systems ask: "How is technology a part of the system in every element?"

Regarding ed tech, Gorman noted that students will use technology in real-world ways. "We have to support students, not as a special event type of thing," he said. "We need to budget for it; it will become part of our vision and mission." —*Melissa Ezarik*

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New survey finds school facilities access control systems becoming crucial during COVID-19

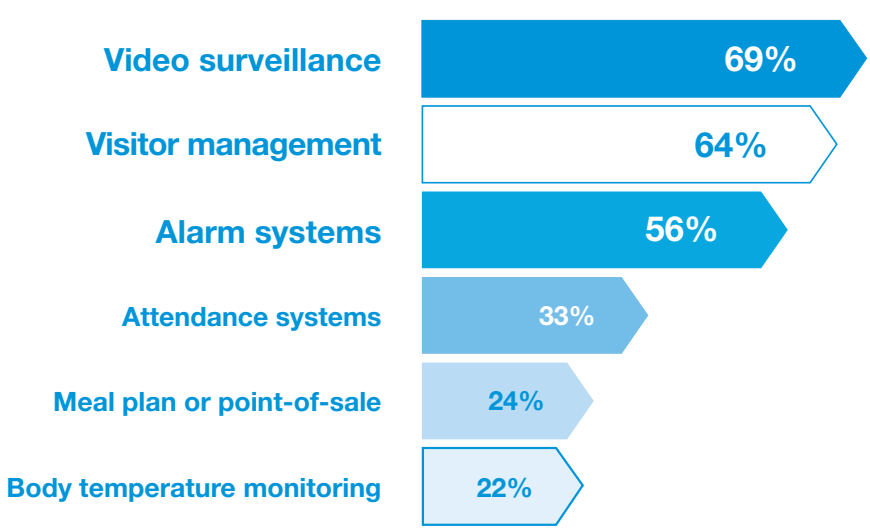
A new survey conducted by *District Administration* in partnership with SALTO Systems examined what tools and technologies school districts commonly use for facilities access control, and their use during the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 185 school administrators responded and participated in the survey, which was deployed in November 2020.

Access control tools and challenges

All respondents were asked to identify which facilities access control tools or technologies they use in their districts. **The leading answer by far was physical keys (56%), which was followed by ID cards (41%).** These were followed by key fobs (22%), RFID enabled cards (19%), PIN numbers (6%) and mobile credentials (4%).

Respondents were also presented with a list of systems and platforms and asked if any are integrated with their access control systems, with the option to choose all that apply. **The leading answers by far were "Video surveillance" (69%), "Visitor management" (64%) and "Alarm systems" (56%).** These were followed by "Attendance systems" (33%), "Meal plan or point-of-sale" (24%) and "Body temperature monitoring" (22%).

Which of these systems are integrated with your district or school's access control systems?



The next question asked respondents when their district or school's facilities access control system was last upgraded or updated. Equal numbers said "Within the last year" and "2-4 years," with each selected by 34%. At the same time, equal numbers said "5-10 years" and "It's been over 10 years," with each selected by 16%.

When asked if it is an ongoing challenge for their school or district to issue and maintain access control credentials, the majority (62%) said this was not a challenge, however, the **remaining 38% said this was a challenge for them, with 9% describing it as "significantly" challenging.**

Similarly, when asked if replacing lost or stolen keys and ID cards required a significant amount of time, money and resources for their school or district, **some 42% said it did,** with 11% saying "significantly" and 32% saying "somewhat." Another 48% said this required "very little" time and resources, while just 9% selected "None at all."

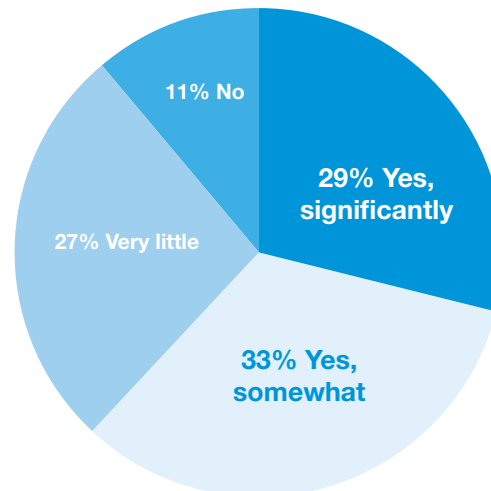
42% of respondents said that replacing lost or stolen keys and ID cards required a significant amount of time, money and resources for their school or district.

62% of respondents said that their facilities access control system played a crucial role in their COVID-19 mitigation strategy.

Access control during COVID-19

Respondents were then asked if their district or school's leadership believed that their access control system plays a crucial role in their COVID-19 mitigation strategy. **Some 29% selected "Yes, significantly" while another 33% said "Yes, somewhat" for a total of 62% saying they did.** Another 27% said "Very little" and just 11% said "None at all."

Does your access control system play a crucial role in your COVID-19 mitigation strategy?



When asked if it would be helpful to use door handles and levers with an antimicrobial finish that reduces the likelihood for viruses and bacteria to be transmitted, **34% of respondents selected "Yes, absolutely," while another 17% said "Yes, highly likely."** Another 45% said it was "possible" that this would be helpful, while only 5% indicated that this would not be helpful.

Respondents were also asked if their access control system enabled them to gather the necessary data to manage contact tracing in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak. While 21% said "Yes, very effectively," some 25% said "Yes, but it is cumbersome." **34% said no, they did not have access to this information, while another 19% said they do not have an electronic access control system at all.**

"The many difficulties the pandemic has presented for schools and districts across the country have been unprecedented," says Steve Burk, Director of Marketing at SALTO Systems. "We applaud the administrators who have stepped up in the face of adversity to meet this challenge head on."

"Because of COVID-19, more school leaders than ever are understanding that modern access control is about much more than just locking and unlocking doors. Today's smart locking technology can play a crucial role in visitor management, contact tracing and other COVID-19 mitigation strategies, while helping to create a more safe, healthy, and contactless environment."

SALTO Systems provides state-of-the-art access control technologies that can help to create safe, convenient learning environments in any school facility. To learn more, visit saltosystems.com.

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Utilizing substitute teachers effectively

During COVID, it's more important than ever that school district leaders place their subs for maximum impact. Here are five approaches to consider.

By Mike Teng

Whether districts are operating in-person or remotely, there is arguably an even greater need for substitute teachers during this not-so-normal school year. Subs can be invaluable resources for districts as they navigate the complexities of operating during COVID-19 and, as our research (http://kxs2.2.vu/1) reveals, many are ready and eager to teach.

Below are five ways districts can effectively utilize subs during the pandemic (and beyond) to both fill teacher absences and meet the needs of students.

1. On-site in the classroom

Prior to COVID-19, this was the traditional and most popular way subs were utilized. Now, for districts that are back in-person or moving that direction, this can still be an efficient way to utilize these educators, especially in a small group setting.

Small groups of typically 8 to 12 students allow districts to safely maintain social distancing while delivering in-person instruction, often to high-need and special education students. In some cases, districts are even able to use "Learning Loss Mitigation" funding under the CARES Act to fund sub costs when using the on-site small group model.

2. Virtual classroom

When delivering instruction remotely, districts can look into hiring a virtual credentialed sub or a virtual aide. A virtual credentialed sub will typically take on more responsibility, such as follow a lesson plan or be prepared to create their own. A virtual aide sub, meanwhile, usually helps out with 1:1 or small group support remotely. Aides can also help other teachers teach their students over Google Classroom or Zoom.

In the virtual format, districts can have a fully remote classroom with both the sub and students being remote or a hybrid classroom where the sub is remote and students are in the physical classroom. Other districts will ask the subs to come on-site to teach in the classroom while students learn from home. This allows the teacher to utilize district computer equipment and access to tech support.

3. Roving, in-person or remote

With roving, districts can secure a sub even if they are uncertain how they'll specifically utilize the sub. Roving subs are beneficial for districts looking for both flexibility and consistency. For example, with a long-term roving sub, districts can have ongoing support from the same sub, which not only provides consistency, but also safety. These assignments are also not typically structured in advance, so in the case of a last-minute call-out, a district can use its roving sub to secure that spot.

4. Long-term

When a teacher goes out on leave, or retires, districts will often need a long-term sub for coverage. It's important to have a good sub for a long-term request, so administrators should identify an individual who meets the needs, and conduct a thorough interview to vet the sub and ensure that person is the best fit. Consider allowing long-term subs to shadow a teacher before the assignment begins, even virtually!

5. Co-teaching in-person when the teacher is remote

With the pandemic, there has been an increasing demand for utilizing subs in this capacity in hybrid and in-person environments. With co-teaching, the sub and students are in the classroom, but the teacher is remote.

When would this use case make the most sense? If a teacher starts to feel under the weather, but can still teach, or if they are quarantining, but don't feel sick, they can still facilitate instruction and have the sub to help manage the classroom and keep students on task and engaged with their assignment.

In addition to providing extra support to the teacher, using subs in a co-teaching model provides extra safety for staff and students while allowing teachers to work remotely. It also reduces technology issues by having the sub act as a support person on site and provides a sense of normalcy for students by having them in their normal learning environment in school.

As districts continue to navigate COVID-19 this school year, and ultimately make plans for returning fully back to in-person teaching, subs will continue to be an integral part of districts' day-to-day operations. DA

Mike Teng is the CEO and co-founder of Swing Education (www.swingeducation.com), a tech-enabled marketplace business that matches substitute teachers with schools in need. Swing provides in-house professional development, dedicated distance learning tech support, and no-cost teacher shadowing to support districts with distance learning.

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Source: Trends in CCLR, https://www.hobsons.com/resources/trends-in-cclr-a-nationwide-look-into-college-career-and-life-readiness-trends-and-practices/

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