

# DA

District Administration®

July/August 2021

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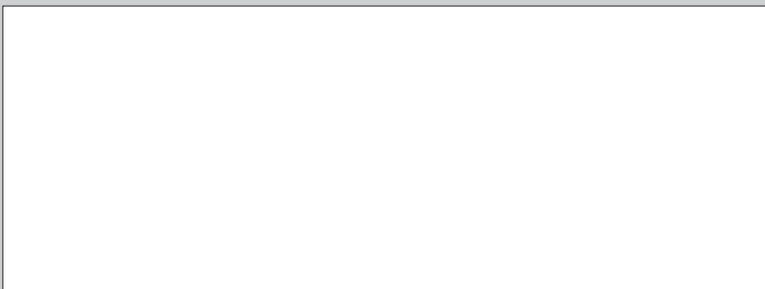
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## Ending a school year like no other

I recently had the pleasure of attending my eldest daughter's high school graduation, a ceremonious end to a decidedly unceremonious year.

For the first time in many months, she got to spend time with her peers in person, not from behind a laptop screen. Even with masks on and social distancing in place, the joy in their eyes at being together again was telling.

A year of remote learning cost our children so much, yet the hard work, creativity, and resourcefulness of educators and administrators made all the difference. Your efforts turned what could have been a truly wasted year into one of invention and ingenuity.

As you hopefully take time this summer to spend quality time with your family and refresh yourself, body and soul, be sure to give yourself credit for the incredible work done this past school year.

As you prepare for fall, *DA* will continue to look ahead to the challenges and opportunities that await. Many of the topics covered in this issue of the magazine will likely still be of concern, while new challenges are sure to emerge.

We're here for you. Kudos for a job well done, and best wishes for a more "normal" school year ahead!

Sincerely,  
*Eric Weiss, Executive Editor*



## 30 questions to ask when selecting a unified district communication platform

If your district is grappling with many communications tools patchworked together, it's time to consider a unified platform.

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### School mask tracker: Who is, isn't loosening the rules

Facing pushback from parents, a small but growing number of districts are loosening or dropping mask requirements.

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### Is the CDC ready to change its school mask guidance?

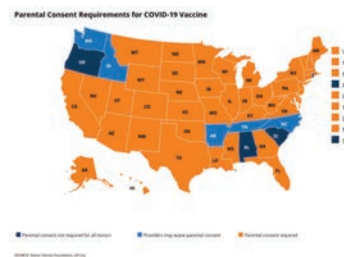
Children younger than 12 could get a COVID vaccine by Thanksgiving.

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### 2 new superintendents detail how they got the top job

National Superintendent Academy participants learn practical skills for getting and succeeding in leadership positions.

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### COVID-19 vaccination and parental consent: State-by-state look at rules

Most states require parental consent at this point, though the landscape may be shifting as more jurisdictions seek to encourage the vaccination of young people.

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## Title IX bars LGBTQ+ discrimination amid fairness concerns

Title IX's protections against discrimination extend to LGBTQ+ students' sexual orientation and gender identity, the U.S. Department of Education said in a clarification of the landmark law.

This syncs Title IX with a 2020 Supreme Court employment ruling that found discriminating against a person based on sexual orientation or gender identity equates to discriminating against that person based on sex, the department's Office for Civil Rights announced in June.

Despite Title IX broader protections, girls still don't have the same opportunities to thrive in K-12 sports that boys experience, one attorney said during a week-long, virtual Title IX hearing held in June by the department's Office for Civil Rights.

Girls, particularly those from lower-income families, have far fewer opportunities to play sports in schools that are

not meeting Title IX obligations, said Kim Turner, senior staff attorney for Fair Play for Girls in Sports, a nonprofit gender equity and LGBTQ rights organization. "Still today, millions of girls are not being afforded opportunities in school sports and those that do play are on a blatantly uneven playing field," she said.

During the hearing, others questioned the fairness of allowing transgender athletes to participate in girls' sports.

Selina, a high school track and field athlete from Connecticut, recounted her experiences racing against athletes who were assigned male at birth who were "bigger, faster and stronger." "Title IX was designed to ensure that female athletes have the opportunity to compete and win but less than 50 years after passing this landmark law we girls are losing to male athletes because of the

### TITLE IX



bad policies that substitute gender identity for biological sex," she said.

But Rebekah, a rising transgender 9th-grader from New Jersey, said being welcomed on her field hockey team has allowed her to feel affirmed and, in turn, thrive in school. "I know that makes me very lucky, but it also means it can be done," she said, "because my school never questioned my identity, and never do my peers."

—Matt Zalaznick



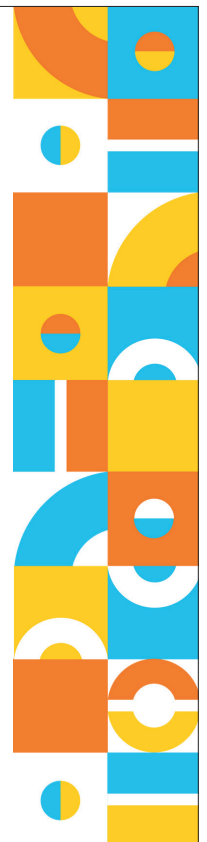
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# Improving school safety, security and efficiency

With ASSA ABLOY, the Kent School significantly upgrades its access control system

Like most schools, the Kent School had for years kept buildings and rooms secure with mechanical locks. But after the tragedy in nearby Newtown, the leadership of the Connecticut private boarding institution wanted to improve Kent's safety and security. This first led to adopting an electronic card-based door lock technology that, while an improvement, didn't connect to the campus network.

"We saw that having everything tied to a network would be a huge advantage, because an online platform improves your ability to remotely monitor and manage the activity assigned to a certain room," says Associate Head of School Jeffrey D. Cataldo, who serves as CFO and COO of Kent. "We also wanted to work with a leader in the field of access control, who could advise us on how to use, maintain and extract as much value from their system as possible." Kent found such a partner in ASSA ABLOY and decided to install their IN120 Wi-Fi locks across campus.

## Smooth implementation process

Kent began implementation during the summer and needed to finish before school began. "We are lucky to have a team of onsite electricians and other trained employees," says Cataldo. "We were also able to rely on ASSA ABLOY and our factory certified integrator who provided consultation and helped us determine how the jobs would go. It was a smooth process from start to finish."

Currently, IN120 Wi-Fi locks have been installed throughout 80 percent of the Kent campus, including 250 dorm rooms. The locks feature reader technology that gives schools the broadest flexibility in their card or mobile credential selection and leverage the school's existing Wi-Fi network to streamline installations.



"An online access control system provides unrivaled efficiency campus wide, and comprehensive control over who can access which facilities and when."

## Improved efficiency and visibility

Students can now easily enter and lock their dorm rooms with their assigned card and, should these cards get lost, campus employees are able to quickly disable the lost card and issue a new card to the student so they can access their room.

Staff can also remotely monitor and manage the locks via real-time alarms and see when external doors are locked and who has been denied entry to certain areas. "For example, there's no need for students to access an academic building or other dormitories besides their own after 8:00 PM when it's time for bed, so we can turn off access to those areas," says Cataldo. Additionally, places such as libraries are only open during study times outside of the normal school day.

## Keeping students safe while ensuring privacy

Kent leadership also put restrictions on faculty and staff's cards. "This wasn't in response to a problem, but it was proactively for the purpose of managing campus in a safe and efficient manner," says Cataldo. For example, staff are only allowed to

enter dormitories during normal working hours, since these buildings are considered students' homes. The same applies to academic buildings if they do not have an office there. Staff and student card holders are protected from unwarranted suspicion through intelligent scheduling and timestamped lock activity reporting.

In case of an emergency, campus security operates 24/7 and can unlock doors remotely should staff need access to buildings outside their normal designated hours.

"It's important for schools to recognize the value of having network-connected locks throughout their buildings' interior spaces as well as the traditionally connected exterior openings," says Cataldo. "An online access control system provides unrivaled efficiency campus wide, and comprehensive control over who can access which facilities and when."

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### 5 ways to prevent COVID-era stress from driving teachers away

Nearly one in four teachers were expected to quit before the end of the 2020-'21 school year, a significant increase compared to the rate of departures seen pre-COVID, new research shows.

Before the pandemic, one in six were likely to leave, according to a report from the RAND Corporation, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization.

And stress appears to be a key cause of this threat to the teacher supply. Public school teachers are almost twice as likely to report frequent job-related stress than were adults elsewhere in the workforce, according to the American Educator Panels survey RAND conducted this winter.

“This raises the concern that more teachers may decide to quit this year than in past years if nothing is done,”



said Elizabeth Steiner, lead author of the report and a policy researcher at RAND.

Leading causes of stress were the modes of instruction, lack of administrator and technical support, frequent technical issues with remote teaching, and lack of implementation of COVID-19 safety measures.

The report recommends that schools implement COVID-19 mitigation measures that allow teachers to focus on instruction, collect data about the mental health needs of teachers, and help teachers access childcare.

—Matt Zalaznick

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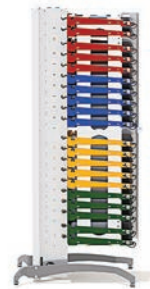
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# THE CLASH OVER CRITICAL RACE THEORY

**Advocates call  
CRT key to understanding  
American history,  
while opponents say  
it targets white  
students**

BY MATT ZALAZNICK

Showing students where and when society has failed to live up to the standard of “all men are created equal” is a driving force behind critical race theory, professor Vida A. Robertson says.

The concept, which is now being banned in a growing number of states, helps students understand, in the context of various academic subjects, the roles race and racism have played, says Robertson, director of the University of Houston-Downtown’s Center for Critical Race Studies and an associate professor of English and humanities.

“In the absence of anti-racist education, racial stereotypes go unchallenged, the inequitable status quo is normalized, and students of color remain educationally ostracized,” Robertson says. “Such bans decrease the probability that K-12 students will be encouraged and empowered to grapple with the most profound

feature of their young lives—race.”

This spring, 20 state attorneys general, calling critical race theory “deeply flawed and controversial,” urged the Biden Administration to strike it and related concepts from the Department of Education’s history and civics guidance.

“The (Department of Education) should make it clear that it will not fund projects that promote CRT or any projects that characterize the United States as irredeemably racist or founded on principles of racism (as opposed to principles of equality) or that purport to ascribe character traits, values, privileges, status, or beliefs, or that assign fault, blame, or bias, to a particular race



or to an individual because of his or her race,” the group wrote in a letter to Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona.

But a district is already teaching components of critical race theory if its teachers are culturally responsive and inclusive, says Cleveland Hayes, the associate dean for academic affairs and a professor in Urban Teacher Education at Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis.

“CRT is not an exclusive framework,” Hayes says. “It’s inclusive.”

### How to change systems

Administrators in many districts have bolstered anti-racism curricula in the wake of COVID’s disproportionate impacts and last summer’s racial justice protests.

The following foundational concepts form the basis of critical race theory:

1. Race is not biological; it is a sociological construct.
2. Racism is a common and systemic

mechanism by which racial differences and racial inequalities are maintained.

3. Race and racism advantage the dominant group and therefore any racial advancement or racial equity measure will only occur if it benefits the dominant group.

4. Racial identity is a dynamic process that changes depending on the needs or interests of the dominant group. Different racial groups are racialized differently at different moments in time for different reasons.

5. Racialized and marginalized people have unique insight into the nature of oppressive systems, structures and institutions.

“The goal of CRT is to equip students with the ability to change the systems, structures and institutions that maintain racial inequities,” Robertson says.

Educators should critically evaluate their curriculum to ensure that the perspectives of Black, Indigenous and other people of color are fully represented, say

professors Esther J. Calzada and Cossy Hough, of the University of Texas at Austin’s school of social work.

For example, such a shift could require “calling the treatment of First Nation People what it was—a genocide,” says Hough, a clinical associate professor and the school’s assistant dean for undergraduate programs.

Students would also think more critically about the legacy of slavery and recognize that the Civil Rights Act did not end systemic and pervasive racism in the U.S., she says.

“Countries that acknowledge their past violent oppression of non-dominant groups are better able to move forward toward change,” she says. “Including open discussion about events and times in history such as Black lynchings, redlining and others, and linking those to the systems we have in place today should be part of education.”

Students sense when adults feel uncomfortable talking about race and, in turn, quickly learn to keep their questions about race to themselves, adds Calzada, a professor of child and family behavioral health and the school’s associate dean for equity and inclusion.

Educators should therefore talk regularly and proactively about racial identities, Calzada says.

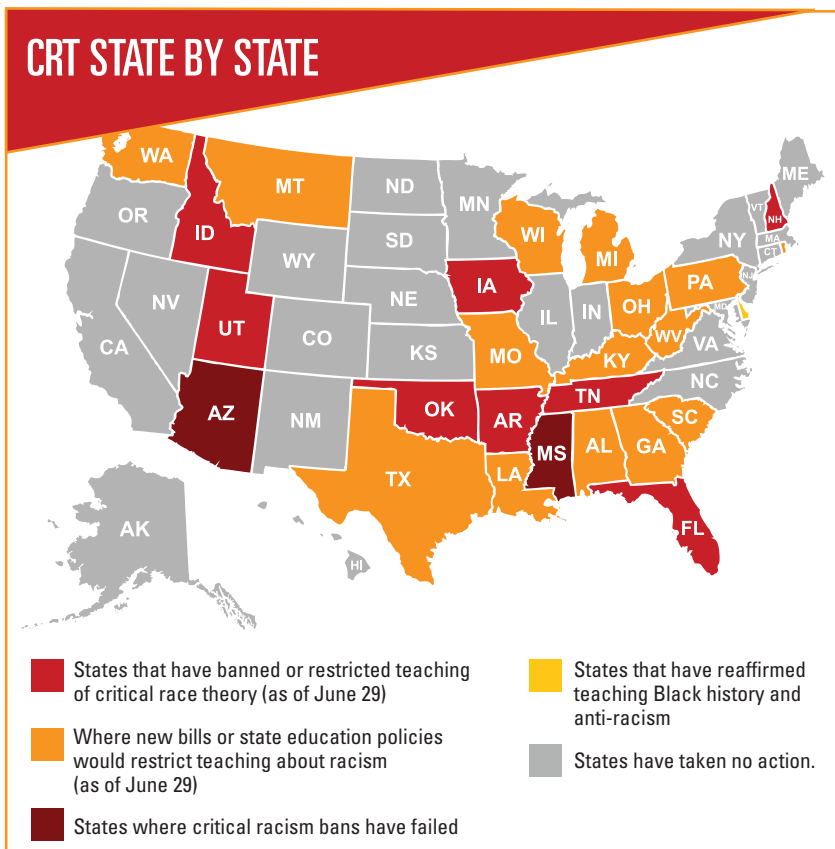
“We need to break this silence and teach children how to be comfortable with and develop appropriate language for talking about race and racism,” Calzada says.

### More states prohibiting CRT

Opponents of CRT have argued that critical race theory unfairly targets white students in its focus on systemic racism today and throughout U.S. history.

In May, Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee signed a law that threatens to withhold funds from schools that violate the CRT ban, The Associated Press reported.

“We need to make sure that our kids recognize that this country is moving toward a more perfect union, that we should teach the exceptionalism of our





**Cleveland Hayes**  
Associate dean for academic affairs and professor in Urban Teacher Education at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis



**Esther Calzada**  
Associate dean for equity and inclusion at the University of Texas Austin's school of social work.



**Cossy Hough**  
Assistant dean for undergraduate programs at the University of Texas Austin's school of social work.

nation and how people can live together and work together to make a greater nation, and to not teach things that inherently divide or pit either Americans against Americans or people groups against people groups,” Lee said, according to The AP.

Oklahoma now prohibits it and, according to The AP, Montana’s attorney has banned critical race theory on the grounds that it is “discriminatory.”

In their letter, the attorneys general argued that CRT could put teachers at risk of discriminating against students “who are inappropriately defined as hav-

ing ‘privilege’ or being ‘oppressors’ based solely on their race.”

“The implementation of these priorities will, in practice, lead to racial and ethnic division and indeed more discrimination,” the letter says.

But critical race theory does not stipulate that some people are racist just because of their race, Hough says, adding that some white students and families are uncomfortable accepting that white culture is still dominant in the U.S. and “that people in white bodies continue to benefit from that.”

“Defining what CRT really is and that

white children aren’t going to be called out in classes as racists as individuals, as some legislators have indicated, is important,” Hough says.

Hayes also urges white educators to look outside themselves to the bigger picture.

“If you’re white, don’t make this about you—it’s not about you,” he says. “It’s really about creating a space where all children can grow and we can learn more about each other.” **DA**

*Matt Zalaznick is DA’s senior editor.*

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# The next generation of access control in K-12 school facilities

## Q&A with **Gerry Rupper**, Senior Regional Sales Manager, SALTO Systems



### What trends are you seeing in K-12 facilities safety and security?

Many school districts are either replacing or planning to replace their old classroom doors. Very often it's because the doors were not constructed with today's security considerations in mind. Older doors often use large glass windows, and many schools are choosing to replace them with doors that have narrower windows, providing a higher level of security.

If a district or school is updating doors, it can also be an ideal time to consider installing wireless electronic locksets, since the door locking hardware is already being replaced. The added cost for the upgrade is minimal, and these systems can provide many safety, security and cost-saving advantages to the district.

### What are some advantages to wireless door locking systems in school facilities?

From a safety and security perspective, wireless systems can provide a lockdown solution not only for classrooms but also for all doors throughout a school building. Every connected door can be locked instantly from one location. This greatly increases the security of the building. A typical wired access control system is only installed on perimeter doors. In addition, a wireless system can provide detailed auditing reports about mandatory school lockdown drills.

Another benefit is added control. With a wireless system, administrators can allow access to specific areas only to certain personnel and at specific times and receive audits and reports on room usage and access history. This also enables easy scheduling, so a school could schedule the bathrooms to lock while students are moving between classes to help mitigate vaping or other illicit activities, for example. Similarly, classroom doors could be scheduled to be unlocked during school hours and automatically lock in the event of an emergency.

Furthermore, a keyless electronic locking system solves the common problem of having multiple master keys



in circulation, which can be a serious security concern. Rekeying locks and reissuing keys to staff can be a costly and burdensome process. But with wireless electronic locks, access can be assigned or removed quickly and easily.

### What does the future of access control look like?

The era of mobile credentials has just begun. Having digital keys and ID cards on mobile phones could provide many advantages to K-12 schools. For example, an administrator could enable temporary facilities access to a contractor or a substitute teacher just for specific buildings, rooms, days and time periods, after which it would expire.

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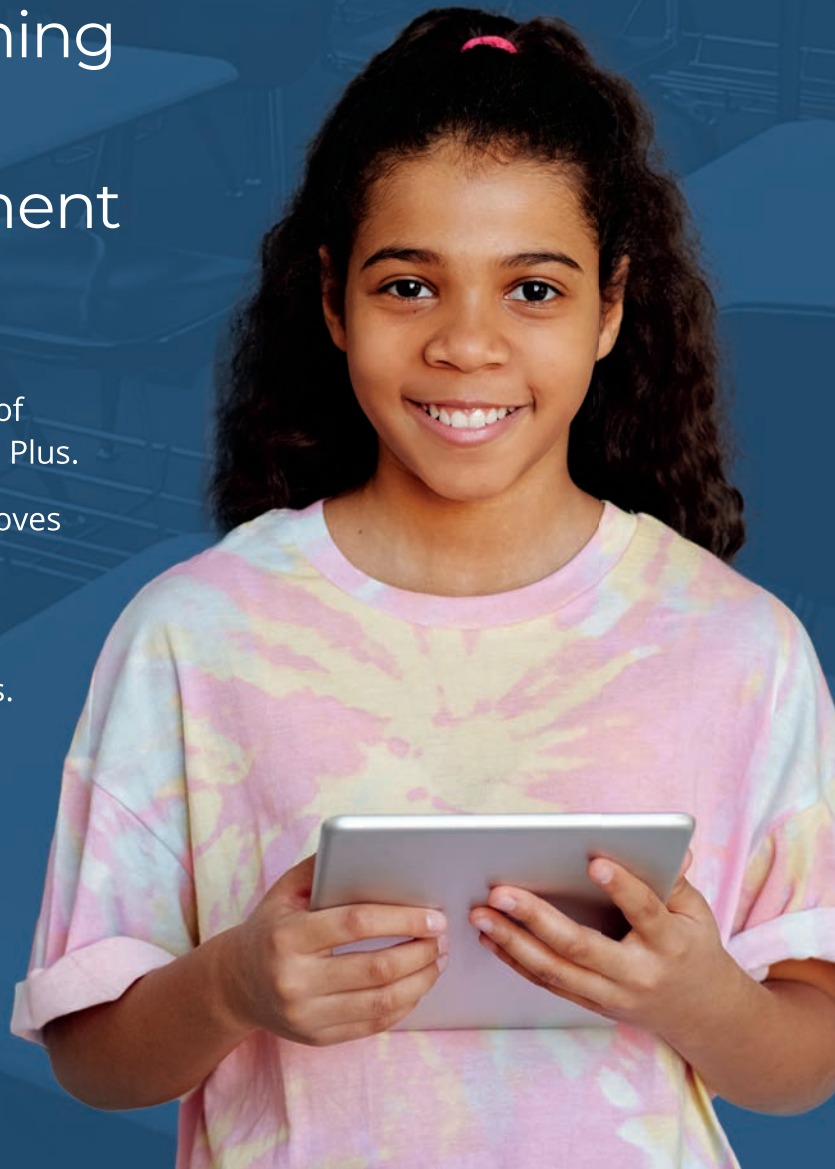
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# COMPUTER SCIENCE SURGE



By Matt Zalaznick

How states are bringing computer science into the core of academic subjects and expanding opportunities

Participation in AP computer science classes in Rhode Island has increased 17-fold since 2016.

During that time, educators have been implementing and refining the state's initial set of computer science standards, which lay out what students will learn from kindergarten to career, says Spencer Sherman, chief for innovation in the Rhode Island Department of Elementary & Secondary Education.

That includes partnerships with Brown University and Project Lead the Way to offer professional development in computer science for teachers at all levels, Sherman says.

Also, the department is now in regular contact with employers to track workforce needs and with higher education to stay up-to-date on how students should be prepared for college.

"If you're a teacher, it can be tough to teach computer science," Sherman says.

"We're building a pipeline from kindergarten to career through an integrated system."

## **Why computer science must start early and often**

Computer science must begin in kindergarten because it's not too many years later when students decide if they are "techies," Stephen King says.

That's why, in helping develop Kansas' computer science standards in 2019, he urged the state to go beyond making computer science a high school graduation requirement.

"We've got a robust system of CTE pathways having to do with computer science, web development and programming," says King, the Kansas Department of Education's education program consultant in media and technology. "But if you can't fill the seats—if you can't fill the seats with a diverse population—you're not doing the state as much good as you could have."

Kansas' goal is to introduce students to computer science early and often, King says. For example, third-grade teachers are now having students program and fly drones to learn fractions.

Starting computer science in kindergarten and first grade, and embedding it throughout elementary schools, also increases the chances that underrepresented and underprivileged students will develop a passion for the subject and study computer science in middle and high school, and college, he says.

Arkansas began developing one of the nation's first set of early grades computer science standards back in 2016, at the same time it began requiring students to take an introduction to coding course in seventh or eighth grade.

The K-8 standards are meant to be embedded across content areas and to support classroom activities.

The standards focus heavily on digital literacy and using computers in instruc-

# Computer Science Surge

tion, says Anthony A. Owen, the state director of computer science education in the Arkansas Department of Education.

“Integration of basic computer science skills and knowledge through practical classroom experiences promote connections to all subject areas and to the real world,” Owen says. “The standards support critical thinking through the essential skills of computational thinking and algorithmic problem-solving.”

## Achieving diversity and completion

In Rhode Island, a key goal in recent years has been increasing participation and equity in advanced placement and other computer science courses, says Holly Walsh, manager of CS4RI, the department’s computer science initiative.

When data revealed that a large group of students needed extra support, the department awarded grants to urban schools to develop strategies and plans for computer science instruction. For instance, this helped educators in those schools align computer science with their CTE programs and expand work-based learning programs traditionally reserved for seniors to younger high school students.

The earlier workforce experiences give students a chance to then take AP computer science on their path to college and careers. And the grants require that the demographic makeup of computer science courses match the demographic makeup of the school as a whole, Walsh says.

In Arkansas, high school students move toward mastery in computational thinking and problem-solving as well as data and security, algorithms and programs, and professionalism and impacts of computing.

A 2020 revision of the standards created nine computer science pathways that cover 55 courses spanning traditional subjects such as programming, networking and robotics along with artificial intelligence, machine learning, data science, app design, game development and other high-growth fields.

These courses were designed in partnership with industry leaders to ensure they met workforce needs, Owen says.

Some superintendents and principals are going beyond state requirements as they make computer science and com-



puting education integral parts of their district, school, and community, he says.

“I like to say, they are not worried about meeting the ‘have to’s’ because they are focusing on the ‘should do’s,’ which include and go beyond the ‘have to’s.’”

These leaders are encouraging multiple teachers across all grades to become fully certified in computer science and to participate in ongoing professional development offered by the state. Educators are also encouraging students to participate in clubs, competitions, student organizations, and after-school programs that are aligned to the computer science standards.

Beginning with the 9th-grade class of 2022-2023, every Arkansas student must earn one full high school computer science credit to graduate. Each high school will employ a certified computer science teacher by the 2023-2024 school year.

“As these requirements come into effect,” Owen says, “our focus will be less on getting enrollments but more on supporting students as they engage in higher-level courses and work toward becoming completers in career programs of study.” **DA**

*Matt Zalaznick is DA’s senior editor.*

## 7 keys for computer science success

Building a pipeline of computer science teachers is one of the biggest steps school leaders can take to accelerate coding, programming and related subjects in their districts, one expert says.

This is particularly important in elementary schools, where teachers are generalists and must navigate between multiple subjects, says Leigh Ann DeLyser, co-founder and executive director of the nonprofit CSforAll.

“Many schools of education do not include computer science in teacher preparation,” DeLyser says.

Tips for computer science success from CSforAll’s “Practice to Policy”:

- 1 Early teacher advocates are key to building interest and momentum.
- 2 Equitable policy outcomes require equity to be a core priority from the start.
- 3 Computer science education policy design should balance rules and incentives (accountability) with clarity on goals and supports for reaching them (alignment).
- 4 In a strong accountability and high-alignment environment, clear targets are more likely to be reached, resulting in equitable institutional implementation.
- 5 Policies must take into account, and directly support, the broader systems supporting classrooms and students.
- 6 Policy needs to be adaptable to individual locations.
- 7 Policy-linked data needs to focus on improvement, not just accountability.



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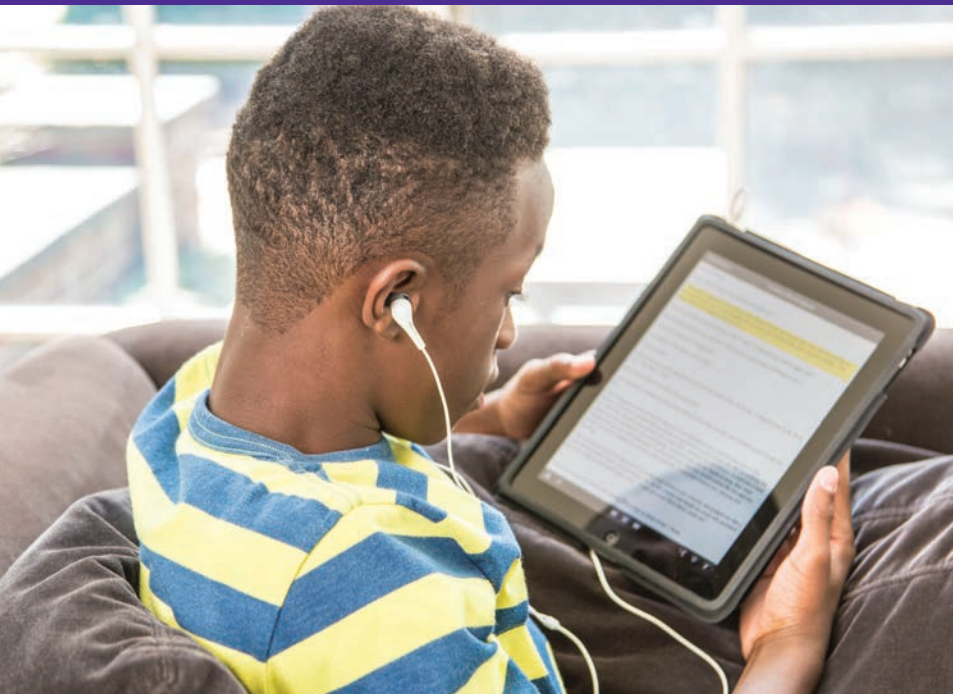
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# BRINGING STUDENTS BACK

Extensive searches and non-punitive responses highlight the efforts districts have undertaken to rebuild enrollment

BY MATT ZALAZNICK

**PERSONAL CONNECTIONS**—In Fresno USD, it was 'all hands on deck' as principals, attendance specialists and other staff worked to encourage all students to return to school after months of online learning.

Educators and social workers in Fresno USD spent several months of the pandemic trying to locate one student who had attended the same elementary school for several years.

After countless phone calls and address searches, a staff member who checked the court system learned the student and their mother had been evicted, says Ambra O'Connor, executive director of Fresno's Department of Prevention and Intervention.

A child welfare specialist then went to a convenience store in the neighborhood asking about the family. After the specialist assured the clerk that the mother would not get into any trouble, the clerk revealed the family was living in a room next door.

Once the district made contact, the mother told staff she had feared her child would be taken away from her. The district, however, acted quickly to provide support—such as clothing and transportation so the child could be enrolled, among other assistance, O'Connor says.

"Our attendance teams are responding much sooner and all school sites are making home visits," O'Connor says. "Principals are out; it's all hands on deck."

## 'A place where students want to be'

The extensive search for just one student, and the non-punitive response, reflects the efforts many districts have undertaken to confront concerning drops in attendance, in-person and online during the long disruptions of COVID.

This school year, Fresno USD administrators were only unable to locate about 2% of the students who didn't re-enroll by the first two weeks of the school.

When a student is located, staff members try to help families overcome barriers, such as access to technology and medical care.

For instance, when administrators looked into why Fresno kindergarteners accounted for the largest drop in online atten-

dance, they discovered that many parents couldn't find childcare or that some childcare providers were charging extra for students participating in distance learning. To further accommodate students, the district intends to maintain a remote option in 2021-22, which means many teachers will continue to teach in-person and online simultaneously. This prevents online students from having to switch teachers, O'Connor says.

In the coming months, the district will hire new intervention specialists to work with students on social-emotional skills individually and in small groups.

Administrators will also pilot a wellness initiative to deploy school nurses and social workers to where they are most needed. "We want positive school climates," O'Connor says. "We want school to be a place where students want to be."

### Teachers are reaching out

Charleston County School District classrooms refilled more quickly this year at schools where long-term principals maintained close ties to the community, Chief Academic Officer Karolyn Belcher says.

To encourage more students to return, the South Carolina district is offering K-8 summer programs that will combine academics with afternoon enrichment activities in arts, music, dance and STEM.

Middle schools used ESSER funds to give raises to teachers willing to work during summer school.

Like in many districts, Charleston County's younger students were among those who struggled most with online and remote learning, says Kimberly Foxworth, the executive director of Early Childhood Readiness Programs. The district is now sending staff members into its communities to encourage families to register for kindergarten and first grade. Once students enroll, teachers and support staff reach out to help begin the transition and gauge how prepared each student is to begin school, Foxworth says.

### Virtual academies

Radford City Schools lost about 80 students—a significant number for the

## 6 WAYS TO CURB COVID'S CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM CRISIS

Attendance gaps ultimately lead to achievement gaps, says the author of FutureEd's "Present Danger" report on absenteeism during COVID

To rebuild attendance, administrators can use funding provided by the CARES Act, ESSER II and the American Rescue Plan. The Georgetown University think tank recommends the following strategies:

- ▶ **1. HOME VISITING.** In-person or virtual visits with a student's family can reduce absenteeism when educators focus on building relationships rather than chastising or nagging families.
- ▶ **2. NUDGES.** Letters and texts that alert parents to their children's absences have proven effective because many parents don't know how many days their children have missed.
- ▶ **3. TUTORING AND MENTORING.** Caring relationships developed during high-dosage tutoring can strengthen a student's sense of belonging.
- ▶ **4. THE RIGHT SCHOOL CLIMATE.** An attendance messaging campaign and greeting students each morning will set a welcoming tone after COVID's disruptions. In elementary school, well-organized recess can improve climate and, in turn, attendance.
- ▶ **5. LEVERAGING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS.** Examples include working with a local transportation agency to make it easier for students to get to school or partnering with nonprofits to find volunteer tutors and mentors.
- ▶ **6. DATA DEMANDS.** Schools may have to upgrade data systems to better analyze the scope of absenteeism issues. Regular reports let educators spot new patterns and students who need interventions.

Administrators can find more strategies in the *Attendance Playbook* published by FutureEd and Attendance Works in 2020.

rural division—to online learning options offered by competing districts and private companies when this school year began.

Budget-wise, the 1,600-student district, which has remained largely in-person this year, also lost \$7,000 in funding for each of those students who left, Superintendent Robert Graham says.

In response, the district partnered with a private company to ramp up its online offerings and recouped much of the funding it lost by enrolling about 900

students from outside its boundaries. Former students also returned to the district from homeschooling and correspondence schools, he added.

Radford City Schools has now joined forces with more than a dozen other districts in its rural Region 7 in southwest Virginia to launch a virtual academy that organizers expect will outlast COVID.

Another goal of the academy is to reduce the burden on teachers who have had to teach in-person and online simultane-



**HEALTHY MESSAGES**—Public Schools of Petoskey is publicizing safety precautions to bring students back.

ously this school year, says Keith Perrigan, superintendent of Bristol Virginia Public Schools, another consortium member.

The academy, which is likely to attract several thousand students or more, will have its own instructors dedicated to online instruction, Perrigan says. “It became pretty apparent after using that model for a year that we needed a better plan for next year,” he says. “But trying to do it [district

by district] would have been an insurmountable task.”

### Supporting students when they return

Getting students who missed all or most of the 2020-21 school year to come back is only the first step in what will be a long and challenging recovery process, says Sandy Addis, chairman of the National Dropout Prevention Center.

“If a school had, for example, 50 at-risk kids before the pandemic, now those 50 kids may be in worse shape,” Addis says. “And there’s a group of kids you would not have considered at-risk before who have not functioned well during the shutdown, and now they’re at risk.”

For instance, the number of students held back from moving up to the next grade will likely increase sharply. But holding students back can have long-term impacts, as even students held back in early grades are more likely to struggle in 9th and 10th grades, Addis says. “That’s a dropout waiting to happen,” he says.

At-risk kids often need a steady routine

to get back on track but many students lost access to the main reasons they come to school, such as a certain teacher, sports or an after-school activity.

“A lot of kids are motivated to come to school and engage academically because of these non-academic supports,” he says. “You’ve got to recreate these connections.”

Another way that leaders can re-engage students is to form post-COVID recovery teams to assess each student’s needs and experiences of the pandemic. Students, for instance, are less likely to re-engage if, when they return, educators focus only on how far they’ve fallen behind.

Addis also recommends administrators resist the temptation to base attendance only on how many hours a student was logged into online learning. “We may have to give some kids a little bit of a pass,” Addis says. “Applying pre-pandemic academics standards and attendance rules to post-pandemic school doesn’t fit.” **DA**

*Matt Zalaznick is DA’s senior editor.*

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## Did emergent bilingual students lose a year of language while at home?

Some in education are suggesting certain students be retained because of the 'learning loss' that has taken place. Here is an argument against that approach

By Maya Goodall, M.A., M.Ed.

Traditionally, learning English in the U.S. K-12 context has been approached from an intervention perspective. The underlying thinking has been that learners who come to school not knowing English are at a deficit and need to “catch up” with their English-speaking peers. This has perpetuated a deficit mindset, where we focus on what learners lack rather than what they possess.

Having a deficit view places the emphasis on a student’s lack of English, and we find ourselves framing such students as having “impoverished language” or “requiring intervention.” In fact, even thinking of English as an intervention is indicative of a societal view that learners are in grave danger of becoming “languageless” when actually, they are merely on the path to English acquisition.

The opposite of a deficit view is an asset view. In this view, the obstacles that a learner faces are peripheral to the learner’s identity. An asset view of language learners focuses on the language skills the learner already has and on the bilingualism they can attain.

A small but profound shift is to refer to learners as “Emergent Bilinguals” or “Multilingual Learners.” Outside of the U.S., multilingualism is often viewed as an asset. Language acquisition follows predictable patterns for the human mind, so instruction in the English as a Foreign Language context is not sensationally innovative. The radical idea which spurs its success is an asset view of language by the educators and society.

### Human capacity for language

The reality is, everyone is born with the capacity for language. Researchers have found that children between the ages of

infancy to five years show signs of being able to distinguish languages. Children who have been exposed to English and another language are able to focus on both of those languages.

In one particular study, as children grew and were speaking both languages, researchers showed that children could not only distinguish between the languages they heard, but also make discrete choices when speaking one or the other. Even when “code-switching,” children would make grammar choices pertinent to the language they were speaking.

Happily, the very thing that makes the difference in whether or not someone learns a second language is something that educators can influence: instruction. This is the mitigating factor that researchers found when investigating the reasons why some children became bilingual and others did not. Instruction comes from multiple sources: home, school, and society.

### Home language as background

There is strong evidence that knowledge and use of a heritage language can help aid in the learning of the second language. Encouraging parents to use their heritage language, speak in complete sentences, introduce new vocabulary words, and read in the home language have all been proven to help children learn a second language. Essentially, the home language is background knowledge that the teacher can leverage to help a learner learn English.

### Your English learner master plan

Most, if not all, school districts have an English Learner Master Plan (if not this, then some kind of accountability plan).

There, you will find a reference to goals, guiding principles, or objectives for the district.

This is the time to reexamine the meaning behind these words. If the advantages of being multilingual are meaningful enough for the creation a stated belief/goal, then supporting a learner to become multilingual must be a concrete activity. Educators should acknowledge that the learner is actually becoming multilingual, and that language learning and teaching is a job divided between home and school. Parents should be praised and encouraged to cultivate heritage language use in their homes.

As teachers, we know how profound and necessary background knowledge is. In this case, the first language is the background knowledge needed to teach the second language. The time spent at home during the pandemic was time well spent, building more background knowledge in the first language.

The asset model asks us to view all happenings from a growth mindset and have reverence for a student’s lived experiences. Our own thinking around multilingualism, which can be found in our school system documents, also codifies our thinking around this. If the pandemic has taught us anything, it is to focus on what we have, how to make the most of it, and move forward. The year spent at home is no reason to retain a student. It is our imperative to focus on the assets a learner has and teach them what they need to know in order to move forward. **DA**

*Maya Goodall is Senior Director of Emergent Bilingual Curriculum at Lexia Learning.*



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## How the NGSS can set your students (and teachers) free

By Ian Kastelic, DA guest columnist

**While the Next Generation Science Standards ask teachers to take a new approach to instruction, they also empower teachers and students to be scientists together**

**L**ike many districts throughout California and the nation, the San Mateo-Foster City School District has been transitioning to the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). While we've been preparing for the shift for years, this is the first school year that we've had the standards and an NGSS-aligned curriculum in place throughout our elementary schools.

As the Teacher on Special Assignment tasked with overseeing the transition for our district, I've found the NGSS to be a powerful framework for bringing all students—and not just those who excel at science—into the world of inquiry and wonder that science makes available. As exciting as the new standards are to some educators, it's a big change to the way we teach science and, as such, can cause quite a bit of anxiety.

This is how we've tried to make that transition as smooth as possible, and why we think it's worth the work, for both students and their teachers.

### **Why some teachers might struggle**

In addition to a dramatic change to the content that is taught, the NGSS is a total pedagogical shift as well. The more you understand about the NGSS, the clearer it becomes that the teacher's role is not diminished, but it is shifted. Instead of being the person with the answers, the NGSS asks teachers to move their students' learning forward by being great questioners.

With the NGSS, students spend a lot of time exploring phenomena and asking their own questions, which leads to experiments, more questions and discussion, and maybe new experiments, allowing students to come to some answers by taking on the role of scientists.

For example, our 2nd-grade students study erosion. In a series of activities, students experience wind and water erosion. In lesson 3, they create erosion models, make predictions about what will happen to those models, and then test them. The teacher's role is not to explain why the student groups get the results they do, but to guide them to the next bread crumb in the trail, which may well be another question. If that's the case, the teacher's job then is to help them initiate and move through the process of testing that idea.

Teachers are excellent question-askers but, especially in elementary science, they are used to being focused on conveying information, not soliciting ideas.

### **Curriculum is key**

Choosing the right curriculum is critical. With the NGSS approach to science and an excellent curriculum built to meet those standards, following the curriculum means that teachers are doing mostly all of the right things.

Knowing that, early on, some of our teachers were going to be relying on their curriculum as a kind of "PD by fire" as they became comfortable with their new role as guides to scientific inquiry, we made a point of choosing a curriculum that had the NGSS baked into it. We chose Twig Science Next Gen for many reasons, but a key one was that the K-8 curriculum was designed from the ground up for the NGSS.

### **Experiential professional development**

We've found the best way to help teachers make the transition from information conveyor to question asker is to give them the opportunity to experience it from the student's perspective. The

NGSS has held a series of workshops, dubbed "NGSS Rollouts," that put teachers in the place of students. Putting them in a position to struggle with ideas and follow the processes they are being asked to guide their students through helps them develop a firsthand understanding of the methodology.

That is, unfortunately, a very time-consuming PD experience. Since it is such a big shift, the increase in a teacher's expertise in these new methods and standards will take years. The writers of the NGSS suggested 3-5 years.

### **A more accessible approach to science**

One of the big challenges to accessibility in our district is language. Almost one-third of our students are English learners. The language scaffolding in the Twig science curriculum is great for English learners or any student struggling with reading or comprehension.

But one of the best things about the NGSS is that they are inherently more accessible than more traditional standards. They don't take away the opportunity for the "science kid" to excel, but they do give everyone else in the class a chance to excel. The NGSS is about equity! Since everyone is looking at the same problem and trying to solve it in the real world, real-world experience comes to bear at least as often as scientific knowledge.

Just as it frees teachers to be questioners and guides rather than answer-givers, the NGSS also gives students the freedom to ask—and ultimately answer—their own questions. **DA**

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*Ian Kastelic is a teacher on special assignment for the San Mateo-Foster City School District. He can be reached at [ikastelic@smfc.k12.ca.us](mailto:ikastelic@smfc.k12.ca.us).*



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