

# DA

District Administration®

September 2021

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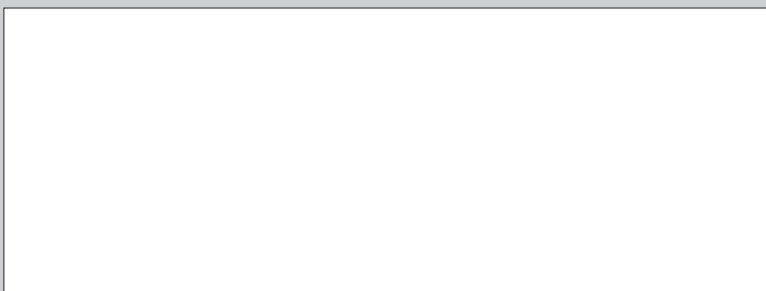
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## Here we go, again

Here we are.

A third COVID-impacted school year has begun, even though we were so close to getting back to normal earlier this year before the virus variants emerged.

Mask and vaccine hesitancy, bans on mask mandates in some states, and other politicization of the pandemic have further complicated what should have been a triumphant recovery from this pernicious disease.

Some governors have tied the hands of school officials when it comes to safety protocols. Frustrated and angry parents have pummeled school boards with protests and threats over masking and other policies. The superintendents of some of the nation's largest districts have quit rather than go through another year of dealing with one crisis after another.

Students across the country, including millions younger than 12 who cannot, as of this writing, receive the vaccine, are back in class. Some are masked, many are not. More than ever are hospitalized. And most are dealing with some degree of learning loss after more than a year of remote learning.

And here we are. So now what?

It's not all doom and gloom. If the last two years taught us anything, it is that educators are resilient and creative. Superintendents and leadership teams have learned to pivot like never before. Teachers, too, have adapted to new and sometimes challenging forms of pedagogy.

Also in the plus column, billions in federal relief dollars are being spent on a variety of remediation efforts, from tutoring programs, to endeavors to reverse enrollment drops, increase professional development, invest in technology, and more. See story on page 33.

It would be nice if we were in a different place. But here we are, and *DA* will continue to look for solutions, highlight innovation, feature success stories, and as always, root for your success.

Wishing you a healthy and productive 2021-22 school year.

Sincerely,

*Eric Weiss, Executive Editor*

## Reasons to visit DistrictAdministration.com

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

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### Schools can keep serving free meals through 2021-22

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### New normal? Delta spike drives CDC's call for another masked school year

'Children should return to full-time in-person learning in fall with proper prevention strategies in place,' CDC director says.

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### How one district is planning to block bullying over students' mask choices

More states and districts impose mask mandates as delta spreads and the school year begins.

[bit.ly/mask-bullying](https://bit.ly/mask-bullying)

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## How SEL training can help alleviate teacher burnout, stress

The Atlanta Public School system recognizes the importance of social-emotional development, not just for students but for teachers and staff. However, its whole approach to developing programs for educators that build self-management and relationship skills is rare. Very few districts employ strategies to assist those who lead classrooms.

A new policy brief from the Southern Education Foundation notes the tremendous pressures being felt by teachers—particularly in urban districts—as well as their impacts on learning. It has offered some recommendations that may guide district leaders and policymakers still coping with further stressors from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Titled *Teacher Stress and Burnout: The High Cost of Low Social and Emotional Development*, it presents the profession as one of the worst for “physical health, psychological well-being, and job satisfaction” that can be much more difficult for younger teachers and those in underserved schools who are tasked with burdens such as disorganization, student hardships and meeting high test standards. The report highlights that nearly a third of teachers are chronically absent and many more apt to leave Title I schools than their colleagues in other districts, which then impacts outcomes for students.

Short of policy change, the Foundation says teachers must be afforded the chance to understand how they can alleviate those stresses and thrive.

“If we want our schools to be optimal learning environments, we need to provide teachers with the opportunity to build their own social and emotional skills,” said report author Sabrina Jones, a former fourth-grade teacher in Miami-Dade Public Schools and the Southern Education Foundation’s 2021 Leadership for Educational Equity Fellow.



“Teachers can then use these skills to manage their own emotions, co-regulate their students’ stress, and contribute to creating a healthier school climate.”

### 5 SEL considerations for districts

The report showcases the five components of SEL building from the nonprofit Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)—self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills and decision-making—that can help to foster “a productive learning environment.” The brief provides a few examples of success from three southern districts, including Atlanta, Palm Beach County, Fla., and Tulsa, Okla. Palm Beach County in fact has worked with CASEL on training for educators that include self-paced modules. Tulsa offers an SEL 101 course for principals and teachers.

The goal of any SEL program is to keep teachers emotionally physically healthy and lessen the tensions in classrooms that often lead to an increase in poor behavior and a decrease in test scores among students.

In addition to the work being done by those districts, the Southern Education Foundation offers five ideas to district leaders and states on boosting SEL for instructors and staff:

**1. Passionate, new teachers need as much support as, if not more than, their colleagues.** Help them get the skills they need to thrive early and remain in their jobs.

**2. Be wary of monetary attendance incentives for teachers.** They might not provide the payoff you think; instead, they force teachers to work while fatigued and stressed, leading to burnout and resignations.

**3. Don’t assume you have a pulse on the mental health and well-being of teachers.** Take surveys or try other forms of feedback that highlight areas of stress and ways to alleviate it.

**4. At a minimum, 20% of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds must be utilized by districts to employ SEL interventions** that mitigate lost instruction time. Consider how teacher development could be factored into those strategies. ESSER funds also could be used to find solutions that help combat teacher shortages.

**5. Any teacher prep programs should include SEL training** (most don’t), as well as the potential for them to be “cross-listed with departments of psychology, which often have available courses that may be adapted to an educational context.”

—Chris Burt



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## Math paths: 3 ways to teach the subject more meaningfully

The COVID-driven shift online, and subsequent learning losses in math, exposed some of the critical flaws in how the subject has traditionally been taught, researchers say.

Math education researchers at Southern Methodist University say they are not surprised to learn that state STAAR test results show students fell furthest behind in math during the pandemic.

“Engaging students in math during online learning is really difficult,” says Candace Walkington, a math curriculum expert at SMU’s Simmons School of Education.

Here’s how superintendents and the team can revamp math instruction to better engage students, recover from COVID learning loss, and continue to increase achievement.

### 1. Make math meaningful:

Walkington connects algebra con-

cepts with careers. Students selected STEM careers, watched videos of how professionals use algebra and then completed algebra problems related to that career.

The exercise increased student interest, while in other studies, Walkington found students were captivated to learn math by designing outdoor “STEM walks” and to learn geometry through body motion.

### 2. Fewer rules, more big ideas

**and applications:** Teachers should put math problems into context, says Annie Wilhelm.

To learn the area of a rectangle, for example, standard textbooks display a rectangle with length and width measurements. Students can use a calculator to multiply the length times the width but often don’t understand “why” the problem matters.

But providing context, such as asking students to figure out how many gallons of paint will cover a specific wall, emphasizes reasoning and other big picture ideas, she says.

### 3. Teach statistics and the math people really use:

Students pursuing certain STEM fields must learn advanced math in high school to navigate college courses. But educators should revise K-curriculum to create data-literate citizens, as jobs rely more and more on data analysis, Wilhelm says.

“The pandemic is forcing us to acknowledge that what we have been doing, the way we have been teaching math, is simply not working,” Walkington says. “There is a real disconnect between the math taught in school and the really important math used in careers and in society.”

—Matt Zalaznick





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# How to help students spot political polarization and extremism

Here's an idea for teaching students about political polarization and far-right extremism: Have them do the research to debunk a conspiracy theory.

This will help students develop healthy skepticism toward the avalanche of information they come across on the internet and other sources, says Cynthia Miller-Idriss, a professor and director of the Polarization and Extremism Research & Innovation Lab at American University. "An exercise for kids is to pick a non-ideological conspiracy theory—like, birds are not real, all birds are drones—and have them figure out how to prove it's not true," says Miller-Idriss, author of *Hate in the Homeland: The New Global Far Right*.

In higher ed schools of education, student interest in taking courses on teaching about far-right extremism is now similar to the interest in terrorism after 9/11. And ultimately, teaching about political extremism and polarization is more about disinformation, misinformation and propaganda than it is about ideology, Miller-Idriss says.

"A great place to start with elementary students is a digital communications class where they learn about how to be good citizens online, and how to protect privacy and online safety," Miller-Idriss says.

It can be extremely hard for teachers to cover specific incidents of political extremism because of the polarized climate. Still, teachers can avoid ideology when teaching lessons about evaluating the legitimacy of sources of information, she says.

This can become even more difficult as students get older and are more aware of the scope of current events, such as the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

## Lesson plans

A new archive on far-right groups in America is now available from Gale.

"Political Extremism and Radicalism: Far-Right Groups in America" contains primary sources educators can use to teach about political extremism and radicalism

Administrators and principals can support teachers by helping to develop guidelines on what fact-based sources educators and students can use to research disinformation.

"Administrators just need to understand that students coming back after 16 months may have been spending extraordinary amounts of time online, where the circulation of propaganda has increased," Miller-Idriss says. "And there is some trauma that has to be processed, so campuses should expect that not everything will be super smooth."

## 'Standing your ground'

While administrators and educators may have less ability to influence the actions of governors and legislators, they can turn down the temperature of controversies over divisive topics such as critical race theory, says Irshad Manji, founder of PD provider Moral Courage ED.

"Education leaders heading into the fall have the huge challenge of making meaningful progress on the legitimate issue of diversity, equity and inclusion, while at the same time unifying parents, students and fellows educators who sometimes have starkly different points of view," says Manji, the author of *Don't Label Me* who has also been a professor of leadership at New York University.

Moral Courage ED aims to help educators achieve "diversity without division" based on three principles:

- **Reject labeling** or shaming of people, no matter what group they were born into.

- Define diversity to include a diversity of viewpoints because understanding another person is crucial to being understood.

- Encourage educators to think more clearly, rather than dictating what they're allowed to think.

Cognitive psychology and neuroscience research have shown that making the other side of an issue defensive at the beginning of a discussion quickly eliminates any hopes of eventual cooperation, Manji says.

The organization's PD, therefore, counsels administrators to be proactive in reaching out to and involving parents in district decision-making. When parents who are concerned white students are being singled, she tells them not to make accusations when interacting with school officials.

Educators should consider that while many parents support teaching about slavery, some may have concerns with how it is being taught. These parents will also have a problem with being labeled as part of the backlash simply because they have questions, she says.

"We need to lower our emotional defenses all around. If we take a zero-sum approach or an either-or lens to these issues, we're doing a huge disservice to both social justice and free speech."

Educators should also expect that any and all social issues to become politicized in the current national climate. And as district leaders expand essential diversity programs, they should remain wary of alienating certain students.

"A lot of diversity, equity and inclusion work in schools is focused so much on what people are supposed to believe, it completely overlooks how we express ourselves to one another," Manji says. "When that's missing, we're actually sowing the seeds of distrust."

—Matt Zalaznick



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### 6 immediate ESSER actions schools can take to improve air quality

Administrators seeking to improve ventilation can use American Rescue Plan funds to provide additional layers of air quality protection in preventing the spread of COVID in classrooms.

The Department of Education released a guide to help district leaders take immediate action to inspect, test, repair, replace and upgrade their facilities. This can include filtering, purification, air cleaning fans, and window and door repair.

Funds can also be used to set up outdoor classrooms, pay for increased heating and cooling costs and purchase portable air filtration units and carbon dioxide monitors.

“Protecting our schools and communities from the spread of COVID-19 is the first step in bringing more students back to in-person learning and reemerging from this crisis even stronger than we were before,” U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona said in a statement. “With the American Rescue Plan, schools and districts now have access to unprecedented resources that will enable them to ensure proper ventilation and maintain healthy learning and working environments.”

The department encourages school leaders to communicate clearly to their communities, parents, students, and

faculty that actions are being taken to improve ventilation. This information should be disseminated in simple language and widely accessible on school websites.

Some administrators have offered school building ventilation walk-throughs with community leaders to assess needs and share ventilation plans. Other school leaders have created video tours of the ventilation systems to explain air quality strategies.

Here are several more strategies for improving ventilation, based on current recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Environmental Protection Agency:

- 1. Bring in as much outdoor air as possible.** Open windows wherever it is safe to do so, including in classrooms and on school buses and other transportation. Where safe, opening doors can also improve airflow. Fans increase the impact of open windows and doors.
- 2. Hold classes, activities, and meals outdoors when safe and feasible.**
- 3. Use HVAC settings to maximize ventilation.** Set systems to bring in as much outdoor air as possible, including for 2 hours before and after occupancy, and reduce or eliminate air recirculation.
- 4. Ensuring exhaust fans in restrooms and kitchens are working prop-**

erly and using them during occupancy and for 2 hours afterward to remove particles from the air. Keep all fans and filters clean to maximize airflow.

**5. Filtering and cleaning the air.** Upgrade HVAC filters to minimum efficiency reporting value (MERV)-13, or the highest MERV rating a building’s ventilation system can accommodate. Consider using portable air cleaners that use filtration technology, such as high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters.

**6. Consider using portable carbon dioxide monitors.** These devices can verify how well air is circulating in classrooms and other spaces. School maintenance professionals may also use airflow capture hoods, anemometers, and qualitative tracer techniques to assess airflow.

Leaders in Grand Rapids Public Schools in Michigan plan to spend \$12 million on extensive upgrades of the HVAC systems in eight of their older buildings that failed air movement tests, Chief Financial Officer Larry Oberst says.

“ESSER dollars, unlike many federal programs, are allowed to be used on capital projects,” Oberst says. “We made do last year by acquiring portable ionization units.”

—Matt Zalaznick





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## How a superintendent shattered the status quo to rev up graduation rates

**Putnam County Schools' graduation rate has soared to 90% from 55% during Rick Surrency's superintendency.**

Superintendent Rick Surrency faces one challenge that most of his fellow district leaders around the county don't: running for re-election every four years.



Surrency, a lifelong educator who started out as a social studies teacher and rose to middle school principal, has been voted in

twice to lead Putnam County Schools in Central Florida. "I had to get my message out about not being comfortable with the status quo," Surrency says of his first campaign, which brought him out of retirement in 2016. "Because we were one of the poorest districts in the state, people had gotten comfortable saying we can't really expect much from these kids. I had a different mindset."

That mindset focused on getting students the right resources so educators could raise their expectations, adds Surrency, who is a member of the District Administration Leadership Institute. Putnam County's graduation rate had stalled at around 55% when Surrency took over. And 11 of the district's 18 schools had received Ds and Fs in state grading, saddling all those buildings with "turnaround" designations.

Surrency and his team started turning things around by better identifying at-risk students by early warning signs, such as absenteeism in the lower grades and struggles in the key transition periods of third, sixth and ninth grades. He made a priority of ensuring principals had access to this data so building leaders could intervene more effectively.

### *Lessons of the pandemic*

Surrency calls the COVID pandemic the biggest crisis he's experienced during 43 years in education. However, the

ordeal also proved more than ever the importance of collaboration between education leaders and communities.

Though districts will have to navigate divisions over masking and vaccines, COVID has also accelerated the effective use of technology. Teachers and students are more prepared to connect via online learning. And platforms such as Zoom have improved communication between teachers and parents. "A lot of parents are reluctant to come into a school," Surrency says. "Linking up electronically has removed some barriers and helped us increase parent involvement." In Putnam County's classrooms, teachers who received job-embedded professional development pivoted to small-group instruction and student-led learning to boost engagement. "Instead of being passive learners, we help students ask questions to clarify their own learning," Surrency says. "When students ask each other those clarifying questions they can sometimes learn more from each other than they can from the adults."

### *Arming district personnel*

Aside from the turnaround, making schools safer in the wake of the Parkland shooting in South Florida was the biggest *political* challenge Surrency says he has faced during his tenure.

The state legislature had mandated that there be a gun in every school, heightening tensions around school safety in Florida and splitting Putnam County's school board over the "highly charged" issue, Surrency says. Because the district did not have funds to station uniformed police in its schools, Surrency developed a "Guardian program" with the county sheriff to train and arm school personnel. Now, 60 staff members, none of whom is a classroom teacher, are carrying guns in a program that Surrency believes puts Putnam

County on the cutting edge of school safety. "Our employees know our kids better than anybody," he says. "They are going to run to an active shooter whether they are armed or not."

### *After the turnaround*

By 2020, the year Surrency won re-election, Putnam County's graduation rate had surged to 90%, representing one of the highest growth rates in the state.

Administrators are now developing a five-year strategic plan that is anchored by the district's newly developed "portrait of a graduate" to drive student success in higher education and the workforce. The profile tasks district educators with developing fearless and resilient students who are confident collaborators, communicators and problem-solvers. The district is also expanding its CTE programs to add advanced manufacturing and artificial intelligence, and enhancing its STEM programs district-wide, from kindergarten up.

"We don't ask kids what they want to be when they grow up; we ask them what problems they want to solve when they leave school," Surrency says. "And if we don't prepare students to contribute to the local economy, then we are failing our community."

Challenges of the near future include overcoming a drop in enrollment. Surrency has closed five schools and restructured the others as K-6 and 7-12. The district will also seek approval of a \$300 million bond to build nine new schools over the next decade. "I have the philosophy that, as a leader, I'm all about planting a seed and building a legacy," Surrency says. "We need to think about doing things now that will benefit future students who we may not be around to see."

Learn about the DA Leadership Institute at [daleadershipinstitute.com](http://daleadershipinstitute.com).

—Matt Zalaznick



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### Shawn Achor: 4 reasons why happiness is essential to success

Educational success starts with happiness and positivity, rather than hard work.



The latter is certainly required, but bestselling author and Future of Education Technology®

Conference keynote speaker Shawn Achor, an expert on positive psychology, says students and educators can become “positive geniuses” by choosing happiness.

“Positive brains reap an incredible advantage,” Achor says, “raising productivity by 31%, tripling creativity, tripling problem-solving ability, improving verbal and quantitative reasoning, while deepening social bonds, raising intelligence and memory, lowering bullying and social isolation, and extending how long we live.”

Achor, the author of *The Happiness Advantage* and *Big Potential*, spent 12 years at Harvard University, where he delivered lectures on positive psychology.

In his FETC keynote, “Rethinking the Formula for Success: The Power of Positive Education,” Achor will take about how the philosophy that says “If I work harder, then I will be successful, and then I will be happy,” is scientifically backward. When that formula is flipped, and people focus first on positivity, nearly every educational outcome improves.

Consequently, our mental pictures of reality determine our likelihood of success and our ability to harness our IQ, and emotional and social intelligence, Achor says.

Educators can build their “emotional immune systems” with habits

like gratitude exercises, journaling, a 15-minute brisk walk, two minutes of meditation, or a two-minute positive email.

“Simple actions, like putting on a seatbelt, have massive consequences and for an educator starting at positive before engaging with the difficult parts of teaching is a necessity,” Achor says.

Becoming a “positive genius” enables school superintendents, administrators and principals to better manage the often-unanticipated challenges pop up throughout the school day.

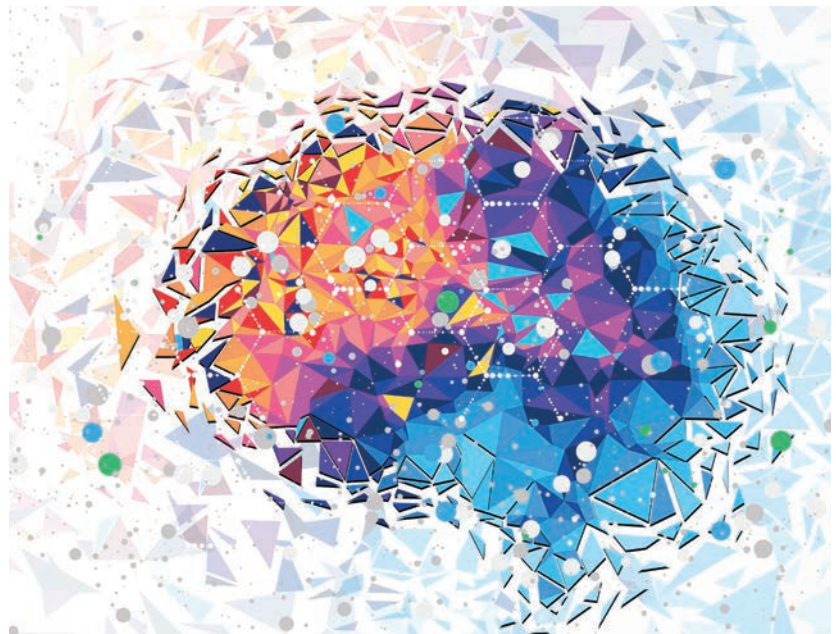
“Embedded within every stress is meaning, but when our brains don’t

perceive it, stress creates a negative impact on the body,” he says. “So increase praise and recognition, scan for meaning in your work, keep a folder or wall of meaningful accomplishments.”

Ultimately, the greatest advantage in the modern economy is a positive and engaged brain, Achor says.

“Our goal is to help highlight for parents, educators and students that if we truly want to see a student’s or educator’s potential, we need to focus on what happens when their brain is positive,” he says.

—Matt Zalaznick



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### This is how Eric Curts empowers educators to master ed-tech

Now heading into his 30th year as an educator, technology integrationist Eric Curts is every bit as passionate about education today as when he started out teaching middle school math for North Canton City Schools. He might still be spending his days before a classroom full of students had the Ohio K-12 Network not been created in 1999, which helped the state’s school districts obtain internet access and get computers into schools. As a result of that funding, Curts says, “A job needed to be created for someone who could help teachers learn what to do with this tech,” he recalls. “I was always the resident nerd in the building and already doing professional development for the teachers, so it was a natural fit for me.”

That’s when Curts made the switch from teaching kids to teaching teachers, which he continued to do for the next 14 years. “During that time, one of the most important things that happened was the launch of the Google suite of tools. I discovered them very early on,” he says. “They were free and we could do amazing things with them. And the best part was coming up with creative ways to use them.”

Curts is now a master at just that, and for the past eight years he has been sharing those creative methods with 35 school districts as well as the one he originally served. Here, ahead of his appearance at the Future of Education Technology Conference, Curts gives his take on how the past year has

affected edtech, as well as his thoughts on what’s to come.

#### *How have your methods of training changed over the past year?*

“One of the big focuses was, How do we stay connected and engaged? With in-person instruction, it’s a bit easier to tell if students are plugged in—you see their faces—but in a remote situation, it’s a challenge. The other thing we had to address was the focus of the content. At first, it was basic—we just gave you the things you need to know to survive, because some people never had to use Zoom or Meet before. But then we took it further. I created a whole bunch of very short videos—three or four minutes long, because teachers don’t have a lot of time right now—covering everything one needs to know about Google Classroom or Google Meet. Today I have this giant collection of instructional videos up on my blog, so if they need to know one thing right this minute, they can get in, watch it and get out. Everyone can access them, and folks across the country and around the world now use them to get up to speed.”

#### *What were the silver linings of the pandemic, if any?*

“Being able to reach more people, more easily than I ever thought I could have otherwise. Also, now we know remote training *can* work, whereas before, the predominant way of thinking was that



we must be face to face. Now we have so many more options.”

#### *What’s one of the most important things to realize about the ever-increasing significance of edtech to curricula?*

“Tech is not an end in itself, but rather it’s a tool that helps us in everything we do. The wheel was once tech. The pencil was tech. They’re things that helped us be more effective and efficient. People ask me, ‘Will teachers eventually be out of a job because of AI?’ I say, no; the idea is not for there to be one or the other. We want to become bionic educators, combining tech with the human connection.”

#### *What’s your forecast for edtech in 2021-22?*

“A couple of things: Hopefully, people achieve a greater comfort level with their use of tech, so that we can have conversations about the next steps and figure out how to go deeper, encourage creativity, make things, work together. I also hope that we continue to use what we’ve learned. It’s been amazing to record instructional videos for students, so even if we’re back face-to-face this year, why let those go? Why not record our instruction so students can listen to it again later if they need to? Why not normalize evening office hours? Hopefully, we’ll realize and accept that not all students learn the same way. It’s important to offer virtual options to those for whom they work better.”

—Lori Capullo





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### Four elite speakers return in person for FETC's Tech Share LIVE!

The panel of stars that wowed audiences at the Future of Education Technology Conference will return in person, for its signature Tech Share LIVE! session.

Leslie Fisher, Kathy Schrock, Hall Davidson and Adam Bellow—who all had to endure more than a year of virtual speaker performances because of the COVID-19 pandemic—will get to unleash their insight, tech tools and incomparable banter face-to-face at FETC. What will be on that agenda is anyone's guess. They have all agreed to keep it a secret (other than the Google Doc they're sharing with one another).

Attendees can expect to see a bevy of product updates, the latest in apps, devices, hardware and software, and the one element that makes it THE event to register for at FETC—the tongue-in-cheek interplay between the EdTech leaders.

“It's a very raucous event,” says Schrock, an educational technologist extraordinaire whose *Guide to Everything* is truly that. “Hall will take a handheld wireless microscope and stick it in my hair. We talk about educational finds. Adam always has a song that he parodies, and it's all about education. It's always fun. People just go crazy in there.”



The CEO of Breakout EDU and father of two belting out tunes? Yes, for the past 10 years, Bellow's singing has become a somewhat legendary staple at Tech Share LIVE!

“The first time I did the song thing, the night before in a hotel room I wrote a parody to Imagine Dragons,” Bellow recalls. “I don't remember what it was. I remember thinking, I might embarrass myself, but apparently it got an OK reaction.”

He's done it every year since. Parodies aside, there is an incredible amount of wisdom, gadget guidance

and ideas being shared (Schrock has promised “technology tips for teachers”) in this fast-paced environment, perfect for every level of attendee within K-12 districts.

“It's a great gathering of so many people, from all the district folks and superintendents to tons of tech people and all the teachers,” Bellow says. “This will probably be my first in-person conference in two years. I would imagine it's probably that way for most of the people that are traveling. This will be a really incredible experience for people.”

—Chris Burt



# Strategies and best practices for improving school security

## Q&A with **Ron Baer**, Director of Business Development for K-12, ASSA ABLOY Opening Solutions



### How is the field of school security evolving?

Planning school and campus security is an increasingly complex process. Learning environment security has the potential to positively or negatively impact student behavior, test scores, and post-secondary education aspirations and success. Recent studies have indicated that surveillance, detection, and monitoring that are perceived to be excessive and/or inequitable can impact both student achievement and teacher satisfaction or retention. Frontline security solutions that were once commonly accepted are now being questioned and reexamined, due to their perceived impact on student learning, which is the primary objective of schools and educators.

### What are some best practices when planning school security?

The single best practice is to form a broad, cross-functional team or committee to collectively learn about security innovations and trends, and develop and implement safety, security and wellness strategies. These interdisciplinary committees can also evaluate solution options based on available resources, future budget and time commitments, and appropriate policies and procedures.

### What should education leaders consider when assessing the specific needs of their schools?

A comprehensive strategy must include appropriate controls for vehicle and pedestrian traffic at the perimeter of each property, environmental and access considerations for each building, flexible uses for classroom and office space, as well as visitor entry management.

At the perimeter, gate and fence access controls prevent unauthorized



**“Access control systems are only as good as the school’s ability to integrate their operation into existing policies and procedures.”**

personnel from entering a school’s campus. Access control systems are also increasingly critical throughout school interiors. These systems can enable the implementation of application-specific lockdown strategies to prevent blind lockouts, improve key control and reduce rekeying costs, enhance school security to create better learning environments, and help to manage the flow of people to enforce social distancing. Having a clear understanding of your schools’ needs and the options available will enable you to select the solutions that will best support your schools’ safety, security and wellness strategies.

An ideal partner can make these solutions understandable and scalable, while digitizing survey and design information to limit education disruptions.

### What are some advantages of having networked, Wi-Fi-connected access control systems?

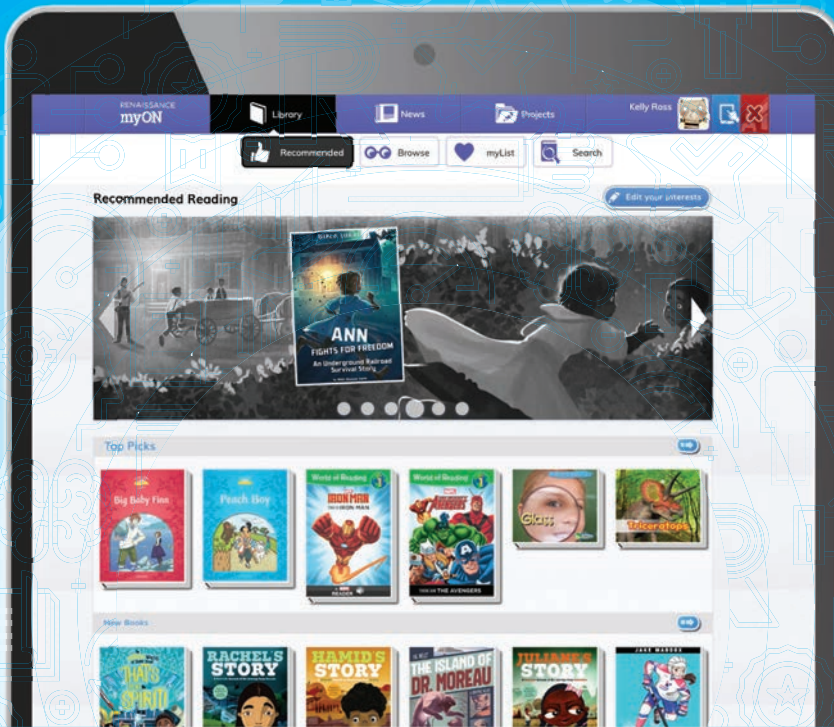
Wi-Fi access control locks connect to the access control system via the school’s existing Wi-Fi network, making installation easy and cost effective. These systems communicate on a flexible schedule, and during alarm conditions. The level of network security is high, and the load is negligible. Also, network or power interruptions do not stop the access control system from operating.

### Why is training important and what should training look like when it comes to access control systems?

Access control systems are only as good as the school’s ability to integrate their operation into existing policies and procedures. During their initial evaluation, school leaders should require process evidence of cross-functional training programs. One-and-done operator training will rapidly render a system tedious or worthless. Comprehensive training should be designed with the school’s daily routines in mind. Understanding who will routinely operate the system, as well as where they will operate it and under what conditions are all important considerations, but these are just starting points. Commonly overlooked areas in training include identifying who will have access privileges, communicating what they need to understand about the system, and deciding who will have authority to make changes and take leadership in emergency situations.

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# CAREER CONNECTIONS

CTE leaders offer several tips for teaming with local industry to develop curricula and design facilities

BY MATT ZALAZNICK

**G**iving up some control is key to building strong relationships with local businesses, says a superintendent noted for creating successful career academies.

Superintendent David James launched the College & Career Academies of Akron in 2017 to give students a more accurate perspective on the world of work and to help them better define their career interests.

“A lot of our kids didn’t have a realistic view or even know how to approach the world of work,” says James,

who is leaving Akron Public Schools to become Columbus City Public Schools’ deputy superintendent for operations.

“Now, our programs allow teachers to connect academic content to real-world experiences and they give kids a chance to get out into the community and see the work it has to offer,” James says.

Ford Next Generation Learning, a branch of the automobile manufacturer, was the first big partner in establishing Akron’s career academies.

**SOUND MEDICAL ADVICE**—In the Sioux City Career Academy’s nursing program, as in all the Iowa school’s programs, decision-making is shared between administrators and regional business and industry leaders.



**PROFESSIONAL GUIDANCE**—A business advisory council helps keep the instruction and equipment up to date at the College & Career Academies of Akron.

Today, more than 300 companies, including Goodyear and Bridgestone, local banks and healthcare providers, and mom-and-pop businesses are involved in mentoring and training students, James says.

“Business leaders are saying to us that they really aren’t interested in whether students passed a standardized test,” he says. “They’re more interested in having them show up for work on time and contribute to the team.”

Building these relationships starts with

a willingness to invite business partners into the district’s decision-making process.

James and the district’s partners have, for instance, overcome questions of liability that once limited students’ opportunities to shadow professionals in the workplace. The district has also maintained a business advisory council for several years.

More recently, the districts launched a middle school program designed to get students thinking about their potential career interests and help them learn about

the opportunities in the Akron region.

“In education, we used to act like an island unto ourselves that didn’t have to worry about the external world,” James says. “But that external world impacts class every day, whether kids are worrying about where their next meal will come from or other situations happening in the community.”

### **‘There has to be a sweet spot’**

More than 60 Sioux City Career Academy students worked in-person intern-



ships last school year despite COVID's disruptions.

At least two were offered full-time jobs and one has received a fall apprenticeship as a chef's assistant, says Katie Towler, principal of the academy that is part of the Sioux City Community School District, where 70% of students qualified for free-and-reduced lunch.

"It's important to help students identify what skills they're really good at," Towler says. "We want to find them career paths so they can continue learning as they leave and break that poverty cycle. It's a bonus if they can have those careers in our community."

Decision-making power at the academy is shared by an advisory committee that includes representatives of business and community associations and retired professionals, Towler says.

While many Career and Technical Education (CTE) instructors have substantial industry experience, the members of the advisory council who are still

## A VIEW FROM A HEALTHCARE PARTNER

A cohort of healthcare-focused juniors at College & Career Academies of Akron are working paying summer jobs during which they are paired with mentors at Akron Children's Hospital.

Students and teachers are getting hands-on experience in clinical work and all other aspects of hospital administration, such as accounting, food service and maintenance, says Bennett Williams, Akron Children's vice president of external affairs.

Support for education in the community has evolved to the point where business and community-based organizations have been invited to the table with Akron Public School leaders in ways that benefit both sides, Williams says.

"The district has done a really excellent job of tying the two together," Williams says. "The district shares in decision-making and is willing to share their challenges."



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**BUSINESS ACUMEN**—Administrators took local business leaders on tours of career academies in other districts while planning and designing the Greater Lafayette Career Academy in Indiana.

working in their fields are more cognizant of labor trends and forecasts. The advisors will, for example, help update the curriculum and decide what equipment and supplies are needed.

“To make it a more valuable experience for our partners and for us, we’re going to vet all decisions through the committee,” Towler says. “It’s a shift for our thinking in how we operate.”

One of the most critical programs business partners can provide is worked-based learning experiences, internships and apprenticeships for students.

“We’re not a temp agency, we’re not here to feed kids into any job,” Towler says. “There has to be a sweet spot—it has to be something kids are passionate about and that meets the communities’ needs.”

Two of the academy’s teachers spend half their time as work-based learning coordinators, contacting companies to partner with the school. A key to engaging new partners in the academy is encouraging them to visit the campus, including inviting them to hold meetings at the school, Towler adds.

The academy also relies on business partners who’ve had successful experiences with students to spread the word about the school.

“Once we get them on campus and they can see the cutting-edge education that’s happening here, I can guarantee they’re willing to work with us at some level.”

### **Building authentic environments**

In Indiana, the Greater Lafayette Career Academy’s business partners have been involved from the outset in the design of the building, which has been under construction for the past four years.

**‘Now, our programs allow teachers to connect academic content to real-world experiences and they give kids a chance to get out into the community and see the work it has to offer’  
– Superintendent David James, Akron Public Schools**

Administrators of the school, a partnership between Lafayette School Corporation, Tippecanoe School Corporation and the West Lafayette Community School Corporation, even brought industry leaders on tours of career academies in other districts.

Business leaders, meanwhile, have helped educators develop authentic environments based on the programming—modern manufacturing, for instance, says Miranda Hutcheson, the academy’s director.

“The key is listening to the community,” Tippecanoe Superintendent Scott Hanback says. “You read, you review data, you tour local manufacturing facilities, you remain active in local chamber events and networking opportunities where you build relationships and establish contacts.”

Administrators from the three districts participate in the regional chamber of commerce’s 2030 workforce visioning committee. Educators give the business community insight into state standards and requirements, Hanback says.

“Our job is a high school diploma,” he says. “Business leaders need to also understand we’re not just a blank slate who can do whatever we want. We have a lot of K-12 centered duties and responsibilities that business leaders don’t automatically know about.”

The academy will reduce much of the redundancy that existed between the three districts’ CTE programs. Administrators will no longer have to compete for the same resources and instructors as students work to earn industry certifications while still in high school.

“We have some very large manufacturers, such as Subaru and Caterpillar, down to the local plumber who can offer an internship or be a guest speaker,” says Superintendent Les L. Huddle of the Lafayette School Corporation. “We’ve been open about offering opportunities to any business in the community.” **DA**

*Matt Zalaznick is DA’s senior writer.*

# How high-quality curriculum and PD can transform the post-pandemic crisis into an opportunity for innovation



## Q&A with **Britt Magneson**, Vice President, National Inventors Hall of Fame

### What do you envision being some of the most significant challenges for K-12 educators post-pandemic?

Our nation's teachers have had to bear an unbelievable burden

during the pandemic, which has resulted in both anxiety and burnout. They had to move to online instruction so suddenly, with very little preparation or additional resources. Our organization works with many teachers around the country, and they tell us they feel exhausted and burned out.

But on top of that, there is tremendous anxiety because of testing and assessments, and the learning loss students are experiencing. Teachers are wondering how they can address those learning gaps.

Motivation is also a challenge; many teachers are leaving the profession entirely and changing careers. And our students have been changed by this experience. When they return to classrooms, they will be very different kids.

### How can administrators address some of these challenges?

This is a pivotal moment in education. It is a very challenging and complex time, but this is also an opportunity for real change. We have had unprecedented disruption, but we also have new resources to address these challenges in the form of federal funding from the American Rescue Plan Act and the ESSER Fund. This is a chance to reexamine the purpose of school.

Addressing these challenges requires two main components. First, we need to provide all students with content-rich curriculum and materials built on engagement and hands-on learning. And second, we need to complement that with curriculum-based, high-quality professional development for our teachers.

Providing teachers with a rich array of high-quality materials and curriculum will help restore joy in teaching and go a long way towards reducing burnout while increasing student engagement. The right professional development is vital, but it can't add to the burden already on teachers.



### What does that type of PD look like?

When our organization works with a district, we first focus on getting teachers interested in problem-based, hands-on learning, and rediscovering their joy of learning. We will have a full day PD experience using imagination and play, asking big questions and encouraging curiosity. Secondly, we follow that up by providing high-quality teaching materials for them to use in the classroom. And third, we provide job-embedded PD later on that is focused on developing an innovation mindset in students, by working directly in the classroom.

### What is an innovation mindset, and why is it important for learning?

Developed from the lessons and stories of National Inventors Hall of Fame inductees, the innovation mindset is a set of eight essential skills and traits: Confidence, Design Thinking, Persistence, Innovation, Creative Problem Solving, STEM, Entrepreneurship and Intellectual Property, which is understanding that ideas have value. Having this mindset can benefit administrators, coaches, teachers and students alike.

We believe that developing these characteristics and habits of mind in students is the foundation of quality instruction. Developing an innovation mindset will invite, sustain and expand the understanding that a student is owner of their learning, and will empower them throughout their lives.



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By Matt Zalaznick

## How districts are preventing lost and damaged devices as online learning becomes a regular part of school

Keeping track of all the laptops and Wi-Fi hotspots distributed urgently to students was yet another of COVID's myriad challenges for many school districts.

How big a challenge that continues to be in the coming school year depends on a range of factors, says Lenny Schad, CIO of *District Administration*.

"The million-dollar question for school systems is are they going to rubber band back to the way they taught in 2019, pre-pandemic, where devices weren't that critical?" Schad says. "If so, then devices in the hands of kids is not that important."

With that outcome unlikely, however, administrators committed to continued digital transformation in 2021-22 will need to focus on asset management strategies that reduce the

number of laptops, tablets and Wi-Fi hotspots that are damaged, lost or stolen, Schad says.

Districts with established 1-to-1 programs when the pandemic began were better positioned to keep track of their devices. Still, 1-to-1 districts anticipate about a 5% to 7% loss each year, Schad says.

And when COVID struck, many districts, in the scramble to get devices to students, did not prioritize asset management, he added. Here, tech leaders share strategies to help superintendents and district tech leaders control costs as take-home devices become an ever-more critical part of K-12 education.

### Better than a longer school day?

Students in Springfield Public Schools are not held financially responsible the

first time a take-home laptop or tablet is lost, damaged or stolen.

Because the damage may not have been a student's fault—if the device was lost in a house fire, for instance—they receive another laptop or tablet to take home, says Paul N. Foster, the Massachusetts district's chief information and accountability officer.

But if that replacement device is broken or lost, the student will lose their take-home privileges, Foster says.

Springfield school leaders, like their K-12 colleagues across the country, are updating and revising device management procedures in the wake of distributing thousands—if not tens or hundreds of thousands—of devices so students could participate fully in online learning.



## DEVICE DAMAGE CONTROL



ED-TECH OUTREACH—Educators at Alta Sierra Middle School in California's Clovis USD host a tech pick-up day in August 2020. The district has distributed more than 23,000 devices during the pandemic. *Ron Webb/Clovis Unified School District*

Prior to COVID, Springfield provided all students in third through 12th grade with laptops and extended the 1-to-1 program to K through 2 during the pandemic.

“The entire price of our 1-to-1 initiative was the same price as making a school day 24 minutes longer,” Foster says. “And we’re getting so much extra benefit—kids can do additional school-

work at home and it provides access in a community where 80% of students live in households that are on some form of public assistance.”

To keep all those devices up and running, the 25,000-student district contracted with a vendor to operate a help desk. During the pandemic, it also eliminated a \$20 annual take-home fee.

The district went from 12,000 laptops going home to 25,000, so an increase in damage and loss rates was expected. “We went from devices being used sometimes to being used all day, every day,” Foster says.

On the other hand, a 1-to-1 program may encourage students to take better care of devices. “When we had the proverbial laptop carts rolling around, and students were using random laptops, we saw more deliberate mischief and damage,” he says. “Now, it’s their laptop for the year and we’re seeing better care.”

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## 8 TECH TIPS



Here are best practices for preventing student devices from loss or damage:

- 1** Second chances: Provide a replacement the first time a device is lost or damaged. If that device is lost or damaged, revoke take-home privileges.
- 2** Expand help desks: Districts with limited staff have contracted with third-party vendors to provide more extensive tech support to parents, students, and teachers.
- 3** Involve families: Provide more formal support to parents and families for maintaining devices, including translating technology guides into multiple languages.
- 4** Don't forget about cyberbullying: Cover aspects of digital citizenship,

such as not cyberbullying or sharing passwords when students agree to take care of devices.

- 5** Watch the numbers: Meet with staff from each building to monitor the level of damage or loss they are seeing. Provide assistance when rates start to increase.
- 6** An ounce of prevention: Provide cases for tablets and laptops.
- 7** Offer incentives: Some schools hold contests to encourage non-breakage, Richardson ISD's Hall says.
- 8** Memory matters: Students may overload their devices and reduce functionality. San Antonio ISD created its own app store to limit what students can download to their devices.



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ASSET PROTECTION—Parents arrive on the first day of school at Young Elementary in Clovis USD in August 2020. The district's \$25 replacement fee is used to purchase parts and devices if take-home computers are damaged. *Ron Webb/Clovis Unified School District*

## Relying on parents

At the beginning of 2020-21, educators in North Carolina's Wake County Public School System prioritized providing more formal support to parents and families for maintaining devices, Chief Technology Officer Marlo Gaddis says.

That effort included adding an English and Spanish technology guide to the district's website and a "more robust" student-parent agreement about caring for devices, Gaddis says.

That agreement covers aspects of digital citizenship such as not cyberbullying or sharing passwords. And while district filters restrict internet use in school buildings, the district relies on parents to monitor use at home, Gaddis says.

"It's really about being more explicit with expectations and accountability—making sure we're accountable, making sure parents and students are accountable, teachers and principals—we're all accountable for different parts of our digital device programs," Gaddis says.

Wake County schools also employs a team of 19 digital learning coordinators who support teachers across the district, particularly with instruction in digital citizenship, Gaddis says.

San Antonio ISD implemented "Teletech"—which Chief Information Technology Officer Kenneth J. Thomp-

son compares to telemedicine—to provide more robust tech support.

If the district's regular help desk can't resolve an issue, students and teachers can schedule a Zoom call with a Teletech technician, who can take over the computer and deal with the problem.

During the pandemic, the district also began offering help-desk support on weekends.

Thompson also wants to reduce the number of mobile hotspots the district distributes, so he is now working with the state of Texas to build the district's own LTE network. "Those hotspots are small and easy to lose," Thompson says.

## Safeguards as demand surges

Richardson ISD near Dallas contracts with a private insurance contractor to cover take-home devices, but will cover half the annual \$29 premium for students on reduced-fee lunch plans.

Students who receive free lunch have the entire cost covered, Chief Technical Officer Henry Hall says.

The insurance policy is required for all take-home devices at the secondary level. If it is not paid, there is a limited amount of hardship funds that schools can use to cover non-payments. The district will attempt to recover costs from families when uninsured devices need repair.

Student-damaged device replacement averages around 3-5% annually.

Both the central office and each school use software to manage device inventory for the districtwide 1-to-1 program. Starting this year, devices will be attached to student information system profiles for tracking across all platforms.

The district also provides cases for every iPad and Chromebook. "Some campuses will offer contests to encourage non-breakage," Hall says.

Hall's team meets with staff from each school regularly to go over the numbers and provide assistance if damage or loss rates are spiking.

On the software side, the district has taken several steps to ensure students' devices are functioning optimally.

"We found out kids had too many apps on their iPad and were running out of storage space," Hall says. "We now have our own internal app store, and students can only pull down things that we allow them to download."

## More devices going home

Clovis USD in Central California was not 1-to-1 before the pandemic. When schools closed, the district provided laptops and hotspots to any families who needed the technology, Chief Technology Officer Raj Nagra says.

The district purchased 5,500 hotspots and distributed over 23,000 student devices. Prior to COVID, students did not take devices home en masse so it instituted a \$25 insurance fee during the pandemic. The fees are used to purchase replacement parts and new devices.

Clovis USD uses an inventory program that is part of its financial system to track tech assets. That is supplemented with internal systems to track any additional information needed and process repair tickets.

"If a computer is lost or damaged, we work with the school and impacted family to recoup costs whenever possible," adds Kelly Avants, the district's chief communications officer.

*Matt Zalaznick is DA's senior writer.*

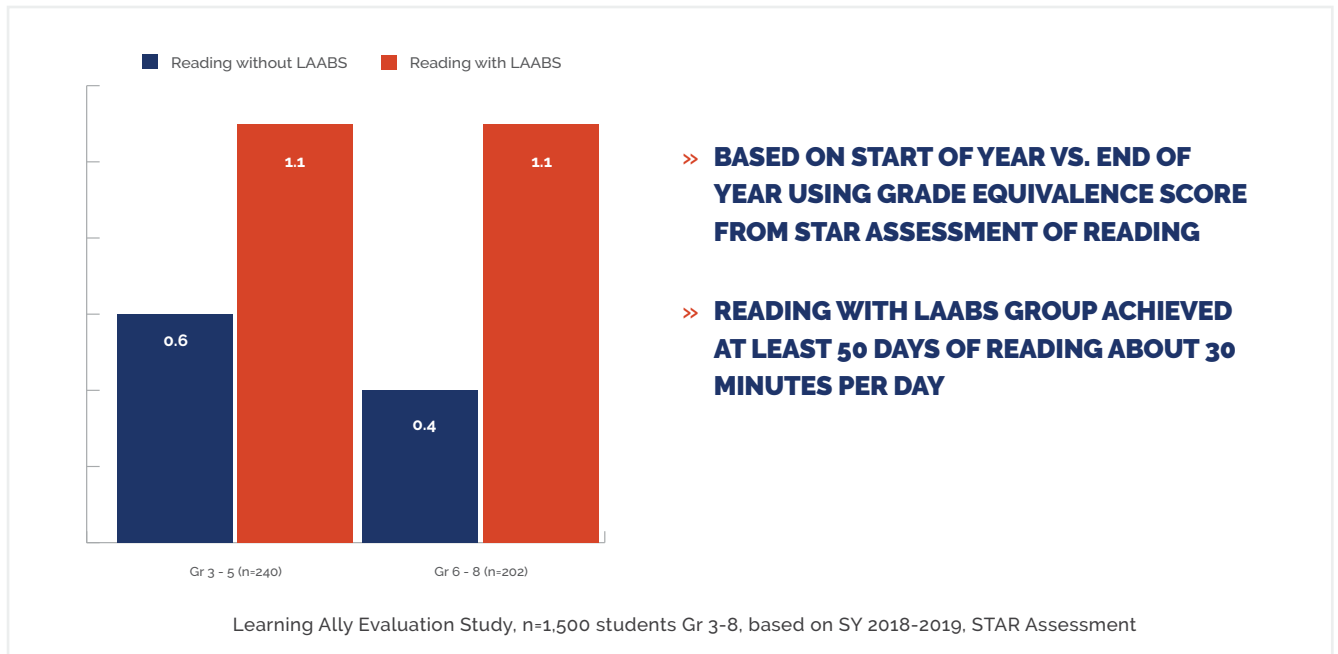




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# New tool enhances the use of educational databases in Milford Exempted Village School District

Ohio district uses *Gale In Context: For Educators* to help teachers and students find, organize, and share content quickly and easily

Located in the northeast suburbs of Cincinnati, Milford Exempted Village School District serves approximately 6,600 students and is consistently ranked among the best school systems in Ohio based on graduation rates, state test scores, and college-readiness indicators.

Melissa Chandler has been a library media specialist at Milford for the past 20 years. Chandler says that the district's leadership has always prioritized equipping their educators with high-quality digital tools and technology. "When I first came here, the internet was still a relatively new resource in education, but Milford had already invested in three *Gale In Context* education databases, and over the past 20 years we have added several more."

## Digital curriculum enhances teaching and learning

*Gale In Context* digital curriculum provides K-12 educators the opportunity to personalize instruction with an electronic library of age-appropriate, standards-aligned nonfiction content in a variety of topic areas while offering students equitable access to resources that enhance information literacy, critical thinking, and more.

Chandler says that a new tool from Gale has enabled the district's educators to get even more out of the eight *Gale In Context* resources the district currently uses. "Our curriculum director and I had just learned about *Gale In Context: For*

**"For Educators is like a learning management system for the eight *Gale In Context* databases that we are already subscribed to. Our teachers are enjoying it because it's a simple and easy way to organize and use content quickly."**

*Educators* when the COVID-19 school shutdowns first occurred in the spring of 2020, and we thought that it would be a great resource to help our teachers with their online learning and instruction."

## Getting the most out of databases

Building on the foundation of *Gale In Context* student databases, *Gale In Context: For Educators* combines quality, curriculum-aligned multimedia content with related lesson plans and instructional tools. *For Educators* enables teachers to find and personalize digital content sets, plan learning activities that work well for remote or in-person learning environments, and ensure equity of access for all students. These benefits are further realized by education leaders in Gale's new insights brief, *6 Best Practices to Use Educational Databases*.

"*For Educators* is like a learning management system for the eight *Gale In Context* databases that we are already subscribed to. For example, if I'm interested in the civil rights movement, I can search for that and access content about that topic from any Gale database. That content can then be organized into folders and uploaded into our learning management system, and teachers can

share it with their students or colleagues. Our teachers are enjoying it because it's a simple and easy way to organize and use content quickly."

Chandler says that implementing *Gale In Context: For Educators* is another example of Milford's priorities and educational values. "As a district, we heavily emphasize the development of research skills and the importance of media literacy and finding good sources of information. I feel fortunate to work in a district that has invested in quality digital tools, including Gale's databases."

## A successful partnership

Overall, Chandler says that the district has been very pleased with Gale, and they have been a true partner. "I've worked with Gale for 20 years, and they are outstanding. Their products are top of the line, and they are always updating their content. Some databases can be overwhelming and difficult to use, but Gale's products make it effortless to find information, and our students find them very easy to use. I think Gale's databases have given our students an advantage when it comes to developing research skills and preparing for the college level and their next step in life."

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As seen in District Administration





# SURPLUS STRATEGIES



Here's how leaders in several districts and states plan to maximize COVID relief funds to accelerate learning

BY MATT ZALAZNICK

**T**utoring and additional outside-of-school academic support will be available within walking distance of the homes of all students in the South Bend Community School Corporation.

That's just one of the critical equity measures that the Indiana district will launch with ESSER Covid relief funds, says Kareemah Fowler, the assistant superintendent of finance and business.

"We know we have learning loss gaps to close," Fowler says. "We're talking about reimagining education, reimagining how we reach and teach students—we want to make sure we are doing everything we can to use this as an opportunity."

South Bend administrators developed their own internal formula to ensure relief funds are going to the schools and students that need the most support. This will include curriculum expansions in math, engineering and pre-Advanced Placement courses.

The district is also expanding Wi-Fi on its buses and working with providers to bring broadband access to more homes, Fowler says.

"We realize that countering learning loss is going to be a multi-year effort and it will require additional expenditures beyond 2024," Fowler says. "You have to seize every opportunity to close gaps, and you also have to explore and try new things."

---

**SUNNY OUTLOOK**—Administrators in Grand Rapids Public Schools in Michigan are using ESSER relief funds to create more outdoor learning spaces.



**REASON TO RETURN**—Grand Rapids administrators plan to spend ESSER funding to reverse an 800-student drop in enrollment.

Administrators from finance to academics to technology and athletics continue to look for ways to get the biggest impact out of an unprecedented level of

relief funding. Here are some of their initiatives.

**From fine arts to enrollment recovery**

Fine arts programs had subsisted on a

shoestring budget in Grand Rapids Public Schools over the last several years.

While officials there will spend their influx ESSER funds on high-profile items such as learning loss and technology upgrades, they also plan to buy art supplies, instruments and tickets to music festivals, Chief Financial Officer Larry Oberst says.

Grand Rapids administrators also plan to spend about \$700,000 to reverse an 800-student drop in enrollment. A substantial number of students were lost to private schools that we able to offer in-person instruction most of the 2020-21 school year, Oberst says.

"We're going door-to-door, letting students know we're back as normal as we can be," he says. "We need to get students back and keep them."

To address students' and staff members' social-emotional wellbeing, Grand Rapids plans to expand partnerships with community providers, including those that can also provide academic tutor-

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ing. Administrators will also hire a small number of mental health professionals and social workers.

“Obviously, we’re trying to stay away from adding significant amounts of legacy costs,” Oberst says. “The last bucket of ESSER III runs out in September 2024 and there’s no assurance what funding will be available to continue.”

Last year, Grand Rapids schools achieved 1-to-1 status by distributing an additional 7,000 take-home devices. Administrators will spend some of their next batch of ESSER funds for in-school technology, says Oberst.

“We have 800 classrooms that need some level of update of classroom technology,” he says.

### Higher-tech tutoring

In Ector County ISD in Texas, ESSER COVID relief funds are allowing administrators to ramp up virtual tutoring and virtual teacher coaching for 2021-22. The district has not been able to hire

**“We realize that countering learning loss is going to be a multi-year effort and it will require additional expenditures beyond 2024. You have to seize every opportunity to close gaps, and you also have to explore and try new things.”**

- Kareemah Fowler, South Bend Community School Corporation

enough in-person tutors or instructional coaches due to staffing shortages in the region, Superintendent Scott Muri says.

After a spring pilot program, the district has signed outcomes-based contracts with several virtual tutoring companies—which means the vendors will be paid based on the growth of students served, Muri says.

English-language learners, economically disadvantaged students and students in special education will be prioritized for tutoring, which will be offered to students in kindergarten through 12th grade.

Students will visit school computer labs to work one-on-one with trained online tutors before, during or after the regular school day. The sessions, in fact, will run just like regular class periods in a “very structured environment,” Muri says.

Tutors will lesson plan with classroom teachers to align instruction, with a focus on catching students up in English language arts and math. Throughout the year, students, who will receive about 60 hours of tutoring, will take regular assess-



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**WELLNESS WORK**—Grand Rapids will expand its community tutoring and mental health partnerships.

ments so educators can closely track their progress.

Muri expects to spend several million dollars on the program, which will account for a "pretty significant amount" of its ESSER funding. The Texas legislature earlier this year decided it would no longer fund online learning.

**Igniting a love of reading**

Delaware and Nevada are using ESSER COVID relief funds to ensure every student has access to digital books.

The Delaware Accelerate Learning digital book collection will allow students to download e-books, audiobooks and digital graphic novels to any device.

The entire program, which is designed to support the equity and literacy work underway in individual districts, is anchored by OverDrive Education's Sora platform, says Monica Gant, the Delaware Department of Education's associate secretary for academic support.

"The department typically does not provide direct resources to students," Gant says. "We saw ESSER as a unique opportunity to provide access to digital e-books to all public-school students, in all grade levels, through their school libraries and high-quality instructional materials."

**ARIZONA SHARES 3 ESSER IDEAS**

Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction Kathy Hoffman discussed her state's three priorities for COVID relief funds:

**1**

**RECRUITING AND RETAINING TEACHERS:** During the summer 2020 Covid spike in the state, The Arizona Department of Education partnered with Arizona State University to launch the Arizona Virtual Teacher Institute, which has served more than 10,000 teachers to date. Moving forward, the state will use relief funds to expand professional development in social-emotional learning.

**2**

**EQUITABLE ACHIEVEMENT:** Relief funds will supply schools with more high-quality learning materials. One priority will be schools in the state's 22 tribal nations. During the pandemic, many teachers paid for learning materials out of their own pockets.

**3**

**CLOSING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE:** The Department of Education has used relief funding to purchase laptops and hotspots for students throughout the state. At the same, individual districts made big strides, in partnership with providers, in connecting families.



The agency will further support the program with professional development in reading, science and literacy. This will include a focus on early literacy for pre-service teachers in college education programs, Gant says.

Students in Nevada have read 6 million books, tallying 60 million minutes (about 114 years) of reading through the state's year-old free digital books program.

ESSER funds now drive READ Nevada, which is backed up by the state's Connecting Kids initiative that brought internet access in the pandemic to approximately 120,000 students who lacked connections.

The platform, which is provided by

MyON, features a diverse library with titles that are relevant to—and therefore more likely to engage—students from all backgrounds. MyON also provides books in multiple languages, says Jonathan Moore, the Nevada Department of Education's deputy superintendent of student achievement.

"Students can spend much of their academic careers without reading any literature that reflects themselves in a positive light," Moore says. "What we typically see from students who may have a disdain for reading is that often they are given literature that they can't identify with or that they don't find exciting." DA

*Matt Zalaznick is DA's senior writer.*

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## Trust no one: The only effective approach to data security

**A 'Zero Trust' mentality is key when implementing data privacy policies and practices for districts**

By Richard Quinones

The National Center for Education Statistics reported that in September 2020, more than 67 percent of adults who had children under age 18 enrolled in a public or private school had reported that their children's classes had moved to a distance learning format using online resources. Of these, over 59 percent also reported that computers were provided by the children's schools or school districts.

Today, virtually all districts have incorporated some form of cloud-first strategy and solutions to help support day-to-day learnings, which has presented unique challenges and concerns.

Alongside the remarkable and mostly successful efforts to connect students and teachers in digital spaces during the pandemic, the past year has also brought stories of zoom bombing, data breaches and inequitable student access to technology. These conditions have had a direct impact on privacy concerns related to educational data, including the ever-growing reliance on cloud applications for teaching, learning and student mobility.

As we approach the 2021-22 school year, we anticipate seeing administrators take additional measures to promote student data privacy, including greater attention to data governance. K-12 IT leaders will be focused on increasing security measures. This will likely include actionable data privacy policies and practices, including a 'Zero Trust' mentality to safeguard the tremendous increase in the reliance on

**Zero Trust is just that: no trust in anyone or anything that could possibly breach data security. This approach includes an integrated defense strategy that addresses threats to security.**

cloud-based teaching and learning applications.

Over the last 18 months, digitalization and 'learn from anywhere' have surely accelerated the need for Secure Access Service Edge (SASE) offerings that offer secure connectivity to any educational resource from any device, from anywhere. With SASE, security follows the student, as it is delivered in the cloud. This ensures that the same level of protection and compliance is applied to a student regardless of whether they are in the classroom or at home.

According to the 2021 Strategic Roadmap for SASE Convergence report from Gartner, "Digitalization, work from anywhere and cloud-based computing have accelerated cloud-delivered SASE offerings to enable anywhere, anytime access from any device. Security and risk management leaders should build a migration plan from legacy perimeter and hardware-based offerings to a SASE model." Gartner also forecasts that by 2025, "at least 60% of enterprises will have explicit strategies and timelines for SASE adoption encompassing user,

branch and edge access, up from 10% in 2020."

**What is Zero Trust and what are the benefits for my school district**

Zero Trust is just that: no trust in anyone or anything that could possibly breach data security. This approach, now increasingly embraced across K-12, includes an integrated defense strategy that addresses threats to security—particularly the cloud, where sensitive data is transacted and stored (often between an on-premises school network and outside locations).

A Zero Trust model forges a data-centric perimeter around school information comprised of powerful encryption methods—as well as stringent authentication techniques. Connectivity is only granted after identity is authenticated, the security posture of the connected device is verified, and the user is authorized to access the desired application, service or information.

As IT leaders look to strengthen their defense strategies, it's essential to find the right platform that offers consistent policies to help keep students secure, without hindering productivity. The pandemic has opened the need for secure connectivity, from anywhere. It is time to ensure each district embraces a Zero Trust mentality. **DA**

*Richard Quinones is a senior vice president at iboss. He has spent over 20 years taking on important IT leadership roles at the county, state and national levels. His past experience includes being appointed Los Angeles County's first chief education technology officer, where he led the delivery of IT services across 80 school districts and five community colleges.*





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## Don't let national wedge issues cripple local education leadership

Culture war issues are adding new and sometimes overwhelming burdens for leaders who need to focus on education

By Paul Hill

This fall, school and district leaders will encounter kids at vastly different levels of academic readiness and needs for mental health intervention, and parents and teachers with varying concerns over safety. Though many schools will follow similar strategies, the specific problems schools will face will lead them in different directions.

This puts a premium on leadership, not only at the school level but also at the district level. Superintendents and school boards must support school-level problem-solving and buffer teachers and principals from distracting regulations and pressures. They can offer help when needed but should stay out of the way of schools that are responding effectively to student needs.

Recently, however, national culture war issues are adding new and sometimes overwhelming burdens for leaders who need to focus on education. Crowds inflamed by opposition to masks and other pandemic safety measures, rights of transgender students, or critical race theory are disrupting and intimidating school boards and threatening administrators. This has led to board meeting cancellations and resignations in localities as diverse as Louisville, KY; Cincinnati, OH; Fort Worth, TX; Loudoun County, VA; and Washougal, WA. At the same time, for many reasons, superintendents have resigned or been fired in dozens of districts, large and small.

Demonstrators are often concerned local citizens, but in at least one state—Arizona—the same demonstrators are showing up in different localities. Board members and superintendents who haven't yet experienced wedge-issue

### Superintendents and school boards must support school-level problem-solving and buffer teachers and principals from distracting regulations and pressures.

disruption are likely to do so in the future, thanks to the work of Fox News and other national outrage machines. It doesn't help for district leaders to say they have other priorities and are not adopting new policies on, say, transgender athletes participating in girls' sports or teaching about white supremacy. The protestors don't trust anyone to tell the truth. They also know that district policies don't really control what happens in classrooms, and they want to intimidate teachers.

Citizens have the right to act on their convictions but not to make officials fear for their safety or shut down open meetings. These adult differences must be worked out in the large arenas of public opinion, state and national legislatures, and elections. Except for pandemic safety issues, which schools must manage, K–12 education is the wrong forum for culture war factions to fight through their differences.

Some of the cultural warriors might know this, yet favor undermining public education's performance and legitimacy. But they might find that other schools they favor, including charters, independents, and religious, are torn by the same forces.

Will grassroots mobilization on wedge issues cripple school and district

leadership throughout the country, or will some places be able to resist it and focus on teaching and learning? Outrage sells, so national news outlets, commentators, and political opportunists will keep pumping it up. State legislatures in Arkansas, Florida, Montana, North Dakota, and West Virginia have only polarized issues further around transgender issues, as have 18 states around the history of race relations in the United States.

But senior public officials, especially the secretary of education, governors, and state school superintendents can also help. They can absorb some of the heat by insisting that schools focus on restoring learning opportunities students lost during the pandemic, saying loud and clear that inequality is a problem to be worked on—not defined away—and that schools can't promote equity for anyone if they don't teach effectively. To date, only a few senior officials, led by Ohio Governor Mike DeWine, have stepped up in this way.

Mayors and state superintendents can also publicly back up the superintendents, like Sonja Santilese in Baltimore and Eric Gordon in Cleveland, who refuse to be distracted from their main jobs of restoring education for all children. Such actions won't make the political storms go away but they can buttress K–12 leaders against the high winds coming their way. **DA**

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*Paul T. Hill is founder of the Center on Reinventing Public Education and Research Professor at the University of Washington Bothell. His current work focuses on re-missioning states and school districts to promote school performance; school choice and innovation; finance and productivity; and improving rural schools.*

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## 5 lessons learned about the digital divide from the COVID-19 pandemic

By Dean Cantu

**While some believe we will be returning to 'normal' this upcoming 2021-22 school year, the truth is there will be a 'new normal'**

Even before the COVID 19 pandemic K-12 schools were faced with the challenge of providing Internet access to underserved communities and were engaged in developing effective strategies to integrate technology into teaching and learning.

The pandemic, however, put a spotlight on the shortcomings of these efforts and the digital divide that still persisted. It also served to indelibly change the way we view and approach technology integration and online or remote learning going forward. If we take away any lessons from the pandemic, it's that technology can facilitate best practices in pedagogy, community building, and professional development.

### Phase I: Spring 2020

When schools initially transitioned to remote learning, many thought it would be temporary. As the news reports of infections and deaths kept coming, schools had to pivot yet again to an online format for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year.

That first phase was born out of necessity, and therefore lacked the structure and organization of other K-12 initiatives that are almost always preceded by extensive research, planning, and preparation. Schools had to pivot almost overnight; and students had to adjust to remote learning. School districts had to figure out how to provide internet access and technology to all students, including those in underserved neighborhoods.

The first task was ensuring high-speed internet access for all students. School districts expanded efforts that had been launched prior to the pandemic. For many, this included partnering with the business community to improve con-

nectivity and setting up internet hotspots in underserved neighborhoods. Other creative solutions included repurposing school buses with Wi-Fi routers.

At the same time, teacher professional development was another high priority. For many teachers, this required additional professional development in order to effectively deliver instruction in an online teaching and learning environment; adding new teaching strategies and approaches to their pedagogical repertoire.

### Phase II: Summer 2020

Administrators knew they had to make good use of summer to prepare for the fall. PD for teachers focused on preparing lessons and delivering instruction using a variety of education modalities.

Before the pandemic, schools and teachers were engaged in all of these instructional modalities, although the scales still tipped to the face-to-face side. In many situations, teachers were incorporating these instructional modalities outside of the school day. These initiatives highlighted the need for state-of-the-art technology and high-speed Internet access across each district; and the pandemic was the impetus that schools and cities needed to expedite efforts to provide these essential learning components to all of their students.

### COVID-19: 18 months later and still learning

The lessons that we learned will continue to inform pedagogy going forward. Indeed, while some believe we will be returning to "normal" this upcoming school year, the truth is there will be a "new normal." Across the nation, teachers and administrators have learned how technology integration and instructional

modalities can augment traditional teaching and learning. The pivot education experienced during the pandemic also resulted in the following takeaways:

Internet access for all students provides an opportunity to learn outside of the school day. Creative solutions such as mobile hotspots and coordinating with local businesses to put Wi-Fi routers in place will help bridge the digital divide.

Teachers may have been thrust outside of their comfort zone initially, but they embraced the challenge and developed engaging and creative activities that enhanced the learning process, both in an online and in-person.

Professional development can be delivered in an efficacious manner both online and in-person.

Technology can serve as an effective conduit to further build the connection between schools and the community.

A final takeaway is that all of this will require government funding, as well as support from the business community. The digital divide that existed before the pandemic will only become wider if we do not invest in high-speed WiFi, which has to be maintained and upgraded throughout its life span.

All of these initiatives were in various stages of development. The pandemic expedited their implementation and compressed the timeline. It is now our responsibility to make sure that the lessons we learned from the COVID-19 pandemic will allow us to fulfill our promise of achieving digital equity, which has eluded K-12 education since the inception of the Internet. **DA**

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*Dean Cantu is a professor and chairperson of the Department of Teacher Education at Bradley University.*

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## The power of activating teacher voice, choice and agency

By Michelle Cummings

### How administrators can empower teachers to make the best digital decisions for their schools

School and district leaders who activate teacher voice, choice and agency have led through the pandemic in a way that fosters innovation and effective collaboration. We know from decades of research that administrators who engage in shared leadership with their teachers get better results for students and higher retention rates for teachers. This needs to be a top-of-mind strategy not only for instructional decision-making but also for the recruitment and retention of educators during a national teaching shortage.

All too often teachers' voices and ideas are muted—or even silenced—as school priorities shift to the burning issues of the day. While these issues are important, administrators must put teachers at the center of their schools' biggest decisions. This is especially true when it comes to selecting digital tools for the classroom.

According to a recent Teachers Pay Teachers (TpT) poll of 1,000+ PreK-12 teachers, 77% of teachers believe that they should have a great deal of influence over selecting the digital learning tools they use. Yet, only 46% believe they currently have that level of influence. It's incumbent on educational leaders to create structures to amplify teacher voices.

To do that successfully, administrators must start by building collaborative teams. School and district committees with diverse representation create the strongest decisions, especially when it comes to selecting the best digital learning tools for students and supporting teachers to implement them. Tisha, a Tech-Integration Specialist in Oregon facilitated such a team that resulted in the selection of a handful of digital

tools as well as an innovative model for professional development (PD) through gamified and differentiated modules. This fall, teachers in her district will choose their own PD adventure in a day of synchronous and asynchronous sessions led by teachers, extending voice, choice, and agency to professional learning.

Additionally, it's well-known that administrators have a unique leadership challenge: they must hold a powerful, shared vision, and sustain improvement efforts toward vital goals while simultaneously providing parameters for teachers to exercise choice. Educators and Professional Learning Community (PLC) consultants Rick and Becky DuFour referred to high-performing school cultures that are simultaneously “loose and tight,” acknowledging that educators can maintain shared accountability for results while allowing for the choices that teachers should make. What does this look like as it pertains to the selection of digital instructional materials? It means that teachers, administrators, and tech departments must work together to determine the criteria for instructional tools, and then the subject matter experts (the teachers) can exercise choice in selecting the tools that best meet the needs of their students. TpT found that 75% of teachers said they are more likely to adopt a digital learning tool that they had a role in selecting.

This was evident in an Illinois school district where Mark, the superintendent, gave significant latitude to teachers in selecting the digital tools that worked for their classrooms. He looked on in awe as a third-grade teacher seized upon this opportunity, using multiple screens, instructional tools, her iPad,

and document camera to choreograph a lesson for her hybrid classroom. As educators invest public funds in digital tools, it's imperative that teachers find them valuable in order to get the most out of them in the classroom. After all, nobody knows better about the efficacy of digital tools in the classroom than the people using them every day. At the close of this historic school year, it's clear that tech-integrated learning is here to stay and that teachers engaged in decision-making are key to realizing the potential of these powerful tools for learning.

Another certainty is the need to recruit and retain the next generation of teachers to the profession. In the face of a national teacher shortage, we know that creating school environments where personal expression and collaboration thrive is key. Sarah, a second-year math teacher, said it this way, “It's important to have autonomy while still having support, resources, and trust from administrators.” Leadership that values teacher voice, choice, and agency will attract Millennials and Gen Zers to the field of education and create work environments where these generations will want to teach and where students flourish. **DA**

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*Michelle Cummings is vice president of content at Teachers Pay Teachers, a platform that provides a marketplace for teachers to exchange instructional materials and access easy-to-use digital tools. Michelle had a 30-year career in education as a teacher, school principal, and district administrator and participated in District Administration's National Superintendent Academy's 2019 cohort.*  
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