

# DA

District Administration®

June 2022

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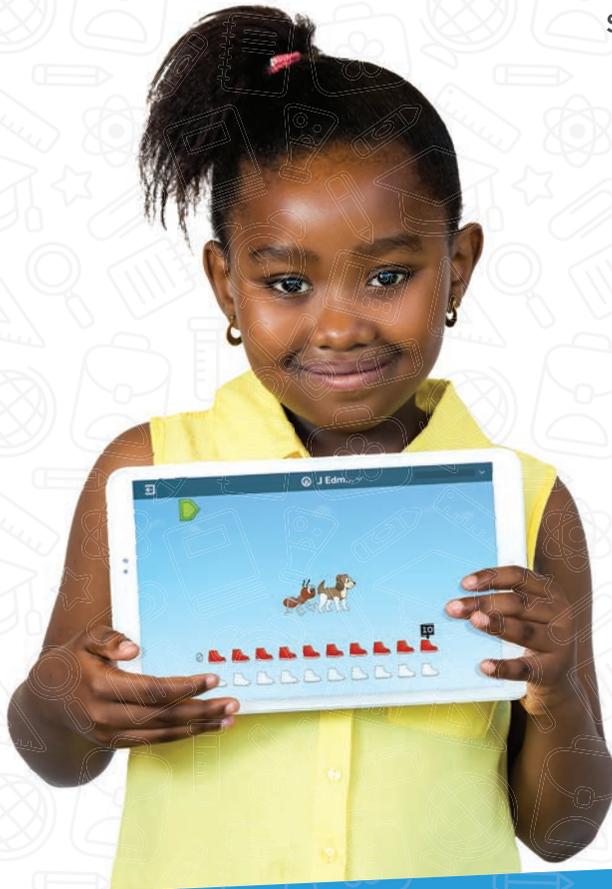
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## Recommended reading



You've made it through another difficult school year and the finish line is finally in sight. It's been a year of dealing with staff shortages, working

to help students recover from learning loss, incorporating the ed-tech that was suddenly needed for remote learning into the new day-to-day, and so much more.

District leaders like you are innovating education in ways that seemed unthinkable just a few years ago. As painful as the COVID-19 pandemic has been, it was also the catalyst for dramatic shifts in pedagogy and student support.

Ed-tech advancements that were developed for remote learning are now being incorporated into the new normal, giving technology a permanent and more advanced seat at the learning table. Our cover story on page 8 dives into some examples of this ed-tech evolution and offers ideas that you might want to implement in your district.

When it comes to grading in this post-remote learning period, a variety of districts have rethought their approach. Instead of grading for compliance and behavior, these districts have shifted to standards-based grading that is more equitable and provides a clearer picture of the specific skills students have mastered. You can find this story on page 12.

Now that summer is arriving and you finally get a needed break to recharge, we will continue to cheer you on and do what we can at *DA* to help you navigate the myriad issues to come in the fall.

Enjoy your summer. We'll be here shining light on innovative people and programs that are making a difference. People like you.

—Eric Weiss, executive editor



## Reasons to visit DistrictAdministration.com

### 7 new ways to stem a rash of new school attendance problems

Educators, however, should not push for perfect attendance, as it can actually increase absenteeism.

[bit.ly/attendance-woes](https://bit.ly/attendance-woes)



### Top 10 states where the most in-person learning occurred during COVID

Learning losses caused by pandemic-era school closures could result in a 3% decline in lifetime earnings for students.

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### These 5 challenges are chipping away at the optimism of principals

More than 80% of principals said watching students grow and relationships with staff led to high job satisfaction.

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### 4 principals to watch: Making strides in outreach, teacher leadership and climate

*District Administration* catches up with four principals who are setting new standards for building leadership.

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### Why two educators say elevating student voice is key to building back better

'We were busting the myth that student voice is a privilege and making it part of our culture that student voice is a right,' educator says.

[bit.ly/-elevate-student-voice](https://bit.ly/-elevate-student-voice)



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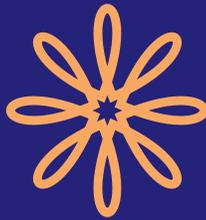
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## Are principal salaries keeping up with COVID's challenges? Some say no

*A rising sentiment among principals: 'Kids, parents and staff need me, so I'm going to stay on.'*

Pinpointing the trajectory of principals' salaries as workloads have swelled during the pandemic is difficult to do on a national scale. But even if these salaries are simply keeping up with the rising cost of living, that's not quite enough, says Ronn Nozoe, CEO of the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

A large majority of principals reported working harder, working longer hours, and having a more difficult time doing their job in a December NASSP survey that warned of a potential "mass exodus" of building leaders. "Principals should be paid more," Nozoe says. "The pandemic has highlighted a lot of the stuff they've dealt with as they've taken on more responsibility than ever before. Their salaries have never been commensurate with other leaders or administrators in similar professions."

Principals have long been accustomed to administrative management and instructional leadership, but they added the roles of public health expert, crisis manager and mental health therapist for staff and students during the pandemic, Nozoe says. Principals are also having to cope with becoming the preferred target of parents and others who are angry about mask mandates, curricula and cultural issues, he adds.

Snapshots of current salary levels in a handful of states and large districts may offer a glimpse of trends nationwide. In Texas, wages have been rising steadily in recent years. The average principal salary was \$97,657 in 2021-22, a slight increase from \$95,965 in 2020-21 and \$94,739 in 2019-20, according to Texas Education Agency data. The average was \$85,262 in 2014-2015.

In Illinois, salary increases dropped slightly, from 2.6% to 1.8%, between 2018 and 2020. The decrease appears to have been caused by the retirements of more experienced principals who earned higher salaries, according to the Illinois Association of School Boards. About a third of the districts in the state were reporting administrator shortages in 2021.

In New York City schools, salaries range from \$179,740 for a first-year elementary school principal to \$191,372 for a high school principal with 15 years of longevity, according to data from the Council of School Supervisors and Administrators union. Building leaders at all levels have seen steady increases—for instance, that first-year elementary school principal earned \$150,330 in 2019; the salary for a junior high school principal with five years of longevity grew from \$162,705 in 2019 to \$174,096 in 2021.

In the School District of Palm Beach County in Florida, principals' pay in 2021 ranged from about \$98,000 to \$140,000, with the potential to rise to around \$167,000 based on certain performance measures. Across the state in Sarasota County Public Schools, principals' salaries ranged from \$94,598 to \$127,527.

Based on recent conversations with principals, Nozoe says it appears some of the burnout and frustration principals were experiencing at the height of the pandemic may be easing. That may reduce the threat of a "mass exodus."

"It's bittersweet—bitter because of some of the working conditions principals have gone through, and sweet because we're seeing the character of these folks," Nozoe says. "They're saying, 'If not us, then who?' It's 'Kids, parents and staff need me, so I'm going to stay on.'"

*By Matt Zalaznick*



# LITERACY STARTS WITH A LINE

The path to literacy spirals out from this subtle movement—when a child’s scribbling becomes language. They will discover that this letter has a sound, which fuses into words, which cohere into sentences, and eventually, into the stories from which they can learn and confidently share their thoughts.



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## Activist parents aren't going away. Here's how to work with them.

*What K-12 leaders need to know about a new generation of parents promoting both conservative and liberal causes.*

“More interested in school district budgets and ballot boxes than bake sales.” That’s how a new analysis characterizes today’s increasingly energized parent activists who are seeking greater influence over their children’s education.

Anti-mask protests, restrictions on teaching LGBTQ topics, and other campaigns around conservative issues have drawn a lot of recent media attention. But parents on the other side of the spectrum have also mobilized behind liberal causes such as equity and teacher diversity, says “Leaning In: The New Power of Parents in Public Education,” by Georgetown University’s FutureEd think tank. “A new generation of far more activist parent organizations are springing up across the country, propelled by the internet, the rise of video conferencing, social media, and millions of dollars in backing from foundations seeking to bring the voices of underrepresented families and communities into the work of school improvement,” says the report, which also covers how educators and policymakers can work more productively with these groups.

First of all, PTAs and PTOs—the traditional parent engagement outlets—are in decline, in part because the groups have been viewed by some as catering mostly to white families who have been hesitant to take stands on controversial issues. This has given rise to organizations such as Atlanta Thrive, PAVE, The Memphis Lift, the National Parents Union, and Village of Wisdom, which advocate for parents of color and families living in poverty.

These equity-oriented groups are also receiving millions of dollars in support from powerful foundations and other philanthropic groups such as the Carnegie Corporation of New York, Bloomberg Philanthropies, and

the Walton Family Foundation. “Some of these local parent groups are fast expanding into national organizations with scores of local chapters—a sign that today’s heightened parental activism represents not just the latest skirmish in the nation’s culture wars but a more permanent change in the education policy landscape,” the report says.

This activism is also providing plenty of fuel for Republican state lawmakers, who have proposed dozens of bills that regulate how schools teach about race, sexual education, sexual orientation and gender identity. The conservative politicians, touting parents’ rights and curriculum transparency, have been joined by new parent-led organizations such as Moms for Liberty, which was a key backer of the controversial Parents Bill of Rights in Florida.

“The pandemic has intensified this new parent activism by turning kitchen tables into classrooms, stoking parents’ frustrations with school closings and online learning,” the report says. “And it has spawned new conservative parent organizations opposed to mask mandates, vaccines, and district attempts to confront issues of race, gender and sexuality in schools—agendas that at times put them in direct opposition to parents pursuing educational equity, and agendas that have turned more than a few school board meetings into civic punch-ups.”

### Working with parents

While the report says these parent activists are here to stay, education leaders can forge better working relationships by inviting them into the decision-making process. Administrators are advised to make a concerted effort to gain the trust of traditionally marginalized families, starting with

holding meetings out in the community at places and times that parents find more convenient.

Some districts have appointed a cabinet-level official who is responsible for community engagement and strongly encouraged teachers to work with families on learning plans for each student. For example, District of Columbia Public Schools’ Office of Family and Public Engagement has worked with the PAVE organization to spread information about various district programs. “While external parent advocacy organizations will continue to put pressure on districts when they think it is necessary,” the report says, “smart district leaders are proactively reaching out to families to engage their views as they develop district policies and practices, a strategy that can help forge stronger parental backing for district policies at the front end, while ensuring policies are more responsive to students and their parents.”

The report also describes how the Burlington School District in Vermont invited students, families, community members, teachers and administrators to play key roles in a “radically inclusive” strategic planning process in the summer of 2021. Among the priorities set by the group are establishing a sense of belonging for students and families and setting school performance metrics that will be shared with the community.

“While some of the more politically motivated parent activists...might withdraw after the 2022 elections, the broader surge of parent activism is likely to persist,” the report concludes. “Social media has expanded communications dramatically and changed power dynamics, and parents have new, pandemic-sharpened expectations for their children’s learning.”

*By Matt Zalaznick*

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# Ed-tech Evolution

Educators are building on the innovations of the remote era to reach a new normal of more advanced technology use.

By Matt Zalaznick

Students at Valley Elementary School in California's Poway USD simply stopped consuming educational technology during the pandemic shift online. Now, they produce videos and digital books, among other projects, to show evidence of what they're learning. "We just recently had fourth-graders focused on Black History Month choose a historical figure to highlight and create video presentations for kids in the lower grades," Principal Ricardo Ceceña says. "They showcased their learning to the rest of the school."

Across the country, educators like Ceceña are now building on the innovations of the remote and hybrid eras to reach a new normal of more advanced use of educational technology. "It's not just six hours within the school day where learning occurs," Ceceña says. "Students Zooming into school, teachers pushing out activities and projects digitally—those are practices we're going to hold onto."

## Students helping each other

"Districtwide alignment" will be one of the lasting ed-tech impacts of the last two years in Wisconsin's Muskego-Norway School District, which has been open for in-person instruction since the beginning of the 2020-21 school year. That means, for instance, all fourth-grade teachers can be following a similar curriculum at a similar pace, so students are getting the same education in the district's three elementary schools, says Tony Spence, Muskego-Norway's chief information officer. The full burden of planning is also reduced as this allows teachers to share lessons more fluidly.

The pandemic also pushed the district to reach its goal of supplying every classroom, from kindergarten through 12th grade, with an identical set of tech tools. This helps teachers, other educators, and students move seamlessly between classrooms. Another positive outcome is the independence and ownership many students have developed around their learning. One example of this is a substantial growth in peer instruction. "Students know that if their friends are online and struggling in math, they can log on and help," Spence says. "Kids are well-placed to teach each other because they know what it's like to not have the answers."

## Deeper dives

High school teachers in the Winton Woods City School District in Ohio were already pretty tech-savvy prior to COVID. And students in the project-based learning-centered Winton Woods City Schools were also comfortable navigating their classes and assignments in the learning management system with their Chromebooks.

What teachers and students will carry out of the pandemic are more sophisticated uses of the ed-tech tools they relied on during remote instruction, says Jennifer Haller, an instructional technology consultant at the Hamilton County Educational Services Center who has been contracted by Winton Woods' high school for the last several years. For instance, teachers now embed voice notes into YouTube videos to guide students on deeper dives into specific details of major

events such as the War of 1812. "We used to ask multiple-choice questions at the end to make sure students were watching," Haller says. "Now, we're using it at a higher depth of knowledge."

Winton Woods City Schools' project-based learning philosophy also facilitates the spread of ed-tech innovations from class to class. When students complete a project, they invite other students and teachers to their presentations. "Students get very good at speaking in front of people and doing presentations, so word gets around about the new tools that work," Haller says.

## What we should do in person

Of course, online and remote instruction existed prior to March 2020. But even leaders at the nation's growing number of online public schools say they have learned plenty from the pandemic. They're also confident that their experiences can help educators both in-person and virtually to use ed-tech more effectively.

At Saddleback Valley USD in California, strengthening online connections between students and teachers became even more crucial during the past two years as the pandemic canceled weekly in-person sessions, says Glenn Giokaris, principal of the SVUSD Virtual Academy. "You can develop strong communities online if done correctly," Giokaris says. "It takes a lot longer, but when there is a robust discussion going on in Zoom, it's really awesome to watch."

One key step for the SVUSD Virtual Academy was making sure teachers and students were comfortable accessing and

# Invention Education in Action: Helping students develop an Innovation Mindset while learning STEM skills

Q&A with **Alaina Rutledge**, V.P. of Education R&D, and **Britt Magneson**, Executive V.P.,  
National Inventors Hall of Fame



## What is invention education, and how is it symbiotic with STEM education?

Invention education does not replace STEM education or even augment it. Instead, it answers the “so what?” question. It provides relevance to STEM by helping students gain a

current understanding of what it means to be an innovator. Innovators are makers, scientists, researchers, problem solvers, creators, and entrepreneurs. Invention education therefore spends a significant amount of time not only developing skills that build the mindset of an innovator, but helping students develop an identity that says, “I am an innovator” or “I am a problem solver.”

## What impact can invention education have on students’ college and career readiness?

Generating solutions for society’s complex problems will require the development of a diverse workforce that is committed to technological and social innovation. That’s why invention education promotes soft skills like problem solving, collaboration, persistence, and confidence. These are all habits of mind that you can’t measure with an SAT.

The research is clear that students need to have these skills in addition to what’s normally taught in STEM and other subjects, because they’re already connected to devices that are essentially akin to having a calculator and every encyclopedia right in their pocket, if they need to do basic math or look up information. Students need to learn soft skills if they are going to tackle the complexities of tomorrow’s workforce, and invention education helps them develop those skills.

## How does the National Inventors Hall of Fame work with districts to bring invention education to STEM learning?

Through our relationship with hundreds of National Inventors Hall of Fame inductees, we have learned that there are thousands of pathways that lead to innovation and invention. There is no one-size-fits-all path to becoming

successful. There are, however, common themes and experiences that were keys to success for a majority of our Hall of Famers. We call it the Innovation Mindset®. This mindset involves collaboration, application of STEM concepts, creative problem solving, entrepreneurship and an understanding that moments of failure are necessary on the path to success.

We offer a variety of programs to districts that provide authentic, hands-on opportunities to help students develop this Innovation Mindset, through STEM activities that position inventors as role models. These include our in-school grade banded program Invention Project for PreK–8, our flexible summer program Camp Invention for grades K-6, the virtual version of the same called Camp Invention Connect for hands-on learning at home, and our afterschool program Club Invention for grades 1-6.

We directly work with teachers through our professional development program to demonstrate and model how to incorporate invention education into their daily classroom experience, whether in literacy, social studies, or mathematics.

## Can any school or district teach invention education?

Yes, because we’re teaching the basic qualities that are foundational to every type of learning. All learning requires that you try something new, with the understanding that you might fail, and if something doesn’t work, it’s okay. The next step is to ask why. It’s all about building confidence in students and developing their persistence so that they become the driver of their own learning. Everything about invention education is beneficial.



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organizing content in the school's Canvas learning management system. For instance, teachers are not overloading lessons with hyperlinks that can distract students from the main activity. Perhaps more importantly, teachers are producing shorter and simpler instructional videos. Rather than making 15-minute videos with cameras and other equipment, they are producing just five-minute videos using their iPhones. And a platform called Calendly is helping teachers, counselors and students schedule meetings. "It's really important that we figure out how to organize the curriculum so the technology doesn't get in the way of learning and we reduce the barriers and obstacles," Giokaris says.

More broadly, it's important for teachers to help virtual students develop their sense of self-efficacy and an ability to prevent themselves from getting off-task. "Virtual is not for everybody," he admits.

"Our teachers might put in a tremendous amount of time and energy and thought to support students and personalize content, but the student still needs to have a certain amount of self-regulation skills and a commitment on the part of their parents to engage with the content."

### Not the "easy way" to graduate

When the Iowa Virtual Academy launched more than a decade ago, leaders there encountered a challenge that many online educators have had to confront. The response may offer guidance to other K-12 leaders as they work to offer more virtual options. "A lot of kids, early on, thought this would be an easy way to graduate," says Shane Wahls, superintendent of the Clayton Ridge Community School District, which operates the academy. "They thought, 'I don't like school. I'll sign up for online and do the bare minimum.'"

Wahls and his team have worked to help families understand that the virtual academy has the same graduation requirements as brick-and-mortar schools do, and its courses are just as rigorous. In fact, its graduation rate has risen to 87%, from 70% in 2020 and 65% several years earlier.

Shortly after the pandemic struck the U.S., the academy's enrollment caps were lifted by the state, which allowed even more students from across Iowa to enroll in the school. The virtual academy also provides leaders in other districts with best practices, such as insight into which students benefit most from online instruction. "Students who have been victims of bullying and harassment, they attend online and they're very successful," Wahls says. The virtual academy also appeals to high school athletes who travel extensively and those who are more vulnerable because of chronic health conditions.

The pandemic provided new opportunities for Clayton Ridge's brick-and-mortar teachers to collaborate with their virtual counterparts. "Collaboration is a big deal in brick-and-mortar, and it's even more important, in virtual, that teachers learn from each other about methods of delivering instruction," Wahls says. "Teachers can too often end up teaching in silos."

But even the virtual academy continues to grapple with the challenge of conducting state assessments online, which the school has had to give in-person throughout the years. And improving the academy's services for students in special education is another ongoing process. For instance, online students who have behavioral goals in their individualized education plans are not surrounded by their classmates. So, the academy's educators provide guidance for parents who want to work on socialization skills with their students at the local library or YMCA. "Parents are usually pretty involved, especially with elementary school students," Wahls says. "They need to be learning coaches, communicate with counselors and advisors, and make sure children are logging into face-to-face, live sessions." **DA**

*Matt Zalaznick is District Administration's senior writer.*

## Nevada Empowers Teachers

Nevada teachers who have been innovating during the pandemic are getting fresh support from a program spearheaded by Jhone Ebert, the state's superintendent of public instruction. Here are the highlights:

- Teachers are getting ESSER-funded stipends to share their ideas as digital ambassadors.
- Teachers are producing podcasts, lessons, templates and other resources that are now available on the Nevada Digital Learning collaborative.
- The collaborative serves as a collection of content and professional development sessions.
- Nevada Digital Learning also contains resources from ed-tech providers.
- The program has received additional funding from mining and telecommunications companies as well as private philanthropy.

**"These are Nevada teachers building the content and resources based on Nevada standards, so other teachers don't have to adjust," Ebert says. "We now have a deeper set of teachers providing support, and that's not going away."**

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# Remaking the Grade

Why more districts are shifting to equity- and standards-based grading after the disruptions of remote learning.

By Matt Zalaznick



**CHANGING WITH THE TIMES**—Standards-based grading gives students hope and provides a clearer picture of students' skills.



Nearly one-third of students in grades three through 12 earned at least one F on their report cards while Santa Fe Public Schools was on remote instruction.

Students had points deducted from their grades not just for poor academic work but also for not turning on their cameras, not participating in discussions and behaving in other ways that teachers considered disruptive. But coming out of the virtual era, administrators recognized that grading for compliance and behavior was neither fair nor an effective measure of academic growth, Superintendent Hilario “Larry” Chavez Jr. says.

The district’s solution involves a wholesale shift to standards-based grading. It’s not necessarily a novel approach, but it has gained new momentum in the wake of the inequities exposed by the pandemic. A standards-based, 0-to-4 scale is more equitable because it provides teachers, students, and parents with more information about why a particular learner is—or is not—meeting standards, Chavez

says. “The grading system has not been changed in more than 100 years,” he says. “When you look at 0-to-59, which is an F, it’s really weighted toward failure.”

## Giving students hope

More equitable grading reduces students’ fear of failure and provides a clearer picture of the specific skills students have mastered, says Jeffrey Tooker, a deputy superintendent at the Placer Union High School District north of Sacramento.

The purpose behind the transition, which emerged as a part of equity work that began pre-pandemic, has become even clearer over the last two years. “Students who used to walk into class thinking they’re going to fail immediately now have hope that by the end of the course they can demonstrate mastery and pass,” Tooker says.

Equity-based grading aims to make it harder for students to get Ds and Fs, which can devastate learners academically and emotionally. Another key component is ensuring grades account only for aca-

ademic abilities, without bonuses for extra credit or reductions for behavioral issues, Tooker says. “Teachers’ conversations with students are now all about learning and which essential skills they’ve mastered,” he notes. “It’s not all about, what do I do to collect points to get my grades?”

A group of volunteer teachers were the first to adopt equity-based grading, which has since expanded gradually across the district’s four schools as educators began to recognize the merits. In shifting to a 1-through-4 grading scale, teachers now place less weight on homework and more weight on grades earned later in a course when a student has had more chances to hone their skills. If a student needs more time to master a skill at the end of a course, the teacher will work with their parents to issue an “incomplete.” The students will then receive intervention with the goal of turning that into a passing grade.

Tooker strongly disagrees with those who say allowing students to resubmit work and retake takes does not reflect the challenges young people will face as adults. For instance, he says, if you fail a driving test, the DMV gives you several more chances to pass. “It has been extremely difficult work and extremely transformational,” Tooker says, adding that teachers who have been involved in implementing the new system have called it “the most meaningful work they’ve ever done.”



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Standards-based learning makes it easier to measure problem-solving and collaboration skills, among others.

### Less Need for Intervention

Educators in San Leandro USD shifted to more equitable grading at the same time they began incorporating more project-based learning in their classes. Teachers had realized that the traditional grading system focused too heavily on basic compliance and participation, which made scores punitive rather than reflective of a student's knowledge, says Sonal Patel, assistant superintendent of educational services for the district that borders Oakland. Simply expanding intervention services was not a solution to the disproportionate number of Ds and Fs students were receiving. "It devastates students' abilities to mathematically and motivationally recoup the grade," Patel says.

In San Leandro classrooms that have made the shift, an F is now a 50 rather

than a zero. Students can also retake tests, homework is no longer graded, and teachers do not automatically mark down assignments when they are turned in late. Extra credit has been eliminated and students' end-of-course grade relies more heavily on regular summative and formative assessments than on day-to-day work, Patel says.

Equitable grading has been a game changer for more than just students. Teachers have found that, when students have a clearer idea of their own progress, there is less need for intervention. This gives teachers more time to offer enrichment. "Teacher feedback has been overwhelming," Patel says. "They're saying things like, 'I had no idea that my grading had this sense of punishment and judgment, that it wasn't really about teaching and learning.'"

### What about college?

Placer Union High School District converts its standards-based scale into letter grades for report cards and college transcripts. "Colleges now have a more accurate academic representation of the students they're considering because teachers have taken out components that could be considered arbitrary to learning," Deputy Superintendent Jeffrey Tooker says.

In Santa Fe Public Schools, a task force comprising assistant superintendents, principals and teachers created a server with fake students to experiment with weighting standards-based grades. They also created a conversion table that translated the standards-based scale into a grade point average for college transcripts and other purposes.

### "No one should be surprised"

Beginning in the fall of 2022, middle and high school students in The School District of Wisconsin Dells will have multiple opportunities to demonstrate proficiency, with teachers providing ample and detailed feedback on specific areas of improvement. Parents will also have a fuller picture of a student's progression—which should give families more confidence in helping their children achieve their academic targets, say Hugh Gaston III, principal of the high school, and Casey Whitehurst, principal of the middle school.

When it comes to college and career readiness, standards-based learning also allows teachers to better measure critical thinking, problem-solving, communication and collaboration skills. "There has been a disconnect between what a student truly knows, understands and is able to do, and their actual grade," say Whitehurst and Gaston, who have been spearheading the transition. "Some learners might need a bit more time to master essential concepts. With traditional grading, early struggles are held against them."

Traditional grading is not sufficiently transparent because it has not been consistent, says Sandra Moumoutjis, executive director of the Learning Innovation Network at the nonprofit Building21. Too often, each of a student's teachers calculates different components—such as homework or behavior—into their final grades.

In the two public high schools Building21 operates in Philadelphia and Allentown, students follow detailed learning progressions in an equity-based, competency-focused grading system. The approach further boosts equity by allowing educators to create ever-more personalized growth targets, including for English learners and students with disabilities. "By creating competencies and progressions, everywhere a student goes in a day they're being rated exactly the same," Moumoutjis says. "They know what's expected of them, no one should be surprised by the rating they're getting, and we don't have to think about failing kids." DA

*Matt Zalaznick is District Administration's senior writer.*

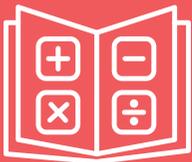


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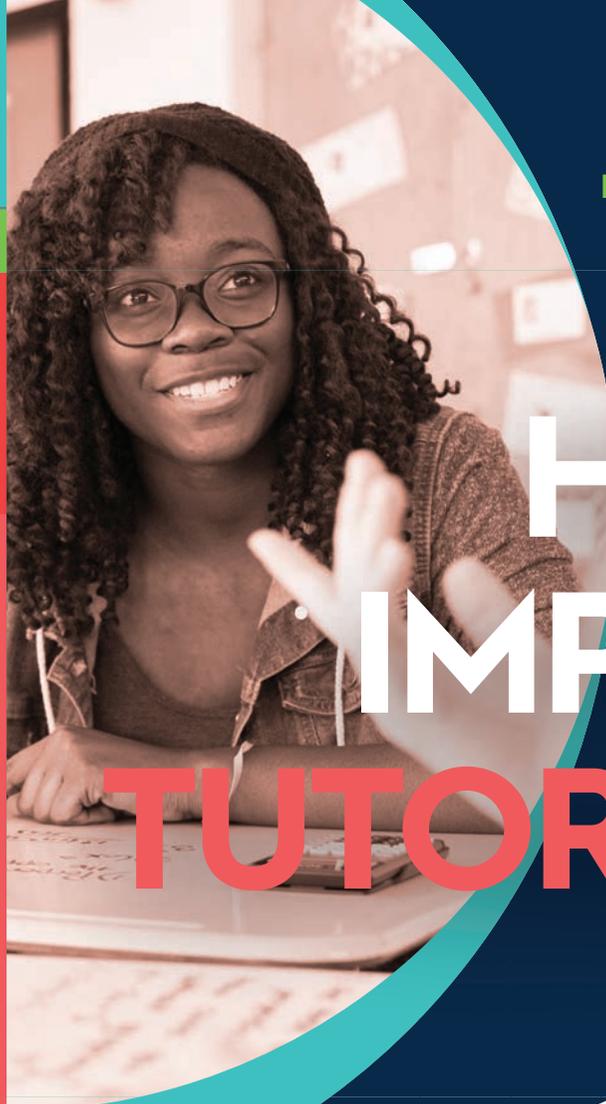
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## It Starts With Our Children: An Anti-racism CEO Explains

Matthew Kincaid dives into the need for early anti-racism discussions.

By Matthew Kincaid

The topic of anti-racism has been at the forefront for some time. During the Summer of 2020, many companies began to ramp up their focus on anti-racism efforts in the workplace. Anti-racism activists also began to stress the importance of instilling anti-racist sentiment in children.

Needless to say, the assertion that kids need to learn how to be anti-racist was met with some resistance. Recently, the issue made national news when Senator Ted Cruz questioned Supreme Court Nominee Ketanji Brown Jackson about Ibram X. Kendi's book *Antiracist Baby*. He famously asked the now-Justice Brown Jackson if "babies were racist."

The attention on Cruz's book-bashing brought to light an important issue: the anti-racist education of children. Sales of Kendi's book skyrocketed following its moment in the spotlight during Brown Jackson's confirmation hearing. Anti-racism education early in life has the positive side-effect of following children into adulthood, producing an overall more anti-racist society.

### Starting the discussion

The first step in any anti-racist discussion needs to be self-education. Parents and other caregivers will want to be comfortable with the concept of anti-racism so they can engage in the topic without reservation. Conversations surrounding race or racism can be difficult because today's adults were not exposed to these topics as children.

Children should feel comfortable engaging in this subject. The tone set

should tell the child that engaging in the subject of race or racism is normal and productive.

### It takes a village

Parents of color often do not choose whether they are going to have discussions about racism with their children. Children of color grow up surrounded by the realities of racism, and these meaningful discussions are essential.

A well-known saying exists that it "takes a village" to raise a child. Parents of color could benefit from the help of their white counterparts—their "village"—in anti-racist education. Much of the work that parents of color put in involves teaching their children to interact with white children, whose parents often are not putting the same effort into anti-racist education.

The value of anti-racism should be considered just as important as instilling other values in children, such as respect, kindness, and gratitude. When white parents place anti-racism education as a priority, they show they are willing to be a part of that global village.

### The challenge of instilling anti-racist values

If the exchange between Senator Cruz and Justice Brown Jackson illustrated anything, it was that there continues to be pushback on anti-racist teaching. There are entire factions that believe the concept of anti-racism is negative, but the idea of anti-racism is straightforward—it simply means being against racism. If being against

racism is not a concept the entire country can rally behind, it may be a time to take a deep look at the soul of our nation.

Bans on critical race theory (CRT), a legal theory typically only taught in graduate school, have spread across many states. Many laws are ambiguous and make teaching in general difficult for K-12 educators. The vague nature of the laws passed is due to an overall lack of understanding of CRT.

Anti-CRT activists fear that teaching children and high schoolers about the United States' history of systemic racism will make them hate their country or, if they are white, hate who they are. The incendiary language and hand wringing amongst anti-CRT activists have continued to slow the widespread adoption of anti-racist education.

The benefits of anti-racist and diversity education are apparent in the workplace and the classroom. The benefits of early anti-racism education are also evident. Only good can come from teaching our children to be more loving, accepting and conscious of the systemic hold racism has on our country. **DA**

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*Matthew Kincaid is a former social studies teacher and school administrator and the founder, CEO, and Chief Consulting officer of the non-profit Overcoming Racism. He is a graduate of Tufts University and a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. Contact Matthew at [matthew@overcomingracism.com](mailto:matthew@overcomingracism.com). Learn more about Overcoming Racism at [overcomingracism.com](http://overcomingracism.com).*

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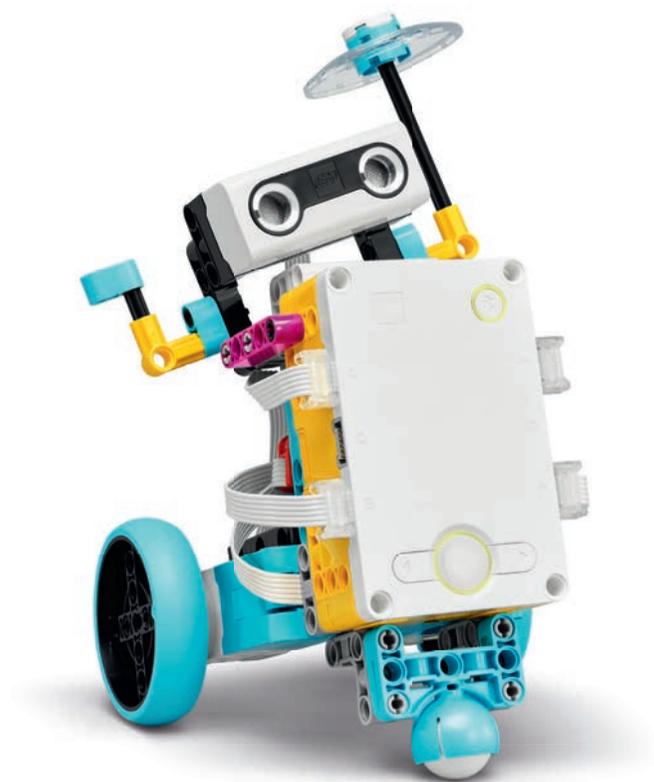
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