

DA

District Administration®

October 2022

PAPER
See pages 18-19

A TOUGH CALL

Administrators want to remove distractions, but not everyone agrees about the benefits of restricting cellphones in schools

Climate champions

These principals to watch are working to boost positivity

Facing a fiscal cliff

A major economic shock is on the way. When will it hit?

FETC 2023

A sneak peek at what attendees can expect at the event in January

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2022 Scripps National Spelling
Bee champion!



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Lori-Ann Savino , Dir. of Transportation
Jericho School District, New York

”

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Recommended reading



With signs of fall upon us—pumpkin spice aftershave, anyone?—and the new school year in full swing, it's a good time to look at some of the biggest

challenges and opportunities district leaders are facing.

As of this writing, there have been 29 school shootings this year. In some cases, it was students who first reported these heinous attacks to law enforcement using their cellphones. Yet many districts have found that the devices cause unwanted distractions and are struggling to find a balance between student safety and helping them stay focused in school.

In our cover story, we spoke to superintendents who are tackling this dilemma in creative ways, from having different rules for different grade levels to requiring students to place their phones in locked pouches during the school day. Read about these and other ideas on page 20.

Principals are the focus of our latest installment of leaders to watch. We heard from an array of building leaders who are making a difference by focusing on relationships and school culture. Hear what they had to say on page 24.

The combined effects of the end of ESSER funding, enrollment declines, inflation, and a potential nationwide recession spell trouble for K-12 education. We explore what it could mean for districts after COVID funds are gone and how they can get ahead of the potential economic cliff that looms next year. This feature begins on page 30.

As always, please drop me a line if you have story ideas or feedback. You can reach me at eweiss@lrp.com.

—Eric Weiss, executive editor

Talking out of school

Here's what education leaders have been telling DA lately.

“The majority of challenges we face in our schools are directly related to some form of communication whether it be miscommunication, a lack of communication, or untimely communication.”

—Superintendent Rob Clayton, Warren County Public Schools

“School librarians constantly have to prove their worth and advocate for their programs. It would be great if everyone understood our value.”

—School library media specialist Lauren Mobley, Clayton County Public Schools

“People ought to look at public education as the hope—as the key to the promises made to children.”

—Superintendent Alena Zachery-Ross, Ypsilanti Community Schools

“To meet the needs of volatile and uncertain markets, we have to lead in a way that's agile and flexible and collaborative.”

—Superintendent Laurie Dent, Sumner-Bonney Lake School District

FEATURES

20 A Tough Call

The use of cellphones in schools has become an even thornier issue since students returned in person.

Matt Zalaznick

24 Climate Champions

These principals celebrate staff and students as they encourage deeper collaboration. *Matt Zalaznick*

30 Facing the Fiscal Cliff

K-12 is facing down 4 major potential economic shocks in the not-too-distant future. *Matt Zalaznick*



FEATURETTES

14 Encouraging students to report violent threats

It takes alleviating their fears of being labeled a “snitch.”

Matt Zalaznick

16 Politics are invading schools

Here are 4 ways to help educators cope with the resulting stress.

Matt Zalaznick

DEPARTMENTS

36 FETC Highlights

A sneak peek at what 2023’s upcoming conference holds.

Micah Ward

38 Leadership Insight

Tutoring proof points and pitfalls.

Anthony Salcito,
chief institution business officer at Nerdy

42 Professional Opinion

4 ways school leaders can stop the cycle of burnout among teachers.

Becca Hughes
director of editorial development for Learning A-Z

44 Last Word

How community colleges can help solve today’s teacher shortages.

Hans Andrews, William Marzano and
Greg Rockhold

BEYOND THE NEWS

4 How 6 school districts are using funding to help homeless students.

6 The most prominent form of bullying is not fighting or teasing. Here’s how to remedy it.

7 Why families and teachers say kids need more social emotional learning.

8 Where does your state rank when it comes to education equality?

10 Why teachers prefer mastery learning to close learning gaps.

12 How big job search sites aim to help Biden tackle teacher vacancies.

13 Reimagining learning can be done. Here’s how.

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How 6 school districts are using fresh funding to help homeless students

Low-cost cellphones and a program to find families to host the students in their homes are among the plans.

Homeless students are seeing unprecedented levels of funding support as districts work to stem one of the most troubling enrollment drops of the last few years. K-12 leaders are now sharing the strategies and programs they are employing to bring back the one in five homeless students who left school during the pandemic.

One of the reasons for that drop may be that fewer than 20 percent of districts received funds from the first round of ESSER money (the CARES Act) to identify and support students experiencing homelessness, according to this month's "Progress and Promise" report by nonprofit SchoolHouse Connection.

New data shows that the American Rescue Plan-Homeless Children and Youth program will not only increase sixfold the number of districts getting funding for homeless students but that K-12 leaders will have more flexibility in spending the money. This includes districts that haven't been receiving grants under the federal McKinney-Vento program for students experiencing homelessness. ARP allows K-12 leaders to use the funds for:

- Staffing and capacity building
- Outreach and identification
- Transportation
- Housing-related supports
- Prepaid debit and store cards
- Academic support
- Wrap-around services
- Early childhood
- Postsecondary planning and

transition

"Just as funding to schools provided by COVID relief packages prior to the American Rescue Plan failed to reach most students experiencing homelessness because it was not designed for

them, other federal education programs more generally geared toward disadvantaged students also fall short," the report says.

Helping homeless students

Here's a look at how K-12 leaders are now using relief funds to implement strategies and programs to better support homeless students.

1. **Capital School District** (Delaware) is working to improve communication with homeless families by giving them low-cost cell phones with unlimited data and minutes for two years. The district added school-related apps and phone numbers to the phones to facilitate direct contact between families and support staff. The district is also planning to build an off-site service center that gives families access to computers, food and laundry facilities, among other services.

2. **Coos Bay School District** (Oregon) is using ARP funds to hire more staff to work at its drop-in center, which provides homeless families with basic needs, such as laundry services, after-school homework support, showers, and food. The district will also launch a program that finds families who are willing to host homeless students in their homes and expand transportation services that include an "open tab" with local cab companies.

3. **Taos Municipal Schools (New Mexico)** is expanding its identification efforts and the wraparound services it offers to homeless families. After adding four new staff members, the district has identified more Native American students who are experiencing homelessness. Staff members are also delivering school supplies during breaks and

holidays to identified students. The district is funding before- and after-school care, including tutoring, at several of its schools. The district now plans to provide case management services to families in motels and to those who are being evicted.

4. At **Saint Paul Public Schools**, (Minnesota), a team of teacher's assistants and part-time social workers are now working to re-enroll students who left the district during the pandemic and to develop attendance plans for those kids. Funds are also being used to expand credit-recovery programs for high school students and increase access to summer school. The district has teamed up with a local nonprofit to pay stipends and provide high school credits to homeless students who participate in community service projects. Finally, Saint Paul Public Schools is partnering with two local shelters to send families on field trips.

5. **Boston Public Schools** is expanding its case management partnerships with local housing agencies to provide families with housing vouchers and help them complete housing applications, find housing and sign leases. The district and its partners have also launched the Emergency Homelessness Intervention Program to increase family access to shelters, healthcare and financial assistance.

6. The homeless liaison at **Richland County School District 1** (South Carolina) is now supported by two new staff members, including a case manager to focus on outreach and identification. Richland One is also now partnering with the NAACP to host clinics to connect families with housing and legal resources.

By Matt Zalaznick

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RENAISSANCE

Bullies do this more often than fighting or teasing. Here's how leaders can help stop it

“Social exclusion” is more prevalent than any other form of bullying—and just as painful.

The most common form of bullying is *not* physical aggression or verbal threats and insults—it’s a behavior known as “social exclusion,” according to new research. Social exclusion is a form of “relational aggression” that occurs when peers exclude a student from group activities or spread harmful rumors about that person, said Chad Rose, an associate professor who directs the Mizzou Ed Bully Prevention Lab at the University of Missouri.

“Previous studies suggest when a kid is excluded from social activities by their peers at school, the outcomes for that kid both short-term and long-term will be just as detrimental as if they got kicked, punched or slapped every day,” said Rose, who was part of a research team that conducted a school climate assessment in 26 middle and high schools across five school districts in the southeastern U.S.

More than 14,000 students were asked how they felt about statements reflecting pro-bullying attitudes, perceived popularity and relational aggression. The survey statements included:

- “A little teasing does not hurt anyone.”
- “I don’t care what mean things kids say as long as it’s not about me.”
- “In my group of friends, I am usually the one who makes decisions.”
- “When I am mad at someone, I get back at them by not letting them be in my group anymore.”

Students who considered themselves socially dominant or popular endorsed pro-bullying attitudes in the survey, but they claimed not to have engaged in social exclusion or relational aggression. Another group who did not think of themselves as socially dominant or popular also endorsed pro-bullying attitudes and admitted to engaging in relational aggression.

“So, the first group thought bullying was OK but did not see themselves as engaging in it even if they actually were excluding others,” Rose said.

“While the second group that admitted to engaging in relational aggression may have been excluding others as an attempt to jockey for the position of being more socially dominant and climb the social hierarchy.”

Rose and his fellow researchers used the term “bystanders” to describe students who did report engaging in some form of bullying. But bystanders can also perpetuate bullying by simply being around it and not intervening, which, Rose acknowledged, can be difficult for children and adults trying to assess a situation. “If we see two kids in a physical fight, we feel an obligation to break it up,” Rose said. “But when we see kids being excluded by their peers, adults don’t always seem to view it as equally damaging, and that’s the scary part.”

Here are a few strategies for preventing social exclusion:

1. Skill-specific interventions, such as empathy training and social-emotional learning, can reduce the levels of relational aggression.
2. Educators—along with parents and community members—can support youth at risk of bullying by celebrating their individuality. Too often, kids are pressured to conform at school. “Individuality should be interwoven in some of the messages we as adults send in our schools, in our families and in our neighborhoods,” Rose said.
3. Teachers can immediately embed social communication skills within their daily curriculum. When educators set academic objectives for a project, they should also monitor whether students are asking their classmates to share their ideas and input. Teachers should praise students when they see

this kind of respectful and inclusive behavior in action, Rose said.

Bullying, by the numbers

About 20% of students aged 12-18 experienced bullying, with most of that occurring at school. The bullying took place most frequently in hallways and stairwells, and in classrooms, according to StopBullying.gov, a list of resources and research maintained by the federal government. About 15% of those students reported being bullied online or by text.

Nearly half of those students notified an adult about being bullied.

The students most at-risk of being bullied are those who are perceived as different from their peers, such as for being overweight or underweight, wearing glasses or different clothing or being new to a school. Students who are perceived as weak or unable to defend themselves, kids who are depressed, anxious, or have low self-esteem, and those who do not get along well with others are also at high risk, according to StopBullying.gov.

The site describes the two types of kids who are more likely to bully others:

- Some are well-connected to their peers, have social power, are overly concerned about their popularity, and like to dominate or be in charge of others.
- Others are more isolated from their peers and may be depressed or anxious, have low self-esteem, be less involved in school, be easily pressured by peers, or not identify with the emotions or feelings of others.

“Bullying does not begin or end with the school bells, it is a community issue,” Rose said. “I think, as adults, we have to be more aware of what we’re teaching our kids in terms of how we interact socially, as schools are a reflection of our communities.”

By Matt Zalaznick

Social-emotional learning: Families and teachers say it's essential for students today

According to teachers, more mental health providers are needed.

“We’ve found that when parents and families truly understand the fundamental everyday life skills—like communication and self-discipline—there’s an a-ha moment and broad support for SEL among families of all backgrounds across the political spectrum.”

That’s according to Andrea Lovanhill, CEO of Committee for Children, a global nonprofit organization that promotes safety and well-being for children through SEL.

Mental health among students is now in a state of crisis as 79% of teachers report that mental health among their students has worsened since the pandemic, according to the results from the Voices from the Classroom 2022 report from Educators for Excellence.

So, what needs to be done? According to teacher responses in the report, they need more mental health providers:

- 72% agree schools should prioritize hiring more mental health counselors/providers.
- 66% agree schools should equip teachers with the best mental health practices for their students.
- 54% want professional development to promote better school and classroom cultures.

But the teacher shortage only made things more difficult for districts in their ability to provide these services. 70% of teachers say this is a significant issue. Parents agree, and they’re asking schools to provide more SEL opportunities for their kids.

The Committee for Children found

that parents across political ideologies overwhelmingly support SEL in their child’s school: 81% of Republicans and 79% of Democrats whose child’s school provides SEL say their school should do more or is doing the proper amount of SEL instruction.

“This isn’t about politics or ideology; it’s about working together as parents and educators to ensure that our kids are healthy, happy, successful humans inside and outside the classroom,” said Committee for Children’s Lovanhill.

“Creating a positive environment where children learn how to focus and be productive means more confident kids with higher academic achievement. It’s as simple as that.”

By Micah Ward



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Maryland is ranked no. 1 for education equality. Where does your state rank?

Maryland, Indiana and Illinois are among the top three states with the fewest gender disparities in education, according to a recent report from U.S. News.

Girls earn higher scores in reading than boys in every state, and that gap increases at higher grade levels.

That's according to the latest analysis on education equality released by *U.S. News* in August. The report sought to observe gender disparities in K-12 and higher education in each state.

Fourth grade girls outperform boys in reading nationally by seven points, eighth grade girls by 11 points, and 12th grade girls by 13 points. In contrast, fourth grade boys outperform girls in math test scores, although that disparity shrinks at higher grade levels as girls' test scores improve. Fourth-grade boys outperform girls in math test scores by only three points. In eighth grade, the gap is less than one point.

The report also provides a ranked list indicating how large gender disparities are in each state. Distinctions were measured using two metrics: four-year college graduation rates among men and women, and eighth-grade math and reading test scores among boys and girls. The results indicate that northeastern states, the West Coast and states that border the Great Lakes rank the highest on the list.

The top three states, meaning those with the fewest education disparities between men and women, are Maryland (#1), Indiana (#2) and Illinois (#3). The bottom three states are Arkansas (#48), Idaho (#49) and Alabama (#50).

Here are the rankings for all states:

1. Maryland
2. Indiana
3. Illinois
4. Oregon
5. Iowa
6. Michigan
7. Colorado

8. Rhode Island
9. New Jersey
10. Nevada
11. Florida
12. Maine
13. New Hampshire
14. Delaware
15. Ohio
16. Nebraska
17. Alaska
18. North Dakota
19. Massachusetts
20. Pennsylvania
21. Louisiana
22. New York
23. Wisconsin
24. California
25. Hawaii
26. Arizona
27. Connecticut
28. Mississippi
29. South Carolina
30. Washington
31. Texas
32. Kansas
33. Oklahoma
34. Minnesota
35. Georgia
36. Tennessee
37. Montana
38. Wyoming
39. Missouri, N. Carolina (tied)

40. Utah
41. Kentucky
42. Virginia
43. West Virginia
44. South Dakota
45. New Mexico
46. Vermont
47. Arkansas
48. Idaho
49. Alabama

It's important to mention that this list represents how each state ranks based on the average of the two metrics: test scores and college graduation rates. Some states rank higher once those metrics are isolated.

Focusing on test scores only, the top three states with the fewest gender disparities in education are Maryland (#1), Florida (#2) and New Jersey (#3). The lowest ranking three are North Carolina (#48), Virginia (#49) and Alabama (#50).

Shifting to college graduation rates, the top three states are Indiana (#1), New Hampshire (#2) and Maryland (#3).

The lowest ranking states are Vermont (#48), Utah (#49) and Idaho (#50).

By Micah Ward



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Teachers prefer using mastery learning to close learning gaps

Every student learns differently. Ensuring each one has “mastered” a skill before moving to the next is key to their success.

As schools reopen their doors for the new school year leaders need to be proactive in addressing learning loss that resulted not only from the pandemic but also from summer break.

A 2020 study from the American Educational Research Journal revealed that students lost 17-34% of the previous year’s learning gains during the summer. The pandemic only made these matters worse, and leaders across the country are developing strategies to combat the resulting learning loss.

In July, the Department of Education unveiled a plan to recruit 250,000 new tutors to support K-12 students. “Now more than ever, students need to feel supported, seen, heard and understood by adults in their schools and communities,” said U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona.

However, a recent study by Khan Academy provides another potential solution for closing pandemic-related learning gaps: mastery learning. From a survey of 639 teachers across K-12 schools in the U.S., 84% support the idea for tackling pandemic-related learning loss.

“Mastery learning is an instructional strategy where we give students the opportunity and the incentive to reach a high level of proficiency—that we call mastery—in a skill before they proceed to the next skill,” says Khan Academy Chief Learning Officer Kristen DiCerbo. “If you think about the gaps that students come with because of the pandemic, if you try to build new knowledge on top of a shaky foundation, it becomes really difficult to keep building on that.”

According to the data, more than half of teachers (53%) already use

mastery learning in their classrooms, and an additional 35% would like to begin using it.

Furthermore, many teachers believe the traditional letter grade system causes more harm than good for their students for the following reasons:

- 61% of teachers believe D’s and F’s lead to less motivation among students.
- 58% of teachers believe letter grades lead to students feeling labeled.
- 46% of teachers believe letter grading is an unfair way to accurately assess student achievement.

DiCerbo suggests two ways schools can begin implementing mastery learning in their classrooms:

1. Allow for more flexibility when scheduling pacing guides.

Every student learns different topics at different rates, she says. “Many districts have what they call pacing guides, where they lay out for every topic to be covered in a domain and how many weeks they should be covering them and when they move on to the next phase,” says DiCerbo. “One of the things that teachers told us in the survey was having a little more flexibility in those pacing guides would be helpful.”

2. Reevaluate the meaning of grades.

“Is a grade a score on a test, or are we trying to encourage both students and everyone who’s involved in learning to think about mastering skills?” DiCerbo says. “If we think about that, we can do things like offer students multiple opportunities to show what they know. And then offer them instruction and different ways to prac-

tice in between those opportunities so that students who are struggling have a chance to rebound and try again with some instruction and intervention.”

In addition to understanding the effects of mastery learning, the data suggest a need for better emotional and behavioral support for students.

Teachers were asked, “What do you think are the most important change(s) that would help make up ‘unfinished learning or the learning gaps that developed during the pandemic?’”

The most common response was related to student mental health, with 60% of respondents supporting increased emotional/behavioral support. “There are also a lot of things around social and emotional issues that students need to deal with and work through before they’re able to really be effective learners and fill in some of those gaps,” DiCerbo notes.

The pandemic has had a profound impact on students’ emotional and behavioral states, according to DiCerbo. She says as students were out of school for months on end, they lost the necessary social skills necessary for effective learning. They also had to reestablish the norms and routines of daily in-person instruction after being away from the classroom for so long.

“All of that is important for them being ready to learn,” says DiCerbo. “Those kinds of things that we probably all lost a little bit of in those days of talking over video all the time are really important in being able to think about being successful in school.”

By Micah Ward

California district uses innovative STEM program to help close pandemic-related achievement and engagement gaps

Invention Project®, a new program from the National Inventors Hall of Fame®, uses hands-on activities that encourage exploration and collaboration

After learning disruptions during the pandemic led to achievement and engagement gaps among its students, the Escondido Union School District turned to an inventive new program—literally.

Invention Project, an engaging and customizable program developed by the National Inventors Hall of Fame (NIHF), is a PreK-8 education program that engages students in collaborative hands-on activities that promote engagement with STEM and the development of 21st century skills. The program also helps students build creative problem solving and social-emotional skills, build competency in decision-making and self-management, and practice empathy.

“Engagement is definitely the foundation for helping students to get to their highest potential,” says Rick Oser, Director of Extended Learning, Intervention and Enrichment for the California district. “Some of the challenges that most school districts are experiencing after the pandemic not only involve learning gaps, but also student engagement gaps,” Oser says. “Escondido USD was purposeful in selecting the NIHF curriculum to address both the achievement gap and the engagement gap.”

“Visiting classrooms and seeing a high level of engagement among students and teachers, with students excited about learning, excited about the curriculum and working collaboratively with their peers shows us that we’re heading in the right direction.”

Adaptive and turnkey

Invention Project contains 25 modules that can be tailored to different learning styles and adapted to the amount of time a school or district might have

available—two weeks in the summer or an afterschool program. The program meets national and state education standards and integrates 21st-century skills to help develop what the NIHF calls an Innovation Mindset™ in students.

Step-by-step curriculum guides and online resources reduce prep time for teachers, and pre- and post-tests track student progress. The lessons can also be used as a resource in asynchronous learning in school, after school or during summer programs.

“The program and materials have definitely helped shape students’ creative skills,” says Shannon Fralish, Coordinator of Expanded Learning in the district’s department of Educational Services. “Being more kinesthetic and hands-on has helped them get excited for everyday inventions. It is expanding our students’ love of learning and inspires them to have a great experience in the classroom.”

Fourth-grade teacher Claudia Ramirez of Oak Hill Elementary agrees. “The materials provided to students help them think outside of the box,” Ramirez says. “The teacher support has helped me with planning. It is also helpful that I am supplied with both the curriculum and the script.”

‘Breath of fresh air’

Nicole Koncur, a fifth-grade teacher at Glen View Elementary, also says she appreciates the ease of implementation and turnkey design.

“The curriculum was very organized and easy to follow. I love the units and different themes,” Koncur says. “It was a breath of fresh air, because it let students explore, be creative and just have fun learning. I have taught for 12 years, and this is one of the best experiences I’ve had as a teacher.”



NIHF, founded in 1973, partners with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office to honor the spirit of innovation and promote inventors as role models. It also partners with more than 2,400 schools and districts.

Fun with a purpose

“Every single teacher has said that they are enjoying teaching the curriculum,” Oser says. “When teachers are having fun, that translates to students having fun. But the program is not just fun. It’s meaningful and purposeful, and our students are learning. They are excited to come to school.”

And, Fralish says, the program costs can be mitigated. “Now is the time,” Fralish says, “to use the unprecedented pandemic relief funding available to schools to ensure that our students can engage in learning that is fun and prepares them with the skills they’ll need in the future.”



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EDUCATION PROGRAMS

How big job search sites aim to help Biden tackle teacher vacancies

There are conflicting views on the severity of the nation's teacher shortage.

Job search giants ZipRecruiter and Indeed are stepping in to help the Biden administration attempt to tackle the nation's teacher shortage, the White House announced in August.

ZipRecruiter is launching an online K-12 job portal designed to showcase openings for teachers, nurses, guidance counselors, social workers, mental health counselors, librarians, and other roles. ZipRecruiter is also offering to post open positions for free. Indeed will organize virtual hiring fairs for teachers, administrators, counselors, and other staff. Participating organizations will get access to the company's free suite of tools to manage the hiring process, from postings to interviews to job offers, the White House says.

Handshake, a site for college students, will encourage undergraduates to explore careers in education. In October, the website will host a free virtual event to give students information about the full range of education pathways, from teaching to counseling to special education. Handshake will also post a list of schools and districts that are currently hiring students and college graduates. Some 10 million current and recent students have joined Handshake's network.

There are conflicting views on the severity of the nation's teacher shortage. Researchers at Brown University found at least 36,504 vacant teacher positions by examining U.S. Department of Education data and news reports from across the nation. But NEA President Rebecca Pringle has said there is a shortage of nearly 300,000 educators, support staff and non-teaching personnel. The factors being blamed for the shortages are



many: worsening student behavior, politically driven restrictions on instruction, harassment by parents and others, and so-called pay penalties that leave teachers with lower salaries than other professionals with similar levels of education and experience.

It's estimated that the average teacher will make \$66,397 for the 2021-2022 school year, as salaries have been increasing gradually. But when adjusted for inflation, this year's earnings are also about \$2,200 less—or about 4%—than a teacher earned a decade ago, according to new figures from the NEA labor union.

Answering questions of quality

The White House also announced that The Pathways Alliance, a coalition of public and private organizations working to diversify the educator pipeline, is

developing guidelines to help states and districts establish high-quality teacher apprenticeship programs.

Apprenticeships will also be the focus of a partnership between The Council of Chief State School Officers, the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association, and the National Governors Association are announcing. Those organizations intend to create new supports for educators who are pursuing apprenticeships and to strengthen pathways for those who want to enter and grow in the teaching profession, the White House says.

The two unions also staged a “National Day of Action” in August to ensure members are taking advantage of the temporary changes the Biden administration has made to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program.

By Matt Zalaznick

Reimagining education: It can be done

Education leaders share their strategies, including a microschool for indigenous students and partnership with an early learning center for pregnant and parenting students.

Education innovation has always been the goal for schools, and that is especially true coming out of the pandemic. COVID-19 forced schools to implement new practices, and some of those are here to stay, such as video conferencing and hybrid-learning options. Most importantly, innovation is a collaborative effort, and several education leaders have provided insight into what it looks like to “reimagine” education.

A new analysis released in September by the Canopy Project, a representation of 161 learning environments to address K-12 innovation practices, created by the Center on Reinventing Public Education and Transcend, illustrates how school leaders are reshaping education.

132 nominating organizations were asked to submit their suggestions for innovative practices done at public, charter and private schools. Leaders from nominated schools were asked about “why and how” they’re promoting K-12 innovation. Among their reported practices in learning environments, five prominent categories emerged:

1. Educational justice and holistic student support
2. Postsecondary pathways and the world outside school

3. Deeper learning for mastery
4. Flexible and individualized learning pathways
5. Blended learning

Additionally, social-emotional learning, competency-based education and culturally responsive practices were among the most common in schools. Leaders say they want to learn more about non-traditional assessment practices, such as SEL and widening measures for success, yet project-based learning continues to be an essential pillar of design for school leaders.

80% of the 161 schools that participated in Canopy say education equity is the main focus when creating innovative learning environments. Among various student groups, the top three most prioritized were:

1. Students with learning differences and disabilities (88%)
2. Economically disadvantaged students (86%)
3. Students of color (74%)

Leaders were also asked how they’ve successfully designed programs to meet the specific needs of their underserved students. Here are six schools that were celebrated in the report for their equitable learning environments:

Georgia Fugees Academy

Located outside of Atlanta, Georgia, the school was originally a tutoring program. Now, it’s a multisite school for refugee and immigrant students aimed at providing a soccer-focused curriculum.

Lumen High School

This high school, located in Spokane, Washington, gives pregnant and parenting students an opportunity for education in partnership with an early learning center.

Albuquerque Sign Language Academy

Based in Albuquerque, New Mexico, the academy serves students who have complex disabilities, including deaf students, through a communications-based learning approach.

Yampa Valley High School

Students in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, are getting a second chance at education. The school offers personalized alternate education for those who don’t perform well in a traditional school setting.

Oceti Sakowin Educational Learning Center

Located in Rapid City, South Dakota, this six-student microschool helps indigenous students thrive academically as they learn by immersing themselves in their language and culture.

Rainier Valley Leadership Academy

Primarily serving Black students in Seattle, Washington, students are asked to question traditional education practices through an identity-affirming learning environment.

By Micah Ward





9 ways school leaders can encourage students to report violent threats

Fears of being labeled a snitch limit students' willingness to report, according to a new analysis.

BY MATT ZALAZNICK

Building students' and staff's confidence that threat reporting will lead to action remains critical to K-12 leaders' efforts to prevent school violence. Fortunately, new research offers guidance for administrators working to create a culture where people feel safe speaking out about signs of potential danger.

A range of conditions must be in place to create an atmosphere of vigilance. First, robust reporting cultures emerge when students and staff forge strong and trusting relationships. This makes students more comfortable about sharing concerns with an adult, according to a new analysis of K-12 threat reporting by the RAND Corporation.

Students are also more likely to report threats if they can do so anonymously over their preferred methods of communication and if they can speak to someone trained in crisis communication. The latter lowers barriers for students or staff who are reluctant to talk to law enforcement, the analysis says.

"Fears of being labeled a snitch or of potential retaliation limit students' willingness to report," the analysis says.

"Others do not trust adults with keeping their information confidential or acting on their information or are uncomfortable with the potential for disciplinary action that reporting might bring."

The RAND analysis offers several recommendations to administrations working to make students and staff more comfortable about reporting threats:

1. Give teachers and staff more opportunities to interact informally with groups of students outside the classroom.

2. Conduct regular training and outreach so students know what to report and when and how they should report their concerns.

3. Training materials should be tailored to specific school contexts and groups of students. Students can also conduct outreach to encourage their more reluctant peers to report threats.

4. Set up reporting systems that are widely accessible to students and other community members.

5. Alert users of anonymous reporting systems when their anonymity could be forfeited. Or, schools using confiden-

tial systems could collect reporter information but keep it private.

6. Specialized staff should be available to support people reporting suicidal ideation or self-harm.

7. Publish regular reports to increase transparency around critical issues, such as when information is shared with law enforcement and when situations are left exclusively to school administrators.

8. Offer clear guidance and training so staff know their roles in the reporting process. Also, provide staff with teaching materials to increase students' knowledge about reporting.

9. Train security personnel to work and communicate effectively with the school community.

Ultimately, students are more willing to report threats if they see that administrators take the information seriously and school rules are enforced fairly and consistently. Communicating what happens when threat reports are received is critical to assuaging students' fears about reporting, the report says.

Matt Zalaznick is District Administration's senior writer.

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Politics are invading schools

Here are 4 ways to help educators cope with the resulting stress.

BY MATT ZALAZNICK

Pennsylvania lawmakers are demanding the state's education commissioner resign over his department's guidance on recognizing students' gender diversity. A group of 20 Republican state representatives opposes the education agency's definition of binary gender as a "faulty concept that there are only two genders: male and female."

The department also encourages educators to ask students which pronouns they prefer and shares resources for teaching about gender identity, including a toolkit for organizing a "gender-neutral day." But the legislators say they want the web page removed because it espouses a "secular worldview" that is not permitted in schools.

It's yet another example of the politicization of education that erupted with anti-masking campaigns during the pandemic. This contentiousness, which has expanded to race and LGBTQ issues, is increasing schoolhouse stress—particularly among principals and teachers.

Nearly half of principals and 40% of teachers reported that "the intrusion of political issues and opinions into their professions" is a significant source of stress, according to a poll conducted in January by the RAND Corporation, a nonprofit research firm and think tank. More than half of the teachers and principals surveyed oppose legal restrictions on discussing race, racism and other

contentious topics in classrooms.

One in four teachers also said that they have been directed to limit classroom conversations about political and social issues. However, 20% of teachers supported setting limits on these types of discussions.

A majority of principals—and more than a third of teachers—reported being harassed over COVID-19 safety measures or teaching about race and discrimination. Consequently, these educators are more likely to cite politicization as a reason for considering leaving their jobs.

4 ways to shield staff from politics

Helping educators cope with the increasing stress of political controversies boils down to administrators providing as much support as possible and communicating openly with families. RAND's researchers recommend that K-12 leaders:

1. Better engage families in decision-making by building systems to promote understanding between educators and parents.
2. Develop content-specific guidance to clarify the purpose of classroom conversations about race and racism.
3. Provide training and resources that help principals and teachers communicate effectively when managing conflict about contentious topics.
4. Ensure that preparation programs

and in-service professional learning show educators how to handle politicized issues in their schools and classrooms.

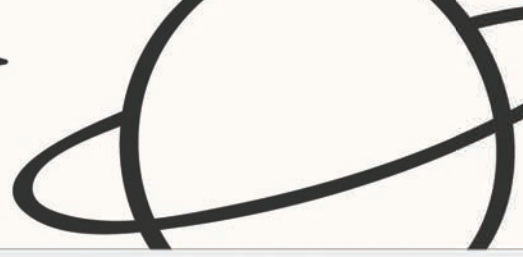
Principals, in particular, are looking for more training in culturally responsive leadership and developing culturally responsive teachers, the analysis found. Teachers, meanwhile, want leaders to clarify that the purpose of discussing race and bias is to create safe and affirming learning environments for all students—especially those who have been marginalized and under-represented.

Leaders can also highlight research that shows students perform better academically when they feel valued and have a sense of belonging, and that culturally responsive practices are linked to increased student engagement and self-efficacy.

Finally, principals and other leaders can improve their relationships with families by conducting home visits, organizing relationship-building exercises and creating opportunities for collaborative problem solving with parents. "Families who have strong relationships with their children's teachers and schools might be less likely to engage them in a hostile or aggressive manner," the researchers conclude.

Matt Zalaznick is District Administration's senior writer.

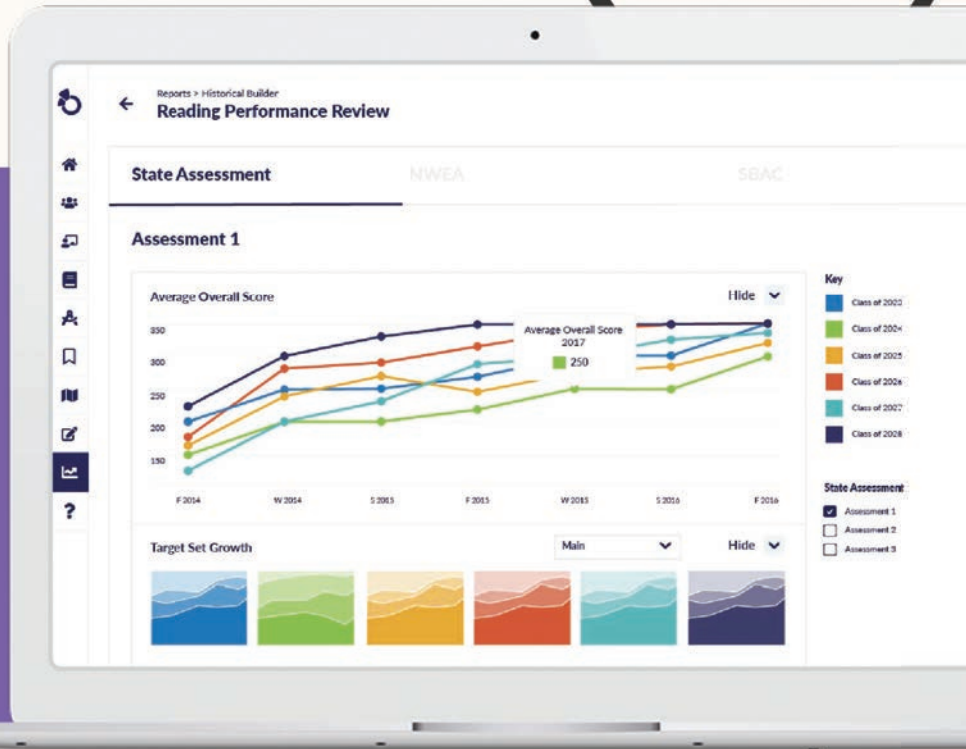
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PAPER

At Val Verde USD, 24/7 tutoring engages disadvantaged students, boosts graduation rates



Enrollment

21,258

English learners

19.1%

Socioeconomically disadvantaged

81.1%

The dilemma

Val Verde sought an academic support solution that could help students any time of day and was accessible by all. They partnered with Paper to provide every student with expert 24x7, 1:1 homework help, writing feedback and study support across 200 subject areas.

The impact

After just two months of usage, students engaged in 2,700 learning moments made of live 1:1 tutoring sessions and more than 1,200 essays submitted for review. Socioeconomically disadvantaged students took advantage of the platform more than anyone — and teachers saw improvements that aligned with classroom goals.



78% of usage was attributed to socioeconomically disadvantaged students.



Learners engaged in more than 2,700 learning moments with Paper tutors.



The district credits Paper for helping maintain high graduation rates.

Watch the full
video case study



Mohawk Area School District helps caregivers support learning at home

District administrators recognized that the adults in students' lives can only go so far in supporting them with schoolwork. At Mohawk Area School District, an innovative tutoring model is helping them overcome the limits of traditional instruction, ease the demands on educators and caregivers, and boost student confidence.

“ There's an endpoint to what we can do with in-person instruction. So it's really become important to meet students where their needs are in terms of time and place.

— Dr. Michael Leitera, Superintendent, Mohawk Area School District, PA





Is it possible to let students carry their cellphones in school while preventing the devices from causing distractions and disruptions? The leaders of Lewiston Public Schools in Maine set out to strike that balance with a new policy that sets different rules for different grade levels, Superintendent K. Jake Langlais says.

Students in pre-K through 8th grade must keep their phones turned off and in their backpacks throughout the school day. But high school students are only prohibited from using their phones during class time. They are allowed to scroll, text and check social media in between class periods, during study halls or in the cafeteria.

Students need to remain engaged in instruction, and they also need to learn to make good decisions about when it's appropriate to use phones, Langlais tells *District Administration*. "It's our responsibility to prepare kids for what's next," he says. "When they are in college, they will know there's a time and place to scroll through their phones. There's also that workplace expectations component."

Last school year, the district saw a significant spike in harmful online chat-

ter, including cyberbullying and students planning fights or other misbehavior. There were also times when students did not come to school because they had been involved in a problematic online chat the previous night.

"We want to minimize the use of phones when they're not necessary," Langlais explains. "We also want to make sure students have opportunities to develop skills around self-control and to be mindful of who they are communicating with online, the types of conversations they are having and whether they might be causing harm to others."

The use of cellphones in schools has become an even thornier issue since lockdown made the devices the sole method of communication for most students. Many administrators, meanwhile, want students to continue to reconnect in person with their classmates and teachers after the isolation of the pandemic.

Making eye contact

Well-known teaching guru Doug Lemov says that the growing number of cellphone bans are "super timely" in helping students bounce back academically

and emotionally. "Students are disconnected psychologically and emotionally, and cellphones fracture attention," says Lemov, creator of the Teach Like a Champion professional development model. "Giving kids the best chance to connect in schools and to form relationships with the people around them is vital right now."

But barring phones may not have as big an impact on attentiveness or engagement as many might hope, says Christopher Ferguson, a professor of psychology at Stetson University who studies the impact of technology on adolescents. "There really are two parallel processes: one, cellphones are interesting and two, school is not," he says. "Removing No. 1 doesn't fix No. 2, unfortunately, and students have found ways to not pay attention in class for centuries."

More than a few districts are allowing students to bring their phones to school but requiring the devices be placed each morning into Yondr pouches, which self-lock magnetically. Students open the pouches at wall-mounted demagnetizing stations on their way out of school at the end of the day.

Dayton Public Schools began using the pouches in high schools this year. In 2021-22, educators in the Ohio district struggled with a sharp increase in phone-related disruptions despite the devices being prohibited during the school day, Superintendent Elizabeth Lolli says.

"When they came back from being remote, students were constantly in violation of our policy," Lolli says. "Fights would occur because they were arranged by cellphone or students were not engaged in learning because they were on social media."

Administrators have received almost no pushback since introducing the pouches. A few have been cut open by students, who are charged a \$20 replacement fee and barred from bringing their phones to school. Disciplinary issues related to cyberbullying have decreased so far this school year.

"When I check in on classrooms, students are actually looking at teachers and making eye contact because they're not looking down at their phones," Lolli says. "And it's fun to walk into the cafeteria because it's really loud now. Students are talking instead of texting each other."

When the community is talking about it

Getting total buy-in from staff is not necessarily a prerequisite for imposing a ban, Lemov warns. Educators will get on board if a policy is implemented effectively and intentionally. Educators can look for guidance from countries such as Australia and England, where schools have implemented bans successfully.

"I'm not saying kids shouldn't have cellphones," Lemov says. "But there should be a place in their lives where they can build cognitive abilities without the influence of this device that's developing in society without much intentionality."

On the other hand, bans may end up being missed opportunities to use the devices as teaching tools and help students learn to manage technology, says Ferguson, the Stetson professor.

"It would take a bit of effort and imagination for teachers to incorporate technology into their lessons," Ferguson says. "I think that without finding ways to make teaching more engaging, bans

are treating a symptom more than the original problem."

Leaders at North Kansas City Schools in Missouri realized cellphones were the biggest obstacle to student engagement after returning from virtual learning. The district acknowledged that students would recover more quickly from learning gaps if they were more focused during instruction. But its new policies still allow students to bring their cellphones to school; they just are not allowed to use the devices in class.

All students also have a district-issued computer that they can use to communicate with parents in case of an emergency. "Within a few days of the procedures going into effect, district leadership noticed an increase in student-to-student and student-to-teacher engagement," North Kansas City administrators tell District Administration. "There has been a discernable difference in the number

of positive interactions between students and teachers."

Both Langlais in Lewiston and Lolli in Dayton say it's crucial to get parents, students and other community members involved in creating cellphone policies. Lewiston received 600 responses to its cellphone survey prior to establishing its new policies. "That was a plus, getting the community talking about it," Langlais says.

District leaders must also make their case by providing parents, staff and students with research that shows the benefits of restricting phones. "Before you put something in place, you need to have a solid plan," Lolli adds. "It all depends on how well you explain it to parents or students. We were very thorough and that's why we had smooth transition." **DA**

Matt Zalaznick is District Administration's senior writer.

ATTENTION, PLEASE! HOW RARE ARE CELLPHONES IN SCHOOLS?

Here's a look at some new cellphone policies that district leaders have put in place for the 2022-23 school year:

Dayton Public Schools (Ohio): Students must put phones in self-locking Yondr Pouches during the school day after administrators last year dealt with a sharp increase in cellphone-related disruptions.

Fairfax County Public Schools (Virginia): Students in grades K-8 must silence cellphones and keep them in backpacks during the school day. High school students can use phone on campus after and before school, during passing periods, and at lunch.

Lewiston Public Schools (Maine): Students in pre-K-8 must keep phones turned off and in backpacks. High school students are only prohibited from using their phones during class time.

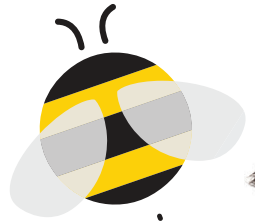
Montgomery County Public Schools (Maryland): Elementary and middle school students can only use mobile devices before and after school. High school students can also use their phones at lunch.

Newburgh Enlarged City School District (New York): Students can bring phones to school but devices "must be turned off and kept out of sight during the entire instructional day."

North Kansas City Schools (Missouri): Students may bring their cellphones to school but are not allowed to use them in class.

Ringgold School District (Pennsylvania): Students are now prohibited from using their cellphones during school and on district transportation.

Meet Harini Logan. She's ruling the word one letter at a time.

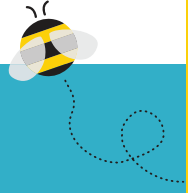


A conversation with the 2022 Scripps National Spelling Bee champion

- Q. How have the last few months been since you won the champion title?** The last few months have been very busy, filled with felicitations and meeting people. I got to go on “Jimmy Kimmel Live!” and “Live with Kelly and Ryan.” I also went to India recently for a family trip, and I got to meet people there like the governor of the state I’m from. It’s been a whirlwind of experiences.
- Q. After your win, what was the reception like from your community and school when you landed back home in San Antonio?** It was so warm. We were arriving on a late-night flight, so I didn’t think there would be anybody there, but there were about 50-60 people there—a majority of them from my school—as well as local friends and family that had come. I think the city has been proud since I am the first champion from San Antonio. I think my school community was probably one of the best I could have asked for because of their support. Whether it was my peers, my teachers, the administration of my school, my librarians—everybody was so encouraging every step of the way.
- Q. What got you interested in spelling in the first place?** My parents. They read to me from when I was about six months old. And then when I came to school there was a little reading corner in my classroom with a mini library and couch. I would finish my work so fast just so I could sit in that corner and read all the books that my teacher gave me. I think my school also really encouraged that passion. My school has really helped me because not only have they urged me to pursue my passion, they’ve also given me an avenue to increase it [with help from] my librarian also. All my teachers were so encouraging—they would give me recommendations so I could improve my vocabulary.
- Q. It sounds like you had some great mentors and advocates. Is there anyone that stands out to you as a mentor or someone who really encouraged you along the way?** I would say my vice principal, Miss Emily—she’s always been such an advocate for me. When I first wanted to start doing spelling and I got interested, my school actually wasn’t registered for any spelling bees. My parents and I went up to her and we requested that this is something I’m really interested in and she registered our school, creating that avenue for me and other students at my school to pursue spelling bees. I’m really grateful for her. She also came to the national Bee in 2018 and 2019 to support me. That meant a lot to me that she was willing to go out of her way to do that for her student and to be so encouraging.
- Q. Do you apply a similar style of studying to other subjects as you do for spelling?** I believe whatever skills you learn as a speller can apply in so many other disciplines. I think it definitely helped me in school as well because time management was something I had to improve, especially balancing school and studying spelling. Spelling also changed the way I study for tests, whether a science test or a math test. I would still study in the way that I could learn and I could progress rather than just the way everybody else did it.



Q. Are there other skills or lessons that you think you learned through your exposure to spelling? The skills that I learned in spelling were enhanced by whatever I learned in the classroom—and the other way around. Of course, something I learned in my English class would add to whatever I learned in spelling. Lexicon, vocabulary, word usage and being able to speak in front of an audience—all of that I learned in spelling. Plus, I learned how to overcome stage fright and connect with people. Even to go up to another fellow competitor and say, "hi, my name is..." can take a lot of effort. So I think networking is also another important life skill that I've learned from spelling that I believe will continue to help me.



“ I think bringing the Bee to your school is probably the greatest gift that you can give your students ”

Q. What would you say that the Bee has taught you about your self as you head into high school? One thing I've discovered about myself is my ability to stay calm under pressure. When I came to the Bee as a fourth and fifth grader, I would freeze up whenever I got a word I didn't know and any information that the judges were giving me would go straight through my head because I wasn't in the mindset to process it. So, what I did was try to get myself into that mindset where I'm not stressing myself out and focusing purely on the word and the information they're giving me rather than anything else in my surroundings. I've grown so much through my Bee journey because of that skill of staying calm under pressure and the feeling that I can pull through even when there are setbacks and adversities.

Q. What would you share with educators who are considering bringing the Bee to their classrooms? No matter what level you're at [in your spelling journey], there's always something to learn whether you win or not. If you win, then you learn how to win with grace. If you don't happen to win, then you learn how to come back and achieve more and stick through in tough times. So, if you bring the Bee to your classroom, your district or to your region, then you're giving something to your students: an experience that they may not be able to get anywhere else. And you're enabling and empowering them to learn skills and life lessons that will really help them throughout their lives. The Bee has helped me develop as a person, as a student, as an individual. I think bringing the Bee to your school is probably the greatest gift that you can give your students.

**Visit spellingbee.com
to learn more!**



Scripps National Spelling Bee®

Climate Champions



By Matt Zalaznick

Our latest round of principals to watch puts their focus on strengthening relationships to strengthen culture.

Principal Thomas W. Glanton Jr. says he can't sleep the night before the first day of school.

Even after 30 years in education, the Atlanta-area educator says he's still excited about every aspect of K-12 education, from cafeteria duty to proms to football games. But that doesn't mean he hasn't had to adapt during three decades as a building leader.

Most recently, the Southwest DeKalb High School principal has had to make sure that he's connected and accessible around the clock—via social media and his smartphone, among other channels. "It's a 24/7 job. Aspiring leaders should understand that," Glanton says. "I'm always the principal. Even when I pull up to McDon-

ald's and give my order, they recognize me on the speaker box."

Glanton's efforts are an example of how *District Administration's* latest principals to watch are strengthening relationships to strengthen the climate at their schools.

How a principal provides options

One thing that hasn't changed—Glanton hopes—is the stability and predictability students can find at school. "The only thing that remains steadfast is the schoolhouse," says Glanton, DeKalb County schools' Principal of the Year. "I tell our staff, now is our chance to give students a shot at reaching their dreams."

To provide students with as many options as possible, Glanton and his team

rely on a strong alumni network of business owners and others to serve as guest speakers. "Sometimes all students know is what they see in their community," says Glanton, whose parents were both school principals. "Many students have [never been] outside the perimeter of Atlanta but they're inspired by people who look like them and who went to the same school."

The district is now going full-steam ahead on academic recovery programs, including after-school and on weekends, to help students bounce back and graduate on time after the disruptions of the pandemic. Glanton and his leadership team are also working to support teachers as the nation's school system grapples with the pressures of the so-called "Great Resignation."



Glanton has filled in as a substitute and often leads professional development sessions. He also regularly uses social media to celebrate the achievements of his school's educators. Other priorities for the coming school year include continuing to steer more students into the school's advanced-placement classes and further strengthening its ninth-grade transition program. "COVID taught us a lot about how to engage students with technology," Glanton says. "No computer screen beats a quality teacher in the classroom, so we have to do a blended model."

When you are at your very best

Principal Mary Fulp asks each student and staff member three questions at the beginning of every school year:



- What will you do to make this school a better place?
- What is one thing that is uniquely wonderful about you?
- Who are you when you are at your very best?

This type of self-reflection is at the heart of Fulp's drive to create a positive environment at Colony Middle School, part of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District in Alaska. Her effort picked up more urgency when a climate survey revealed that some students felt intimidated by their peers due to bullying.

"I believe as a leader that my job is to find unique qualities in people and nurture and grow them," says Fulp, Alaska's 2022 principal of the year. "On this campus, we need everyone to take action to make this a positive place to be—everyone has something to offer."

This is even more crucial in middle school because students are establishing their belief systems and goals for the future. "We want them to believe they are so much more capable than they thought they were," she explains. "If we do our jobs well, we're going to create a better community of more thoughtful citizens who are open to differences, instead of being divisive."

She and her educators are also working to help students balance their use of technology. Her students have plenty of hands-on opportunities to be creative in the art room, but the school is also 1-to-1 with Chromebooks. The heavy reliance on technology during the pandemic inspired Fulp and her team to create the school's first digital citizenship course.

Fulp also says she is optimistic about this year, particularly when it comes to more consistent staffing. "I believe that in the most difficult circumstances there are opportunities for us to figure out new and better ways to do things," she adds. "We've learned new and innovative ways to provide education and we can provide high-quality online instruction."



Uniting students and staff

Students and staff were caught in "grade-level bubbles" at Sturgis Elementary School in South Dakota's Meade School District. Student activities were being scheduled within their classes or grade bands, and, although teachers were collaborating, they were doing so within those confines, Principal Chantal Ligtenberg says.

To increase interaction, she implemented a "house system," an idea she borrowed from the Ron Clark Academy, a nonprofit middle school in Atlanta. Students remain in the same house with the same staff while they are progressing through elementary school. Each house has an emblem, a chant and a representative character trait. Each house meets monthly to participate in team-building activities and soft-skill development.

Students can earn "house points" for demonstrating one of the 15 Sturgis Elementary Essentials, which include making eye contact and asking questions during conversations, performing random acts of kindness, and accepting and moving on from one's own mistakes, says Ligtenberg, a 2022 South Dakota National Distinguished Principal honoree.

The report also urges state and district-level leaders to:

- Develop standards for state licensing and principal PD programs.

Climate Champions

- Invest in a statewide infrastructure that gives principals access to coordinated, high-quality and sustained professional learning.
- Prioritize equity by increasing access to high-quality professional development in underserved schools and districts.
- Reform state and local policy to build comprehensive, aligned pipelines of qualified school principals and a coherent system of development.

She has also created “What I Need” time during which third- and fourth-graders are grouped together for more personalized instruction based on ELA performance. It’s designed as a supplement to what students are learning in class. “This hasn’t only been a successful instructional intervention for all students, but it has also been another way for students to build relationships with staff other than their classroom teacher,” Ligtenberg says.

Ligtenberg has also been leading book studies to bring teachers and staff closer together. They have read books about building staff relationships and transforming classrooms to make learning more memorable and fun. One teacher, for instance, solicited donations so students could dress up like surgeons as they broke down a sentence into parts of speech. Another teacher created a pirate-themed game to liven up math review.

“I frequently see teachers thinking out of the box,” Ligtenberg says. “And with all the additional stress with the COVID pandemic, I believe we were able to be more united than divided as we went through that difficult time.”

Mentoring new principals

The building leader’s job is more difficult—and more important—than ever before, says Amy Schott, principal of Henderson Elementary in Virginia’s Prince William County Public Schools.

Schott stands at the center of these challenges in her role as a mentor for new principals, which she considers an opportunity to positively impact an entire community of students, staff and families.

“My goal is to maximize their time in classrooms and work side by side planning for instruction with teachers, which is absolutely the most important part of our role as a principal,” says Schott, who was named *The Washington Post’s* principal of the year. “I love being able to coach new principals through challenging situations because it can be a very lonely job at times.”

Two of her keys to the job are reflecting on three positive things at the end of each school day and turning off email notifications on her cellphone. This mindset also drives her to create a fun climate and intentionally strengthens relationships with students, staff and parents at her neighborhood school, she says.

“This gives me a unique opportunity to connect with families at the pool, the library, the neighborhood lake, at the grocery store, when I’m out exercising, or at many other places in the neighborhood,” Schott explains. “Parents have quickly learned that they are not a bother to me, and that I absolutely love being a part of families’ lives outside of the regular school day.”

Every Monday, she serves dinner at her house to a group of teachers who get together to plan weekly student activities. She also regularly posts on social media



to recognize the work of her educators.

Her goals for the near future are expanding project-based learning, emphasizing environmental literacy, and developing a “house system” in which each student is a member of one of five houses. This system motivates students to demonstrate positive character, develop a stronger sense of belongingness, create additional positive relationships, and “boosts school spirit to extremely high levels,” she says.

Students get to exercise voice and choice at school in how they demonstrate learning and through activities such as the school’s “No Place for Hate Committee.”

The biggest challenges she sees ahead are students’ increasing need for mental health care and the pressures of standardized testing. “Every time I’m reading the news about topics such as the negative impacts of climate change, deadly diseases, violence, or unkind humans,” Schott says, “it gives me such a strong sense of urgency to change the trajectory of so much that is happening in our world through our work with students today.” DA

Matt Zalaznick is District Administration’s senior writer.

Outdoor Visionaries



Bear Tavern Elementary School's extensive outdoor learning spaces are one of the main reasons Christopher Turnbull was named a visionary principal of the year by the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association.

The Philadelphia-area school began mapping out and building gardens, meadows, ponds and outside classrooms about five years ago. The project began when Bear Tavern's educators began looking for ways to put the excess land around the building to better use. The new space took shape thanks to a combination of imaginative teachers,

grant funds, assistance from nonprofits, and donations of time and resources from local landscaper companies, says

Turnbull, whose elementary school is part of New Jersey's Hopewell Valley School District. The work has strengthened the bonds between the school and the community while the spaces themselves became an invaluable asset as students returned to in-person learning during the 2021-22 academic year.

"We had a lot of areas where kids could be outside—and not just outside, but forming authentic and meaningful connections," Turnbull says. "Our kids have access to opportunities outside the traditional book-and-computer ways of learning."

Students have also helped build a boardwalk through a wetlands area and created a nature trail and the requisite signage.

The evolution of the school's morning announcements during the pandemic is the second achievement that earned Turnbull the visionary principal award, he says. He shifted the traditional morning rundown of bulletins to a more fun and engaging lineup that now includes:

- Mindfulness Mondays
- Guest hosts on "Takeover Tuesday"
- "We Dance Wednesdays"
- Environmental message Thursdays
- Friendship Fridays
- Cultural celebrations

When the school was on an alternating schedule during COVID, Turnbull not only delivered the morning announcement over school loudspeakers but also emailed the video out to families at home.

During the pandemic, the school also chose a new theme, "Feeding Hope." The phrase originated when a staff member asked in a Zoom meeting if anyone was feeding the large turtle—whose name is Hope—that lives in an aquarium in the building's lobby. "I'm confident kids are going to learn and be OK in that sense," Turnbull says. "We have to remember that they spent six months to a year at home and work hard on teaching the social-emotional skills that were turned upside down."

Key to these efforts will be following a growth mindset to view all students' as more elastic in their abilities to learn. Educators also will use STEM and other subjects to show students how they can contribute to their communities. "Even as 5-, 6-, 7- or 8-year-olds, they can find solutions and make an impact," Turnbull says. "When you create student agency and the belief they can make a difference, you're operating on an entirely different plane."



Meeting the demand to personalize learning for every student

Q&A with **Dr. Shawn Smith**, Chief Innovation Officer, McGraw Hill



What role can technology play in addressing the teacher burnout we're seeing across the country?

This should be a top priority for education technology today. Teachers are being asked to do more with less, and the pandemic wore many people out. We're seeing teacher burnout, teachers leaving the profession, and teacher shortages as a result. At the same time, society is asking teachers to focus more on personalizing learning for individual students because there is more awareness of different ways of learning.

We must find ways to automate some of the low-level administrative tasks that teachers need to do daily. Technology should be able to provide teachers with the right information at the right time for every student. The field of education technology has been a fragmented ecosystem, and teachers have had to go to many different places to access that information. The industry needs to come together with common standards and more interoperability to make the lives of teachers easier.

What challenges do teachers and administrators face when it comes to achievement data?

On the one hand, educators can sometimes feel that they don't have enough data or the right data on students. But in other cases, they can feel like there is too much data, it's overwhelming and not useful, or too difficult to access. While we have access to more achievement data than ever, we need to do several things to help teachers be more efficient and effective.

We need to be able to serve up fragmented data in a way that isn't overwhelming, provide it at the right time, and then recommend exactly what each student may need in terms of instructional content that meets them where they are in their academic journey.

The data needs to flow naturally into teachers' work. Teachers don't have time to examine individual sets of data for 25 or 30 different students, especially when the data could be housed in many different platforms and locations. Ultimately teachers know best how their

students are doing, but they want data to be able to validate their instincts and guide them.

We also must figure out how to get more granular with student data. Just knowing whether a student is meeting the state standard is not enough, for example. We need to be able to dissect the standards into specific and discrete skills, and then immediately prescribe action steps for teachers to address student needs.

Ultimately, it's about providing the right data at the right time, and then providing the means to respond in a way that drives efficiency.

How can this also help to personalize learning?

With the help of technology and automating manual tasks, the possibilities for personalizing learning are only limited by our imaginations. For example, we could potentially recommend a specific resource to a student, such as a 15-minute lesson based on a skill deficiency, but the technology could also get a sense of that individual student's interests based on their user behavior. If it's sports, music, theater, engineering or something else, that specific lesson or resource could have that theme, which goes a long way toward building motivation and engagement. There are a lot of places we could go with this in the future.

What has prevented personalized learning from being implemented at scale in many schools and districts?

It's nearly impossible to personalize learning paths for every student manually. Technology is key to doing that. However, a barrier in education technology has been how fragmented and siloed the platforms, devices and products are. When it comes to digital tools, schools are typically using core curriculum resources, as well as supplemental digital resources, plus intervention tools for certain students. Teachers are using multiple products and platforms, and they often don't integrate with



each other. That creates a very fragmented and overly complicated ecosystem. Solving this interoperability problem is critical.

At McGraw Hill, we are one of very few companies with the ability to tackle these challenges, not only because we offer solutions in all three areas—core curriculum, supplemental and intervention—but we now offer a way to access data from all of them in one simple tool: *McGraw Hill Plus*. That capability is unique, and it can enable more personalized learning to be implemented on a larger scale.

What impact can this have on achievement gaps?

There are two main areas of impact. First, technology can provide the ability to put instructional content into the hands of students that is perfectly in the zone of proximal development for that student. The second area is making the broad value of diversity, equity and inclusion more practical.

Meeting individual student needs through personalized learning is inherently more equitable. In addition, providing instructional content with more diversity so students can see themselves represented, or other groups represented, is also extremely important. These values are top priorities for McGraw Hill, and we believe that technology is a very effective way to promote them.

How can technology help to promote student agency and ownership of their learning?

We envision a future where students have access not only to more personalized learning resources, but also a diversity of types of content—eBooks, video, augmented or virtual reality and more—and are given the agency to explore them on their own. This can lead to more student ownership of learning, and higher levels of engagement.

How can technology help to streamline and automate Response to Intervention and MTSS workflows?

The ability that we have here at McGraw Hill to connect core curriculum, supplemental and intervention resources is essentially an RtI model, connecting Tier I, Tier II and Tier III. Traditionally, RtI requires an understanding of each student's time on task, as well as their academic performance compared to peers in the classroom and across the district. Done manually, that takes a tremendous amount of time and effort. But technology can automate many of the manual tasks that teachers need to do and provide all that information to intervention specialists, special educators and administrators, so everyone can make more informed decisions.

How is McGraw Hill working to address these challenges to enable more personalized learning?

This fall, we're excited to be releasing *McGraw Hill Plus*, a new tool that simplifies educators' daily workflow by connecting and transforming fragmented data sources from multiple digital solutions into a holistic view of each student, helping educators to conduct personalized learning at scale.

To do that, we are helping educators leverage content across a range of programs, including core curriculum, supplemental solutions, and intervention resources. *McGraw Hill Plus* will translate and provide comprehensive data to teachers in an accessible, digestible way, and recommend personalized learning paths and content for each student in the class. We believe this new platform has the potential to usher in a new era of truly personalized learning.



To learn more, go to <https://mhed.us/McGrawHillPlus>

Facing the FISCAL CLIFF



K-12 is staring down 4 major economic shocks in the coming years. By Matt Zalaznick and Micah Ward

“Things get pretty ugly” in the 2024-25 school year, a K-12 financial expert says.

Schools won’t fall over the fiscal cliff this year, but experts across the K-12 spectrum believe major economic shocks lie ahead, even if the country does not slide into recession.

Right now, school district leaders are experiencing the *positive* economic shock of a surplus of COVID relief funds. But some have been too quick to make long-term financial decisions that they may not be able to sustain, says Marguerite Roza, a research professor and director of the Edunomics Lab at Georgetown University.

The financial outlook will begin to dim in 2023-2024 as administrators feel the full impacts of inflation, enrollment declines, and pandemic-fueled hiring. It is likely in the 2024-25 school year—during which ESSER funds expire—that districts will feel the full force of these multiple economic shocks. “We’re calling it the bloodletting,” she said.

An end to relief funds

K-12 is facing four major economic shocks in the coming years:

1. ESSER funding is scheduled to end in September 2024.

2. Growing enrollment declines, with northern states potentially hit the hardest.

3. Inflation combined with a tight labor market and new school hiring over the last few years.

4. A nationwide recession or economic slowdown will sap state revenues and cause a drop in education funding.

“You are going to get a double whammy of funds going away that you had and a loss of other funds that should have been coming if the economy was going along normally,” says David Lewis, executive director of ASBO International, the professional association for school business officials.

Some states have cut education funding because of the ESSER surplus. Lewis fears, however, that states will not restore that funding when ESSER expires. Education leaders must therefore advocate aggressively for K-12 funding at the state and local levels. “There’s a lot of criticism out there about what is being taught but overall support for public education is still very high,” Lewis says. “Communication needs to be ongoing with lawmakers, so they know education is a priority for voters.”

According to Roza, the districts most at risk of more severe financial distress are those that used ESSER funds to create recurring financial commitments—such as by hiring new staff—and those that backfilled budget shortfalls, Roza says.

Despite reports warning of a substantial amount of unused ESSER funds, Roza said it’s unlikely that districts will not spend all the money. “There are signs indicating that spending is picking up with a vengeance this year,” she said.

Still, most public schools—just like employers throughout the workforce—are also failing to raise salaries to keep up with inflation. And the salary increases districts are giving out could lead to an “ESSER hangover” in which administrators must figure out how to meet these recurring financial commitments even as state revenues decrease.

“They have ESSER money from the federal government that is phasing out as of September 2024,” Roza told *District Administration*. “That alone will create a fiscal cliff—basically, a moment when districts were accustomed to spending a lot more money than they’re able to spend now.”

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Will Schofield, superintendent of Hall County Schools in Georgia, said his district realized this early on and has adjusted its spending accordingly. He believes ESSER is giving some district leaders a false sense of financial stability. “We have tried to be very cautious against utilizing the ESSER funds in a manner that is not sustainable,” Schofield said. “We fully expect the economy to cycle down and have planned [for it] with reserve funds and sustainable expenses with one-time funds.”

Enrollment anxiety

When it comes to enrollment, the deepest declines are most likely occurring in districts that remained remote the longest during the height of the pandemic. Long closures drove some parents to pull kids from public schools and switch to homeschooling, enroll in private schools, or find other education alternatives.

More students equal more money, Roza said.

But some administrators may also have a false sense of security that pandemic-era enrollment drops are only temporary, added Elleka Yost, ASBO International’s director of advocacy.

There is a misconception that if districts can restore confidence in public education, most students will return. But several trends are indicating the declines may be something more like a new normal that will force spending cuts and the elimination of programs, Yost warned.

A substantial number of parents switched to homeschooling, private schools, and other alternatives over the last few years while younger couples are having fewer kids. “Enrollment is the dark horse issue that not a lot of districts are really thinking about,” Yost said. “They’re understanding enrollment as a short-term issue rather than a longer-term problem where they are going to have to right-size their budgets.”

Getting ahead of the cliff

The good news is that many education leaders are investing ESSER funds in academic recovery strategies that, in the past, have proven highly effective. That includes high dosage tutoring and focus-

ing on accelerated learning rather than remediation, Yost said.

Administrators will have to make the case that these programs deserve continued funding when ESSER expires. “It is a bit of a challenge determining return-on-investment right now, despite public pressure for wanting those answers now,” Yost said. “It has only been a short amount of time.”

The economic shocks could begin to ease in the 2025-26 school year, said Roza, who shared several strategies administrators can follow to ensure they are spending their funds in a manner that will not come back to haunt them.

- Consider offering one-time raises to retain teachers instead of permanent raises.

- Hire contractors for certain services instead of full-time employees.

- Communicate with your employees about sustainability and how temporary funds will be used.

- If you’re short on teachers, consider hiring retirees who do not plan to stay long-term.

Yost and Lewis of ASBO also urge administrators to make sure the community understands that COVID funds were a one-time relief package. Leaders should be transparent with stakeholders so they know reduced revenues mean districts and schools may have to make some tough decisions. “That way the community can be a part of the process if programs are cut or schools are consolidated,” she said. “Getting ahead of this and asking for community input on these issues will result in better decisions.”

Remember the lessons of the Great Recession

School leaders should keep in mind that districts often lag behind the rest of the economy in feeling the effects of recessions and other economic disruptions, says Noelle Ellerson Ng, the associate executive director of advocacy and governance at AASA, The School Superintendents Association.

Schools also experience a slower recovery. In fact, school funding never fully recovered from the Great Recession. Leaders need to convince state and federal policymakers that continued investment in education helps the wider community endure recessions.

“Superintendents understand that funding one program or person comes at the expense of something else,” Ng said. “It’s just a deeper conversation now because of the potential depth of the fiscal cliff.”

For example, districts may have to discontinue the community Wi-Fi services they created during the depths of the pandemic. “That is not a school’s job, but they are doing it,” she said. “When that money goes away, there are going to be a lot of devices that don’t light up and a lot of homes that are not connecting.”

Many superintendents and other educators are now pushing for more concrete guidance from the U.S. Department of Education on how and when ESSER may be extended. This is particularly important in giving districts confidence that they can sign longer-term contracts for HVAC improvements and other facilities upgrades. Supply-chain snags and other issues mean that while districts can solidify their plans now, they may not be able to spend the money for a few years, Ng explained.



FATHOM READS

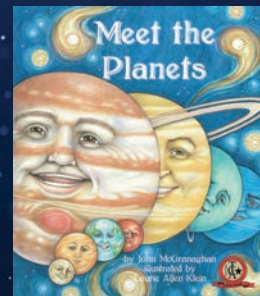
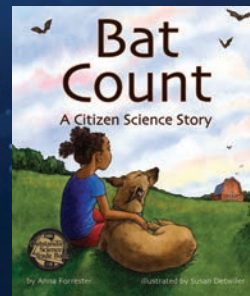
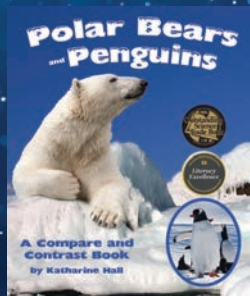
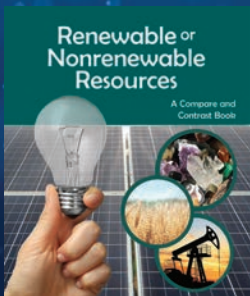
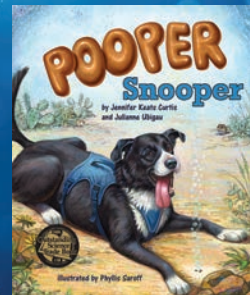
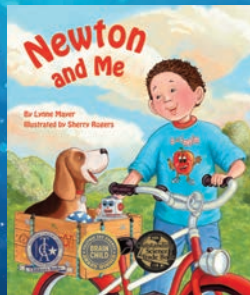
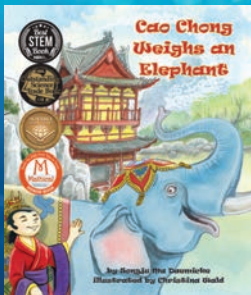
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How One District Overcame Uncharged Devices in Their 1:1 Take-Home Program

Edmonds School District reduced disruptions to learning with the help of new at-the-desk charging solutions.

Conquering the Obstacles of a Large-Scale 1:1 Technology Program

At the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Edmonds School District technology team, led by Chris Bailey, Director of Technology, was well positioned with a 1-to-1 Chromebook program to support at-home learning. Students had assigned devices they would use in class and then bring them home at night. They asked the students to bring their devices back to school fully charged each morning. The technology team found that this period of fast transition magnified some issues.

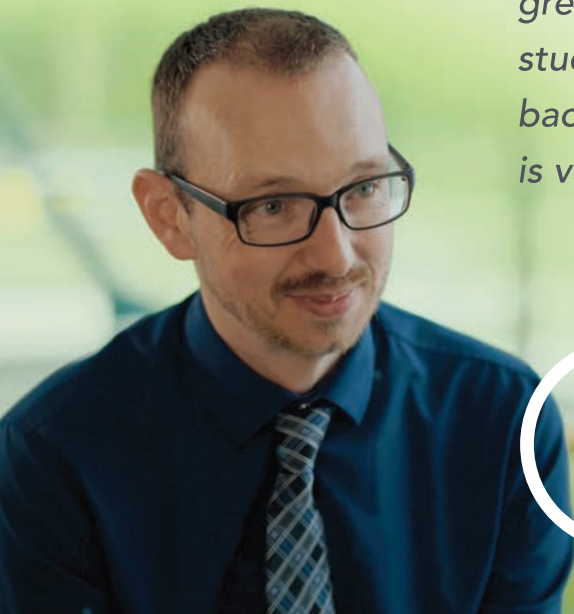
With the increased use of digital learning tools to support at-home learning when necessary, an uncharged device damaged a student's ability to participate in lessons.

To address the issue of students bringing devices to school uncharged, they had previously supplied "loaner" devices in their technology offices, and outfitted some classrooms with extra AC adapters. They soon recognized a need for more permanent solutions as the AC adapters laid across the floor created trip and fire hazard concerns, and instructional time was frequently interrupted by the students

going to the technology offices to check out the loaner devices.

Part of their approach to resolving the issue was encouraging students to come to school with their Chromebooks fully charged. While they influenced some of their students, they needed a solution that accounted for the circumstances beyond their control. They envisioned an environment where they could rely on technology-focused lesson plans that require regular use of devices. So, they began searching for accessible and easy-to-use charging solutions.

"We have the ability to meet the students' charging needs wherever they are located, and we can do that without tripping or fire hazards. It's been really great for teachers since it is a simple task, having the student go pick up a power bank, plug it in, and get back to learning. So, the impact on instructional time is vastly reduced." - Chris Bailey, Director of Technology



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Exploring Affordable, High-Quality Check-Out Systems

The team explored all possible avenues to solve their charging problems. While reviewing options, they discovered the [Active Charge Power Bank](#) solutions by JAR Systems. They learned more and were impressed by the product line, the focused solutions, and how the company helped them find the right application for their needs. They honed in on the [Library Check-Out Charging Solutions](#) for their tech offices at the middle and high schools. This all-in-one solution came with 16 power banks each that the students could easily access from one centralized area. They also chose the [Adapt4 USB-C with Active Charge](#), a smaller four-power bank solution, to be placed near groups of classrooms at the elementary level.

Given their capabilities, they believed these products would be perfect for supplying at-the-desk charging to their students without modifying electrical infrastructure or creating classroom hazards. They liked that Active Charge Power Banks could be a global solution across their district, working universally for their 1:1 Chromebooks as well as for other devices used in special programs,



Adapt4 with Active Charge Upgrade

and would enable the team to provide consistent support for the solution.

IT Support Supervisor, Sarah Luczyk, noted the ease of implementing their new solutions, *"Our student support team was able to get the systems set up with little to no disruptions or questions. They were pretty much plug-and-play."*

Protecting Instructional Time with At-the-Desk Charging

The new power bank solutions are now working as planned and have been well-received throughout the district. Director of Technology, Chris Bailey, remarked, *"One of the things that we like about the products is their flexibility. We have the ability to meet the students' charging needs wherever they are located, and we can do that without tripping or fire hazards. It's been really great for teachers since it is a simple task, having the student go pick up a power bank, plug it in, and get back to*

learning. So, the impact on instructional time is vastly reduced."

Technology Projects Coordinator, Jordan Suver added, *"One other department that has really been appreciative of this setup is our maintenance and facilities department... There is no longer any daisy-chaining of outlets, which was a massive issue, especially in our older schools that did not have the electrical capacity that our newer schools have."*

The new charging solutions have helped the school district achieve greater success with their 1-to-1 take-home technology, which has in turn provided wide-reaching benefits for students and their families. With every student having access to a device at home, they are seeing more participation in the students' learning and more families tuning into board meetings virtually. Sending the devices home has also lessened the strain on the electrical infrastructure of their schools, freed up classroom space, and reduced management responsibilities for teachers. For more information, call 866.393.4202.



Library Check-Out Charging Solution

See their power bank check-out systems! Watch the Video: [JAR-Systems.com/ESD](https://www.jar-systems.com/ESD)



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A SNEAK PEEK AT WHAT JANUARY HOLDS

Next year's Future of Education Technology® Conference will host over 600 workshops and sessions for attendees.

By Micah Ward



Next year's Future of Education Technology® Conference (FETC®) is just around the corner, and it's shaping up to be a robust one.

Every year, the event brings together dynamic and innovative educational leaders for an intensive, highly collaborative exploration of new technologies, best practices and pressing issues. Participants and attendees can also expect a change of scenery this year, as it's being held at the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center in New Orleans in January.

FETC® 2023 will feature sessions and workshops in five tailored tracks:

- Future of Ed Tech Administrator
- Future of Ed Tech Information Technology
- Future of Ed Tech Educator
- Future of Ed Tech Library Media Specialist
- Future of Ed Tech Coach

Attendees will have the opportunity to sit in on hundreds of sessions and workshops. Here are some highlights:

LEADERSHIP LESSONS ON MAKING LEARNING STICK: BLENDING CREATIVE THINKING & ED TECH

As part of the Future of Ed Tech Administrator track, attendees will learn how to integrate technology into education programs to increase engagement among students and create meaningful learning.

EMOTIONAL QUOTIENT + TECHNOLOGY: THE SECRET BEHIND SUCCESS

As part of the Future of Ed Tech Administrator track, attendees will learn how to integrate technology into education programs to increase engagement among students and create meaningful learning.

20 TIPS TO TRANSFORM ASSESSMENT AND TAKE ACTION

As part of the Future of Ed Tech Educator track, participants will examine how digital tools offer a special benefit for students as teachers expand student opportunities and options to share learning. In addition, they'll learn strategies for collecting and analyzing data to assist educators in taking making decisions through instructional pivots and interventions.

THE SECRET TO BUILDING A POWERFUL TECHNOLOGY TEAM

As part of the Future of Ed Tech Information Technology track, featured speakers will discuss how to build a powerful, dedicated and committed technology organization.

DEVELOPING DIGITAL DETECTIVES: INFORMATION LITERACY IN THE AGE OF ALGORITHM

As part of the Future of Ed Tech Library Media Specialist track, the session will dive into ways to teach people about how algorithms work and provide strategies for disrupting control over the content that influences our opinions, identities and relationships.

"FETC 2023 will host the most diverse group of leading experts from around the country, energized with new skills and knowledge learned from the experiences of the last few years, to provide the highest quality program we have ever produced filled with all-inclusive concurrent sessions and deep dives in hands-on workshops," said Conference Chair for the Future of Education Technology® Jennifer Womble in a statement. "FETC is leading the way by providing the industry's highest quality professional training." DA

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Tutoring proof points and pitfalls

Serving all students well and equitably means baking tutoring into the school schedule.

By Anthony Salcito

With good reason, district leaders are asking tough questions about the returns on their tutoring investments. Over the last 24 months, districts spent millions in federal funds, first to stem gaps in the wake of pandemic closures, and, more recently, as a tool to provide extra help for students and teachers working to redress the implications of unprecedented learning loss. A recent report from FutureEd at Georgetown University estimates that up to 40% of districts are planning to allocate federal funds toward tutoring.

Increased investment in tutoring is backed by a growing body of research that suggests it can play a critical role in helping students catch up. While some may simply benefit from the quick untangling of a problem, many need consistent tutoring rooted in a trusted relationship. Face-to-face interactions with the same tutor, even online, can mean the difference in terms of improved academic performance.

That has, in turn, led to questions about how to define tutoring. The term “high-dosage” has become more of a marketing slogan than a clinical descriptor, and the quality of such programs varies wildly. District leaders know that not all tutoring is created equal. And like the students they serve, schools and districts embody a multitude of unique challenges and variables.

Context matters. What works in one district may not work in another. Outcomes often belie the claims of even the best-intentioned providers.

Writing an article on what isn’t working or needs to improve may seem an odd undertaking for a tutoring company executive. But there is learning to be had from the last 18 months as schools are quickly implementing tutoring initiatives as part of their learning strategy. My hope is that by examining not just the proof points but the pitfalls, we can help districts and providers forge more purposeful partnerships.

1. Teachers connect tutoring to classrooms

As teachers grapple with unprecedented challenges across the classroom, we’re seeing record levels of burnout. Tutoring initiatives should be in direct service of teachers. There’s an opportunity for “teacher-assigned tutoring”—tapping teachers-as-experts to identify who needs support and when, and then directing that remediation in collaboration with tutors.

The model leverages the expertise and intentionality of teachers, who understand their students’ academic progress well enough to recognize specific needs and challenges,

rather than delivering tutoring in a vacuum or putting an additional burden on educators. The best programs model instruction not on a separate curriculum but based on what the students are learning from their teachers in the moment and do so in a way that aligns with state and district standards.

When tutoring is assigned by the teacher to a group of tutors familiar with the school, the experience can be connected to the classroom curriculum. The National Student Support Accelerator explains that tutoring can be especially beneficial if your target isn’t universal (you’re not serving all students in a given population) and it directly supports what students are doing in school to reach grade-level benchmarks.

2. When and where tutoring happens matters

Schedule it. Consistency is critical. Just because a district builds an engaging personalized tutoring initiative doesn’t mean all students will show up on their own.

As I’ve spoken to district leaders across the country, they’ve said they launched ambitious programs only to find low participation. When I dig in, I learn they’re often opt-in, unscheduled programs—meaning that students raise their hand for help when they think they need it. These kinds of offerings tend to best support students who already possess the confidence to reach out to external resources, the clarity on what help is needed, and the motivation to seek help. This is often not true of students who need support the most.

Many districts have told us that left unchecked, the bulk of tutoring time is consumed by high-performing students looking for a leg-up in STEM or an advanced class. While that can be valuable and important, serving all students well and equitably means baking tutoring into the school schedule.

Research confirms that in-school tutoring programs have larger impacts than those conducted after school. Students benefit from having a set time and day, week after week. The research also supports that when students are meeting with the same tutor, the growing relationship increases confidence and participation, especially when tutoring is part of their school day.

3. Chat-based tutoring has limits

Not all tutoring programs are equal—or even similar. As districts work to identify the right approach, we need to talk

openly about the benefits of different modalities, and what works best, when. For example, chat-based services (one of several modalities my own company offers) can offer an affordable solution that allows districts to provide all students with some level of support and reliable troubleshooting. But the format is far from optimal for learners who may be grappling with reading comprehension, an algebra program, or other serious and specific challenges.

Regular instruction helps students become more comfortable and gain self-confidence. A spate of recent studies suggests that high-dosage tutoring—defined as more than three days per week or at a rate of at least 50 hours over 36 weeks—is one of the few school-based interventions that demonstrates positive effects on both math and reading achievement.

4. Keep families in the loop

Since the era of remote learning, more families are looking for supplemental learning resources and they are demanding that district leaders provide their students with tutoring, a service many have never received before. In one of our nation's biggest districts, parents are pushing schools for more access to tutoring and looking to understand how it will be implemented for their children. They want to understand their role in keeping kids on track and making up for unfinished learning. It's critical that districts build a mechanism

into tutoring programs that engage everyone around the child—from teachers and tutors to students and families—from day one.

With virtual tutoring, parents can often access sessions online to play a role in not just monitoring but understanding and reinforcing key concepts. Kimberly Guerin, assistant superintendent of the Scottsdale Unified School District, says recording sessions enable students and parents to re-watch together to see how to work that algebra problem, for example.

The rise of school-based tutoring programs is part of an evolution in K-12 education and one that is well overdue. It's no longer seen as a short-term solution to an unforeseen event (like a global health crisis) or a service reserved for the neediest learners. Instead, leaders recognize that tutoring should be part of a student's long-term learning journey and a strategy to deliver more personalized instruction.

We know that students can benefit from tutoring—and providing the service at scale is more affordable for districts than ever—but not all solutions are the same. The trick is making it easier for districts to find the most effective, most equitable, and most accessible option for their teachers and students. **DA**

Anthony Salcito is the chief institution business officer at Nerdy, the parent company of Varsity Tutors.

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Scholastic Programs Help Educators Significantly Raise Reading Scores on State Assessment

RISE Academy in Florida Credits Scholastic F.I.R.S.T. and Literacy Pro for Dramatic Improvement

For one charter school in Margate, Florida, taking a different approach to reading instruction and the use of new software tools resulted in one of the state's largest improvements in third-grade reading scores on the 2022 statewide assessment.

RISE Academy (Raising Individual Student Excellence) is a public K–8 charter school that is part of the Broward County Public Schools and was founded in 2008. Dr. Carmella Morton is its founder and executive director. “Our curriculum is focused on science and technology,” she says. “We are one of the only STEM Cognia-certified schools in south Florida and proud to be one of the highest-performing schools in Broward County.”

As a public charter school, RISE Academy follows the curriculum of Broward County but has the freedom to use additional educational materials and resources. The academy currently enrolls approximately 300 students, and Morton says the leadership hopes to move the school into a new facility soon so it can accommodate more students to keep up with demand.

High-achieving but still looking for ways to improve

Despite RISE Academy's steady improvement in grades from the state department of education—moving up from a B rating from school years 2016–2018 to an A rating in 2019—school leaders were looking for ways

to improve further. Tricia King, curriculum specialist, says she was also looking to address the impact of the pandemic. “We were seeing learning loss in many areas but most clearly in reading,” she says. “I attended a literacy workshop in the district in February 2021 where I saw the Scholastic programs F.I.R.S.T. and Literacy Pro, and they were just what I was looking for. I knew they could provide our teachers with the tools they needed and would motivate and engage our students.”

Introducing interactive, personalized reading programs Scholastic F.I.R.S.T. (Foundations in Reading, Sounds & Text) is a research-based program that focuses on teaching students the five foundational reading skills through interactive and adaptive activities and games, as well as eBooks. Designed to fit seamlessly into any classroom schedule, Scholastic F.I.R.S.T. is effective both in small-group rotations as well as in independent digital learning settings.

Scholastic Literacy Pro is a reading management solution that provides access to a library of over 2,800 eBooks for students in grades K–8, comprehension checks for thousands of books, assessments, and many additional resources for teachers and families. The platform curates a personalized bookshelf for



each student, using a reading recommendation engine that works in partnership with teachers to drive students toward books that are aligned with their interests, grade level, and independent reading level.

Reorganizing classrooms into rotation models

“We started using F.I.R.S.T. for our K–2 students and Literacy Pro for grades 3–5 beginning in August of 2021,” King says. “At the same time, we rearranged our classrooms to follow the recommendation from Scholastic in a design better suited for both whole-class and small-group instruction in a rotation model. That was something we had wanted to do, but Scholastic provided us with a clear blueprint.” [pictured at right]

“We use F.I.R.S.T. and Literacy Pro in stations as part of our 90-minute reading blocks, which use a 30-minute rotation schedule. Implementation was fast and easy for our teachers, because the

programs were so straightforward. Teachers and students loved using them. They saved our teachers a lot of time and helped them understand how to conduct small-group instruction effectively."

Data and insights help guide instructional decisions

King says the analytics help RISE Academy educators to make more informed, data-driven decisions. "The programs provide a lot of insight and enable teachers to understand the proficiency of students in specific areas," she says. "We use that data in combination with our progress-monitoring assessments to group students together in reading groups and identify students who need extra help, instruction, or encouragement. It helps me guide our reading specialists on what to focus on in a specific classroom or with a small group or individual student."

Seeing dramatic results

RISE educators were encouraged by the progress throughout the past school year. "We have two progress-monitoring assessments during the year, and we saw

steady improvement in our reading scores, particularly for third grade," King says. "Finally, at the end of the year, the percentage of third-grade students reading at or above grade level on the FSA (Florida Standards Assessment) rose to 71 percent, 20 points higher than on the previous year's assessment."

"This increase was the largest in Broward County and one of the most dramatic improvements of any school in the state," says Dr. Adriana Guerra, principal of the academy. "We used the same curriculum as before. What changed was adding Scholastic F.I.R.S.T. and Literacy Pro. The results prove that these programs are effective. And they had an impact across our curriculum; because students' reading skills improved, they did better in science and math as well."

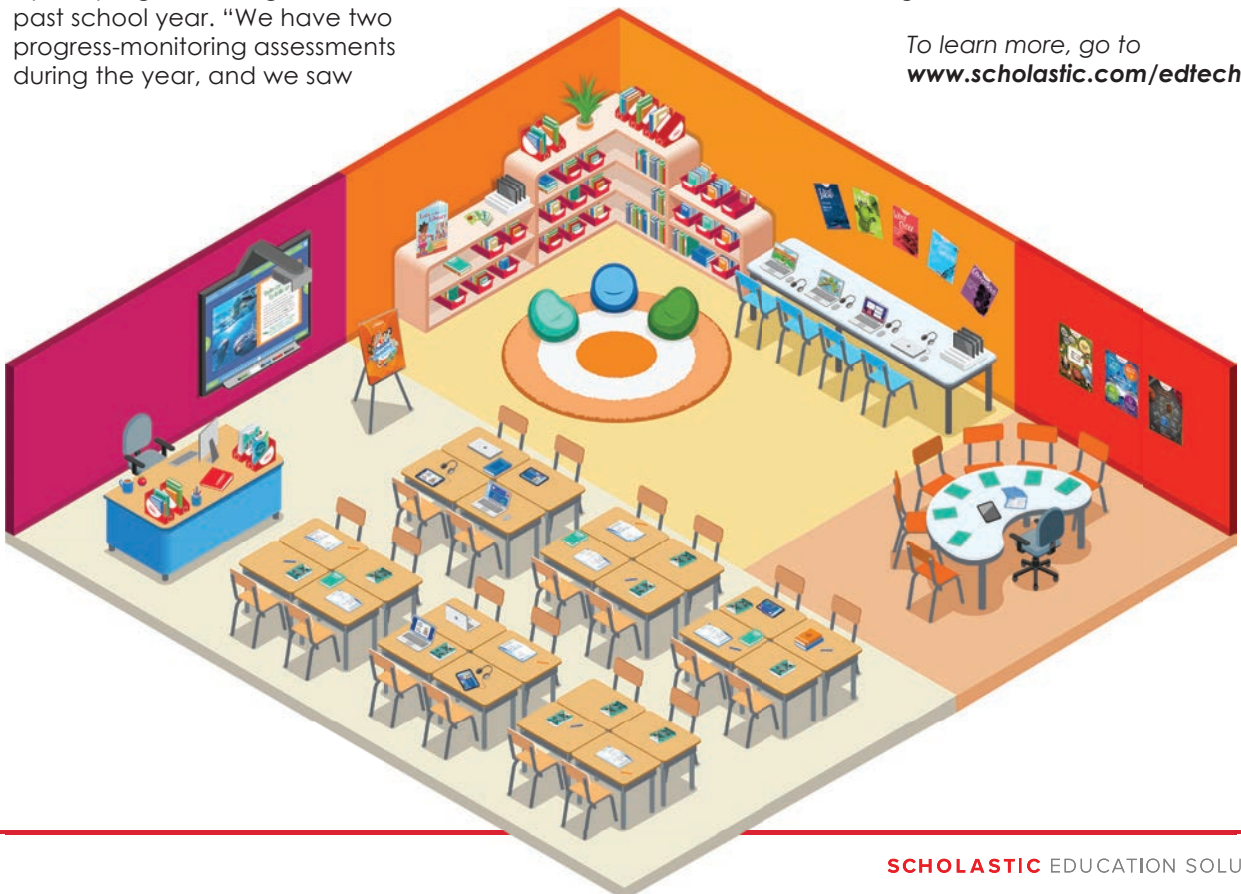
"It was amazing to see the scores improve by such a wide margin," King says. "Our high-achieving students continued to be high-achieving, while

struggling readers improved significantly. Of the lowest-percentile students for reading in grades 3–5, some 90 percent moved up during the year. The missing piece that we needed was using these Scholastic programs in combination with moving to a rotation model."

Expanding on the partnership

Looking to the future, King says educators at the academy are excited and motivated by the results and looking forward to continued improvement in reading skills and assessment scores. "We are excited to continue working with F.I.R.S.T. and Literacy Pro because of the great results we've already seen, and we plan on adding Scholastic W.O.R.D., which is a game-based vocabulary and comprehension program for grades K–5, to expand and build on the work we're doing with reading instruction," she says. "Scholastic's programs have made all the difference for us, and we're grateful for that."

To learn more, go to www.scholastic.com/edtech.





4 ways school leaders can stop the cycle of burnout among teachers

School administrators must remember that building a community doesn't require fancy tools or expensive resources.

By Becca Hughes

More than 40% of American K-12 teachers are “always” or “very often” burned out. That percentage surpasses all other industries, including healthcare and law. While discouraging, this news is not surprising.

Teaching has always been a meaningful but challenging profession. However, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing challenges and introduced new ones to teachers already facing numerous stressors, resulting in a higher rate of teachers leaving the profession.

Those committed to teaching need support to ensure they don't reach burnout levels that prompt them to quit or that impact their well-being. School districts must take action by demonstrating their appreciation for teachers and offering them support at all levels.

Here are four ways school districts can champion their teachers.

Reimagine classrooms

Classrooms—no matter the size—usually only have one teacher to meet the academic and emotional needs of students. Attending to 20 to 30 students (or more) can be physically exhausting and mentally draining for teachers, who often lack personalized materials, supplies or simply an extra set of hands.

To protect teachers' physical and emotional well-being, school administrators should reimagine classrooms. One option is to deploy a team of volunteers and interns to work with small groups or provide one-on-one instruction that meets students' unique learning needs. Assigning additional adults to a classroom alleviates pressure on teachers and prioritizes student education, demonstrating that leaders care about the mission and understand teachers' challenges.

Build a caring culture and community

Teachers need their schools to provide a strong support system. When a school district creates formal and informal communities of educators, it cultivates a sense of belonging for them, and this belonging promotes self-care. To help build teacher communities, districts can set aside a space and carve out designated time for educator collaboration. School leaders can also develop more formal communities where seasoned teachers serve as coaches, sharing experiences and insights with their peers. Offering teachers an opportunity to discuss questions, issues or concerns with each other helps reduce stress levels. This type of sounding board can lead to the implementation of proven solutions.

School administrators must remember that building a community doesn't require fancy tools or expensive resources. It requires initiative and consistency. Further, community-building and culture-enhancing opportunities should provide targeted support to help teachers focus on instruction.

Celebrate accomplishments

While teachers hold an important and essential job, only 46% of teachers feel respected and seen as professionals by the public. That's a 31% dip from 2011. School districts must work to change this perception, prioritizing teacher appreciation efforts both within classrooms and in the community. When district and school leaders celebrate teachers, they:

- Make teachers feel appreciated and valued.
- Improve overall staff culture.
- Increase individual and team confidence.
- Strengthen individual and team

relationships.

Public praise doesn't have to be costly. It can look like a special shoutout during a school meeting, in a newsletter or on a school website. Or, school leaders can offer extra planning time by assigning recess, dismissal or other extra duties to staff or volunteers. Something as simple as a handwritten note or an email with positive feedback can also show gratitude and make a difference in a teacher's day.

Evaluate compensation

Despite the huge responsibility of educating the youngest generations, teaching comes with a low monetary return. In fact, teachers make just 80.8 cents on the dollar compared to similarly educated professionals. And that's despite having to maintain certifications and participate in continuing education courses.

Low compensation is a significant contributor to teacher burnout, especially when more than 20% of teachers have to take a second job to make ends meet. This is unacceptable. More organizations must advocate for increased teacher salaries, and districts must develop creative and implementable solutions for realizing fair and equitable educator wages.

An educator's role is essential to society. But, without the proper reinforcements, burnt-out teachers will continue fleeing the profession. School districts must offer more support—extra hands in the classroom, supportive communities and recognition and respect—so they can positively impact the future of our young people. **DA**

Becca Hughes is the director of editorial development for Learning A-Z, which provides teachers with instructional resources that lead to student engagement and success.

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How community colleges can help solve today's teacher shortages

Dual-credit programs offer high school students an early start on teaching degrees.

By Hans Andrews, William "Bill" Marzano, and Greg Rockhold

An educational crisis has been growing for over a decade in the United States. The once reliable university pipeline of educating future teachers has declined by 50% in the last decade.

From 2010 to 2019, 340,000 fewer students were preparing to become teachers. A 50% decline is documented in nine states: Pennsylvania, Oklahoma, Ohio, New York, New Jersey, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, and California. Oklahoma reported that the University of Central Oklahoma teacher preparation enrollments had dropped from 1,800 to 856 in seven years.

Diversity also continues to decline. Studies have found that 15,000 fewer Black students enrolled in teacher preparation programs in 2018 compared to 2010. Latino and Black student enrollments in these programs stood at 9% and 7%, respectively.

Over 60 universities and colleges across the country have dropped their teacher preparation programs. Many of the other 1,300 education programs have experienced enrollment losses similar to those mentioned above, and many are hanging on by a thread.

Teacher shortage legislation in 2021-22

Recent legislation has resulted in what may be called putting "bandages" on the problem rather than developing new pipelines. Some of the 'bandages' have included assigning larger workloads to already overworked teachers and using more paraprofessionals who are not fully credentialed as teachers. Other examples of these are as follows:

- **Michigan:** In late 2021, janitors, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, and others in the school systems were

allowed to serve as substitutes.

- **Arizona:** Since adequate government legislation wasn't forthcoming, more entrepreneurial school leaders had to develop their own "pipelines" to fill their classrooms.
- **Colorado:** Bills are in process to make it easier for retired teachers to return to the classrooms.
- **New Mexico:** The National Guard was ordered to serve as substitutes in fall 2021. The state legislature this spring approved allowing newly retired teachers to return to the classrooms for a three-year period.
- **Illinois:** The newly approved state budget year includes a two-year, \$400,000 investment in Educators Rising, a program that encourages high school students to consider pursuing teaching careers.

Other issues of great concern

These poor working conditions have been lingering and expanding for a long time and include:

Lower pay than in most other professions with comparable education.

The pandemic caused significant stress for overworked teachers and support staff.

Political clamor for installation of microphones and cameras into the classroom to "monitor" teachers.

Weeks and months taken away from teaching to prepare students to 'pass the high-stakes tests' that state and federal governments now demand.

Removing (firing) teachers if their students don't test high enough.

Being evaluated on these test scores rather than being evaluated for their teaching.

Building an expanded teacher pipeline

Over 1,200 community and technical colleges could quickly provide a new and more robust expanded teacher pipeline. Also, high school students can get an "early start" on college work if their school has a dual-credit partnership with its local community college.

Another contribution community colleges can make is developing partnerships that create pathways for teacher preparation. It would involve taking introductory education classes for dual-credit as a high school student, enrolling in their community college to complete an associate degree, and then transferring to a senior college or university partner to complete their teacher preparation.

Florida has established models of teacher preparation programs most community and technical colleges can follow. Additionally, community colleges can contribute to increasing the number and diversity of a future cohort of K-12 educators. The solutions for teacher shortages via community and technical colleges are available throughout the country in the back yards of all American school districts. Time to get to work! **DA**

Hans Andrews is a distinguished fellow in Community College Leadership and former president of Olney Central College in Illinois.

William "Bill" Marzano is an adjunct faculty member in management for Aurora University in Illinois.

Greg Rockhold has served on the board of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, as president of the New Mexico Coalition of School Administrators and executive director of the New Mexico Association of Secondary School Principals.



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