

# DA

**District Administration®**

May/June 2023

### Edtech Successes

Why it's important for districts to share what is working for them.

### K12 Challenges

Principals and supers reveal their top 7 pressing issues.

### Stay in your lane?

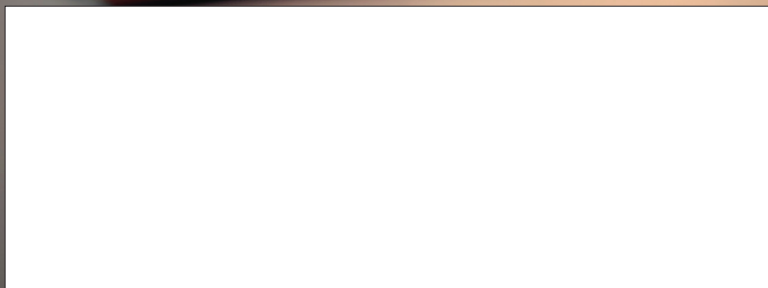
4 reasons educators should not be so stubborn.

# 5

Which products are turning out to be the most effective for schools? Here's what we found out.

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## Give yourself a break

As another school year draws to a close, K12 leaders across the country are no doubt gearing up for a summer of reflection and planning. This is a time for educators to take stock of the previous year, identify areas that need improvement, and, of course, celebrate their successes and achievements.

Perhaps the most exciting thing about the summer break (besides it being a break) is the opportunity for K12 leaders to explore fresh approaches to teaching. With the ongoing shift toward personalized learning, many districts are developing ways to tailor instruction to the unique needs and interests of each student, from computer-based adaptive assessments to project-based learning initiatives that allow students to pursue their own passions and interests.

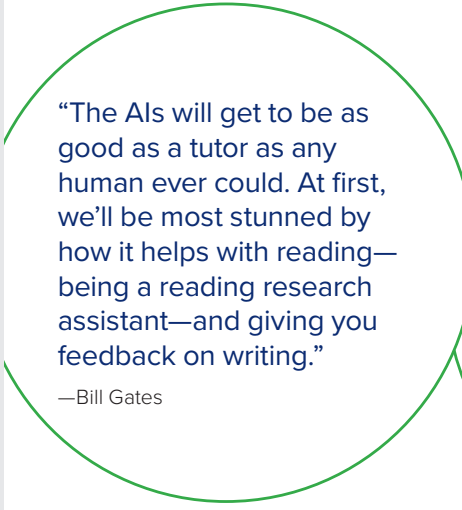
In addition to these new pedagogical approaches, K12 leaders have a chance to explore emerging technologies and tools that can enhance teaching and learning in the classroom. The rise of edtech and the many tools being introduced for both educators and students is opening up exciting new possibilities for engaging students and promoting deeper learning.

Of course, it's also important to remember that summer is a time meant for rest and rejuvenation. As hard as educators work during the year, it's important they use their well-deserved downtime to recharge their batteries and prepare for the coming year—and challenges—ahead.

Given the current climate, this promises to be another transformative summer for K12 education. And as much as we all look forward to the slowdown the season brings, we also look forward to seeing what new developments and innovations will emerge at the start of the 2023-24 school year.

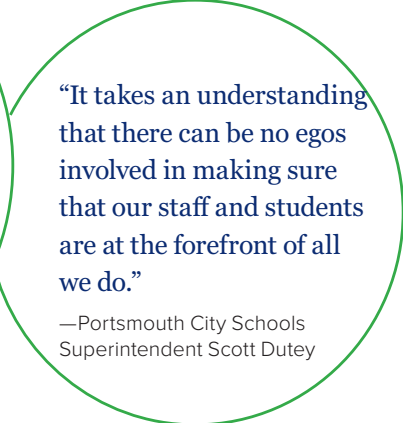
To all of our readers, here's to a happy and productive summer break.

—Lori Capullo, Executive Editor



“The AIs will get to be as good as a tutor as any human ever could. At first, we’ll be most stunned by how it helps with reading—being a reading research assistant—and giving you feedback on writing.”

—Bill Gates



“It takes an understanding that there can be no egos involved in making sure that our staff and students are at the forefront of all we do.”

—Portsmouth City Schools Superintendent Scott Dutey

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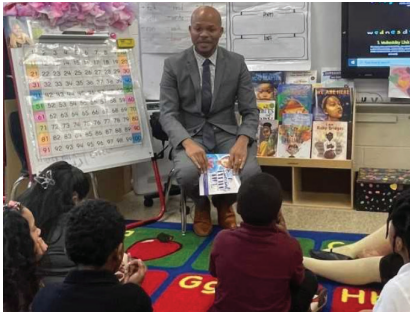
These leaders shared with *District Administration* their most valuable edtech tools and why they work so well for their students and staff.

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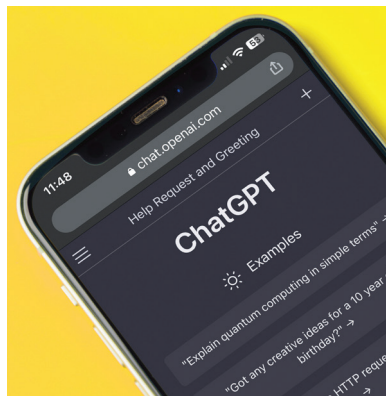
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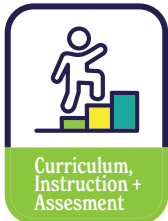
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# BEYOND the news

## Edtech firms embrace ChatGPT to boost student performance

*Artificial intelligence in the classroom is seemingly inevitable. Some say it's already here. Whether you let your students access ChatGPT to learn, edtech companies are now using it.*

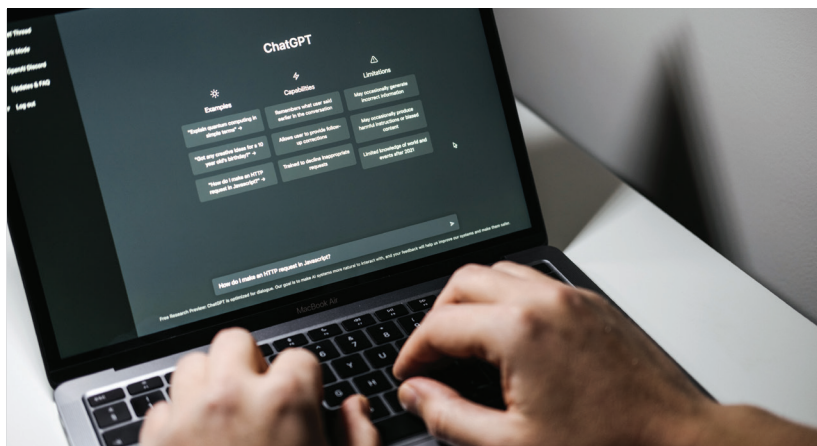
Whether you're for or against artificial intelligence in the classroom, its arrival is seemingly inevitable. In fact, some might say it's already here. Whether you choose to allow your students to use ChatGPT to learn, edtech companies are already embracing it.

On Monday, the educational support service provider Chegg announced CheggMate, a new GPT-4-powered study aide for students to be released for early access in May.

"It's a tutor in your pocket," CEO Dan Rosensweig told Reuters.

The software will combine GPT-4's advanced AI systems with Chegg's content library to adapt to exactly what students are learning. Users can also input a query in any format, whether it's by written text, a photo, a diagram or a math problem. Students can then ask further questions and receive help on concepts they don't understand in real-time.

"AI provides an incredible opportunity for students to be aided by a digital companion that supports and enhances their learning and helps to prepare them for the future," said Nina Huntemann, chief academic officer of Chegg in a statement.



"Chegg understands learners like no one else. We are building generative AI into our powerful and proprietary learning tools to support students' active engagement in their learning process."

Other edtech giants have recently joined the generative AI hype train. Brainly, a leading global learning platform, announced earlier this month beta access to its new GPT-4-powered AI functions: "Simplify" and "Expand" answers. According to the company's announcement, these additions will help enhance student learning in a more dynamic and personalized way.

"The 'Simplify' function uses AI to modify answers to be shorter, straightforward and focused on the main facts. The 'Expand' function lets Learners access more in-depth AI-generated explanations for an existing answer," a news release reads.

Last month, Khan Academy released a small AI pilot for Khanmigo, another tutoring aide powered by GPT-4. Sal Khan, founder and CEO of Khan Academy, recently published a blog post describing his experience with GPT-4. Simply put, he thinks it has massive potential to close the digital divide among students.

Students using Khanmigo can ask the AI tool the same questions

they would ask of a real in-person tutor and it will generate patient, human-like responses. For teachers, it's a timesaver that will allow them to focus more on their students. But there's still room for growth.

"AI makes mistakes," Khan wrote. "Even the newest generation of AI can still make errors in math. AI can still 'hallucinate,' which is the term the industry uses for making stuff up. A lot of work needs to be done."

Others, however, are trying to ensure that AI is used with integrity. In February, the well-known plagiarism catcher Turnitin announced its "state-of-the-art" AI writing detector, which went live this month. According to their announcement, it's capable of identifying 98% of text written by ChatGPT with a less than 1% false positive rate.

However, the work is far from over.

"The technology is constantly evolving and just a few weeks ago, OpenAI announced the release of GPT-4 with broader access to the web and third-party sites," according to a blog post by Turnitin. "We will continue to adapt and respond to the next iterations and innovations in AI writing, putting the safety of students and the needs of educators and institutions first."

*By Micah Ward*

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## Leadership series: ‘It was the best professional development that I had ever been through’

*When Superintendent Jonathan Prince took the helm at St. Lucie Public Schools in 2022, he described it as being passed the torch by Bear Bryant. Fortunately, he had the experience from District Administration’s Superintendents Academy to rely on.*

“My predecessor—it’s almost like following Bear Bryant in the sense that he was the superintendent here for seven years,” says Dr. Jonathan Prince, superintendent of St. Lucie Public Schools. During that time Prince served as deputy superintendent, where he would contribute to the district’s success in becoming one of the top 10 districts in the state of Florida for graduation rate

and one of the highest-performing communities in terms of academics.

“For the first time on what we call the Treasure Coast, based on the most recent performance on our standardized test, we were the highest performing district. That has never happened,” Prince says.

SLPS is a high-poverty district, he adds. Yet, they’ve been able to outperform districts that don’t have the same challenges.

“This the sixth consecutive year that our graduation rates have exceeded 90% in the state of Florida,” he notes. “Only four counties out of 67 in Florida can say that.”

And in 2022, his time came to take over the helm at SLPS. Although he had big shoes to fill, he came armed and ready with the tools to succeed.

Prince is an advisory board member of the District Administration Leadership Institute, an opportunity that he says has helped drive his district’s success from a leadership perspective.

They’re gearing up to send their second cohort of principals through DA’s Principal Leadership Academy after seeing just how impactful it was for their first bunch.

“I sent my chief of schools through the leadership academy and the professional development he got

was really powerful,” he says. “They had the principal cohorts for the principal training and we wanted to send a cohort through of about seven or eight principals, and each ranged from newer principals to principals who were veterans.”

Several of them questioned why more PD was even necessary. “They thought they were being punished,” he says, amusedly. Fortunately, it was an experience none of them would regret.

“They went through it and it was like the greatest thing since sliced bread,” he says. “Some of the challenges we have with principals is providing quality professional development for them. And when they went through that, they felt like it really resonated with them and addressed some specific things they could bring back to their campuses and apply.”

In fact, the district was so happy with the outcome that they plan to send all of their principals through the academy.

“We’ve got about seven or eight principals that are going through the second cohort now,” he says. “It’s just been really, really effective professional development.”

Prince is also a product of DA’s Leadership Institute, which he notes he’s grateful for. “I went through



Jonathan Prince, superintendent of St. Lucie Public Schools.





# How AllCourse Can Solve Teacher Shortages and Credit Recovery Challenges in Your District

By T. Trent Gegax, former Newsweek correspondent

Noelle Mador has licenses in Special Education and Elementary Education. The New Jersey native is also licensed to teach in Texas and will soon add a Virginia license. She has taught online since 2003, making her one of the earliest full-time online teachers in America.

“I had a child with special needs,” Mador said. I had to homeschool my son because he was slipping through the cracks in school. I signed him up with an online school while I was teaching online at the same time. Online school was great for our family. He was really able to focus.”

Noelle has recently joined a new service called AllCourse, an online marketplace linking schools with credentialed teachers delivering for-credit online schoolwork.

AllCourse helps schools quickly fill teacher vacancies and expand course offerings. Schools can post jobs with specific criteria and every AllCourse teacher who is an exact match is automatically alerted. And school administrators can browse teacher profiles or search for teachers using an array of precise search filters.

Schools can also create their own storefronts and make their teachers’ courses available to other schools – either for free or for a fee.

“There’s definitely a lot of classroom teacher shortages in my state,” said Rosciel Doctama, a teacher from Maricopa County, Ariz. She sees AllCourse as an obvious solution to persistent teacher shortages.

Some teachers prefer to teach online — and believe it minimizes behavioral and other problems. Steven Getz, an AP History teacher from South Carolina, said, “I like teaching online way better. Today’s classrooms are crumbling. Teachers are struggling. Young teachers coming out of college are idealistic and want to try all these learning techniques and then they get in there and find students are swearing in class, talking constantly, and so on. But these behavior issues go away in online class because the students aren’t distracting each other or performing for each other.”

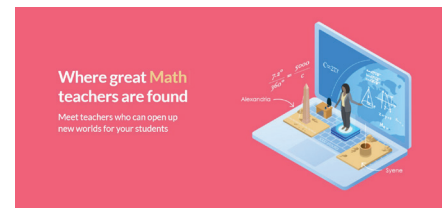
Robert Avossa, former Superintendent of Schools for Palm Beach County, Fla. and Fulton County, Ga., echoes that sentiment. “Schools today are facing myriad challenges — from teacher shortages to pandemic-related student learning losses. By providing a network of on-demand online teachers, AllCourse can help reduce teacher vacancies and operating pressures on schools. But I think it could help in some unexpected ways as well, such as improving options for at-home learning and responses to student behavioral issues.”

AllCourse was founded in 2022 by José Ferreira, an edtech veteran who helped reimagine Kaplan Test Prep in the 1990s and more recently founded adaptive learning pioneer, Knewton (acquired by Wiley in 2019), and autograding pioneer, Bakpax (acquired by Teachers Pay Teachers in 2021).

“José may have the most insightful and creative mind I’ve come across in decades in the world of education,” said Andrew Rosen, CEO of Kaplan Inc. “He sees opportunities and patterns that no one has seen before — and then figures out how to leverage

technology in ways that make learning faster and more convenient for students, teachers, and systems.”

In addition to its marketplace of online teachers, AllCourse is also building a directory of free educational content. Their team of teachers finds, tags, and summarizes all the best free resources from around the web, so that teachers, schools, parents, and students can quickly find exactly what they’re looking for using AllCourse search filters — and know that it’s been reviewed by a U.S. K12 teacher.



“We want to be the place that makes life easier for teachers and school administrators,” Ferreira said. “Need high-quality free content? We’ve got you. Are you a teacher who wants to find online teaching opportunities? Or maybe you’re an admin who needs great teachers who can plug and play instantly for your students? We’ve got you covered there too.”

AllCourse’s model is very different from that of course provider companies who create the content and keep most of the revenue. 85% of AllCourse revenue goes to the teacher or school offering the course.

“Our idea is simple,” Ferreira said. “Provide a service connecting schools with great online teachers, and then let them keep almost all the value they create. What kind of energies, motivations, and efficiencies would that liberate?”

# BEYOND the news

their Superintendents Academy in preparation for potentially applying to this job, and it was the best professional development that I had ever been through,” he says. “And you pay it forward.”

The close of the current school year also marks the end of Prince’s first year as superintendent. As far as priorities lie, Prince says his primary goals for his district in the years to come remain the same: student outcomes and attendance.

“My priorities for student achievement are unchanged,” he explains. “Covid has really had a huge impact on our students in negative ways—the socialization issues that we’re having, the mental health challenges that we’re having with our kids, and really the attendance

of our students.”

Absenteeism, he adds, has almost become the norm for students and parents since the pandemic. As families got used to their children missing school, the academic-related consequences soon began piling up, which Prince hopes to reverse.

“They’ve kind of carried that forward to where if their child misses a day, they think, ‘Eh, it’s no big deal.’ But one day compounds and all of a sudden you’ve got 20 to 25 days, and if you’re a first-grade kid, you’ve missed a significant amount of your developmental time, especially with early literacy. So, we’re really putting a new emphasis on attendance, making sure kids are in school and communicating that to parents.”

*By Micah Ward*



## Why districts must share their edtech victories

*As new technologies emerge and education methods adapt and transform, it is essential that successful districts share what works.*

Education is a practice. It is through practice, pedagogy, and intentional strategies that we improve teaching and learning to be constantly improving. The role of educational leadership is to guide this practice to maintain the focus on constantly improving student outcomes, access, equity and achievement. K12 education is at an inflection point, driven by technological advancements, and cultural and economic shifts. Districts and schools are looking to create resilient learning ecosystems,

supported by digital teaching and learning to prepare all students for the future. Due to this constantly evolving nature of education, education is constantly striving to learn from practices that work. Sharing your professional work with others in the community provides evidence that demonstrates effective best practices.

The Future of Education Technology Conference (FETC) is an annual meeting where those who

are constantly learning and leading have synthesized new methods and technologies into classroom instruction and share their best practices to improve the entire ecosystem. It is essential, as educational leaders and educators, that we share and constantly support and encourage evolving pedagogy. As new technologies emerge with new opportunities for widening our perspectives and education methods adapt and transform, it is essential that successful districts share what works, and as continuous learners, those in the education space must continuously listen and implement successful practices, reflect and strategize about ways to incorporate new technologies and methodologies into schools to improve for the future.

FETC is a place where continuous learners can communicate and partner with the latest educational technology companies to produce outcomes that meet the needs of their students. Building community happens on the investigative trail for designing curriculum strategies



# Gaggle is more than tech.

For over 23 years, Gaggle has been the trusted partner in helping districts protect their students.

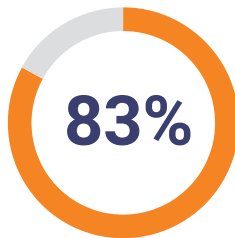


## Are you up at night worrying about your students?

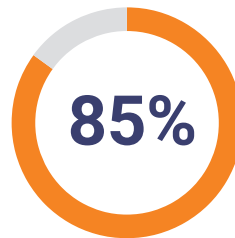
Gaggle - the highest ranked student safety company - helps educators address bullying or harassment of students on the basis of: ethnicity, gender, LGBTQ status, special education/disability, and socio-economic status. We're passionate about helping you help your students.



believe that Gaggle makes schools safer\*



believe Gaggle has helped reduce school violence\*



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117% increase in bullying over the past school year

\* Results from EdWeek Research Center Survey of Gaggle Districts



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# BEYOND the news

methods and best practices. FETC offers senior decision-making strategies to administrators as they discover emerging edtech trends, skills and education technology vendors with the opportunity to build connections. We aim to provide thought leadership, world-class content and networking opportunities to our communities with the ultimate goal of driving real-world implementation that solves current and future classroom challenges.

Now is the time to submit your best strategies for improving district, leadership, and classroom learning. Through ideation, other educational leaders can learn and adapt, and modify their own programs to match the success and student outcomes. Speakers at FETC are selected with the goal of sharing how to build skills, strategies and implementation techniques so that what is learned at the conference can be immediately used to impact student engagement.

The request for proposals is currently open on [FETC.org](https://www.fetc.org) and we are asking that those on the journey of transforming education submit their application to present to lift up the entire education community with knowledge, skills, intentional practices, informed pedagogy and transformative implementations. There is no learning without joy and play, so FETC encourages presenters to share sessions and engage the education community in the hopes of bringing together diverse minds and experiences to help create a path forward for the future of education.

FETC invites K12 education professionals representing all content areas and specialties, as well as industry leaders and technology experts, to submit cutting-edge education technology presentations to the Request for Proposals for our 44th Annual Future of Education



Technology Conference to be held on January 23-26, 2024, at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, FL. The most dynamic and creative minds in the learning landscape—superintendents, administrators, district leaders, state and national policy leaders, IT directors, CIOs, instructional and technology coaches, media specialists and educators—will gather at FETC to take part in this four-day exchange of ideas and techniques about how technology is unlocking new ways to teach and elevate learning.

We're looking for charismatic, innovative and articulate speakers to deliver original presentations addressing the latest trends in emerging technologies, leadership strategies for driving organizational change, innovations in pedagogy and proven practices for inclusion, equality, security, skill-building and well-being for school districts to utilize as they ensure impact, efficacy and the use of technology. Share your educational technology methods, tools and implementations in compelling thought leadership sessions, skill-building hands-on workshops and interactive presentations for senior-level strategists and education professionals committed



to the future of teaching and learning.

Curious about how district leaders transform schools preparing students for the future? They learn from others, share best practices and encourage adaptation. If you are chosen to present after submitting a proposal, you will not only gain the respect of your peers and an opportunity to network with the nation's leading education technology experts, you will also receive FREE registration and the opportunity to fuel inspiration for forward-thinking teaching and learning with your session topics producing a better future by transforming education.

*By Jennifer Womble, FETC Chair*

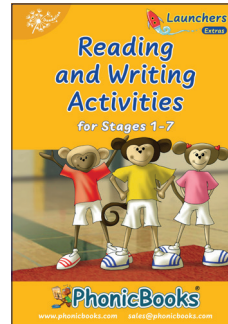
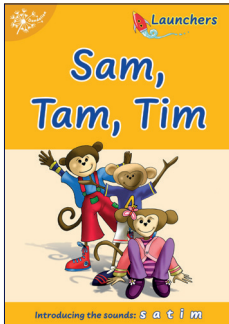
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### Ages 3–7

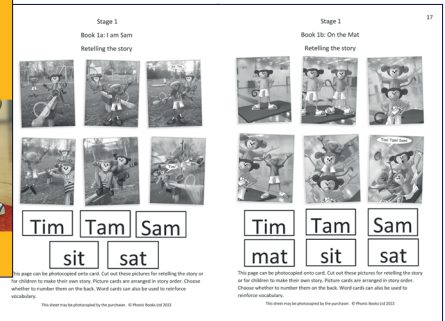
**Dandelion Launchers and Readers** offer beginner readers a gentle, gradual approach to the alphabet and vowel teams.



### Activity Books

**Activity Books** accompany the Readers to further develop language fluency, comprehension, spelling, and writing.

Permissions allow for photocopies of Activity Books.

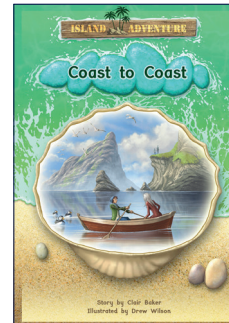


**"Phonic Books does an outstanding job of combining the Science of Reading with the joy of teaching and learning."**

—Barbara S.,  
Reading Specialist

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**Catch-Up Readers** support older readers who need to bridge gaps in phonics skills through exciting, action-packed adventures.



## Safety First

*Backpacks—even the clear ones—are being banned at some schools in an end-of-year safety push.*

In a rush to tighten security as the school year winds down, more districts are banning clear backpacks along with the standard canvas and nylon models.

As most administrators know, schools have been barring backpacks for years to prevent students from concealing weapons and other potentially problematic objects. Many districts allowed students to switch to clear backpacks that make all the content much more visible, but that's no longer a viable solution, say leaders who are hoping to head off the annual rise in behavioral incidents in the final weeks of school.

Students in Flint Community Schools in Michigan are now prohibited from bringing any backpacks to school for at least the rest of the school year. Flint's decision was made in response to nationwide increases in threatening behavior and students carrying "contraband" into their schools, Superintendent Kevelin Jones said last week in a message to the community.

"Backpacks make it easier for students to hide weapons, which can be disassembled and harder to identify or hidden in pockets, inside books or under other items," Jones wrote. "Clear backpacks do not completely fix this issue."

Students in Flint can still bring small purses to carry hygiene products, wallets, keys and phones. They are also allowed to bring clear plastic bags with gym clothes, and lunchboxes "will be allowed within reason." "We take threats against



our school community and weapons brought onto school property very seriously, and parents and scholars should understand there are legal ramifications to both of these actions," Jones added. "We encourage all family members to continue an open dialogue with our scholars about their safety concerns and well-being."

DeSoto ISD in the Dallas, Texas suburbs has implemented a no-backpack policy for 6th-12th graders through the last day of school. Administrators said they want "to ensure that our scholars are positioned to soar through the end of the school year."

"Whether it's Pokémon cards or shaving cream or water balloons, we want to make sure the kids are not bringing items that could be a distraction to the school setting," DeSoto's chief of communications Tiffanie Blackmon told CBS Texas.

Last summer, Knox County Schools in Kentucky banned backpacks, briefcases and duffel bags in its middle and high schools beginning in the 2022-23 school year. "Backpacks, and forms of backpacks, are just one article that

may warrant a safety concern and be considered prohibited by school administrators," the district said at the time.

### **Where clear backpacks are still the solution**

Corpus Christi ISD will allow only clear backpacks in the 2023-24 school year. Students are permitted to carry in their backpacks a pouch—no larger than 5.5 inches by 8.5 inches—to hold personal items.

"We acknowledge that clear backpacks alone will not eliminate safety concerns," the district said. "This is merely one of several steps in the district's comprehensive plan to better ensure student and staff safety."

Cleveland ISD, also in Texas, is requiring clear backpacks after administrators and law enforcement investigated a "serious" threat at the district's middle school last month, Superintendent Stephen W. McCannless said in a video message. He did not provide many details about the threat but said a student has been suspended for several months.

*By Matt Zalaznick*

# What school transportation taught me about being a superintendent

## Any district leader can benefit from becoming more knowledgeable about busing and transportation in their school system

By Dr. James Hanna, Superintendent,  
Rossville Consolidated School District (Ind.)



I've served as the superintendent of the Rossville Consolidated School District in Rossville, Indiana for the past 23 years. Being a small district with a total of 930 students, our administrators serve in multiple capacities, and so I am in the unique position of also serving as the director of transportation. This role has taught me a lot about school district leadership, and I take these lessons with me everywhere.

### Efficiency

Efficiency of operations is critically important across any school district, but when you dive into busing and transportation, you see up close how vital logistics truly are. Fuel, maintenance, routing, driver availability; these are all issues that need to be carefully coordinated, and seemingly minor adjustments can make a huge difference, positive or negative.

Bus routes are a prime example. I plan all our routes using the Routefinder PLUS software from Transfinder, and it has made a huge improvement from an efficiency standpoint. I can adjust instantly whenever it is needed, and I can do so from my laptop remotely and at any time, because it's cloud-based software. I know of colleagues in other districts who are still using pencil and paper, just because they've done it that way for years. That's costly, time consuming, and inefficient.

Districts must have the data available to ensure all students have a "ride" to school. Our mission is to educate students; we can only do this if they are in their seats. Transportation today is more complex than ever, and no matter the district size, you need the right technology to help you maximize efficiency.

### Teamwork

Every component of a school system needs to work together towards the goal of educating students. Bus drivers and transportation staff can sometimes be overlooked in the conversation, but they are so important. Before students sit down in their classrooms, before they

receive any instruction, they need to be safely brought to school.

The superintendent is leading one big team, and everyone on the team plays an important role. Transportation deserves a seat at the table when it comes to the leadership of a district.

We are fortunate that we have enough drivers, and substitute drivers if we need them. The driver shortages that so many districts have experienced recently around the country—and all the issues they created—show how important these roles are.

### Data

The Routefinder PLUS software we use provides us with a wealth of data, which is also so vital to district leadership. Having access to the data is what enables you to adapt quickly when needed, whether that's rerouting a bus due to road construction, providing teachers data to ensure students are on the right bus, or making any other decision in leadership. You need those insights to make the most data-driven decisions.

### Community

When you're responsible for routing, you develop a deep knowledge of your community. If there's a new stop, or an issue that needs to be resolved, I'll go there in person. I know every route and street in our district. You see where your students live, their homes, families and neighborhoods. Safely getting all these kids from their doorsteps to school and back every day is a big challenge, and it can be a real accomplishment no matter the size of the school system.

When you get a boots-on-the-ground view of your community, it reminds you of why we're doing this and what our mission is, and that influences your leadership for the better.

transfinder

## Taking action on distraction

*Schools are wrapping up the year by banning cell phones to cut down on rampant disruptions from students on their devices.*

From student behavior to mental health, the list of contributing factors driving poor student behavior seems to be growing. While the pandemic exacerbated these issues, there's one common conductor that school administrators are split on finding ways to mitigate its risk, and that's cell phones.

With the school year nearly under wraps, leaders are taking lessons learned throughout the year surrounding student behavior and incorporating new policies in the last weeks of school. Most recently, districts have enacted cell phone bans with hopes of mitigating one primary student-centered problem: misbehavior.

In April, Brevard County Public Schools in Florida said it's updating its policies to restrict phones and other technology use in the classroom.

"We're basically giving the control back to the teachers and the principal inside those classrooms so those kids can learn rather than sitting on their phones," Brevard Public Schools Board Member Matt Susin told FOX 35.

Susin added that the district's previous policy simply wasn't being enforced.

"Some schools were. Some schools weren't," he said. "So, the strict enforcement of the policy is the beginning."

Certain cell phone use is allowed, however, such as students who use



their devices for diabetes management and parents who require their child's phone to be turned on for location tracking because that's not where the issue lies, according to Susin.

"We had reports coming out of our schools where they were saying that these kids were sitting there and telling our teachers, 'Hey, I'm watching the World Cup. Leave me alone.' That can't be anymore."

One district revealed its new policies ahead of the school year with hopes to have them finalized this summer. Cleveland County Schools in North Carolina is looking to add a new code of conduct for students

to eliminate all cell phone distractions. It would apply to students of all grades from elementary through high school, WCNC reports.

Under the policy, students would not be allowed to use their phones during the school days. Punishment would vary based on whether the phone was actively being used or if it created a disruption.

Students would also receive punishments on a multiple-offense basis. First offenders would receive up to one day of suspension from school. Further offenses would warrant more serious consequences.

Other districts are having similar issues regulating cell phone use. In Wisconsin, West Allis-West Milwaukee School District has been enforcing a cell phone ban since early April. Administrators say it's a result of increased fights among students. What adds to this issue is the number of students recording these fights on their phones.

The board voted to suspend any student seen recording and sharing fights.

"It's not so much that we're trying to hide fights," Superintendent Marty Lexmond told CBS 58. "Everybody knows we're struggling with fights in school. What we're trying to do is minimize the disruption to the learning environment."

**"We had reports coming out of our schools where they were saying that these kids were sitting there and telling our teachers, 'Hey, I'm watching the World Cup. Leave me alone.'"**

— Brevard Public Schools Board Member Matt Susin

*By Micah Ward*



# What school administrators, nurses and caregivers should know about head lice

Q&A with Dr. Katie Friedman, Board Certified Pediatrician



## What should parents and caregivers know about head lice?

Head lice are tiny insects, about the size of a sesame seed. They feed on blood from the scalp, causing itching and irritation. Lice usually live about 28 days, but they multiply quickly, and the lifecycle can repeat every 3 weeks if left untreated.

In recent years, some lice, called “super lice,” have become genetically resistant to the chemicals found in some treatments, similar to the way in which bacteria develop resistance to antibiotics. Unfortunately, there is no way to know if a child has super lice until traditional treatments fail.

## What are the most common misconceptions about head lice?

First, all head lice are crawlers—they aren’t able to jump, fly, or swim. Despite their lack of athleticism, they can easily spread via direct head-to-head contact. Lice can also move from one host to another by head-to-hand contact and through shared items, such as hats, hair ties, and pillows, but that is much less common.

Another popular myth is that head lice only infest dirty people. The reality is that personal hygiene has nothing to do with head lice infestation.

Finally, many people do not realize they can be proactive. To reduce the chance of lice spreading in classroom situations, teachers and administrators can teach children to avoid close head-to-head contact with other children and to not share hats, scarves, or hair accessories.

You can also encourage using at-home shampoos and sprays that prevent lice, such as Vamousse Lice Defense Daily Shampoo or Lice Repellent Leave-In Spray.

## What are the most effective solutions to head lice?

The best way to stop any head lice infestation is to prevent it from happening in the first place. Here are some helpful tips:

- **Pull hair back.** Evidence suggests girls are slightly more likely to get lice than boys. Keeping hair tied up in braids or buns may reduce the chances of an infestation.

- **Lice-preventing shampoo and spray.** Children can use a daily lice-killing shampoo, like Vamousse Lice Defense, which kills recently contracted lice before detection when used daily for 10-14 days following exposure or treatment. Sprays, like Vamousse’s Lice Repellent Leave-in Spray, also contain essential oils, which create a barrier on hair that lice avoid, further reducing the risk of an infestation.

- **Home remedies.** Add a few drops of certain essential oils (tea tree oil, eucalyptus oil, lavender oil, rosemary oil) to shampoos and conditioners for added protection. You can also mix a few drops with water in a spray bottle and spray hats, jackets, or even directly on children’s heads. Keep these oils out of the reach of small children, as they can be dangerous if ingested.

If an infestation does occur, there are also great products available to kill all types of head lice, including super lice. Vamousse Lice Treatment Mousse is an optimal choice because the convenient mousse formula goes to work within 15 minutes to kill all adult lice and their eggs once hair is fully saturated—tackling the entire infestation cycle—while lice are still in the hair. Vamousse also works on super lice, and while many other lice treatments require more than one application, Vamousse takes care of the entire infestation at one time.

## What time of year should school administrators and nurses be on the lookout?

Head lice can be passed around all year long, but there are certain times of the year when lice are shared between children (and with adults) in overwhelming numbers.

Summer and fall are generally peak seasons, mainly because of summer camps, playdates, and school. The proximity of children together over the summer and at the start of the school year generally increases the chances of lice spreading.

Even though these are the peak seasons, it’s still a good idea to be on the defense throughout the year with preventative measures.

## The end of the spend

*Districts have recently been spending ESSER funds at a rate of more than \$5 billion a month—a pace that can't last until the 2024 deadline.*

That school districts would spend all of their available ESSER funds was, despite the alarming headlines, never in doubt for most K12 administrators. The big questions most superintendents and their teams have always had were a.) whether the funding would be enough, and b.) if they would face constraints beyond their control.

Districts are now spending ESSER money at a rate of \$5 billion a month, a pace that will exhaust the funds by the 2024 deadline, according to data compiled by the Edunomics Lab at Georgetown University. Looking ahead to 2023-24, most district leaders are now setting their final ESSER budgets.

“That makes the next few months particularly high stakes for ESSER,” Edunomics Lab leaders Katherine Silberstein and Marguerite Roza wrote in an analysis for Education Next. “Worth watching: Will districts take advantage of this last opportunity to leverage remaining funds to meet their students’ most pressing needs?”

### Rerouting ESSER funds

The amount of money is unprecedented but so are the learning and social-emotional challenges that only intensified during COVID. With ESSER expiring, many district leaders may now find themselves in the same bind as administrators in Georgia’s Dalton Public Schools.

Like many districts, Dalton used

ESSER funds to hire 35 staffers to help students bounce back academically and social-emotionally but can no longer afford the additions. “Many of those positions are being reduced naturally through attrition such as retirements and resignations,” the district’s school board reported, according to the *Dalton Daily Citizen*. “There are 24 ESSER positions that the school district is absorbing into the general fund since those are teachers, special education teachers and paraprofessionals, psychologists, social workers, counselors and administrators.”

Leaders in the Sun Prairie Area School District in Wisconsin are facing a different hurdle. Leaders there say the state’s legislature has forced public schools to use the final round of ESSER funds to balance their budgets, the *Sun Prairie Star* reported.

“Funding meant for COVID relief is being used to meet general operating expenses,” the district’s director of finance Phil Frei told the Sun Prairie School Board this week. Districts across Wisconsin are in the same situation as the state provided no new public-school funding in either 2021-22 or 2022-23, the *Sun Prairie Star* noted.

Watertown Public Schools in Massachusetts is also having to use ESSER to cover a budget shortfall caused in part by increased costs

of out-of-district special education placements. This forced the district to postpone a universal pre-K program, Superintendent Dede Galdston said, according to the *Watertown News*.

“I would not want to spend ESSER funding knowing we are in a \$1.3 million deficit and not knowing what the future looks like,” Galdston told her school board this week. “It is really not right to start a program we cannot support.”

### A soft landing in San Antonio

San Antonio ISD in Texas faces both a drop in enrollment and a \$40 million budget deficit that administrators intend to patch with ESSER funds. But administrators there have also planned ahead to prevent falling off the fiscal cliff, according to the San Antonio Report.

Last year, the district leveraged ESSER to “create a soft landing post-covid” by reserving \$27 million for its general fund to spend in the years ahead, San Antonio ISD spokeswoman Laura Short told the website.

“Our long-term sustainability plan calls for us building reserves during the three years that we have ESSER and utilizing the reserves in the three years post-ESSER,” Short said.

*By Matt Zalaznick*



# Why students need social studies now more than ever

**Heather Bassett**, Gale District Manager and former social studies educator

**Cynda Wood**, Gale Training Consultant and former social studies educator



## How has the field of social studies education evolved over recent years?

As we know, social studies encompasses much more than just history; it also includes topics such as media and financial literacy, sociology, government, and economics. Social studies education has moved away from memorization, and toward skill building and developing information literacy.

As content standards and pedagogy evolve, the social studies classroom is increasingly being built around inquiry and project-based learning, bringing together a variety of sources and content types for a vibrant, relevant social studies curriculum.

## Why is social studies so relevant and important in K-12 education today?

For many educators, the goal of social studies is to create more informed and active citizens. The curriculum should provide space to examine human nature and build historical and intellectual empathy. Setting aside personal opinions or judgment and seeking out a variety of perspectives is incredibly difficult. But when given chances to practice, students can start to understand the life of another person. Over time, students may be able to transfer that skill to understand the life of another person in their class, across town, or around the globe.

Social studies should also provide students with an opportunity to see themselves represented in the curriculum. All learners develop a sense of identity through knowledge acquisition.

For example, if you have a large student population from Belize, you can go to *Gale In Context: Biography* and filter for content that includes people from Belize. Students are immediately more connected to the history and stories of people like them.

## What issues and challenges are unique to social studies education today?

Requirements in many states squeeze social studies out of the curriculum, and not all states have social studies requirements for graduation. In addition to simply getting the time it deserves in classrooms, another challenge is the tension created when we shift toward understanding diverse perspectives. Whose stories are

we telling? Where do we get those stories? It can be difficult to teach about the complexities of people, culture, and society, but helping students develop critical thinking skills is worth the effort.

## What are some ways to help students to connect history to current issues?

The key is equipping students to think for themselves about these issues once they know the relevant facts and context. To do this, social studies teachers are actively seeking out different points of view. Resources from outside the U.S. and Europe can help broaden students' understanding of topics that affect us all. *Gale In Context: Global Issues* and *Gale In Context: Opposing Viewpoints* are designed to provide diverse perspectives like this.

## What role does content selection play in social studies?

Content is critical for gaining knowledge, but developing source awareness for content is even more important. Students seeking factual overviews choose a reference source. Students seeking to see what people thought at the time find a primary source. Students hoping to understand why a historical topic is still significant to the world today consult news or magazine sources. Constructing narratives in social studies requires a critical mindset about sources in a way that a single-source textbook can't. A variety of sources brought together with intentionality enables well-rounded discussions about societal issues—with the necessary context and relevance.

But it's not just about the content; it has to be used wisely to make the most of instructional time. *Gale In Context: For Educators* makes it possible for teachers to leverage this curriculum-aligned content effectively in their classrooms with pre-built lesson plans and assessments, and it includes digital tools that make learning accessible for all social studies students.

To learn more, go to [gale.com/socialstudies today](https://www.gale.com/socialstudies today)



## Who and what is putting K12 schools at risk?

*A new analysis from one cybersecurity firm breaks down the most prominent criminal organizations, as well as the most common tactics used in ransomware attacks.*



With the education sector now one of the most targeted industries by cyber criminals, it's important for leaders and IT directors to understand exactly what's coming their way. Like most security threats, schools can take steps to mitigate and ultimately prevent ransomware attacks.

Since last quarter, the education industry has seen a 17% increase in ransomware attacks, according to a recent report from cybersecurity firm GuidePoint Security. Across all sectors—mainly education, manufacturing, technology, health care, banking and finance—the organization found a 27% increase in public ransomware victims compared to the first quarter of 2022.

### The “Who”

The number of ransomware organizations targeting the education sector is rather widespread, but one group remains the most “dominant” threat to K12 schools.

According to the report, Vice Society contributed to 27% of publicly reported attacks against education in the first quarter of 2023. This same organization was responsible for disrupting the network of the nation's second-largest school district Los Angeles Unified last fall.

Recent reports revealed that the criminal group stole files containing

contractors' Social Security Numbers. Bleeping Computer reports. The district also admitted that the threat actors were active in its network for over two months.

Vice Society is known for its consistent targeting of healthcare facilities and hospitals, Wired reports. But during the pandemic, the organization and other cybersecurity threat actors pledged not to attack the public health sector, leaving K12 institutions even more vulnerable to such attacks.

Other prominent ransomware organizations known in the education industry include Lockbit, Royal, AlphV, BianLian, Clop, Stormous and Medusa, the report notes.

### The “What”

Cybercriminals have various methods of making their way into school networks, but GuidePoint's analysis reveals that “double extortion” was the most common model of operations. This is where ransomware organizations not only corrupt networks and hosts with encryption files but also exfiltrate the data, as was the case for L.A. Unified. Once that's been done, groups will then “leverage the threat of leaking data to the public to coerce compliance with ransom demands,” the report reads.

Unfortunately, experts predict such attacks will only become more frequent.

“Based on what we've observed during Q1, we assess that more advanced ransomware threat actors will increasingly deploy novel coercive techniques, particularly as the fallout of existing instances generates media coverage and civil lawsuits against affected organizations,” said Lead Analyst Drew Schmitt for GuidePoint Research and Intelligence team (GRIT) in a statement.

“We can make this assessment based on the increased prevalence of these techniques in open-source reporting and internal research, as well as our technical and professional understanding of business risk as it pertains to ransomware events.”

### Mitigating the risk

Earlier this year, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security offered updated guidance to superintendents and their IT teams in its “Protecting Our Future” report.

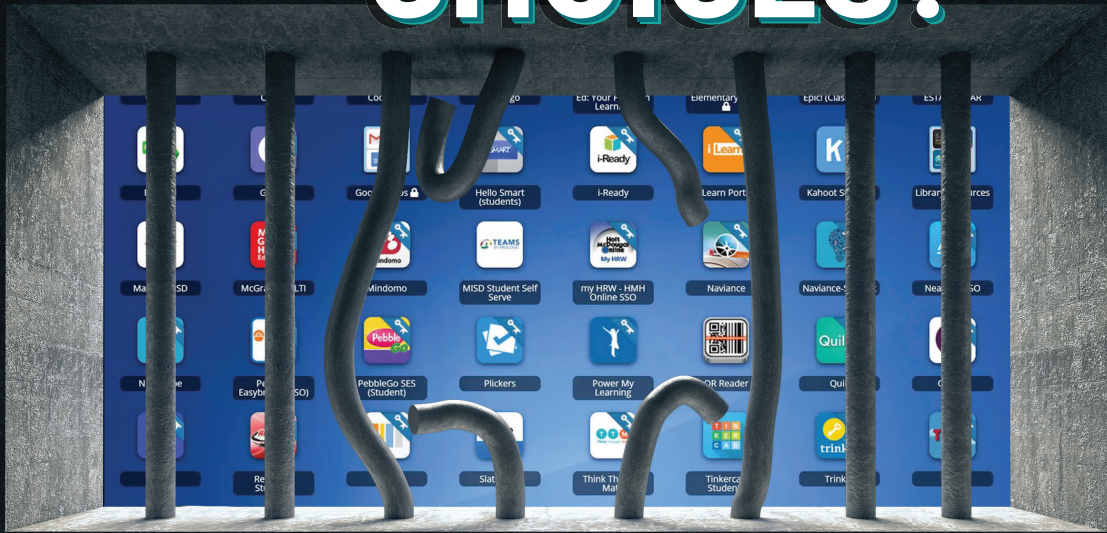
In summary, the report pointed to three key areas education leaders must focus on to prevent cybersecurity threats:

1. Invest in the most impactful security measures.
2. Evaluate and address resource constraints.
3. Prioritize communication and information sharing.

*By Micah Ward*

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# Oklahoma district's rigorous blended learning program grows exponentially

## Union Virtual Learning Academy has been successfully meeting student needs for over 10 years, through its partnership with FlexPoint

For more than 10 years, Oklahoma's Union Public Schools District has relied on FlexPoint to provide the right mix of online and face-to-face instruction for Union Virtual Learning Academy (UVLA), the district's blended learning option for over 800 students in grades 10-12.

### Engaging with students

It all started in 2012 when Union Public Schools district leaders were looking for an innovative way to engage students and meet them where they were. At the time, students were starting to take advantage of online resources to search for information, entertainment, and to socialize with friends. With all of that in mind, district leaders knew they wanted to have virtual components to evolve with the way their students were experiencing the world. Before deciding which learning model worked best for their students, district leadership attended an online learning leadership event hosted by FlexPoint. At the event, they heard from other school and district leaders from across the nation about the successes and challenges they experienced with their online, blended, or hybrid programs.

### Complementary learning model

After discussing best practices with other online learning leaders, UVLA decided the best learning model for their students was blended learning because it combined the best of both worlds—comprehensive digital courses and face-to-face instruction. That way, students supplemented what they were doing in the classroom with online courses, while teachers continued to do what they do best: help their students achieve success.

Once UVLA decided on a blended learning program, their next step was deciding which curriculum provider would be the best fit for their school. After doing research on different providers, FlexPoint really stood out to them.

### Rigorous, standards-aligned curriculum

"Not only was FlexPoint's curriculum aligned to our state standards, but it was also the most engaging and interactive, while still being rigorous and preparing students for college and beyond," said Gart Morris, Executive Director of Instructional Technology with Union Public Schools. "My three children all took online classes

in their junior and senior years of high school, and when they went to college, they received A's because of the level of rigor they experienced with the FlexPoint courses."

UVLA also found that the support they received from the FlexPoint team was what they needed to achieve success. "Launching a new program can be a little nerve racking," said Todd Borland, Executive Director of Information Technology at Union Public Schools. "But, with FlexPoint, we've always been able to call or email someone with questions about issues we're experiencing, and we hear back quickly. They also consistently email us about course updates and new features, so that we can continue to innovate for our students."



### Success and significant growth

After 10 years of successfully teaching students in a blended learning environment, the leadership of UVLA is most proud of the longevity of the program and how it has grown over the years, as well as how all the teachers, staff, and students wholeheartedly embraced this new learning opportunity.

On average, UVLA receives 1,100 full-year course enrollments per year, and since launching, has averaged 800 students each year. To highlight how much the program has grown, they started with close to 75 students enrolled the year the program launched.

Additionally, in the 2021-22 school year, 50% of all seniors in the district took at least one blended course, with the passing rate for all blended learning courses never falling below 93%. "My mantra has always been to help teachers and students be more efficient," said Morris. "By partnering with FlexPoint, we've been able to do just that due to the team's support and high-quality curriculum."

To learn more, go to [FlexPointEducation.com](https://www.flexpointeducation.com)



## Censorship legislation and its grip on K12 education

Education policies aimed at restricting and monitoring classroom discussions, particularly surrounding race and LGBTQ topics, create difficulties for teachers.

BY MICAH WARD

Fewer teachers are entering the field, and for those who are currently in it, “it’s a wonder we have any,” said President of the National Education Association Becky Pringle.

Her statement addressed the burden America’s educators currently face, specifically surrounding the lack of respect they receive and the inadequate pay. However, there are additional external factors that directly impact both K12 schools and higher education.

According to a recent report from the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, education policies aimed to restrict and monitor classroom discussions, particularly surrounding race and LGBTQ topics, most often create difficulties for teachers in K-12. Ashley White, a professor in the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the author of the report, points to four themes representative of current censorship legislation.

The first theme White addresses indicates that current policies intend to erase ethno-racial diversity in America’s schools by prohibiting “divisive concepts” from being discussed in schools and institutions of higher education. “This has the great potential to stall intellectual and social conversations in postsecondary and other settings,” she writes. “This legislation is couched in false narratives regarding critical race theory (CRT).”

Secondly, censorship legislation also works to limit LGBTQ+ diversity. Similar to anti-CRT legislation, she argues, it falsely and disproportionately targets the “rights

of sexually and gender-diverse students and persons,” and it’s been around for decades.

The third prominent theme revealed in censorship legislation is the distortion of narratives via dog whistle language. Fear, White explains, is a method policymakers use to keep teachers in line. “Policymakers, both state and local, intent on curtailing diversity of thought in IHEs and other educational spaces have successfully employed false narratives and whistle-blown language to create a climate of fear and cool the efforts of educators and other educational stakeholders to create equitable learning environments for students through accurate and inclusive teaching practices in schools.”

### Call to action

So what can be done? According to White, the state of education relies on advocacy toward educators from administrators, parents and higher education faculty and staff.

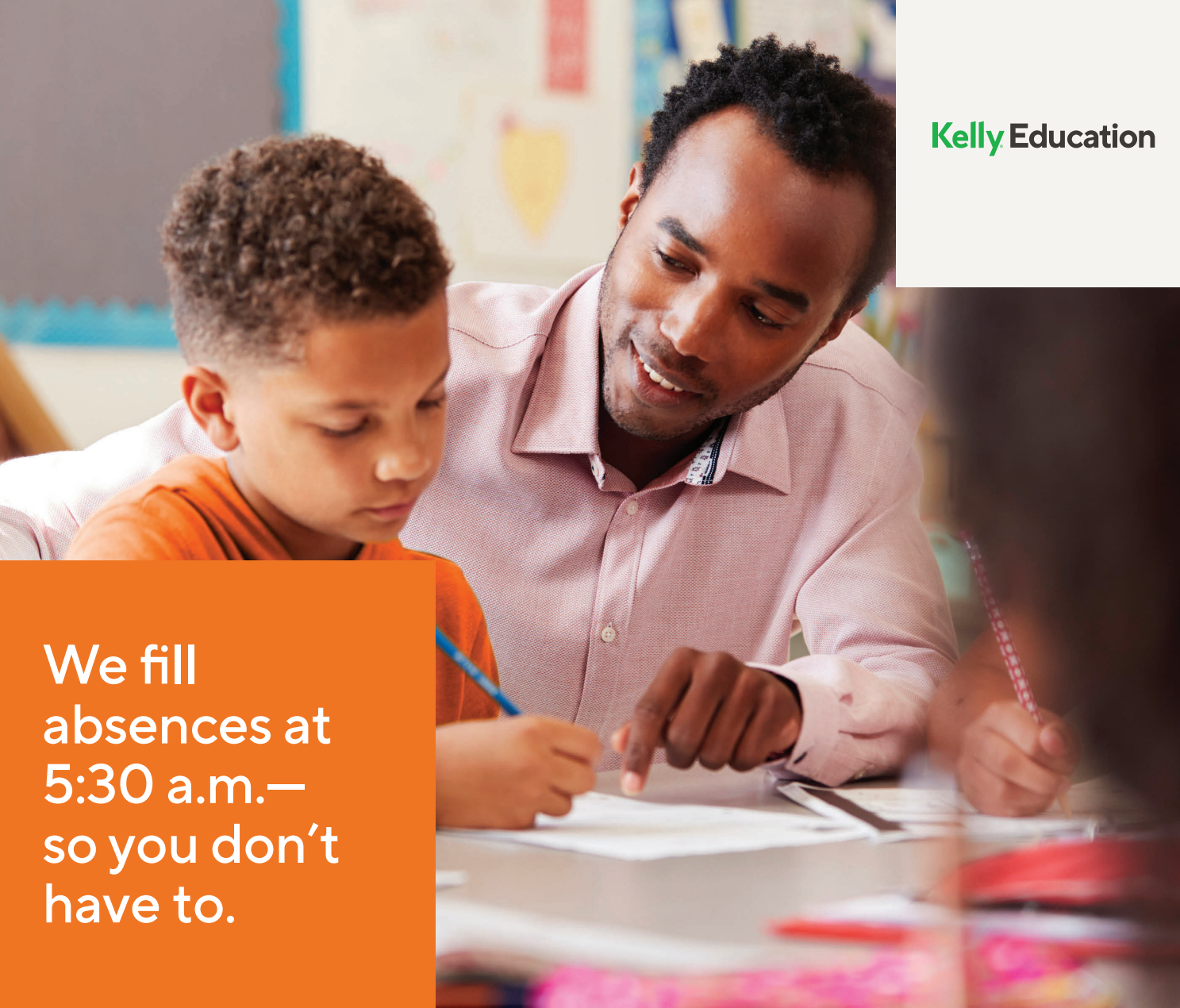
Educators should be allowed a safe space to discuss curricula reflective of their student population. To do so, an inclusive curriculum must be established and maximized and geared toward accuracy and inclusivity.

Teachers need administrative support, White explains. “Advocate for educators’ effective teaching practices and expertise in schools to maintain and enhance a positive school climate,” she writes. Update and maintain district policies for parents, teachers and students to thrive. **DA**

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*Micah Ward is a District Administration staff writer.*





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# More edtech companies embrace ChatGPT to boost student performance

Whether you choose to allow your students to use ChatGPT or not, edtech companies are already using it.

BY MICAH WARD

Whether you're for or against artificial intelligence in the classroom, its arrival is seemingly inevitable. In fact, some might say it's already here. Whether you choose to allow your students to use ChatGPT to learn, edtech companies are already embracing it.

On Monday, the educational support service provider Chegg announced CheggMate, a new GPT-4-powered study aide for students to be released for early access in May.

"It's a tutor in your pocket," CEO Dan Rosensweig told Reuters.

The software will combine GPT-4's advanced AI systems with Chegg's content library to adapt to exactly what students are learning. Users can also input a query in any format, whether it's by written text, a photo, a diagram or a math problem. Students can then ask further questions and receive help on concepts they don't understand in real-time.

"AI provides an incredible opportunity for students to be aided by a digital companion that supports and enhances their learning and helps to prepare them for the future," said Nina Huntemann, chief academic officer of Chegg in a statement. "We are building generative AI into our powerful and proprietary learning tools to support students' active engagement in their learning process."

Other edtech giants have recently joined the generative AI hype train. Brainly, a leading global learning platform, announced earlier this month beta access to its new GPT-4-powered AI functions: "Simplify" and "Expand" an-

swers. According to their announcement, these additions will help enhance student learning in a more dynamic and personalized way.

"The 'Simplify' function uses AI to modify answers to be shorter, straightforward and focused on the main facts. The 'Expand' function lets Learners access more in-depth AI-generated explanations for an existing answer," a news release reads.

Last month, Khan Academy released a small AI pilot for Khanmigo, another tutoring aide powered by GPT-4. Sal Khan, founder and CEO of Khan Academy, recently published a blog post describing his experience with GPT-4. Simply put, he thinks it has massive potential to close the digital divide among students.

Students using Khanmigo can ask the AI tool the same questions they would ask an in-person tutor and it will generate patient, human-like responses. For teachers, it's a timesaver that will allow them to focus more on their students. But there's still room for growth.

"AI makes mistakes," Khan wrote. "Even the newest generation of AI can still make errors in math. AI can still 'hallucinate,' which is the term the industry uses for making stuff up. A lot of work needs to be done."

Others, however, are trying to ensure that AI is used with integrity, including Turnitin's "state-of-the-art" AI writing detector capable of identifying 98% of text written by ChatGPT. But the work is far from over. **DA**

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*Micah Ward is a District Administration staff writer.*



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# The biggest safety obstacle schools face and how to overcome it

Physical security and training are two of the most-needed safety improvements among school leaders, according to a new survey. Yet, there's one major issue that money can't fix.

BY MICAH WARD

To date, there have been 106 incidents of gun violence on school grounds in 2023, according to the “K-12 School Shooting Database.” Whether this is a reflection of school security or gun legislation is up for debate. However, schools still have a part to play to ensure the safety of their students and staff. Yet, there’s one common obstacle the K12 world still needs to overcome: mental health.

Nearly 1 in 3 high school girls in the U.S. have seriously considered attempting suicide and 57% reported feeling “persistently sad or hopeless,” a recent survey from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggests. In contrast, 14% of high school-aged boys said they had considered attempting suicide, up from 13% in 2011.

This teen mental health crisis affects nearly all of a student’s academic experience from performance to behavior. But in recent months, we’ve seen how it’s dramatically impacted schools and students in terms of safety and security. And according to new research, it’s become a substantial safety barrier.

Raptor Technologies, a leading school safety software company, released the results of its annual School Safety Survey in partnership with the National Association of School Resource Officers. The findings help equip district leaders with knowledge of some of the most prominent

student wellness challenges schools face today.

## Here’s a look at the survey’s key findings:

- Respondents agree that early intervention is the most important and effective way to support students. Yet, less than one-fourth feel equipped with the tools and support to tackle safety concerns in their school districts.
- 60% of respondents cite “mental health issues” as the number one school safety obstacle they’re encountering.
- 78% of respondents report student mental health needs have increased since returning to school post-COVID.
- More than 50% believe they aren’t fully equipped to help students with mental health-related needs.

“Recognizing a student in the initial stages of distress empowers schools to reduce that child’s exposure and give them the support they need when they need it,” said Gray Hall, CEO at Raptor Technologies, in a statement.

Additionally, respondents cited physical security and training as their two most-needed safety improvements, as well as reporting the importance of door hardening and emergency communication.

## 10 steps for strengthening school safety and security

Despite growing mental health concerns among teenage

"Recognizing a student in the initial stages of distress empowers schools to reduce that child's exposure and give them the support they need when they need it."

students, schools incorporate security measures today that align with best practices. According to a blog by school safety expert Kenneth Trump, president of the National School Safety and Security Services, school leaders should consider these 10 steps for building safer schools:

1. Avoid "security theater," a.k.a., heavily investing in physical security such as metal detectors and other hardening measures to portray a sense of safety.

2. Focus on strengthening relationships between adults and students.

3. Rapid response to neighborhood/group/gang conflicts.

4. Increase communication and information sharing with the police, probation and community partners (within legal and policy parameters, of course).

5. Regularly conduct security and preparedness assessments.

6. Supervise students, especially in areas with fewer adults.

7. Look into investing in anonymous reporting tools.

8. Strengthen student supports like social, emotional and mental health resources.

9. Engage students in addressing safety concerns and strategies to reduce the number of threats in schools.

10. Participate in anti-violence and gun crime reduction and prevention initiatives within your community. **DA**

*Micah Ward is a District Administration staff writer.*



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## Teachers leaving K12 for the FBI and bartending? It's not the whole staff shortage story

"I'm respected as a professional who is an expert at her job as a bartender. Teachers are not respected as professionals who are experts at their jobs," says one former teacher.

BY MATT ZALAZNICK

Administrators wanting to know who is hiring teachers away from their classrooms can look no further than the FBI. That's right, the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Over the last year, several FBI field offices have posted job openings on LinkedIn for a special agent with an education and teaching background.

In Kansas City, the FBI is offering former teachers \$78,000 a year. "Teachers possess the qualities that the FBI wants in a special agent," Special Agent Karen Smilgis, an FBI recruiter, told KMBC. "Communication, interpersonal skills, problem-solving, organization, empathy, compassion, perseverance, and hard work."

This follows one of the narratives around K12 staff shortages in which burned-out teachers are bolting the profession for more satisfying and lucrative jobs in the private sector. But research in one state may reveal an arguably more concerning outcome.

In Arkansas, the overwhelming majority of teachers who left education at the end of the 2020-21 school year did not secure new jobs.

"The fact that 80% of exiters did not immediately find employment outside of public education suggests they may have left due to factors like job dissatisfaction and working conditions rather than better job opportunities and higher pay," researchers at the University of Arkansas' Office for Education Policy concluded. "Improving these other job conditions may encourage some exiters to return and reduce future turnover."

The small number of teachers who found new positions

quickly went to work in education services, healthcare and retail, the study found.

### Aside from the FBI, where are teachers ending up?


Some teachers are landing in alternative arenas of education, such as small group "micro-schools" and online programs, according to The74. The website profiled a New Hampshire teacher who left public school to run a micro-school from home with the Prenda network of tuition-free, small-group instructional programs. Many parents, moreover, intend to keep their children in these types of learning programs even with all schools reopened for in-person instruction, according to a report by Tyton Partners, the educational consultants.

Teachers are also finding new careers in classroom-adjacent industries such as edtech, curriculum development and publishing, and online and in-person tutoring, the blog We Are Teachers noted in its list of companies that have been eager to hire former educators. Curriculum Associates, Discovery Education, Encyclopaedia Britannica, HMH, Khan Academy, Newsela and Scholastic are among the heavyweights hiring former teachers.

Edtech companies want teachers because they are familiar with the target market and understand some of the challenges educators face when adopting new platforms, particularly when it comes to instructional design, according to Forbes. **DA**

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

A large, stylized white number '8' is centered on a solid red background. The number is composed of two thick, rounded strokes that meet at the top and bottom, creating a central void. The overall composition is minimalist and high-contrast.

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Test the waters. Start with summer camps, afterschool events, and even home activities around scholastic esports, then build up. Including your students on the journey is a great way to facilitate learning and allow students to share their gaming expertise.

#### 2. How do you tie esports into your STEM curriculum?

While esports started out as a way of "playing together," to build community, it has evolved into much more. Schools are helping students learn skills that they could transfer to contexts outside of esports, like coding, graphic design, broadcasting, marketing, and much more.

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Create the gaming environment tailored to your school's requirements. Turning classrooms into flexible learning spaces will require a reliable, multigig network that delivers A+ performance.

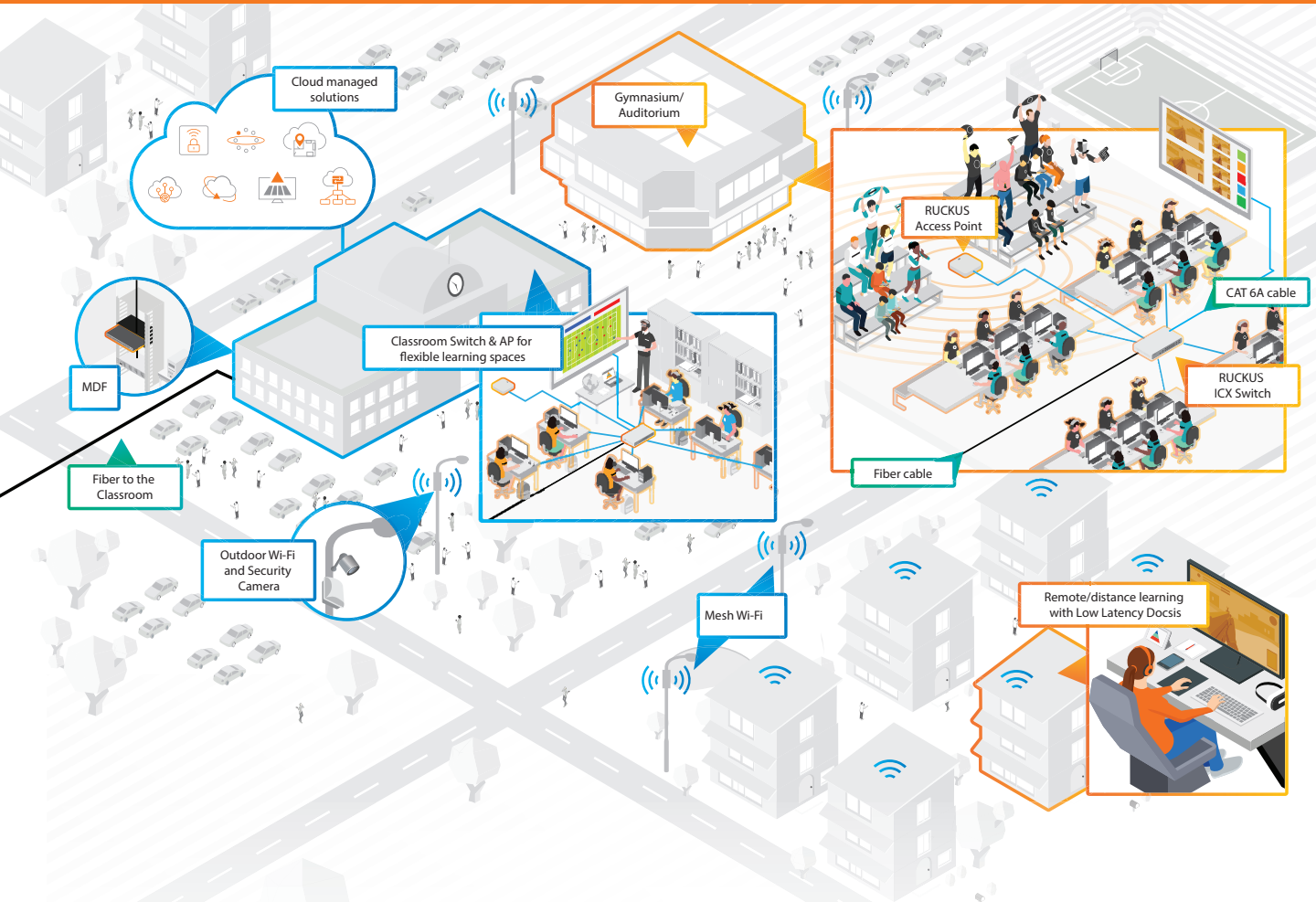
#### 4. Is your school network esports ready?

The best network is one where the user experience for the user is seamless. Some games, like multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA), require a stable wired internet connection, while innovations like Wi-Fi 6E can support all kinds of games and handheld devices.

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# 5 districts share their most prized edtech tools

These five leaders shared with *District Administration* their most valuable edtech tools and why they work so well for their students and staff. To no surprise, it all comes down to effectiveness and ease of access.

BY MICAH WARD

Since the height of the pandemic, education technology has proven itself instrumental to the academic success of K12 students. Schools continue to rely on its use to help students bounce back from pandemic-related learning loss, career development and even virtual field trips. And for these five leaders, edtech has been crucial for their district's and school's success.

For many districts, the pandemic came as a wake-up call urging leaders to get up to speed in the edtech sense. According to David Hoffert, superintendent of Warsaw Community Schools, his community was ready.

“WCS has been a leader in instructional technology and was an early adapter to 1:1 technology,” he says. “When the pandemic hit, we were prepared with devices and basic instructional practices.”

What did come as a shock was the depth needed to adapt to the pandemic.

“The lessons learned pushed us out of our comfort zone and helped us create a model for post-pandemic instructional practices,” he explains. “Our movement—and continual push—is to create a synchronous learning environment when using technology. Students crave personal interaction and not a pre-recorded lesson. Collaborative

tools for new forms of communication with students, parents and the community have become a must!”

This frame of mind is also shared by Josh Carter, principal of Science Hill High School of Johnson City Schools in Tennessee, who took measures to ensure his school was utilizing technology before COVID-19.

“Prior to the pandemic, we had already made several important moves toward integration of educational technology,” he says. “We had been one-to-one for a couple of years. Our students have Chromebooks and our teachers were using Canvas and several other ed tools.”

However, he notes that the pandemic elevated the school’s use of these tools. It allowed all of his teachers to become fully immersed in Canvas, and now edtech is here to stay.

“That immersion has continued, and all of our classes have a robust presence on Canvas,” he says. “As far as other tech tools, our staff is much more likely to try new things post-pandemic. Most of our classrooms use technology to enhance their lessons on a daily basis.”

As K12 school districts continue to embrace innovative edtech tools, District Administration sought to understand which solutions have proven most successful for some of the most impactful leaders in education. And to no surprise, Canvas, VR simulations and Google products seem to dominate the education sphere.

Lenon Harvey, director of information services at Putnam County School District, which is led by Florida’s 2023 Superintendent of the Year Richard Surrency, says tools like GoGuardian, Clever, Canvas, GoogleWorkspace, Renaissance Learning Products, Savvas and McGraw Hill are among the tools that have had “a significant impact” on his district’s students and staff. What sets these platforms apart, he notes, is their efficiency, personalized learning experiences, collaboration and access to digital resources.

“We had a deliberate process for incorporating new edtech tools into our teaching and learning practices that ensures they are effective and safe for our students,” Harvey says. “Our IT department has recently developed a Technology and Infrastructure for Digital Education (TIDE) plan, which includes Innovation Navigators responsible for vetting the efficacy of new programs before they are implemented in our district. This ensures that all tools we adopt are thoroughly evaluated and meet our high standards for effectiveness, data privacy and security.”

He adds that they also utilize coaches within their “Teaching and Learning Department,” who evaluate the efficacy of curriculum programs before they’re adopted to ensure all aspects of teaching and learning are impactful.

Similarly, Carter says tools like Nearpod, IXL and Hapara are widely used by his teachers, which he says have profoundly impacted how teachers deliver content, student engagement and closing learning gaps.

To be a school that leverages edtech to enhance learning engagement, he says they must be innovative yet cau-

tious to ensure their interventions are effective.

“Six years ago, our district started a Teacher Leader program for educational technology,” Carter says. “Each cohort participates in a year-long program that trains them to be technology leaders in their building. When a teacher at Science Hill wants to learn about a new tool, the teacher leaders are here to help. They provide professional development sessions as well as one-on-one assistance. These teacher leaders, along with our district supervisor of educational technology, vet potential ed tools regularly.”

Don Killingbeck, superintendent at Hemlock Public Schools in Michigan, has long known the importance of technology in the classroom, which proved instrumental in their transition to remote and blending learning during the pandemic.

Since then, his district has added several platforms to its “edtech toolbelt,” such as Google Classroom, Paper, NWEA, Skyward, Kami, GoGuardian, Edgenuity, IXL and SAM Labs.

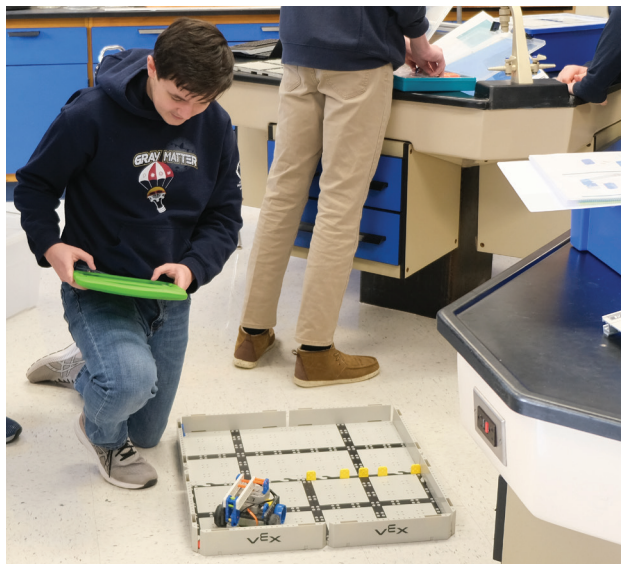
“Overall, these tools can be impactful for students and staff by providing greater access to resources, promoting personalized learning and improving communication and collaboration between teachers and students,” Killingbeck says.

“For the most part, we believe that technology tools should serve the purposes of either improving instruction or simplifying processes to make either or both the student and staff experience better,” he adds. “We believe that the



Students at Hemlock Middle School in STEAM Class learning how to record and edit their very own podcasts.

## 5 districts share their most prized edtech tools



Sixth-graders at Washington STEM Academy in Warsaw Community Schools using Google Earth to find a location for their inclusive playground park as part of their project-based learning; students at Hemlock High School in science class learn how to code and program mini robots.

best ideas come from staff in the field and try to harvest their ideas and implement them in a variety of ways.”

Fidelity, intuitiveness and ease of access for students, teachers and parents are some of the primary necessities of a successful edtech tool, WCS Superintendent Hoffert says. His district’s post-pandemic response is to focus on what works and what doesn’t.

“Too much of everything is nothing and unrealistic to support appropriately,” he says.

Tools like Google Classroom, Google Suite, SeeSaw, Canvas, Aptegy and ParentSquare have become some of the district’s most valuable solutions.

“Google has become a ‘go to’ in many facets of life and there is a comfort with parents along with ease of integration,” he notes. In addition, they’ve been intentional when it comes to relying on data and feedback to make such decisions.

“As a district of roughly 7000 students and 500 certified teachers, it is important that our technology department can support the devices and programs,” he says. “Through the feedback and continual evaluation, our teams are able to provide implementation and ongoing support of the recognized technological devices and district-approved programs.” Alongside the explosion of education technology exists a need to support students as they prepare for a career after graduation. Jonathan

Prince, superintendent of St. Lucie Public Schools in Florida, said the goal is to mix the two ideas using virtual reality.

SLPS leverages a variety of simulations ranging from driver’s ed to welding. By using VR, students can gain real-world experience without the fear of seriously injuring

themselves or others.

“These are very inexpensive tools to teach kids, particularly in career and technical education, how to use a welder and how to weld materials,” Prince says. “We have a lot of internships in our district with local industries, but the bottom line is a lot of times before those internships start, the kids are ready to go because of the technology they’re afforded in the classroom with some of these simulations.”

### Edtech in 2023-24

As this school year soon comes to a close, district leaders have already begun preparations for 2023-24. If schools learned anything from the pandemic, it’s that we shouldn’t return to normal. And according to these leaders, they don’t intend to.

“It’s true that the edtech industry will continue to evolve and change in the coming years, and there will likely be winners and losers,” says Killingbeck. “The pandemic has accelerated the adoption of technology in education, and many schools and districts have had to quickly implement new solutions to support remote and hybrid learning. As we move forward, it will be important for districts and solution providers to continue to focus on providing effective and impactful solutions that meet the needs of students and teachers. This may require innovation, collaboration and a willingness to adapt to changing circumstances. Ultimately, the success of edtech solutions will depend on their ability to support student learning and achievement.” DA

*Micah Ward is a District Administration staff writer.*



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# Leaders sound off on their top 7 challenges

Mental health and staff shortages are some of the issues that stand in the way of K12 student achievement.



Funding the future: Long-term financial stability is the biggest challenge that Pottstown Public Schools faces, says Superintendent Stephen Rodriguez (right).

Neither test scores nor grades have dominated the conversations that *District Administration* has had with superintendents and principals about the biggest education challenges in 2023.

Rather, leaders are focusing on issues such as mental health and staff shortages that stand in the way of student achievement.

“As a result of having few resources and the lowest-paid professional staff in the county, our students have not performed to their academic potential and some even suffer from self-esteem issues,” says Stephen Rodriguez, superintendent of the Pottstown School District in Pennsylvania.

Leaders are also priming their teams to tackle issues from inadequate funding to technology. Here’s a rundown of the top seven education challenges:

## Beating the biggest education challenges



Erick Pruitt

### 1. Supporting mental health and student safety

A concerning number of students experimenting with recreational drugs and others bringing weapons to schools are two signs of how the national youth mental health crisis is playing out in the Ankeny Community School District north of Des Moines, Iowa, Superintendent Erick Pruitt says.

In response, Pruitt and his team are working to ensure students are involved in the arts, athletics or other extracurricular activities. The district is trying to educate parents about the mental health resources available at school and in the community. He is also looking at how to better

utilize data around students who need more support.

“We also want to ensure parents are aware of how to keep kids safe at home and at school,” Pruitt continues. “We see what’s happening around us, and we want to make sure our facilities and classrooms are safe, and that our staff have the resources they need to react when issues arise.”

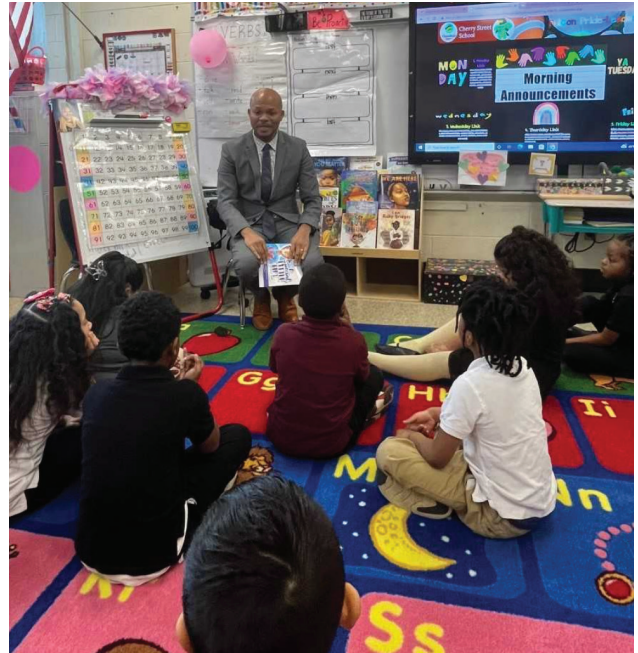
Bridgeton Public Schools in New Jersey now screens every student multiple times a year to track their social-emotional health as proficient, an emerging concern or at risk, Superintendent Keith Miles says. Teachers in Bridgeton have infused SEL lessons across all grades in health, physical education and social studies.

“While we provide all students SEL lessons across all grades, we have additional school counselors, SEL specialists, crisis counselors and clinical practitioners on hand to follow up with at-risk students with more frequent individual and group therapy sessions,” says Miles, who is leaving Bridgeton to become superintendent of the School District of Lancaster in Pennsylvania this summer.

For Superintendent Nyah Hamlett, supporting students’ mental health at Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools in North Carolina means centering student voice throughout her district’s operations. This helps students develop a sense of connection to their schools and educators. “They can be fierce and fearless about telling us what they want and when we’re focused on the wrong things,” Hamlett said.

### 2. Tackling teacher shortages

The shortage of classroom teachers and aspiring leaders is like nothing that Principal Melissa Shindel has ever seen. “We had never started school year without a full staff,” says Shindel, principal of Glenwood Middle School



Bridgeton Public Schools screens all students for social-emotional health throughout the year, says former superintendent Keith Miles, who is moving to a district in Pennsylvania this summer.



Melissa Shindel

in Maryland’s Howard County Public School System. “This is the second year in a row that’s happened. We’ll be in a real crisis if we can’t figure out how to better grows kids in college and attract them to this field.”

A colleague of Shindel’s described the situation as “emotional whiplash.” The same teachers who were hailed as heroes during remote learning in the darkest days of the pandemic are now being vilified over curriculum and other issues.

In Pottstown, Rodriguez says the “competition is fierce.” His district fills positions but often loses teachers to more affluent districts. His district has been forced to increase class sizes and “put other teachers on permanent overload schedules.”

“We have had multiple positions open throughout the entire school year, and some buildings have not been fully staffed,” Rodriguez says. “Our teachers who show up every day for students end up getting almost no break because they are covering classrooms that have no teachers.”

Bridgeton Public Schools has experienced unprecedented shortages in math, science, special education and bilingual instruction, Miles says. Teachers and support staff have had to fill vacancies while the district has contracted with a company that provides virtual teachers to supplement the instruction provided by substitutes. “We

# Leaders sound off on the top 7 challenges

have targeted students in courses with substitute teachers with one-to-one in-person and virtual tutors,” Miles says.

## 3. Sustaining success



**Stephen Rodriguez**

The Pottstown School District has been a “highly underfunded entity for several decades,” Rodriguez says. As the community’s tax base has slipped, the district has struggled to pay competitive salaries to teachers, particularly in special education.

The district’s No. 1 education challenge? Support in achieving financial security for the future. “Our biggest concern is in sustaining the excellent growth we started this year,” Rodriguez explains. “With more resources, we have been able to make a real difference for students and the community. Parents and other communities have noticed, but being able to continue on this path will require appropriate and fair funding, which is still a question mark for future years.”

Among the biggest education challenges for a high-performing district such as Ankeny is driving student achievement higher, says Pruitt. Some 85% of the district’s students are proficient in English and about 70% have hit the mark in math.

“We’re asking what is our compelling ‘why’ around how we push for continuous improvement,” Pruitt says. “What’s our message moving forward in a district that does so well in serving kids from multiple backgrounds?”

## 4. COVID relief crunch

Sustaining success will be further complicated by the looming ESSER deadline that will put pressure on district leaders to make shrewd spending decisions, says Carl Dolente, superintendent of the Cumberland Regional School District in New Jersey.

“Many of the programs, positions, and technology will be hanging in the balance,” Dolente points out. “Sustaining these important and much-needed improvements we were able to make over the past three years will take a great deal of creative budgeting and resourcefulness.”



**Dana Bedden**

## 5. Holding assessments accountable

Superintendent Dana Bedden of the Centennial School District near Philadelphia urged Congress to change the current punitive nature of standardized testing and state accountability systems during a recent 100 Superintendent March to Congress (where he was



**Karla Loria**

accompanied by *District Administration*). “Let’s make the system about spotlighting opportunities rather than a hammer for punishment,” Bedden said.

Today’s school accountability systems are used “as a hammer against districts,” added Karla Loria, superintendent of the Adams 14 School District near Denver, during the U.S. Capitol visit. She noted that most assessments do not account for the whole student experience, such as race, background, poverty levels, disability and mobility, English-language learning and trauma.

Loria pointed out that every school and district monitored under Colorado’s accountability system is rural, poor or has high populations of English learners. She added that her district is trying to “change the narrative” by testing multilingual learners in their native languages and in English. And these students are showing growth.

## 6. Updating aging buildings

Outdated facilities have a direct impact on the quality of the education schools districts can provide, particularly when it comes to preparing students for their futures in higher education and the workforce, says Miles at Bridgeton Public Schools



**Keith Miles**

Miles listed maintaining aging facilities and developing new buildings to accommodate population growth, particularly in grades 6-12, as his biggest education challenges.

New Jersey’s School Development Authority is currently helping the district plan a new middle school and is also providing funds for a high school expansion that includes a new gym, a three-story classroom addition, a bigger cafeteria, and additional parking and office space.

## 7. Distracting devices

During lockdown and remote learning, students’ mobile devices provided a critical connection to the outside world. Post-pandemic, those digital lifelines have become a major learning obstacle, says Dolente of the Cumberland Regional School District.

“Cellphones have become a major distraction in classrooms,” Dolente notes. “We are currently exploring creative ways to detach our students from their personal devices, which they were conditioned to utilize as their only means of communication, education and entertainment for almost two years.” DA

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



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# LESSONS IN SUCCESS

Two things to know about promoting student success: Classroom relationships work; one-size-fits-all approaches don't.



Superintendent Carl Dolente (center, in costume) is focused on student success post-graduation, in colleges and careers.

BY MATT ZALAZNICK

Superintendent Carl Dolente knows two important things about promoting student success: Classroom relationships work and one-size-fits-all cookie-cutter approaches don't. This is why the motto of the Cumberland Regional School District that he leads is "Creating connections to empower every student to be successful and fulfill their dreams."

"Relationships within the classroom are essential to optimize student success on every level," Dolente says. "When students feel connected to their teachers, administrators, counselors, and school community as a whole, they thrive and flourish both academically and emotionally."

The current student success priority in Dolente's New Jersey district centers on college and career preparation. The district operates an early college high school and seven

different CTE academies that have most recently expanded into electrical and HVAC training. "We teach the importance of individuality, diversity, and being comfortable with who you are," Dolente adds. "For students to realize their full potential, a variety of pathways must be available to them."

## Day-to-day student success

One of the biggest shifts in how K12 leaders approach student success is most evident in the evolving role of school counselors, who once focused mainly on getting the most at-risk students on track and helping graduating seniors get into college. "We haven't shifted away from risk, we've shifted risk to include prevention," says Mary Walsh, executive director of Boston College's Center for Thriving Children, which recently released National Guidelines for

Integrated Student Support. “We’ve shifted from a focus just on academics to include other aspects of childhood and adolescence.”

A key component of this big change is a commitment among K12 educators to expand opportunities for students, particularly those from socioeconomically deprived areas who have been under-resourced. Another shift is identifying each individual student’s strengths and needs rather than lumping kids together based on academics or other factors, Walsh adds.

The guidelines are based, in part, on successful interventions developed by K12 leaders across the U.S. education system. “One of the most important things we learned is that the most effective approaches are built into the day-to-day operations of a school,” says Joan Wasser Gish, the Center for Thriving Children’s director of systemic impact who led development of the guidelines. “Educators are reviewing each and every student comprehensively and creating a plan that not only addresses a student’s needs but is about cultivating strengths and opportunities.”

The student success guidelines encourage district leaders to take stock of their current student support programs, build consensus around enhancing those programs and develop a budget to fund the changes. These steps should also include revamping staff roles and responsibilities to fortify a system of integrated student support. Finally, districts should also partner with community organizations to augment student success services and track data to determine which enrichment and intervention programs are most effective, Gish explains.

“We’re providing a roadmap of all the current practices that can be brought into alignment to drive the right resources to the right child at the right time,” Gish concludes.

### **Are you overlooking the arts?**

The arts—from multimedia to music to theater—should be a central component of any district’s student success strategy, says Mary Dell’Erba, the assistant director of the Arts Education Partnership.

While students need support in developing their artistic skills, the arts can also be put into service of learning in math, English, science and other core subjects. Countless research has proven that students who are engaged in the arts perform better in academics, civic engagement and workforce outcomes, Dell’Erba points out.

The arts teach young people to process and express their emotions, to express what they’re going through and help them explore their own identities. When students take on a role in a drama or a musical, for example, it gives them an opportunity to step into another person’s perspective. Dance, which is often wordless, can actually help students develop their ability to communicate. These experiences can be the “hook” that keeps students engaged in other content areas, she says.

“For a lot of young people, what they’re doing in their

art rooms is why they want to go to school,” Dell’Erba adds. “We should be making sure young people have a space where they feel safe to express themselves to try new things and to learn new skills that will serve them as artists and as people who live in a community.”

Administrators can also guide all of their teachers in integrating arts into subjects such as math, science and history. Music is a perfect match for educators who want to use the principles of rhythm to teach math concepts. Dance can support literacy by helping students communicate certain ideas even before they have the right words. “Arts education *is* education—it’s not something extra,” she says. “Embedding arts into other subjects advances learning in both areas.”

### **How about homework?**

Here’s another area of student success where there is no “one-size-fits-all” answer when it comes how much homework teachers should assign. There are some guidelines based on a student’s age and some other factors, says Harris Cooper, a Duke University professor emeritus who has researched homework extensively.

“Homework goes wrong when too much is assigned,” Cooper says. “It can also go wrong if parents don’t understand the objective of the assignments.”

Homework for younger children should be short and simple, lead to success, and show that things they enjoy doing at home are connected to what they’re learning at school. Communication is particularly important in the early grades so everyone is on the same page about the purpose of homework, how long it should take and when it should be completed.

As kids get older, particularly in high school, homework should guide them in integrating multiple subjects while also teaching skills like time management that help prepare college-bound students for the independent study demands of higher education. When it comes to workload for students in middle and high school, Cooper does encourage administrators to bring teachers of different subjects together to ensure students aren’t being assigned too much homework.

The type and scope of homework should be based on the stage of a student’s learning. For example, homework in a Spanish 1 class may feature heavy practice and repetition while higher-level science or history classes should require students to use inquiry, creativity and other cross-disciplinary skills to complete their assignments.

“Teachers and administrators should also be aware of the families that their school servicing,” Cooper adds. “There are differences in the demands that students have at home and differences in parental attitudes. It’s important to recognize whom you’re serving and remain in communication about what you’re doing and why.” **DA**

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

## Stay in your lane? 4 reasons educators shouldn't be so stubborn

Staying in your lane in education often perpetuates inequities and limits student opportunities.

BY MATTHEW X. JOSEPH

The phrase “stay in your lane” is often used to tell someone to stick to their area of expertise and not interfere in other people’s business. In education, this phrase often tells teachers to focus solely on teaching their subject and not get involved in other aspects of their students’ lives. However, this phrase is restrictive for teachers for several reasons:

1. It creates a narrow view of education: Education is about teaching subject matter and preparing students for the world beyond the classroom. This includes teaching them life skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and communication. Unfortunately, teachers that are encouraged to “stay in your lane” may focus solely on teaching their subject matter without considering how it fits into the broader picture of a student’s education.

2. Teachers are not just subject matter experts: While teachers are experts in their subject matter, they are also responsible for many other aspects of their students’ lives, including their social and emotional well-being. Teachers are often the first line of defense for identifying and addressing issues such as mental health concerns, learning disabilities, and social problems. By telling teachers to “stay in your lane,” we limit their ability to address these issues and support their students.

3. It discourages collaboration: Teaching is not a solitary activity, and

teachers often need to collaborate with colleagues, administrators, and other professionals to provide the best possible education for their students. By telling teachers to “stay in your lane,” we are discouraging collaboration and limiting the opportunities for teachers to learn from each other and improve their practice.

4. It ignores that teachers are not just educators but also advocates for their students. They often speak up on behalf of students’ needs and rights. By telling teachers to “stay in your lane,” we limit their ability to support their students and make a difference in their lives.

### A road to inequity

In education, “status quo” refers to the existing or current state of affairs or conditions in a particular educational system or institution. When I hear “Stay in your lane,” I hear “This is how we have always done it” or “Don’t rock the boat.”

But staying in your lane in education often perpetuates inequities and limits student opportunities. Therefore, efforts to challenge and change the status quo often aim to promote more equitable and inclusive educational practices.

Staying in your lane often includes:

- Outdated teaching methods.
- Limited access to resources and technology.
- An emphasis on standardized testing.

While many people argue that this system has worked in the past, there are several reasons why the status quo is bad for education and why it needs to change to better serve students in the 21st century.

### One-size-fits-all does not work

The one-size-fits-all approach to teaching fails to account for students’ individual needs and learning styles. Some students may excel in a traditional classroom setting, while others may require more individualized attention or a different approach to learning. The education system may be leaving many students behind by failing to account for these differences. This is what happens when you stay in your lane.

Encouraging educators to “Stay in your lane” because “We have always done it that way” is detrimental for students because it limits creativity and critical thinking, fails to engage students, hinders learning by limiting access to technology and resources, and takes a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching.

To create a better education system, we need to disrupt and embrace new teaching methods, provide access to technology and resources, and focus on meeting the individual needs of all students. This will encourage students not to memorize information and regurgitate it on a test but rather learn how to think critically and apply what they have learned to solve problems in the real world. **DA**

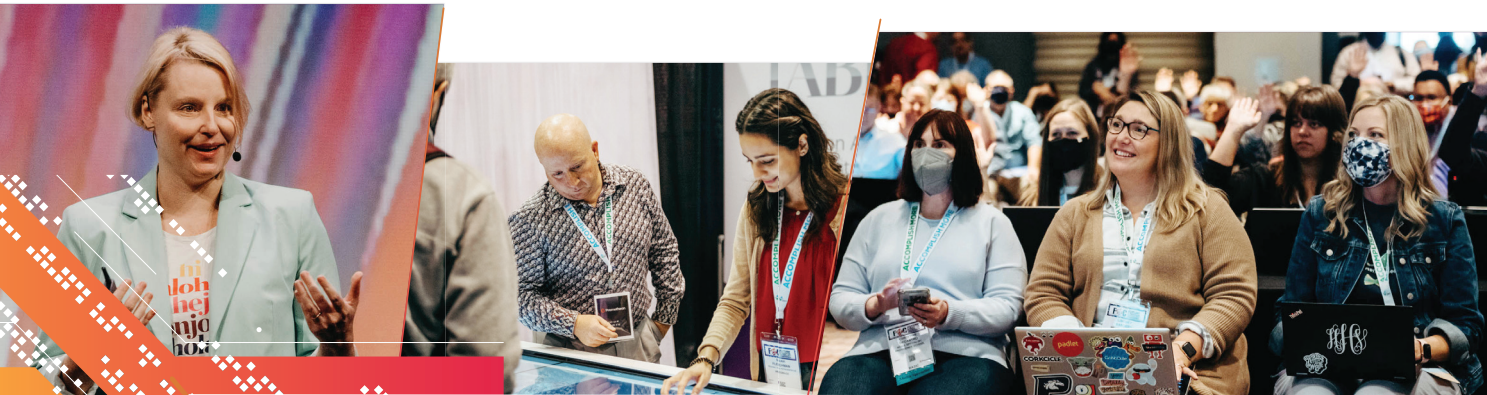


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## Show me the reading science: An expert explains how to get it right

We need clarity of practices that will enable the enactment of the science of reading in classrooms across America every day for every child.

BY ELIZABETH BASSFORD

Whether you are in your preservice years, well into your tenure, or a veteran like me, we are poised for yet another seismic shift in practices around reading instruction. It will take time, patience, and selflessness—the heart of what defines an educator—because this is very hard work.

Many of us are or will soon be immersed in the study of the science of reading—what the latest research says works for helping our children evolve from emergent to extraordinary readers. It is a time of great learning for us all, but theory will only get us halfway home. We need clarity of practices that will enable the enactment of that science in classrooms across America every day for every child.

### D. Ray Reutzel's perspective

In the spirit of “look back to move forward,” I spent some quality time about four years ago with D. Ray Reutzel, a titan of academic research. Ray can turn a casual conversation into a master class on the history of reading. We met before Emily Hanford's brilliant journalism shook America awake, before the science of reading became a movement. After recounting some of the wrong turns in our pedagogy, Ray said, “Of course, all of this could have been avoided if every educator at every level would simply learn to de-

mand—show me the science.” Ray's insightful whitepaper, “Putting the Science of Reading to Work,” is the story of how we got here, and how we can get it right this time. It will help us move past various interpretations of the “how” and stay focused on the “why”—the proof.

He reminds us that science guides us beyond foundational skills and informs both theory and teacher moves. The science of reading is based on empirical research studies that describe the underlying processes of how children become proficient readers and how to effectively teach humans to read.

### What doesn't work

Let's take the painful underperformance of Reading First, our last foray into sweeping explicit instruction as a nation. Despite the deluge of dollars, high-integrity training channels, and the best scientifically research-based reading research available to us at the time, we were not successful in realizing the dream of getting all children reading by Grade 3:

Well into Reading First, evaluations concluded that there had been “no consistent pattern of effects over time in the impact estimates for reading instruction in grade one or in reading comprehension in any grade.”<sup>1</sup> The fourth graders who took the NAEP Reading assessment in

2009 had been three years old when Reading First began to be implemented. Consequently, they should have benefited from the program in every grade, from kindergarten through Grade 4.

Nevertheless, 67% of them scored below the proficient level in reading.<sup>2</sup> This and other evidence led to the conclusion that there was “almost no improvement in student performance” during Reading First.<sup>3</sup>

How could that be? And how can we not waste our moment and our momentum this time? How will we not recreate the flaws of the past?

### Getting reading right this time

Many agree that these findings are at least partly due to how we focused solely on the code and ignored the rich world of language comprehension.

This time let's make space for high engagement, wonder, the development of a positive reading identity, and the “honoring of the young bilingual mind.” We can say we were triumphant when our children read broadly, with pleasure and purpose, for deep transferable knowledge of the world and themselves. **DA**



*Elizabeth Bassford is vice president of content and implementation at Curriculum Associates, with a 43-year*

*career in teaching, research, and development. She consults with districts and state departments nationally, guiding impactful initiatives with an emphasis on the transformative power of data, cutting-edge science, and high standards. She holds a B.A. in education from New York University and an M.S. in education from Fordham University.*



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