

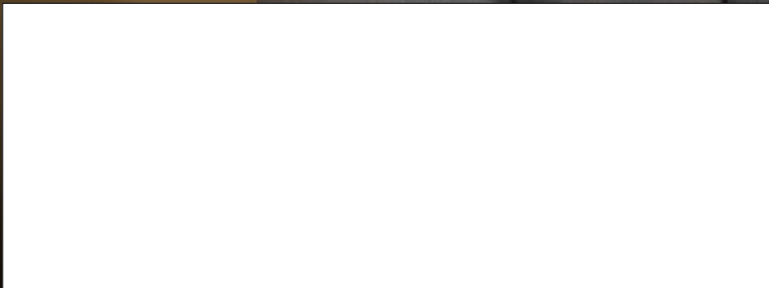
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January/February 2024

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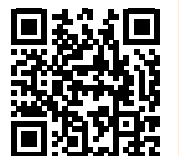
# 2024 SUPERINTENDENT OF THE YEAR Dr. Alex Marrero



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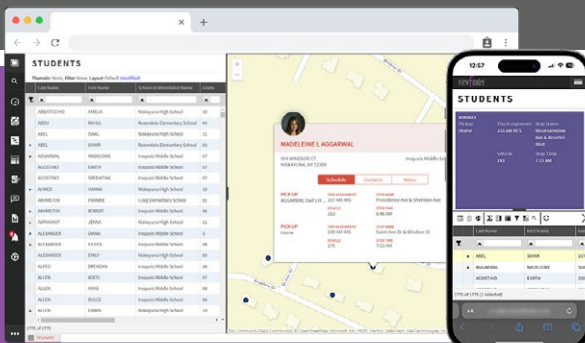
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**FIRST TAKE**



# An Exciting Year Awaits

As we close out the first half of the 2023-24 school year, it's almost overwhelming to reflect on the accomplishments, challenges and innovations that have shaped the K12 educational landscape. The district mindset has been at the forefront of your work, driving us toward a future that sees all students thriving and succeeding.

Over the past several months, we've witnessed remarkable determination and achievements. Your efforts have most certainly not gone unnoticed. It's for that reason that *District Administration* and the District Administration Leadership Institute have brought back the Awards of Distinction to acknowledge and celebrate your many achievements. In this issue, we are proud to showcase those finalists and winners who made their indelible mark on their districts and on K12 education in general and who, we are confident, will continue to work tirelessly to empower both teachers and students to excel.

Educators are the backbone of our communities, and their dedication, passion and fearlessness have a profound impact not just on our children, but on all of us. They are warriors and they are angels, and they are the CEOs of the most important organizations in the country.

As we kick off the new year, it's my pleasure to congratulate all of you and wish you the very best as you continue your journeys. We are there with you and cheering you on.

Lori Capullo  
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

“What we’re attempting to do through our content and experiences is show students what they’re learning is going to be significantly important to them.”

— PRINCIPAL SCOTT GENGLER,  
WAYZATA HIGH SCHOOL,  
MINNEAPOLIS

“I’m a firm believer that if there’s one skill our kids need to graduate with, it’s [news and media literacy]. I can’t stress the importance of that enough. I think every school district in the country needs to do something similar.”

—SUPERINTENDENT DR. SHERI CAMHI,  
BALDWIN UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT,  
NEW YORK

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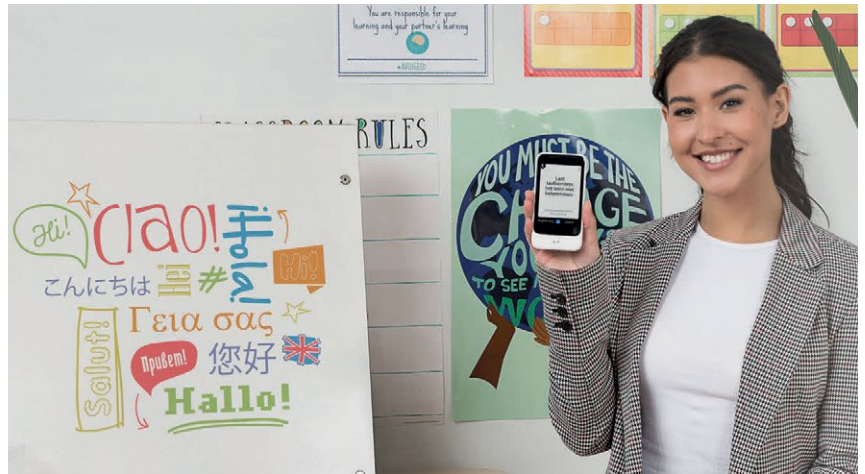
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# Pocketalk Is Changing Education Through AI



Across the country, multilingual learners (MLL) and English language learners (ELL) students sit in their classrooms willing and ready to learn, but are unable to learn to their full potential without the help of language interpreter. As resources for these students continue to diminish, Pocketalk, an AI-powered translation device translating over 84+ languages, fills in the much noticed gap. The 2023 recipient of the Best Communication Solutions at the EDTech Cool Tool Award, and Tech & Learning Best of Show 2023 for Best Education Tools, Pocketalk is a proven aid to navigate in and out of the classroom to better these students and teachers lives alike.

**Pocketalk, an AI-powered translation device translating over 84+ languages**

**Pocketalk is a handheld translation device** powered by artificial intelligence that provides convenient and efficient two-way communication between individuals speaking different languages that reflects natural dialogue. Pocketalk is the first ever HIPAA and GDPR compliant translation device, while Pocketalk Ventanna is a centralized administrative panel that allows for effortless management of multiple Pocketalk devices. Ventanna gives administrators complete control over their school's devices by providing real-time translation insights and management functions through a singular platform. With over 1,000 school districts across the country utilizing Pocketalk, it is clear this small device is making a giant impact on education.

In West Central, IL at United Junior High School, a kind donation from Bridgeway had a profound effect on Alejandro, a student facing language barriers, and sparked remarkable academic growth. After providing him with a Pocketalk Plus device, Alejandro was able to communicate with his peers, actively participate in class, and even share jokes. His language skills flourished, progressing from a first-grade to a sixth-grade reading level within a single academic year. It's important to note that Alejandro did not have a reading problem - he simply had a language barrier.



**Students come from all over the world** to the welcoming arms of Taft Elementary in Boise, ID. With Multilingual Learners (MLL) making up around 40% of the student population, Taft Elementary School needed translation support not only in the classroom, but also in the nurse's office, with supervisors at recess, at the front desk and with MLL parents during school events. After seeing the success of the devices during a parent night at Taft

Elementary, a Boise district administrator made sure every department had their own Pocketalk and there was one for each school in the district. Now, the devices are seen across the school, from the front office to the school nurse. The primary use of Pocketalk continues to be family interactions, welcoming new families to the school, and building relationships between staff and students.

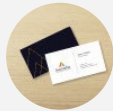
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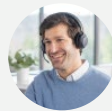
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# 3 Advantages of Using a Print Services Partner for Your School or District

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The tide in print is turning. Today, many schools and districts are seeing more efficiency and cost savings by transitioning from in-house printing to a strategic print services partner to meet their needs for a wide variety of printed materials.

“Transitioning print management to a trusted partner enables school and district leaders to reduce costs and gain access to high-quality printed materials, while maintaining control over the finished product,” says Michael Schnare, Print & Marketing Expert from Staples.

By handing over the reins to professionals in the field, schools not only free up valuable internal resources, but also take advantage of the latest printing technologies, expertise, and faster project turnaround times, allowing school and district employees to focus on more important work.

Here are three advantages of using managed print services in any school or district.

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The challenges and costs associated with in-house print equipment and facilities are plentiful. From equipment and operational overhead to maintenance and space allocation, these expenses can mount quickly, resulting in unnecessary spending.

Using a partner for print management helps alleviate these challenges and their costs and streamlines operational productivity across multiple departments. A print services partner will manage the budget efficiently and provide visibility into spending.

## 2. Improved quality

Inconsistency in quality can quickly tarnish the branding and image of any school or district. Maintaining consistency of high-quality print materials helps to convey professionalism to parents and the community, as well as teachers and other staff members.

Quality issues requiring reprints and adjustments can create additional costs and delays, resulting in wasted resources. A reliable trusted partner can reduce or eliminate these issues and ensure all printed materials are consistently high quality.

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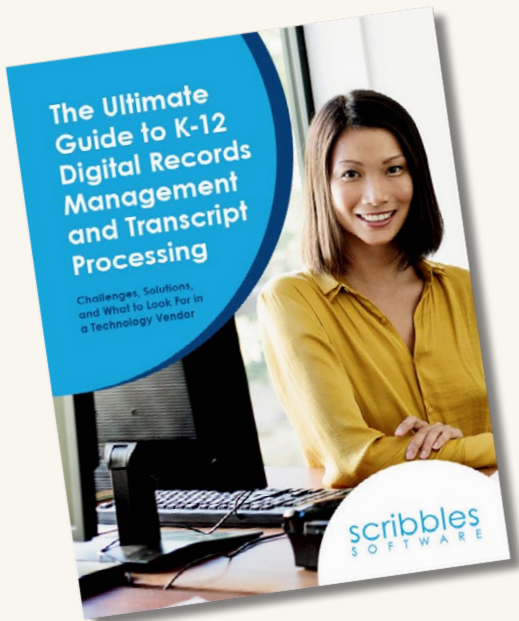
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## 5 ways principals' roles are being redefined

“While teachers are facing formidable challenges right now, districts cannot afford to lose sight of school leaders,” says a new report.

The role of principals in student success is immense but some educators may not quite comprehend the full breadth of a building leader's influence on achievement.

For one, the principal's impact on learning growth is “significantly larger in scope” than that of teachers, say the authors of “Redefining the Role of the Principal: Innovative Approaches to Empower School Leaders,” a new report from the Aspen Institute that looks at the new ways principals are being empowered by their districts.

That impact is magnified when principals create strong learning climates that promote high expectations for students and teachers, continuous analysis of student data and a culture of accountability, the researchers assert. While the principal workforce is more diverse than it was 30 years ago—and is now majority female—it still does not reflect the racial-ethnic

diversity of the student population.

Moreover, a staggering 85% of principals reported high levels of stress compared to just a little more than a third of the general workforce that said the same. Finally, principal turnover leads to teacher turnover, which can also depress student achievement. “While teachers are facing formidable challenges right now, districts cannot afford to lose sight of school leaders,” the researchers counseled in the report.

Against this backdrop, states and districts are taking steps to redefine and empower principals.

### REDEFINING THE ROLE OF PRINCIPALS

The Aspen Institute's researchers detailed what four districts and one state are doing to help principals improve their craft and focus on instructional leadership. The report

also notes “why principals love” each of the initiatives:

**1. More capacity to focus on strategic priorities, District of Columbia Public Schools:** A newly created, school-level leadership position—the director of strategy and logistics—oversees administrative tasks such as operations, enrollment, facilities, security, food and nutrition, and inventory. This frees principals up to work on academics, culture and climate.

“Prior to the creation of this position, principals in DCPS reported spending nearly half of their time on building management, and teachers reported a lack of administrative support as a primary reason for departure,” Aspen's researchers wrote.

**Why principals love it:** They have more time to focus on instructional leadership and other strategic priorities.

**2. Responsive PD for principals, Cleveland Metropolitan School District:** Professional development now zeroes in on areas where principals have the most impact. PD has shifted from procedural updates and compliance to teaching, learning and leadership. Also, the district's PD provider regularly collects feedback from principals and assistant principals on content and scheduling.

**Why principals love it:** Principals' feedback helped create “rigorous and relevant learning opportunities.” Principals are now confident student achievement is also a priority for district leadership.

**3. Support from content specialists, Tulsa Public Schools:**

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Teams of content specialists now provide principals and principal supervisors with additional expertise. Principals also have access to a “School Partner Team” of central office administrators and, early in their careers, leadership development coaches. School Partner Teams analyze school-level data, determine strategic shifts and offer PD to improve outcomes.

**Why principals love it:** School Partner Teams serve as thought partners and content experts to expand principals’ capacity. Content leaders synthesize data to help principals make informed decisions.

**4. Differentiated professional learning for principals, Long Beach Unified School District:**

Differentiated professional development covers “competencies and leadership dispositions that effective principals should demonstrate and the subsequent support principals need to achieve those competencies.”

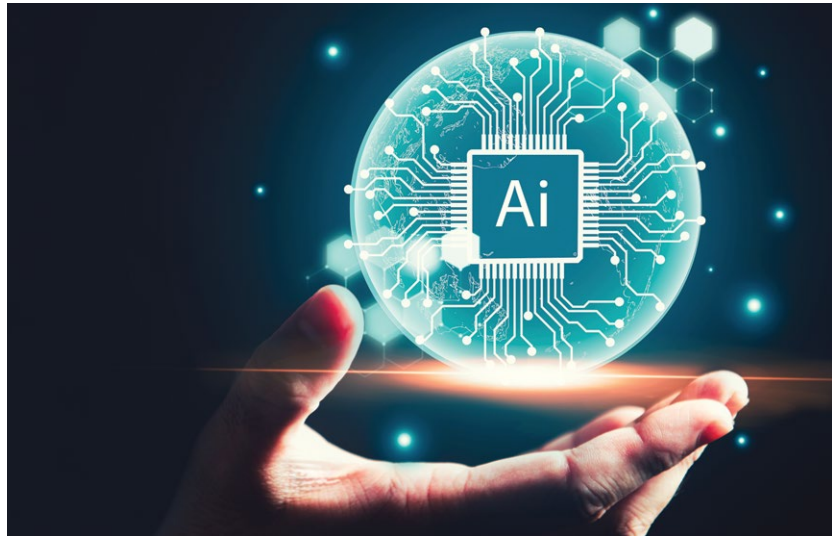
**Why principals love it:** Principals receive support from coaches or principal supervisors who are former principals.

**5. Evaluating readiness through authentic tasks, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education:**

The “Performance Assessment for Leaders” measures school leadership candidates’ skills in evaluating teacher effectiveness, analyzing data and creating a professional learning community.

**Why principals love it:** The assessment prepares principals by emphasizing technical and adaptive skills.

—Matt Zalaznick



## How to offer guidance for using AI in education

“The longer states wait to provide guidance, the more ground they’ll have to cover when they do—and AI isn’t waiting for anyone,” a recent analysis reads.

To date, California and Oregon are the only two states in the country that have offered official guidance on artificial intelligence to school districts, something that teachers have been pleading for as they’ve yet to become comfortable enough to use it in the classroom.

That’s according to new research from the Center on Reinventing Public Education, a research organization at Arizona State University’s Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College. The organization requested updates from all 51 states on their approach to AI guidance, and besides the two that have already offered school support in this area, an additional 11 say they’re in the process of developing guidance; 21 states have provided details about their approach but don’t plan to offer schools any guidance in the foreseeable future; And the remaining 17 (or one-third) didn’t respond to the CRPE’s request

and don’t have any guidance publicly available at the moment.

While there’s still significant progress to be made, it’s a considerable shift in development considering the CRPE’s last national scan revealed that not a single state had released any official communication supporting schools as they learn to navigate AI. Yet, a majority of states still have no plans to modify their strategies for AI guidance for schools this year.

**HOW TWO STATES ARE LEADING THE WAY**

Most guidance surrounding AI in education focuses primarily on the ethical and equity implications, recommendations for students and teachers and best practices that aim to enhance instruction, according to the CRPE’s analysis. Take, for instance, California and Oregon.

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Here's how they're supporting school districts this year:

## CALIFORNIA

The state's guidance, *Artificial Intelligence: Learning with AI, Learning about AI*, identifies equity and bias as two primary issues educators may face. Additionally, California describes how AI could help bridge the equity and diversity workforce gap, particularly in STEM fields.

"By integrating AI education with a focus on diversity and inclusion, we can pave the way for a more equitable future in these disciplines," the guidance reads.

It also offers district leaders some recommendations on how to evaluate AI systems and encourages them to develop AI computer science standards for schools.

## OREGON

Oregon's Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) in K12 Classrooms document highlights the potential implications surrounding equity and offers a variety of strategies to address its impacts. It also discusses some data privacy implications, how to use AI to support students and teachers and addresses policy considerations for district leaders.

This research comes soon after the Biden administration issued an executive order on AI, which will lead to updated resources and guidance from the Department of Education for schools across the U.S. But that won't be for another year, the CRPE notes. For now, it's up to the states to encourage responsible and equitable use of AI in school systems.

"The longer that states wait to provide guidance, the more ground they'll have to cover when they do—and AI isn't waiting for anyone," the analysis concludes.

— Micah Ward



## Happy anniversary ChatGPT

How has generative AI impacted K12 education?

According to data from Turnitin, the company has flagged at least four million student papers for containing 80% of content likely written by AI.

Thursday, Nov. 30, 2023, marked one year since the public release of OpenAI's ChatGPT, the artificially intelligent chatbot that's taken the education world by storm. What once was a terrifying unknown entity capable of allowing students to breeze their way through coursework with little consideration for academic integrity is now an exciting edtech tool that has immense potential to enhance student learning. Companies like Microsoft have already incorporated AI into many of their learning tools, like "Reading Progress," a free program available in Microsoft Teams that assesses students' reading proficiency in real time and provides actionable feedback. Despite this adoption among tech companies and educators, one fact remains: Students and educators need guidance.

That's the consensus of Annie Chechitelli, chief product officer

at Turnitin, a popular plagiarism detection tool used by schools across the country.

According to data shared with *District Administration*, Turnitin has analyzed more than 142 million student-authored papers for evidence of AI writing. Among those submissions, nearly 10 million were flagged, as 20% of their content was likely written by AI. Furthermore, another four million were flagged because 80% of their content was produced by AI.

"While many educators were surprised by the debut of generative AI tools and how quickly it impacted education, at Turnitin we were not surprised," Chechitelli said in a statement. "Prior to the launch of ChatGPT, Turnitin had already recognized the potential impact and began investing in AI writing detection to ensure we

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# Sora

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would help provide educators with a tool that works alongside both an instructors' expertise in assessing students' work as well as academic integrity policies."

It's a trend that also impacts the higher education landscape. According to a recent survey from Tyton Partners in partnership with Turnitin, nearly half of college students surveyed are "regular users" of AI. Additionally, 75% of students said they'll continue relying on it regardless of whether their professors or institutions ban it.

These findings come at a time when OpenAI, the makers of ChatGPT, is encouraging schools to use its technology in their classrooms.

According to reports from Reuters, the company is exploring how its chatbot can be used for classroom lessons. At a conference in San Francisco, Chief Operating Officer Brad Lightcap said they'll form a team to explore its educational applications.

"Most teachers are trying to figure out ways to incorporate (ChatGPT) into the curriculum and into the way they teach," Lightcap said at the INSEAD Americas Conference earlier this month. "We at OpenAI are trying to help them think through the problem and we probably next year will establish a team with the sole intent of doing that."

School districts, too, are reconsidering their initial concerns surrounding cheating with the chatbot. According to *The New York Times*, school districts like Walla Walla Public Schools have hosted daylong workshops on AI chatbots to inform teachers about the technology.

"I do want students to learn to use it," one teacher told *The New York Times*. "They are going to grow up in a world where this is the norm."

—Micah Ward



## 4 mistakes that can derail a superintendent's relationship with their school board

An effective way to prevent disruptions is for superintendents and school boards to strike "social contracts" that cover everyone's commitments.

Open and honest communication is the cornerstone of robust and productive superintendent-school board relationships, most superintendents know. But some commonly made mistakes can drive relations off the rails.

An effective way to prevent disruptions is for superintendents to strike "social contracts" with their school boards, counsels Robert L. Long III, the division director for board development services at the

Texas Association of School Boards. These contracts cover everyone's commitments, how conflicts will be resolved and how the superintendent and members expect to be treated, among other issues.

"It's incumbent on the superintendent—they're the community's leader for education and the education experts," Long says. "It's important for them to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15



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**“I want board members to see themselves in our plan and in our work, and to give them credit when we make big things happen.”**

CONTINUED FROM 13

make sure there are guidelines and guardrails up.”

A key to this collaboration is reaching a consensus in the community. “It’s important for the superintendent to work with the board to define what consensus looks like,” Long adds. “Is it a 7-0 vote? Is it a split vote and, if so, are we OK with that?”

Strategic planning is an ideal project for superintendent-school board collaboration, says Brian Nichols, superintendent of New Kent County Public Schools in Virginia. He intends to have conversations with school board members as the district rolls out its strategic planning in January. “I want board members to see themselves in our plan and in our work, and to give them credit when we make big things happen,” Nichols says.

#### **SCHOOL BOARD RELATIONSHIPS: 4 ROADBLOCKS**

Here are four mistakes that Long says are often the culprit when superintendents stumble in their relationships with their school boards:

**1. Trying to avoid conflict:** Superintendents may try to stay out of the way when board members fall into conflict. Superintendents, in these cases, may leave it to the board president to fix or feel inclined to turn their attention to “schoolwork,” such as instructional issues and other campus problem-solving. Superintendents should be able to rely on members of their cabinet and other administrations to handle day-to-day

operations while they help get the school board back on track.

**2. Sink-or-swim mindset:**

Superintendents shouldn’t leave new board members on their own to get a handle on their responsibilities. Superintendents should see themselves as a guide, coach and mentor to members, whose role on the board may not be a first priority (compared to their day jobs). Superintendents should provide clear and concise information to prevent school board members from falling prey to rumors and misinformation. Board members may need even more guidance when reviewing student and school data.

**3. Overlooking onboarding:**

Superintendents should ensure districts have comprehensive

onboarding plans for new school board members. It should cover everything from roles and responsibilities to giving members contact information for all the personnel with whom they are going to work.

**4. Not getting involved in elections:**

Superintendents, board presidents and members can hold a meeting with all candidates to go over responsibilities, operating procedures and ethics, among other big issues. “It provides a level of transparency in the community that nobody’s hiding anything,” Long concludes. “It also provides candidates with an understanding of what they are getting themselves into and other ways to be engaged with schools.”

— Matt Zalaznick





## Student discipline

The latest numbers and 8 evolving solutions.

Student discipline continues to have an outsize impact on certain students, particularly Black boys and girls and students with disabilities. These groups, along with white and multi-racial boys, are suspended and expelled at rates that remain higher than their shares of total K12 enrollment, the latest data shows.

At the same time, solutions are emerging and evolving as K12 leaders work to reverse the trend and eliminate the school-to-prison pipeline.

“We cannot be complacent when the data repeatedly tells us that the race, sex, or disability of students continue to dramatically impact

everything from access to advanced placement courses to the availability of school counselors to the use of exclusionary and traumatic disciplinary practices,” U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona said in a recent statement.

### DISCIPLINARY DISPARITIES

Black boys are more than twice as likely to be suspended than their white male classmates, according to a November report from the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights.

Overall, about 638,700 students were suspended (out-of-school) at

least once and about 28,300 were expelled in the most recent year for which national data was available, 2020-21. Black students, among other groups, are also overrepresented when it comes to arrests and law enforcement referrals:

- Black students represented 15% of K12 enrollment, but 18% of students referred to law enforcement and 22% of students subjected to a school-related arrest.
- White students represented 46% of enrollment, but 55% of students referred to law enforcement and 47% of students subjected to a school-related arrest.
- Students with disabilities represented 17% of enrollment, but 27% of students referred to law enforcement and 28% of students subjected to a school-related

arrest. They also accounted for 29% of students who were suspended at least once and 21% of those who were expelled.

- Boys, Black students, students of two or more races, and students with disabilities were subjected to restraints and seclusion at disproportionate rates.

Districts reported approximately 274,700 school offenses in 2020-21, the large majority of which were “threats of physical attack without a weapon.” About 180 schools (less than 1%) reported at least one school shooting and about 100 schools reported a homicide of a student or staff member, the Department of Education reported.

#### “PEACE-BUILDING CIRCLES”

New solutions are emerging and other practices are being refined right alongside the troubling

numbers. In November, a leading civil rights group aimed to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline. Learning for Justice, an initiative of the Southern Poverty Law Center, released several resources for school leaders who want to reform disciplinary practices in their districts.

“Educators and families can advocate for and implement practices that prioritize mental health and well-being and do not push children out of the classroom,” says the nonprofit, which shared the following ideas and articles:

1. A community “Freedom School” model embraces transformative practices to strengthen relationships.
2. A tool kit for using peace-building circles.
3. “Decarceration” gives educators a key role in ending discipline

that criminalizes youth with trauma-informed practices and other reforms.

4. “It Was Always About Control”: Why class management that’s based on compliance is at the root of discipline that harms young people.
5. School safety without police is an effort to advocate for students’ dignity.
6. How leaders can work with parent-led grassroots organizations that want to end punitive school discipline policies.
7. From slavery to school discipline: Examining the connection between school discipline and the history of slavery can help schools affirm and protect Black students.
8. A webinar on trauma-responsive education.

—Matt Zalaznick

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# The End of ESSER

Short-term fixes = long-term crises. It's time to address the looming fiscal cliff.

BY DANA GODEK AND MICHAEL MOORE

**A**mericans gain an average of eight pounds over the holidays each year. Before switching to a fad diet, consider a loftier weight loss goal: \$122 billion. Since the beginning of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) we have been warning that when FY24 arrived, executive leadership teams would need to be ready to shed initiatives they can't sustain and report on their return on investment (ROI). Teams must also maintain initiatives that produce learning on investment (LOI).

As we travel the country, we've been increasingly worried that superintendents and boards are waiting too long to confront the upcoming fiscal cliff. The reporting season is here, as the U.S. Department of Education released financial reporting dates as early as March 2024 for all states.

Chief financial officers and grants administration leaders have been patching budgets with one-time fixes as schools returned from pandemic disruptions. Year-to-year, short-term solutions are not only causing the avoidance of hard decisions about the loss of ESSER funds but, we'd argue, they are also masking deeper, longer-term crises such as declining student enrollment, an educator workforce that is too large to sustain, and instructional offerings that are too diffuse to close learning gaps. It's like going on a fad diet rather than making the necessary lifestyle changes.

Like getting to a healthy and sustainable weight, you'll need to adjust both your intake and your level of activity. Communicating a compelling vision of success shared with a wide range of stakeholders will ensure better results, more satisfied families and educators, and predictable fiscal planning.

## MEASURING INVESTMENT

ROI is a financial metric used to evaluate the profitability or efficiency of an investment relative to its cost. ROI is measured by dividing a company's net profit by its initial investment and then multiplying the result by 100 to express the ratio as a percentage. But how to measure learning on investment (LOI)?

An LOI measure divides net student learning gains by the investment needed to generate that gain. This is a versatile process that can be applied to various scenarios, such as evaluating the performance of academic interventions, assessing the effectiveness of training programs, or comparing curricula. It guides decision-makers as they allocate resources effectively and informs choices about where to invest time, money and effort. It also identifies initiatives that need to be strategically shed to make room for fresh approaches based on the current needs of students, families and our workforce.

**“We gave you additional resources to help you through the pandemic and return to school. These resources improved your resiliency but reduced your efficiency. That’s not sustainable.”**

## **THE FUNDAMENTAL CHALLENGE OF PUBLIC SERVICES**

“Public services”—road maintenance, public safety and K12 education, for example—don’t have a “profit motive.” That absence makes it challenging but not impossible to measure the effectiveness of a public service. Historically, a particular public service will expand in scale or scope in response to political pressure and will be reduced or constrained when resources (usually tax dollars) are limited.

This push-pull dynamic can be seen as a back-and-forth between resiliency and efficiency. Resiliency in this context is the ability to respond quickly to things that aren’t predictable, such as post-pandemic student learning loss. Efficiency is simply getting the “most bang for the buck” in the most expedient ways.

There’s a negative correlation between resiliency and efficiency: when one goes up, the other goes down. Think of restaurants: they plan for efficiency, but customer volume is unpredictable and some diners want changes to what’s on the menu. School systems are facing similar changes with volume (enrollments) and modifications (requests for new services such as intervention and student well-being). That’s the challenge presented by the fiscal cliff.

ESSER was intended to improve the resiliency of K12 operations, providing for 1:1 technology, increased staffing, facility upgrades, and innovative methods and materials. The narrative of ESSER’s expiration is: “We gave you additional resources to help you through the pandemic and return to school. These resources improved your resiliency but reduced your efficiency. That’s not sustainable. Now we need you to continue moving toward a ‘new normal’ by improving your efficiency and to do that, we need to reduce your resiliency.”

### **THIS SUPERINTENDENT’S CHALLENGE**

While CFOs and federal programs directors have done a good job guiding districts through the last three years of budget tailoring, now it’s time for superintendents, cabinet members and board members to take a longer-term, strategic approach to ensure that only the most effective strategies—those with the strongest LOI—are retained as resiliency is drained from the system.

Researchers of corporate governance refer to this as “repositioning the core” of the business. LOI is not as clear-cut as ROI. Superintendents are subjected to more public scrutiny and political pressure than corporate CEOs. As such, it’s important to design a comprehensive decision-

making model, maximize appropriate stakeholder engagement, push for data-driven decisions, prioritize equity, and communicate a clear and compelling vision of the future emphasizing the investment, not the reductions.

This will test even the most experienced superintendents. In our next article, we will offer practical, actionable ideas on how to get this done. But before you stop eating all carbs, push your team to show the data wins for each initiative. It will become very clear quickly: If you can’t put it on a scale, it’s going to derail the weight loss. **DA**

*Dr. Dana Godek is a seasoned expert in educational policy, social wellness, and community engagement. Her extensive career encompasses roles as a teacher, public school administrator, national researcher, and leader in federal and state policy. In her current role as the CEO of EduSolve, she applies her wealth of experience tackling intricate educational challenges in collaboration with local communities. Dana is a dedicated policy advisor to the Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning and serves as a data currency advisor to Credential Engine. She has contributed her expertise as a board member of the National Association for Federal and State Program Administrators and is a sought-after keynote speaker on matters related to federal investment in public education. Dana holds a doctorate in organizational leadership with a specialization in public policy and is a certified fundraising executive.*

*Michael Moore has been a national leadership and organizational development consultant and executive coach for 20 years, following a successful career as a high school principal and Superintendent of Schools. He works in school districts with "directors and above" to prioritize strategy, manage change and build organizational capacity. As an expert in principal supervision and development, Michael co-designs culturally responsive, job-embedded leadership pathways and support models. As an expert in talent strategy and team building, he coaches executives and their teams across a wide range of organizations. Michael is a partner at the Urban Schools Human Capital Academy and works frequently with the Partnership for Leaders in Education at the UVA Darden School of Business.*



# Bolder visions: What 6 new strategic plans look like online

Graduation is no longer the goal in the latest wave of strategic plans. Superintendents and their teams are expanding their focus to ensure graduates find academic and professional success after high school.

BY MATT ZALAZNICK

**A**lmost as important as projects and priorities in the latest round of strategic plans are the increasingly sophisticated and user-friendly ways in which districts are presenting their visions on their websites.

The Poudre School District in Colorado highlights each of its three big goals on its web page.

When it comes to priorities, graduation is no longer the goal in the latest wave of strategic plans. Superintendents and their teams are increasingly expanding their focus to ensuring their graduates find academic and professional success after completing high school. “To empower and inspire our students to achieve academic excellence and make a positive contribution to the world,” is the mission set by Superintendent Lewis Brooks and Shelby County Schools in Alabama.

The visions laid out by K12 leaders in the second half of 2023 also cover school safety, staff development and facilities upgrades, among other major pillars. Here’s what those strategic plans look like online and a few details about the paths charted by district leaders:

## **ALBUQUERQUE PUBLIC SCHOOLS (NEW MEXICO)**

Albuquerque’s plan is mapped out across four clickable categories—goals, rules of the road, strategic priorities and “our work.” Rules of the road lists the rules the district has set for itself, such as providing students with wraparound support, allocating resources equitably and supporting staff through professional development and giving employees a bigger role in decision-making. “Our Work” is a series of stories and photos of student and

school achievements and activities.

### **BILLINGS PUBLIC SCHOOLS (MONTANA)**

Four strategic priorities are listed in drop-down menus that lay out Billings' goals, accompanied by expected outcomes. Under one priority, foster a safe and positive environment, Billings leaders plan to increase parent and family involvement by creating a "Family Friendly School Program." Among the outcomes the district is striving for are increasing enrollment in dual-credit and AP courses, and raising the number of students who earn career certifications.

### **CEDAR RAPIDS COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT (IOWA)**

Cedar Rapids relies on graphics, namely hardhats, to illustrate the four pillars of its plan. Each pillar is linked to a set of "strategic anchors"—for instance, "Energize the Staff" is underpinned by diversity and cultural competence, development and promotion, stable attendance and staff efficacy.

### **CHARLES COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS (MARYLAND)**

A "Strategic Plan Data Dashboard" covers Charles County's three leading priorities: student learning and achievement; access and opportunities; and culture and climate. The district provides the metrics leaders are tracking under

each priority. Culture and climate, for example, are being assessed by the number of suspensions and referrals, participation in extracurricular activities, and the completion of school improvement plans, among other data.

### **POUDRE SCHOOL DISTRICT (COLORADO)**

Literacy, mental health and belonging, and graduating with options are the Denver-area district's three big priorities—and each has its own web page that details projects and goals. Under "Graduate With Options," the district will update its graduation requirements to better support multiple post-secondary pathways, covering college, the workforce and the military. It will also tackle chronic absenteeism and give middle school principals more time to collaborate around student readiness and grading practices.

### **SHELBY COUNTY SCHOOLS (ALABAMA)**

Shelby County's plan is driven by five "commitments"—innovation, community partnerships, leadership development, recruitment and retention, and organizational commitment. That last commitment covers getting buy-in for the strategic plan by communicating goals clearly and fostering a stronger culture of teamwork. The district is also pledging to maintain two-way communications with its stakeholders, provide staff with opportunities for continuous professional growth and prioritize fiscal responsibility. **DA**

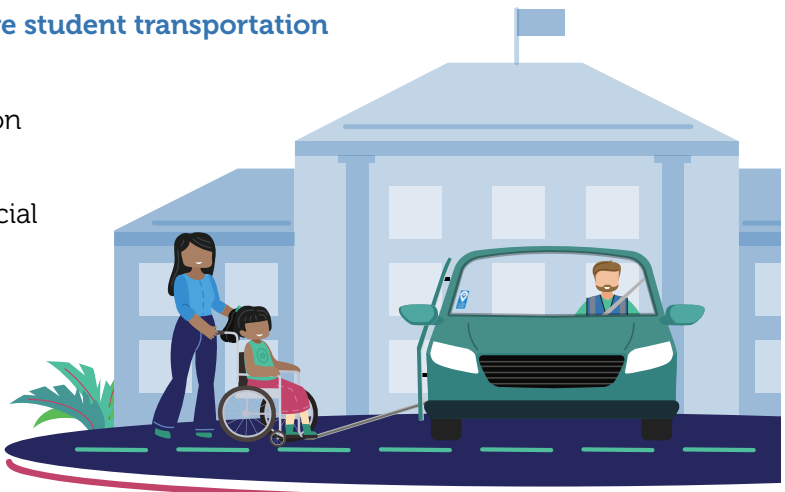


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# Navigating leadership churn

A 3-part guide for a future-ready education system.

BY QUINTIN SHEPHERD

**A**s the world emerges from the lingering shadows of the COVID-19 pandemic, the educational sector faces an unexpected and ongoing aftershock: dramatic leadership churn at all levels. For the first time in our profession's history, there has been an alarming rate of retirements and lateral moves within administrative positions, all happening in quick succession. While personnel transitions are not uncommon in any field, the factors contributing to this sweeping change are both diverse and interconnected.

The most obvious cause is the immediate aftermath of the pandemic. Leaders who took the helm during the crisis now face the stress of “rebuilding” rather than “sustaining” school systems. The shift has been significant, requiring a completely different skill set. Those who stepped up to lead during the pandemic faced unimaginable challenges, from shifting to remote learning almost overnight to implementing safety protocols, all while keeping the educational machinery running.

However, as the world transitions to a post-pandemic

phase, the leadership stressors have evolved from crisis management to reconstruction. Now, the task is not just to keep the ship afloat but to potentially redesign it altogether. This shift in responsibility and focus is significant and calls for a wholly different skill set. Where once the emphasis might have been on maintaining established curricula and administrative processes, the priority now includes reimagining educational delivery, reevaluating long-standing policies and, perhaps most crucially, rebuilding community trust.

Thus, the role has expanded in scope and complexity, requiring educational leaders to be not just managers, but visionaries, strategists and architects of a new, more resilient system. Additionally, societal polarization has infiltrated school boards and administrative discussions, adding an emotional toll to an already exhaustive list of responsibilities.

The ever-growing technical demands, including the incorporation of artificial intelligence in educational settings, are an added burden. This is not a value statement



# The task is not just to keep the ship afloat but to potentially redesign it altogether. This shift in responsibility and focus is significant and calls for a wholly different skill set.

of good or bad, simply a recognition of resource consumption. The paradigm shift in required skills has triggered a need for rapid learning and adaptability.

Finally, the gradual transition of the baby boomer generation into retirement has opened up positions but has also taken away decades of experience and institutional knowledge. All of these elements create a perfect storm for leadership volatility.

## “TURTLES ON FENCEPOSTS”: THE LEADERSHIP CHURN CHALLENGE

Many years ago, in my first year as a superintendent, I had a mentor who told me I was a “turtle on a fencepost.” He made two important points. First, a turtle in this position didn’t get there by itself. Second, it is only a matter of time until they will be knocked off!

He was a gruff, plainspoken and brilliant man. His point was well taken and stands true today. The current scenario can aptly be described as a multitude of “turtles on fenceposts,” and paints a vivid picture.

It is helpful to remember that like a turtle on a fencepost, we understand that many of the new leaders didn’t reach their positions without external help. Moreover, like the turtle precariously positioned, they are vulnerable and will eventually need additional support to remain in place and be effective.

The challenge at hand is dual-layered. On one level, new leaders often lack the technical skills required to navigate complex educational ecosystems. This gap may include a lack of understanding of legal frameworks, budgetary planning or the integration of new technologies. On another level, these individuals could benefit immensely from executive coaching, aimed at honing soft skills like effective communication, decision-making, and leadership philosophy.

This is not a slight on their capabilities but rather an acknowledgment of the unique and challenging times we are in. Even the most competent leaders can benefit from mentorship and continuous learning to navigate these unprecedented challenges. We find ourselves at a unique crossroads: We have never needed technical and executive support more than now, and we are seeing a mass exodus of the support we so desperately need.

## SUPPORT SYSTEMS: STATE ASSOCIATIONS AND BEYOND

Traditionally, state educational associations have served as invaluable support systems, offering localized solutions and resources. These support systems and

resources are critical for our success within a local and state context. However, the modern challenges necessitate a more expansive support network as well—one that transcends state boundaries. It is important to point out, I am not describing a “supplant” mindset but a “supplement” mindset.

District Administration Leadership Institute (DALI) provides a well-rounded approach to this leadership support. Many leaders are first introduced to DALI at a national event, where they find a mix of technical best practices, a showcase of available industry resources, and a healthy dose of thought leadership. Those who dive deeper into the DALI culture recognize the opportunity to secure customized support. You can learn more about this through the website or by contacting any of the folks at DALI.

## CALL TO ACTION: THE IMPERATIVE OF SEEKING SUPPORT

Navigating the current leadership landscape without a safety net is not just risky—it’s imprudent. The only wrong move in this volatile environment is not to seek support. Whether through state associations or national institutes like DALI, school leaders have multiple avenues for acquiring the tools they need to succeed.

Your leadership journey is not one you must walk alone. Tap into these support systems to provide your schools, your staff and ultimately, your students, with the resilient and adaptive leadership they need. Accept that the dynamics of educational leadership are in flux and that leaning on a support network is not a sign of weakness but a step towards collective strength and stability.

Let us shed the precariousness of being a ‘turtle on a fencepost’ by actively seeking support and mentorship. Take the first step; reach out for the help that is readily available. Because in these turbulent times, collective wisdom and collaborative effort aren’t just advisable—they’re indispensable. **DA**

*Quintin “Q” Shepherd is a public school superintendent with 18 years of experience serving in three states. He began his career in education as a school custodian, became a PreK-12 music teacher, and served as an elementary principal before becoming a high school principal. Q is also an adjunct faculty at the University of Houston-Victoria and the author of the best-selling book, *The Secret to Transformational Leadership*, which has been widely celebrated for its insights into effective leadership.*



# LEVEL UP

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# LEVEL UP CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION to Prepare the Future Workforce

According to the U.S. Department of Education, students who focused on Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses while in high school had higher median annual earnings eight years after their expected graduation date than students who didn't. A reason for this is that CTE courses gave them the opportunity to learn valuable workplace skills like communication and time management.

So, how can school and district leaders help ever-evolving student populations graduate from high school and enter high-demand, high-wage jobs or continue with postsecondary education? **Develop a long-term strategy for CTE that allows your program to grow and adapt over time.**

To help, we've put together **three ways you can enhance CTE offerings** to ensure your decisions are driven by what employers want to see paired with what students are excited about.

## Provide Students with Opportunities to Gain Employability Skills and Industry Certifications

With fewer students interested in completing a four-year degree and high-demand, high-wage job opportunities more readily available, it's important that educators help students learn the technical skills needed while also teaching them the value of employability skills.

A great place to start is the U.S. Department of Education's Employability Skills Framework, which includes three overarching skill categories for employability - applied knowledge, effective relationships, and workplace skills. The best way to ensure your students are grasping these skills is through different assignments, quizzes, and more.

CTE courses can also prepare students for **industry certifications**. They're valuable to employers because they verify a job candidate's technical skillset - giving your students a leg up when applying for jobs.

## Partner with Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs)

CTSOs are an integral component of curriculum and instruction, building upon employability skills and concepts through the application and engagement of students in hands-on demonstrations and real-life and/or work experiences. There are eight CTOSs, including DECA (formerly Distributive Education Clubs of America), TSA (Technology Student Association), and FFA (Future Farmers of America).

Students within these organizations have the opportunity to gain real-world job experiences,



including working with their peers, creating resumes, networking, and more.

## Refine and Expand Your Career and Technical Education Course Catalog

Just like the employment landscape changes, so do your students' interests, which is why it's critical to refine your CTE offerings each year. The top three questions to ask yourself every year include:

- Over the next five years, what are the top three to five occupations for your county/state?
- What employability skills are employers most looking for in the next three years?
- How has your student population changed over the past year?

Once you answer these foundational questions, you can start looking at your current CTE course offerings. For example, if you're a rural school or district and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics is estimating an increase in agriculture jobs over the next five years - do you have a program of study related to agriculture? If not, it may be time to start investing in that program of study.

To help school and district leaders take their CTE program to the next level, our team developed a free guide.

**Download the Free Guide at [FlexPointEducation.com/CTEGuide](https://FlexPointEducation.com/CTEGuide)**



# And THE WINNER

At the final District Administration Leadership Institute (DALI) Superintendents Summit of 2023, some of the most extraordinary districts and leaders were recognized for their outstanding work.

# IS...

## **SUPERINTENDENT OF THE YEAR**

**Dr. Alex Marrero,**  
DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS, CO

Dr. Marrero's leadership journey exemplifies resilience and unwavering determination. He rose from humble beginnings to become an influential leader in the field of education. Inspired by his mom, Dr. Marrero embarked on a mission to share his passion for learning with others. He has championed groundbreaking initiatives that have had a positive impact on academic performance and student achievement. Dr. Marrero's story is one of determination and compassion; it teaches us that even in the face of adversity, we can be agents of change through our actions and our words.





PHOTO BY TIM GIBBONS

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## SUPERINTENDENT OF THE YEAR FINALISTS

### Kristin Brown

LAKE DALLAS INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT, TX

Kristin has taught courses within the district to build a solid pipeline of leaders ready to take on the challenge of campus principals. Respected for her support of others, over the past 10 years she has mentored six women through their doctoral program and worked with them to ensure they were successful in passing the superintendent exam.



### Ben Shuldiner

LANSING SCHOOL DISTRICT, MI

Ben has demonstrated a commitment to tackling the most formidable challenges, including chronic attendance issues, low graduation rates and declining enrollment. He set ambitious goals for the district, effectively setting equally formidable challenges for himself. Under Ben's visionary guidance, Lansing Schools has experienced a transformation that extends beyond our classrooms and into the heart of our community.



### Mike Van Sickle

LOUISIA- MUSCATINE COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT, IA

Mike Van Sickle has been described as a servant leader. His staff members know he is willing to do, help, guide, support and listen when responsibilities are put on their plate. Working closely with his administrative team to provide valued professional development programming, Mike has been innovative in effecting school system change as well as enhancing academics and behavior.



### Wayne Vickers

ALABASTER CITY SCHOOLS, AL

Incorporating cutting-edge technology, personalized learning and STEM education into learning processes are among the initiatives championed by Dr. Vickers. His storied career culminated with the success of Alabaster City Schools. Schools in the Alabaster zone had one National Board Certified Teacher in 2013. In 2023, there were 28. Reading proficiency for elementary students in 2013 was just 39.5%; today, that number stands at 70%. Alabaster's graduation rate was 89% in 2013. By the Class of 2023, the graduation rate had climbed to 99%. The list of accomplishments goes on, but perhaps his greatest achievement is his ability to maintain forward momentum wherever he leads.



## DISTRICTS OF DISTINCTION

### ACADEMIC ACCELERATION

Fulton County Schools, GA

### STUDENT AND ADULT WELLNESS

Poway Unified School District, CA

### TECHNOLOGY

Tiverton Public Schools, RI

### COLLEGE AND CAREER PATHWAYS

Laurens County School District 55, SC

### CREATIVE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Warsaw Community Schools, IN

### EQUITY AND INCLUSION

Spokane Washington, WA

## LEADERSHIP AWARDS: WOMEN OF DISTINCTION

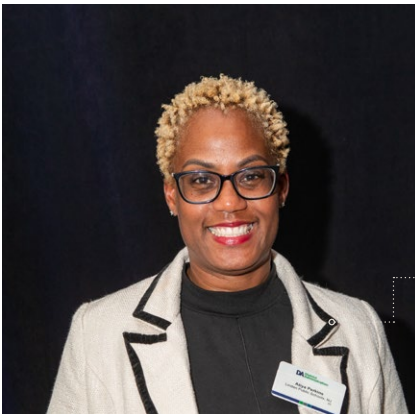
PHOTOS BY TIM GIBBONS



▪ **Maura Horgan**  
NEWARK CITY SCHOOLS, NJ

▪ **Kelly May-Vollmar**

DESERT SANDS UNIFIED  
SCHOOL DISTRICT, CA



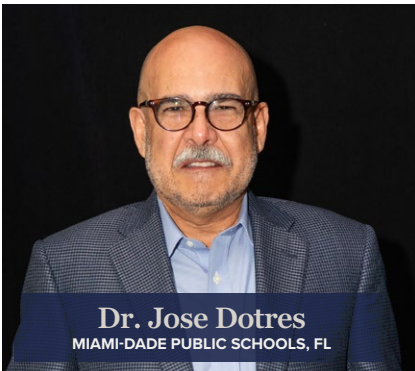
▪ **Jeanne Siegenthaler**  
RICHMOND SCHOOL DISTRICT, WI

▪ **Atiya Perkins**  
LINDEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS, NJ

▪ **Cherie Washington**  
FORT WORTH INDEPENDENT  
SCHOOL DISTRICT, TX



## LEADERS OF DISTINCTION



**Dr. Jose Dotres**  
MIAMI-DADE PUBLIC SCHOOLS, FL



**Alex Haltom**  
HEMLOCK PUBLIC SCHOOLS, MI



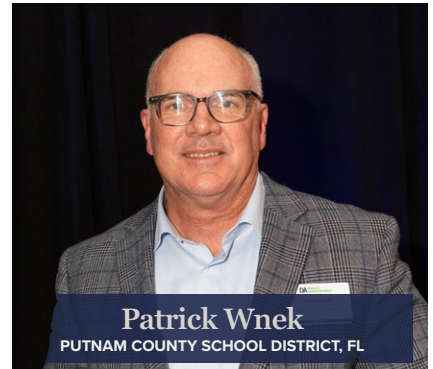
**Dr. Barbara Mullen**  
RUSH-HENRIETTA PUBLIC SCHOOLS, NY



**Matthew Frederickson**  
BOWLING GREEN R-1 SCHOOL DISTRICT, MO



**Beverly Miller**  
GREENVILLE CITY SCHOOLS, TN



**Patrick Wnek**  
PUTNAM COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT, FL



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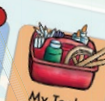
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Handwriting Without Tears  
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TEACHER'S GUIDE

TEACHER'S GUIDE



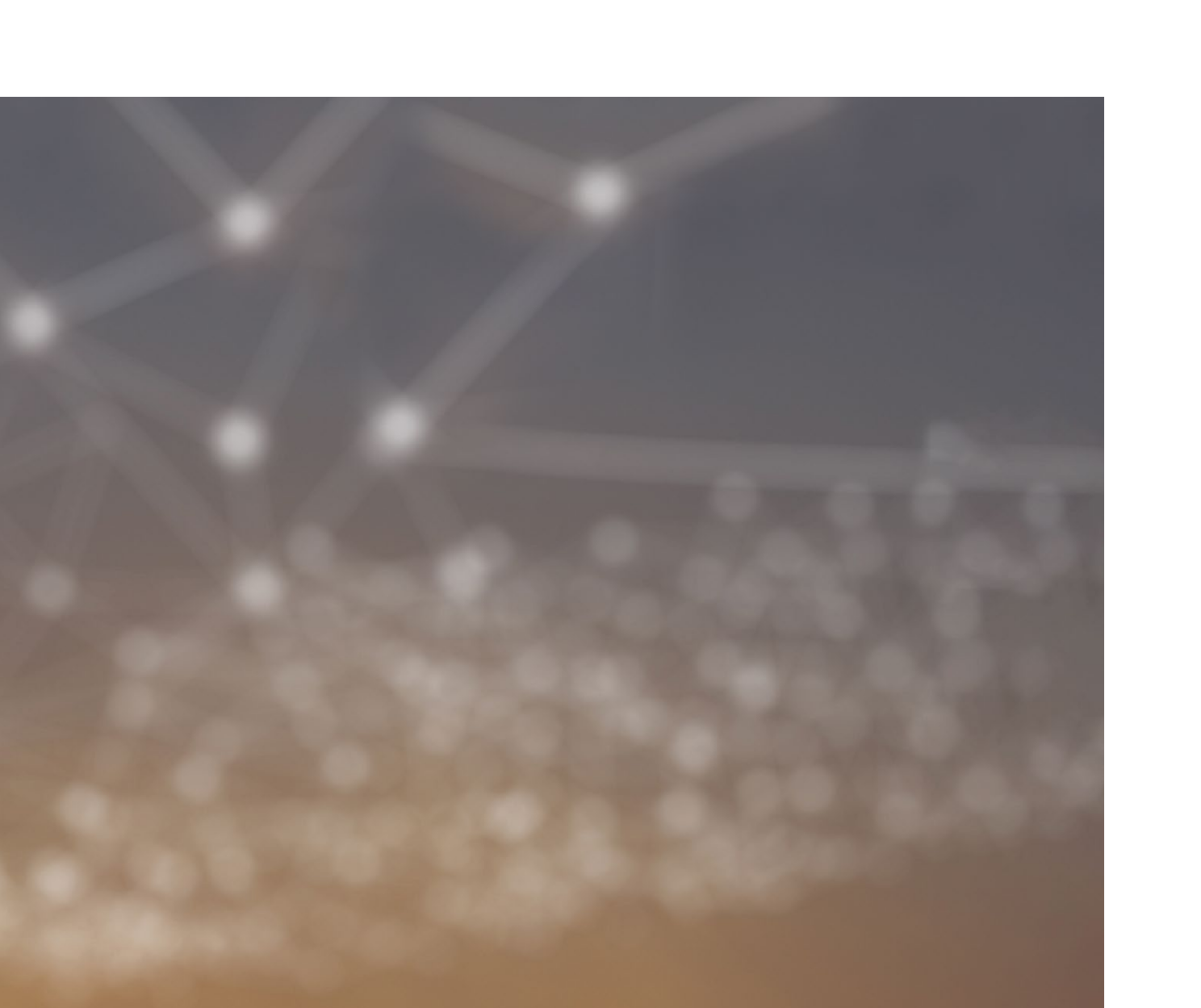


# K12 IN 2023

**WHAT'S IMPROVED AND  
WHICH ISSUES STILL LINGER?**

Student behavior and teacher shortages are among the list of challenges these two superintendents still face in their districts post-pandemic.

**BY MICAH WARD**



**T**he past few years have been nothing short of an eye-opener for educators and district leaders as they've battled unprecedented disruptions that have manifested blips in what we know as "traditional" K12 education. From enrollment declines to political intervention—and of course, a global pandemic—superintendents are in the thick of a new era of the superintendency. Now, the question is: How is the 2023-24 school year treating leaders?

### **BARRIERS TO LEARNING**

The pandemic revealed to many the sheer importance of equipping students with reli-

able education technology and connectivity. Richard Surrency, superintendent of the Putnam County School District in Florida and the state's 2023 Superintendent of the Year, says it made learning difficult for his students.

"Both students and staff faced challenges after the initial school closures; especially our youngest students who developed foundational learning gaps because they did not receive face-to-face instruction for many months."

But the most revealing issue he witnessed was the dramatic shift in student behavior, a manifestation of the pandemic most leaders across the country weren't immune to.



Lance Evans

“The challenge was finding the staff and tools to support students and staff with the mental health issues that were experienced throughout the pandemic,” he notes. “Severe student discipline issues increased and attendance decreased for both students and staff.”

Lance Evans, superintendent at the New Albany School District in Mississippi, says discipline is an ongoing conversation in his district, too.

“We set up multiple avenues for students to get help and get in contact with our counselors,” he says. “But the behaviors have changed so much. The things we see in some of our lower elementary grades we’ve never seen before.”

Yet, the greatest challenge that continues to linger in Surrency’s Putnam County is the impact the pandemic has had on the district’s ability to recruit and retain teaching staff.

“This challenge has been our number one focus because we have seen the impact on student learning by not having a face-to-face teacher,” he notes. “We have increased pay for both teachers and non-instructional staff;

**“The challenge was finding the staff and tools to support students and staff with the mental health issues that were experienced throughout the pandemic.”**

however, the need to improve the intrinsic motivation for working in our district has been our focus.”

### **EMBRACING NEW LEADERSHIP STYLES**

These new and exacerbated challenges prompted many leaders to reconsider their career timelines, resulting in a significant turnover in district leadership across the U.S. Those who chose to stick it out witnessed tremendous personal growth and strength necessary in this era of K12 educational leadership.

“The pandemic has made me a more resilient, flexible leader,” says Surrency. “I learned that leaders like to be in control of their environment. However, during the pandemic, I began to realize I could only adapt to an environment of a phenomenon that I had never experienced before. It became obvious that I did not have the answers for addressing the many challenges that surfaced during this time. As a result, I came to the realization of how important collaboration with other leaders is for different perspectives.”

As for Evans in New Albany, he says he

had to learn how to be OK with adjusting their academic standards to meet the needs of his students.

“We have really high standards,” he says. “But sometimes you have to adjust them to get the students where they need to be so they can have complete access to instruction.”

Additionally, he discovered that there’s more than one way to educate a student effectively. They’ve carried over several strategies brought forth during the pandemic that continue to benefit their students, like opportunities for credit recovery and additional course offerings during the school year.

“It broadened my perspective on ways to help students earn course credit,” he adds.

### 2023-24: WHAT’S IMPROVED?

Though the challenges and obstacles that have arisen over the past few years remain plentiful, these superintendents are spearheading several initiatives to ensure their communities are future-focused and resilient to the challenges brought forth by COVID-19.

School culture, for one, tops Surrency’s list of priorities this school year.

**These new and exacerbated challenges prompted many leaders to reconsider their career timelines, resulting in a significant turnover in district leadership across the U.S.**

“During the previous school year, our school administrators reached out with a need to build a stronger school culture,” he says. “As a result, my leadership staff worked with the district calendar committee to create monthly early release days for the purpose of building stronger teams and to just have some fun with their employees.”

They’ve also purchased a research-backed school survey tool that allows staff members to record their perceptions of their school’s culture throughout the year, rather than just once per year.

“School leaders monitor perception data throughout the year and set goals of how to address areas of need,” he says. “We are continuing this initiative during the 2023-24 school year to build on the successes from the past year. As one of my staff has stated, ‘Happy big people means happy little people!’”

In New Albany, students can rest assured that their superintendent remains focused on providing equitable opportunities for them to become college- and career-ready.

In a recent interview with *District Administration*, we discussed their latest partner-



Rick Surrency

ship with Toyota Mississippi to launch the 4T Academy, a hands-on training program that affords students a direct pathway into Toyota production professions immediately after high school.

“Five years ago, we had zero business partners,” he said. “Now, we have around 208 that are established business partners.”

It’s also the only district in the state of Mississippi that’s launched the 4T Academy.

Furthermore, this year, Evans was named Mississippi’s Superintendent of the Year a testament to the strategies and successful initiatives he and his team have embarked on over the past several years.

“I want us to be seen as not only the premier academic school district in Mississippi but also the premier workforce development school district,” he said during a recent interview. “We have great people doing great things, and I would tell you that we’re very lucky because of the people we have.”

Circling back to teacher shortages—the issue that continues to plague districts around the nation—Surrency says he’s seeing improvements through his district’s strategic interventions..

“We have developed a ‘Novice Teacher Mentor Program’ that has received national attention,” he says. “Teachers who are in their

first three years of teaching receive unlimited support from full-time mentors who are certified teachers. The mentors do not have any classroom responsibility and work with a caseload of 30-40 novice teachers. “

As a result, they’ve seen retention rates improve from 65% to 93% over the past few years. They’ve also developed a district-wide culture of coaching for all their teachers.

“Teachers are provided time to develop lessons with teachers from other schools and are supported by district-level coaches throughout the year in a side-by-side coaching model.”

Ultimately, Surrency says his goal is to elevate the teaching profession so that teachers feel revered similar to doctors, lawyers and engineers.

“In May of 2022 I had the opportunity to visit schools in the nation of Finland, one of the highest academically achieving nations in the world,” he adds. “There is no teacher shortage there because teachers are viewed as true professionals. They have no standardized tests in Finland because teachers use their professional opinions to determine the progress of their students. Since my trip to Finland, my focus has been to recognize the teachers in my district as very noble and honorable professionals.” DA

**“During the previous school year, our school administrators reached out with a need to build a stronger school culture.”**



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# Solutions providers look ahead To 2024

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**BY MATT ZALAZNICK**





One of the biggest forces impacting education in 2024 will be labor shortages—and not just in the classroom.

Pressures on the wider U.S. workforce caused by a lack of workers with the requisite skills will drive more collaboration between K12 schools and employers, say product developers who are forecasting 2024's biggest education trends.

It will also lead to a surge in the popularity of career and technical education programs. "As the talent shortage concern shifts to the state level, 2024 will be a year of increased collaboration between employers, schools and government agencies," says Jeri Larsen, the chief operating officer of YouScience, a career guidance platform for students. "The goal will be to create a more responsive and adaptable education system that ensures the workforce remains well-equipped to meet the evolving demands of the job market."

District leaders will be updating curriculums with a deeper focus on future-ready skills and adding more work-based learning, STEM education and vocational training programs. "These efforts will be aimed at equipping students with the skills that are in high demand in the job market and promoting a broader range of career paths," Larsen notes. "With a rapidly changing job market and evolving skill requirements, schools and education systems will find themselves under increased scrutiny to ensure that students are adequately prepared for the workforce."

Employers should grow ever more eager to collaborate with schools and districts, predicts Hans Meeder, a senior fellow for education and workforce education at YouScience and a former deputy assistant secretary in the U.S. Department of Education. "Yet, a challenge lies in the limited experience of schools and districts in systematically collaborating with business partners," Meeder points

out. "Many are still navigating this uncharted territory, actively searching for tools, guidance and real-world examples to establish partnerships that are not only effective but also sustainable." What other issues will be top of mind for K12 leaders and their teams in 2024? Here are predictions, hopes and forecasts from solution providers that cover a range of education topics.

### **ACADEMIC GROWTH AND INTERVENTIONS WILL BE CAREFULLY ASSESSED.**

The disruptions of the pandemic will continue to loom large over academic progress, and administrators will be emphasizing growth and doubling down on the most effective interventions, say thought leaders at NWEA, the testing firm. Here are some of their insights:

### **WHICH ACADEMIC INTERVENTIONS ARE WORKING BEST?**

"While school districts made some progress in reducing pandemic-related achievement gaps in the 2021-22 school year, progress stalled in the 2022-23 school year. Interventions that have strong evidence of efficacy include high-dosage tutoring, summer school programs and double-dose math classes. Districts should adopt these high-impact interventions while continuing to monitor implementation and adapt interventions to local context so that students can have access to meaningful opportunities to catch up on unfinished learning." —Ayesha K. Hashim, research scientist

**Classroom practices that support high growth learning will be essential.** "The cornerstone of elevating educational quality rests upon strengthening the student-teacher relationship. By fostering meaningful and constructive interactions and offering valuable feedback to students, we empower them to take greater ownership of their learning journey.

Recent research underscores the efficacy of specific approaches and practices in promoting substantial learning growth, such as allocating time for retrieval practice (where students benefit from multiple opportunities to reinforce new knowledge) and maintaining flexibility in student group dynamics (allowing for effective student movement between learning groups), among others.”—*Chase Nordengren, principal research lead, effective instructional strategies*

**Research-based interventions will be needed to help older students with reading fluency.** “National data show that almost 70% of eighth-graders are not considered proficient in reading based on 2022 test scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, also known as The Nation’s Report Card. In 2024, districts will be working to find research-based interventions to help older students with reading fluency. Middle and high school teachers will need support to help older students with foundational reading skills to address this problem. Programs that emphasize repeated reading and giving older readers the opportunity to choose practice readings on topics they find engaging will help older readers improve fluency.” — *Laura Hansen, NWEA director of academic services*

**Expect a data-driven revolution in gifted and talented identification.** “In 2024, states are poised to revolutionize their approach to gifted and talented education, driving greater equity and inclusion through a dual strategy of data-driven identification and the implementation of state policies mandating access to gifted services. Universal screening, encompassing a multitude of assessment tools, will ensure that no gifted potential remains unnoticed, while continuous monitoring and transparent reporting will guarantee equal access to the selection process. Simultaneously, state policies will require the development of individualized learning plans for gifted students, promoting inclusive enrichment opportunities,

differentiated instruction, and robust teacher professional development.”—*Scott Peters, senior research scientist.*

## **EDTECH EVOLUTION WILL BE ALL ABOUT AI**

**Artificial intelligence will likely continue to suck up all the oxygen in the edtech space.** “AI will impact everything—from creating relevant lesson plans to acting as a teacher’s assistant and student learning,” says Sara Gu, co-founder and COO of ClassIn, which provides blended, hybrid and remote learning platforms. “AI tools are being developed for educators and launched into the market every week. Many of these are designed to save teachers time.”

As many AI tools are designed to save teachers’ time, Gu says she expects a comprehensive lesson-planning tool will emerge in the near future. “With the vast amount of material currently available on the internet and the number of databases that the [AIs] can pull from, a world where all teachers have to do is plug in their learning objectives and standards and get an array of choices in each of the categories—materials, activities, and assessments—can’t be that far off.”

Gu also predicts that student behavior will guide the development of AI codes of conduct and determine how the technology is used in schools. Gu sees a fine line between AI being used as a tool and being used to cheat.

“There is not yet one commonly accepted approach to integrating AI tools and technology into a school or school district’s code of conduct,” she continues. “Early policies range from extremely strict ‘student work submitted for academic credit and completed using AI will be considered plagiarism’ to encouraging teachers to use AI tools in their classrooms.”

Teachers will increasingly use AI to assess and grade students, and these tools could save time and reduce burnout, says Sari Factor, chief strategy officer at K12 curriculum provider Imagine Learning. “Educators will have more equitable access

to actionable, research-based measures of student success to better inform instruction, allowing educators to focus on providing personalized support to students,” says Factor.

Ethical school leaders will also have to ensure that principles such as transparency, accountability, fairness and privacy are priorities when adopting AI-driven educational tools. “Leveraging AI and digital-first curriculum to develop personalized lesson plans that cater to unique student needs, for example, will allow teachers to focus on delivering impactful lessons that inspire student success,” Factor contends. “As a result, we’ll see less teacher burnout over time.

Beyond AI, Gu expects more schools to lean on virtual and hybrid instruction to cope with teacher and staff shortages. She notes that a charter network in San Jose, California, has transferred math and science classes to Zoom where students are taught by teachers from around the country.

“We also expect hybrid solutions to gain momentum in response to student demand as schools work to balance their finite resources while offering more flexibility,” Gu predicts.

## **ESSER EXPIRATION REQUIRES RELIABLE DATA**

States and school districts have about \$70 billion left to spend this school year, which “will be a mix of states and districts spending their remaining funds while also looking to the future,” says Lindsay Dworkin, NWEA’s senior vice president of policy and government affairs.

“As the one-time funds expire,” Dworkin adds, “it will be more important than ever for education communities to have access to reliable and actionable data to know which interventions have been most effective in helping students grow, and where to continue investing strategically amidst shrinking budgets.”

Because decision-makers will continue to analyze persistent learning gaps, they also will be looking for

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Administrators and teachers will become more discerning about edtech purchases as ESSER money expires and shortages increase workloads, says Gu, of Classin, who estimates that schools adopted between 600 and 1,400 products during the pandemic.

“While many of these products helped plug the gaps during remote instruction, now districts are faced with the dilemma of too many tools. The process has already begun, but schools are starting to become more strategic about which tools they keep and which ones they stop using.”

## THE ONGOING IMPORTANCE OF EQUITY AND PD

The academic identities of educators will have to be a focal point in district administrators’ efforts to make their districts more equitable, says Fenesha Hubbard, the lead professional learning designer at NWEA. Academic identities comprise educators’ attitudes, beliefs and dispositions toward teaching and learning. “When teachers develop an unhealthy academic identity, their internalized negative perception is very likely to influence their instruction and can shape their students’ academic identity.”

Educators will strive to better understand themselves and others by exploring their beliefs, examining their actions and strengthening their academic identity. “More teachers will identify and address their academic identities, whether healthy or not, and employ strategies in their classroom to help all students thrive,” Hubbard forecasts.

## FAMILY ENGAGEMENT WILL BE EMPHASIZED

Districts will take several approaches to leveraging the strengths of families to accelerate student achievement, including by providing more learning materials that can be used at home, say Vidya Sundaram and Elisabeth O’Byron, co-founders of the nonprofit Family Engagement Lab.

**Here is what they expect will happen:**

- 1. How can districts make the most of classroom instruction?** “Improving the quality of instructional materials is a smart, cost-effective strategy to improve learning outcomes. Districts looking to optimize their curriculum investment will also implement newly available curriculum-aligned offerings, from professional learning to assessments and family communications,” says Sundaram, the Lab’s CEO.
- 2. What’s the role of families in effective SEL programs?** “With student mental health needs outpacing many schools’ capacity to provide support, it will be even more critical to look to families as vital partners in supporting student success,” notes O’Byron, the chief impact officer. Educators can promote relationship-building between parents and children and share activities that let families reinforce specific SEL skills at home.
- 3. How do you envision school learning environments changing for multilingual learners?** “As we continue to see an increase in the linguistic diversity of our school communities, as well as growing interest in multilingual learning environments, I am hopeful that a spotlight is shone on what a tremendous asset multilingualism is. Embracing multilingualism truly enriches school communities and, as such, schools need to be equipped to equitably and authentically engage multilingual families as partners in supporting student learning.”
- 4. How do you envision K12 edtech evolving next year?** “While generative AI has been the hot topic of 2023, I expect next year we will see K12 technology advancements that strengthen the capacity of teachers (such as automating repetitive tasks), and more multilingual culturally responsive learning resources for students and families.”

## LITERACY WILL REVOLVE AROUND THE SCIENCE OF READING

The science of reading, or SoR, has gotten almost as much attention as AI in K12 circles over the last year. In 2024, districts navigating its adoption will, for one, have to ensure teachers, principals and other administrators are receiving adequate PD in the science of reading, say thought leaders and experts at IMSE, the Institute for Multi-Sensory Education.

“States that have passed SoR legislation recognize the need for teacher prep programs to include SoR, but getting universities to change is a slow-moving shift, even if legislation requires it,” says Janelle Norton, ISME’s senior manager of strategic partnerships. “Expect more administrator training in SoR as districts recognize the need for principals to understand what children need to learn to read,” Norton adds.

Teacher shortages will likely be a barrier as district leaders work to embed the science of reading in their curriculums, says Alana Mangham, a lifelong early educator and ISME’s current director of development and implementation support.

“There aren’t enough qualified individuals in the science of reading,” Mangham notes. “Schools can only hope to find capable candidates. And, if they do, the next hurdle is paying them equal to or better than what they can make as a private professional.”

Elsewhere in the literacy realm “multilingual learner instructional practices will become a hot topic,” concludes Nicole Florez, director of the Manzano Day School in Albuquerque, New Mexico. She predicts more leaders will “recognize the need for culturally responsive teaching in response to the growing population of English language learners.” “States are leveraging the right stakeholders to develop learning modules around second language learners and literacy,” she concludes. **DA**

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# Is the U.S. heading toward a new republic?

Civics education will determine our path.

BY FRED FRANSEN

The United States, which was conceived as a grand experiment in governance, now faces a pivotal moment in its history. Will we continue as a democratic republic or are we on the verge of remaking our government system as many other countries already have?

When drafting the Constitution and during the debates surrounding its ratification, the Founding Fathers expressed a belief in the ability of the United States to establish “a more perfect union.” Yet, the framers also were aware of the challenges and uncertainties that lay ahead.

Drawing on their knowledge of history and philosophy, and their own experiences, they understood the historical failures of democracies and republics, such as those in ancient Greece and Rome. The evolution of these systems into autocratic empires that led to their downfall fueled concerns about the sustainability of the American experiment.

Today, the question of whether the United States is ready for a new republic looms large, especially as voices within both political parties question the desirability of the limited government envisioned by the founders.

For this reason, the need for civics education has never been greater. After all, today’s high school and college students will be the generation tasked with making serious decisions about the direction and fate of the country. But it’s clear that the way we are educating students about civics—if at all—is failing. According to one study, fewer than half of adults could

name the three branches of government and 26% could not name a single right guaranteed by the First Amendment.

As we live in what some argue is the second American republic (born with the ratification of the U.S. Constitution in 1789), students must ask themselves if they are prepared for a potential third republic.

To make informed decisions about



the nation’s future, students must first understand the seven American principles that together make the American experiment unique: Civic Engagement, Egalitarianism, Entrepreneurship, Governance, Individualism, Liberty and Trade. Studying history and civics through the lens of these American principles will equip tomorrow’s citizens to make informed decisions about the kind of country they desire to live in.

As citizens grapple with weighty topics such as constitutional changes, alterations to the Supreme Court, winner-takes-all elections and the tra-

ditional two-party system, the need for informed civic participation becomes increasingly urgent. Civics education based on American principles plays a pivotal role in preparing students to understand and evaluate the promises, failures and alternatives that shape the American experiment.

The exploration of American principles is not just a theoretical exercise but a practical tool for students to navigate the complex terrain of American governance and contribute meaningfully to the ongoing conversation about the nation’s future.

When the Constitutional Convention of 1787 concluded its work, a woman asked Benjamin Franklin what type of government the Founding Fathers had created. Franklin replied, “A republic, if you can keep it.”

As the American experiment evolves, each of us is responsible for its direction. I believe the discussion has already begun. We must be prepared when asked, “If not this, then what?” DA

*Fred Fransen is CEO of Certell, the maker of the Poptential family of free digital social studies courses designed to create independent thinkers. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago’s Committee on Social Thought. He can be reached at fred@certell.org.*

# How to put teachers in the position to best help their students

After three decades in the classroom, my new goal is to make teaching appealing to future generations and ensure its sustainability for current educators.

BY REBECCA PALACIOS

When I was in the first grade, I dreamed of becoming a teacher, which, at the time, was an unlikely career path for a Mexican-American girl attending a segregated school in Texas.

Girls like me were far more likely to become secretaries than educators. But throughout my school-age years, I became more and more determined to meet my personal goals, and, thanks to my teachers for going above and beyond to help me, I was able to become the first in my family to graduate from college, which set me on my teaching career path.

After three decades in the classroom, my new goal is to make teaching appealing to future generations and ensure its sustainability for current educators. We all have seen and heard about teacher burnout, and it worries me that we are not doing enough to support these professionals. It is time for us to shift our focus toward tangible solutions.

For early childhood educators, the stakes are even higher, because of the long-term effect early education has on children's cognitive and social-emotional development. Research shows that children who attend a high-quality early childhood education program are less likely to be placed in special education, less likely to be retained in a grade and more likely to graduate from high

school than peers who did not attend such programs.

When a child enters kindergarten ready for school, that child is nearly twice as likely to master basic skills by age 11 when compared to children who are not school-ready. Children cannot reach these milestones without strong educators in the classroom.

## “22 TEACHERS IN A CLASSROOM OF 22 CHILDREN”

First, we must invest in teacher training. In my current role with the Texas, National Board Coalition for Teaching, I work with teachers across Texas providing them coaching, training and counsel on how to become more effective educators. While even veterans in the field can benefit from continued coaching, teachers with less experience rely on the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) to guide them through their first few years in the classroom.

Rather than feel like they are on an island during a challenging moment, teachers who have access to these training programs can draw on their experiences with their peers to problem-solve.

For example, in cohorts across the country, the National Board Certification process draws on the work of each candidate to describe, analyze and reflect on their practice and use videos, student work and

other materials to meet standards through rubrics set by the NBPTS. Candidates have the support of a professional learning facilitator and a mentor to meet the criteria of four components. These networks of support are available across all states and through the NBPTS.

Second, we need to embrace the transformative power of technology. In the years before retiring from teaching in the classroom, I began using an interactive whiteboard with my students. At the time, I was working diligently to find grants for pre-kindergarten students to have access to cutting-edge technology. My first challenge was lack of funding but the second was getting the maintenance department to place the whiteboard at a four-year-old's eye level.

Today's technology runs laps on those earlier innovations, and through AI and machine learning, education technology solutions blend interactivity, adaptive challenges and real-time feedback to power individualized learning.

For teachers, the assessment tools built into these solutions is the foundation for personalized instruction. The programs available today can continuously assess student performance and provide real-time data to teachers illustrating where there is a knowledge gap and what the student is most ready to learn next.

Look no further than Harlingen, Texas, an underserved community with Title I schools, for an example of how technology is accelerating student outcomes. In 2020, the district implemented My Math Academy, an adaptive, personalized learning solution from Age of Learning, a company where I serve as a curriculum advisor.

Some 98% of pre-K students who used the program ended that year on track in math and kindergarten students demonstrated exceptional



growth, with many reaching first and second-grade levels of math comprehension. And educators there have shared that this program solves for learner variability and offers highly personalized instruction, making it seem like there are 22 teachers in a classroom of 22 children.

**FINDING TIME FOR PARENTS**

Finally, we must foster an environment where parents, educators and students come together as a close-knit educational family. One of the biggest mistakes I made when I first started teaching was not involving parents in my work. Over the years, I learned just how valuable family

engagement is—it is a cornerstone of effective education and significantly influences children’s early learning and development.

With teachers being asked to do more with less, it is challenging for educators to find the time and resources to involve parents in learning. This is another post-retirement goal of mine in my role at ParentCorps, where we engage parents as partners to support the social-emotional well-being of children and unlock the full promise of childhood education.

I was fortunate to have teachers who cared enough about my future that beating incredible odds was pos-

sible. Across the country, there are tens of thousands of educators with children in their classrooms who just want an opportunity to reach their full potential. That is only going to be possible if we also put teachers in a position to help their students do just that. **DA**

*Rebecca Palacios, PhD, is a 2014 inductee to the National Teachers Hall of Fame and serves as a senior member of Age of Learning’s curriculum board. She is the author of Being Your Child’s Most Important Teacher: A Guide for Families with Young Children.*

**Today’s technology runs laps around those earlier innovations, and through AI and machine learning, education technology solutions blend interactivity, adaptive challenges and real-time feedback to power individualized learning.**

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# The eSports advantage

Education leaders are discovering how this deeply collaborative activity fosters social networks, school spirit and career pathways for young people.

BY CAROLYN GLUTH

**H**ere's something you don't hear a mother of two young boys say every day: Students should be playing video games more.

It's all a matter of context. Gaming under your desk while your teacher explains the water cycle? Probably not great. But gaming for your school's eSports team? I'm all for it. From my company's position at the center of the eSports phenomenon, it's been gratifying to see the industry bloom recently and to watch as education leaders discover how this deeply collaborative activity fosters social networks, school spirit and career skills for young people.

I say the eSports industry has bloomed—exploded might have been a better word. There's been a massive increase in players, viewership, events and prize amounts in the past few years. Much of this growth has occurred within education.

More than 5,000 college varsity eSports athletes are now at 170 colleges across the US. That number doesn't even include the students supporting their school programs in roles like production or shoutcasting (eSports commentary). With total eSports scholarships doubling from 2019 to 2021, K12 students and educators are also taking note of gaming as a useful pathway to college and career opportunities.

Educators may be particularly interested in the apparent power of eSports to close gaps in student achievement and well-being. Let's

consider the evidence: Students who participate in extracurricular activities have higher GPAs and more positive perceptions of their schools than students who don't. They have higher self-esteem, better social skills and more chances to discover their own talents and interests.

Meanwhile, 80% of eSports players have never participated in another extracurricular activity. That means, for these students, eSports is the only bridge to the benefits of extracurricular participation. How many more students would that bridge carry if we fortified it and celebrated its place in academic culture?

The benefits apply to many students apart from the gamers themselves, with the chance to develop a variety of skills. The players depend on communication, coordination and teamwork to succeed.

At the same time, other students sharpen their critical thinking and public speaking with live match commentary or they collaborate to produce the event, edit footage, design promotional content and deliver highlights and news to eager audiences. It's not hard to see how this single hub of practical experience might inspire a hundred student journeys toward careers in STEM, media, marketing, journalism or event management.

## 3 KEYS TO ESPORTS SUCCESS

In 2018, the Pew Research Center

found that 97% of boys and 83% of girls aged 13 to 17 identify themselves as gamers. By starting or building on eSports programs, educators can harness that consensus for the sake of better academic outcomes and stronger student-body relationships. If you're ready to move forward with an eSports initiative, here are my first three recommendations:

- **Maximize resources:** Use the infrastructure you've already got. A computer lab, for example, doesn't have to sit idle after school—it could easily become the site of your eSports program.
- **Don't just focus on the gamers:** As I've mentioned, some of the primary benefits attach to supporting roles like shout casting and producing, so give those roles the attention they deserve and the equipment they need.
- **Be inclusive:** By its nature, eSports will connect participants to their school community. You can add to that effect by offering extra support to those—like girls and inexperienced gamers—who might otherwise feel unsure about joining in. Try hosting practices for beginners or girls-only sessions to help these gamers build confidence for other events.

By embracing eSports as a conduit of social development, career opportunities and fun, schools can ensure that they listen to students' voices and offer them a learning experience that enhances the rest of their lives. I stand by what I said: students should be playing video games more. In the right context, every mouse click and every keyboard stroke can be a step toward something great. **DA**

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# Redefine math by answering “When are we ever gonna use this?”

We can motivate students to have a more positive mindset about the goals and purpose of math through community buy-in, professional learning and the right resources.

BY TIM HUDSON

**M**athematics can be an imposing and feared subject, with many students believing it's too difficult to be understood or too irrelevant to be appreciated. I've found that people's feelings and mindset about math are usually based on a flawed notion of what “math” is.

Common complaints such as “geometry proofs seemed pointless” and “when letters started showing up in math, I gave up,” reveal that we need to improve how we talk about math with our students.

Changing this mindset requires that everyone—educators, parents, caregivers and community members—work together. We need to reframe and accurately define what math is: a tool for using and improving logical thinking skills to make better sense of the world.

As a first step, we need to re-align how we'll respond to the most commonly heard frustration about math: “When are we ever going to use this?” Here are some new suggestions for how to answer this question the next time someone asks it:

“That's a great question! Being curious is an essential part of math. You're probably asking this because at some point you were told, ‘Math is important because you'll use it in the real world.’ First off, whoever told you that had good intentions. They wanted to motivate you because

sometimes math will be challenging and we can more easily push through challenges when there's a meaningful purpose or reward on the other side.

“Second, you deserve an apology because that statement is a half-truth. The true part is that math involves studying things like numbers, 3D objects, patterns, graphs and how to think logically about them. You'll encounter all of those things nearly every day of your life, but probably not in the way we study them in school. What's not true is the implication that you will see every math topic from school at some point later in life. If you study trigonometry in school, you might never see it or have a use for it ever again. But that doesn't mean studying trigonometry is a waste of time. And it certainly doesn't mean trigonometry isn't part of the ‘real world.’

“So, here's a better way to think about math. In math class, we're learning a structured approach to logical reasoning and problem-solving. You're doing this all the time in your other classes. The difference in math is that we're analyzing logical things like numbers and shapes, which are less complex and more predictable than what you study in other classes. That makes math topics easier to reason about and understand.

“For example, the duck-billed platypus is classified as a mammal, but it has a bill and lays eggs, which are

usually characteristics of birds. Living organisms aren't logically consistent in the same way number systems are. In math, there aren't outliers when classifying objects; all triangles have exactly three sides, and there's no ‘duck-billed triangle’ that breaks the rules. In life and other subjects, there will usually be too many variables and unknowns to draw exact logical conclusions, like when meteorologists forecast a 50% chance of rain. But in math, we analyze simple things so we can also become better thinkers about more complex things.”

In addition to aligning on this narrative, districts can further reframe students' mindsets about math by using standards-aligned content designed for diverse students that makes math more relatable, relevant and engaging. Administrators can also leverage professional development that invites teachers to reflect on their own math mindsets and experiences overcoming math challenges so that we can better empathize with and support students. Finally, education technology tools can help students reason logically and make sense of math concepts with inherently engaging tasks and games based on real-world examples.

By defining math, its purpose, and its value accurately, we can shift students' mindsets to be more positive about math and how it helps them in contexts far beyond the classroom. **DA**

*Tim Hudson serves as chief learning officer at Discovery Education, where he supports partner districts and internal teams as they develop and implement research-based, innovative and effective resources for teachers and students. Prior to joining Discovery Education, Hudson spent 10 years in public education.*

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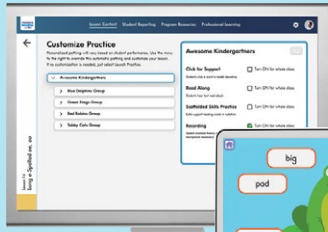

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**SCAN ME**



# 4 ways to emphasize AI and ethics in schools

Instead of blocking AI generators and purchasing AI detectors, start with a few simple strategies to promote the ethical use of AI.

BY KIMBERLY WEST

Fifteen years ago, I was an instructional technology coach in a school district just outside of Seattle, Washington. As we planned for the roll out of our laptop program, I began my work to prepare teachers on how to use successfully integrate this technology into their curriculum.

As my fellow digital coaches know, this initiative came with A LOT of questions and trepidation. Our district is in the backyard of Amazon and Microsoft, yet there was still tremendous anxiety on what the future of learning would look like in the age of technology. For me, the key component was starting with helping teachers embrace the idea of integrating digital citizenship concepts into their daily lessons.

## INTERSECTION OF AI AND DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

Fast forward to today. Yes, we have policies around cyberbullying, plagiarism and digital literacy, but teachers still struggle to embed these concepts into their daily curriculum. Knowing how to navigate the internet safely and ethically is as important as knowing how to read and write.

As artificial intelligence becomes increasingly prevalent, the ethical use of this technology and the guidance on using AI detectors become paramount. Instructional coaches play a pivotal role in how schools can

embrace AI instead of blocking it.

AI's prevalence in our digital lives is nothing new. From personalized recommendations to automated customer service, AI is everywhere. We use AI to offer grammar and spelling suggestions on papers, generate data with Excel and we can even use apps to create beautiful newsletters with just a couple of clicks. But now with the onset of generative AI, school systems are grappling with what to do.

Instructional coaches play a pivotal role in how educational institutions embrace or reject AI. Coaches are in the ideal position to guide teachers and leadership in understanding AI technologies and navigating their complexities. By demystifying AI, coaches empower teachers and students to use these technologies effectively and responsibly.

The Berkman Klein Center at Harvard University created a Digital Citizenship+ Resource Platform that provides over 100 educational tools that can help teachers teach digital citizenship skills to their students. These tools are based on their Digital Citizen+ Framework, in which AI is one of the 17 components.

## USING AI IN PRACTICE

In education, we have two paths we can take: Be reactive or proactive. AI detectors are tools that identify

AI-generated content. Focusing on finding ways to “catch” AI-generated content is reactive. As coaches, we need to show the importance of being proactive.

Instead of blocking AI generators and purchasing AI detectors, start with a few simple strategies to promote the ethical use of AI. You also get better quality results with both AI generators and student work.

1. Have a consistent, unified message among your staff on when and how students can appropriately use AI. Microsoft has a dedicated website with guidance on responsible AI practices.
2. Show teachers how they can use AI to improve their own practice.
3. Suggest that teachers pre-emptively address how students can use AI to enhance their work, not replace it. A recent study of college students found that 51% of students agree that using AI is cheating but still use it to complete assignments. We need to change that perception.
4. Provide learning options for teachers to better understand the why, what and how of generative AI. Microsoft Learn has free online courses and resources to get them started.

Instructional coaches play a crucial role in promoting ethical AI use and digital citizenship. They bridge the gap between technology and users, fostering an informed and responsible digital community. As we navigate the AI-infused digital landscape, the role of a coach becomes increasingly important for guiding teachers and students toward a future where technology serves humanity ethically and responsibly. **DA**

# Why it's time to “electrify” school bus transportation

“We are going to go through the largest transformation the industry has ever seen in its 100-plus years of existence,” says one expert. “And that’s because electric is here, and it’s not going away.”

BY MICAH WARD

“**T**he school bus industry is changing. We are going to go through the largest transformation the industry has ever seen in its 100-plus years of existence. And that’s because electric is here, and it’s not going away.”

That’s according to Kevin Matthews, head of electrification at First Student, a leading school bus transportation provider. The company currently deploys 310 electric buses, a number they anticipate to increase in the coming years.

He says district leaders should begin looking into the available sources of funding as early as possible, citing concerns about their longevity.

“Mixing the EPA’s Clean School Bus Program and \$5 billion from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill—states have some funding as well—that’s available now,” Matthews says. “Five billion dollars seems like a lot of money. It’s not. That’ll disappear in the not-too-distant future.”

Diesel prices are also on the rise, he adds, which heavily impacts districts’ cost-benefit analyses of their bus fleets. Additionally, he believes diesel engines for school buses will disappear much sooner than people realize. By 2026, at least 15 states will no longer be purchasing diesel-run school buses. Instead, they’ll be adopting legislation first introduced in California, the Advanced Clean Fleets rule, which will require manu-

facturers of medium- to heavy-duty vehicles to transition to zero-emissions starting in 2036.

“The people who manufacture diesel engines are beginning to stop manufacturing or investing in meeting emissions requirements in these states because they know they’ll no longer be able to sell them,” he says. “Diesel engine development is coming to a halt.”

Add to that a mandate from the Environmental Protection Agency, which proposed new greenhouse emissions standards for heavy-duty vehicles. For upcoming model years 2028-2032, manufacturers will be expected to meet more stringent standards than ever before required by the EPA.

Each of these regulations provides a forecast of how the traditional diesel-run school bus will be phased out of district transportation.

## A SLOW TRANSITION

As of June 2023, nearly 6,000 electric school buses have been awarded, delivered or are in operation across 914 school districts or private fleet operators, according to a recent count by the World Resources Institute, a global research nonprofit. This time last year, they noted a significant rise in the number of ESBs (electric school buses) being adopted by schools, and it’s a trend that’s continued since.

However, many leaders are still hesitant due to the sticker shock associated with the initial cost of an all-

electric fleet. Greg Jackson, director of business development for School Bus Logistics and former executive director of transportation for Colorado’s second-largest school district, Jefferson County Public Schools, says leaders must understand that it’s a long-term investment that eventually pays off.

“It’s going to pay for itself over the lifespan of that bus,” he says. “Now you’re not paying for the parts necessary for an engine, which will constantly need servicing. A battery will give you about eight years of operation.”

But before beginning this transition, Jackson cautions leaders to do their research. Districts need the proper infrastructure to operate these vehicles effectively.

“Infrastructure is one of the biggest challenges for school districts because electric buses require more spacing than diesel buses or any fossil fuel vehicle,” he says. “You’ve got to make sure you have chargers in place. You’ll have to work with your local electric companies to see if your grid can withstand the impact of charging and maintaining that bus.”

He says hiring for special positions like a sustainability director who is responsible for overseeing this type of work can help districts make significant progress in this area.

Don’t be too quick to leverage these previously mentioned funding sources, he says. Implementing a successful ESB fleet requires you to answer questions ahead of time. Can they be used on your routes? How much charge will you get out of them? These are the kinds of questions leaders ought to ask ahead of time.

“As people are looking to bring on EV, there’s a lot of that back-ground work coupled with hesitations and fear that these buses are not going to do what they need to do,” he notes. “It’s all about doing the pre-planning necessary before you take your next steps.” **DA**



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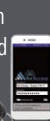
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