



## 4 things you should know about digital portfolios

**BY MATT RENWICK**

During a recent visit to our elementary art classroom, I saw students in various stages of their personal learning projects. Some were heavily engaged in their work within the medium of their choice, such as sculpture or fiber arts. Others were capturing their work using the app Seesaw to showcase and self-assess their learning. The teacher was busy but not as we typically imagine: checking in on student progress, offering feedback on their process, and ensuring students were submitting artifacts of their work that truly represented their best efforts.

When she saw me, the school principal, she surprised me by apologizing. “Sorry for the mess. I realize it’s a little chaotic in here.”

I replied that it was not necessary to apolo-



gize. “Students have choice and voice,” I told her. “They are becoming self-directed learners because you are guiding them to assess their own work. Your kids are fortunate to be in your classroom!” She smiled with a sigh of relief

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## 10 things I learned flipping my classroom

**BY DANIEL HARROLD**

In the spring of 2013, after attending several conferences and beginning research for my dissertation, I set out to flip some of the aspects of my classroom. The term “flipping your classroom,” coined by Jon Bergmann and Aaron Sams more than a decade ago, has become a flexible term used to describe a number of different teaching techniques for turning instruction on its head. After five years, three grade levels, hundreds of students, and a lot of trial and error, here are 10 takeaways from my experiences flipping my classroom.

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## Teachers need help teaching computer science

**BY LAURA ASCIONE**  
Managing Editor, Content Services

Most teachers agree that computer science education is critical to students’ future success in the workplace, but not all teachers feel qualified to teach the subject, according to new research.

The Microsoft and YouGov survey, released in conjunction with Computer Science Education Week, reveals that while 88 percent of teachers say computer science will play a pivotal role in students’ workplace success, 30 percent say they feel under-qualified to prepare students for a more digital future, and 20 percent feel overwhelmed.

Two in 10 teachers say their students

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## Portfolios

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and then continued with instruction.

This shift in instruction, with students in the lead, is not like flipping a switch. Technologies are popping up everywhere that promise personalized learning through digital portfolio assessment, in which students showcase and assess their work and then post it online for an authentic audience. But the actual practice of maintaining and communicating one's learning involves more than adopting a tool.

So before diving into this work with you students, consider the following four points for ensuring this work is done with authenticity as well as for impact.

### 1. Portfolio assessment is not new to education.

Digital portfolios came into prominence in the 1990s, around the time when computers became commonplace in classrooms. David Niguidula, a pioneer in this alternative form of assessment, coined the term “digital student portfolios.” He defines them as “an online collection of student work for a particular purpose and audience.” Digital portfolios cut the distance between student thinking and evidence of learning. There is no longer a need to represent understanding through a score or a grade.

So why haven't digital portfolios taken hold everywhere? Possibly because innovation is more about changing our practices and less about adding tools or technology. Karen Fadum, a former primary teacher and now helping teacher in British Columbia, Canada, uses FreshGrade to document her reading conferences with her young students. She records their conversations and posts them online for families to hear. Fadum says that when parents listen to these recorded conferences, they start to emulate her language when speaking with their child about their reading. Even better, her students grew as readers because of this double dose of responsive language.

Recording audio of a reading conference isn't new to education. What's innovative is using today's tools to make learning truly visible for students and their families.

### 2. The best digital portfolios are process oriented.

A myth in education is that we should only showcase student's best artifacts of learning. We might think of an artist's body of work when considering digital portfolios as an alternative assessment. Yet how did that artist get to a point of success? The development of their skills and talent didn't just happen. Many mistakes, quiet reflection, and new pursuits of learning had to have occurred prior to mastery.

So, it would be logical to expect a student's digital portfolio to be process

*Families, peers, and the student themselves come to see that understanding does not come out of thin air.*

oriented. This means that at every critical stage of learning, something is documented. Not everything is published, but there is reflection and context for the work that's attached to the artifact. Families, peers, and the student themselves come to see that understanding does not come out of thin air. The result is an appreciation for the process of learning itself that is not dependent on an external evaluation.

### 3. It's not a digital portfolio unless students are in charge.

We think we are “doing” digital portfolios when we have students post their work for an audience along with a reflection. But students must get to decide what goes in and stays out of their portfolio. That's the whole point of this practice. If students cannot discern

what is high-quality work vs. what is less than expected, then they do not understand the criteria for success.

In Lisa Snider's high school journalism course in Oklahoma, students publishing their pieces on WordPress blogs. These sites serve to document their writing throughout the year for an authentic audience (peers, parents, community). Snider does not grade their blogs; she asks students to self-assess their body of work and provide a final evaluation. The student and Snider come to an agreement about this summative assessment, with the student leading the conversation.

### 4. Digital student portfolios are about more than just assessment.

The best digital portfolio processes do more than serve as an evaluation tool. They help the student develop a stronger sense of themselves as a learner and see their growth over time, such as through a series of drafts posted toward a final project and presentation. Students start to identify themselves as capable learners. If the digital portfolio has been maintained over several years, their progress is even more evident. This type of self-observation communicates one's role as an agent of their own life journey due to the visual nature of assessment.

And isn't that the ultimate goal of education? To develop individuals who can reflect on their actions and make changes for the betterment of themselves and those around them? I cannot think of a better reason to introduce digital student portfolios into the classroom. 

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## Flipping

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### 1. The title is misleading

The concept of flipping the classroom originally referred to the time and place of homework versus direct instruction. Rather than watch a lecture in class and complete homework at home, students would watch a video lecture at home and do the “homework” in class. While that might be interesting for a while, it does not really change much. Students are still learning via direct instruction, still having to work outside of school on their



own time, and still receiving virtually the same pedagogy. To me, and many others, flipping is more about flipping the focus of the classroom from the teacher to the student. Once that has become your primary objective, everything else can follow.

### 2. Question everything

Schools hold many things sacrosanct—whether they’re mandated by districts or just a part of the student-and-teacher expectation. When I committed to flipping, I realized that it would only work if I were prepared to question everything. Things like late policies (“If it’s not in by Tuesday, it’s a zero”) and homework, and even traditional planning, all had to be brought into question. Students needed the flexibility to redo assignments if needed, turn in work a day or two late if life got in the way, and even have the option to work ahead or design their own projects.

### 3. Flipping the grading

One technique I have used in my classroom for years now is based on Bloom’s concept of Mastery Grading, as well as video-game leveling. Traditional grades are designed to be easy for the teacher and to mimic quality-assurance spreadsheets. Students begin at 100 percent and are gradually whittled down to their deserved score when, in reality, the opposite is true: Students build knowledge as they go.

In my class, students start at 0 and earn “Experience Points” by successfully completing each assignment until they ultimately reach their goal. If they fail to

meet expectations on an assignment, they are not permanently punished for the nine weeks, but are able to fix their mistakes and resubmit, much like one might do on a level of Angry Birds or Candy Crush. This mastery-grading approach lets kids control their final assessment, rather than its being dictated by means, averages, and spreadsheets.

### 4. Homework is useless

While that may sound harsh, there’s truth in that statement. A student working hard for a 5 on AP Physics or a 1500+ on the SAT should be studying often, but otherwise, homework tends to make the rich richer and the poor poorer. If kids understand the homework and complete it quickly, they probably did not need it in the first place. If students cannot complete the homework or find it too challenging, it is not going to help them, either.

A flipped class is about designing the classroom so students have access to the

content AND the practice at once, allowing the teacher time to work with students who would otherwise be stuck at home. Some call this the “in-class flip,” though I would just call it class. The person working is the person learning.

### 5. Just do it

Like many teachers, I was initially concerned I would face pushback when I started this system. It was tough to explain without having a practical example to point to, and I figured I might be cautioned to curb my enthusiasm, so I just dove in. I found a laptop cart that had not been used in several years, bought extension cords and power strips, and turned my class into a flexible computer lab. Students now had access to content, videos, and my learning management system (LMS) in class every day. My district has since gone 1-to-1 with Chromebooks and Google Classroom, making this much easier.

I made sure I was covering the required content and administering the correct common assessments, but otherwise, I invoked the art-of-teaching card as often as possible to change everything else. First, I was ignored, then questioned here and there, and now—five years later—it’s part of the mainstream. Whether it’s flipping or another new concept, only through implementation will you be able to see what works and what doesn’t.

### 6. Mind the neighbors

One of the biggest challenges for students in a flipped setting is figuring out how to set their schedules in a more open environment. While some naturally figure out how to manage their time, others struggle with the amount of choice and freedom and use the time to work on assignments for other required courses rather than your subject. It’s important to remember that, as a teacher, you have to work around the reality of the rest of the school. Your students spend the majority of their day outside your class, even if you feel everyone should use a similar system.

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### 7. Integrate project-based learning

A natural extension to flipped classrooms is a project-based-learning approach. Rather than delivering content through live lectures or even video lectures, most content is best absorbed through reading or practice. This is different than simply giving an assignment at the end of the unit. Give students a task they need to research, learn, and teach themselves to complete. Not only will this lead to long-term retention of the information, but it will be a much more practical application of the information.

### 8. Be patient with the learning curve

Switching to a flipped system is a learning curve for the teacher and the students. For me, it was a matter of changing the way I graded papers and changing the way I worried about in-

class conduct. Rather than marking up assignments on paper, I was now accepting work through my custom LMS and Google Drive. Handwritten annotation was out; longer, typed comments were in. While it was a net gain in the end, it took time for me to figure out how best to assess students in the new medium. Additionally, students needed to learn not only the new technology but the tools and techniques for managing their time. Since the class periods were now less formally structured, there was a clear learning curve in how to budget time and attention. It is a valid struggle, but necessary to produce students who truly can act, not just react.

### 9. Pick and choose

There are many different elements of flipped instruction out there. Some advocate daily videos, while others push for use of question-banks and online assessment. My version is more in line with gamification and a focus on self-efficacy and self-regulation; other versions are more focused on daily structures. To any-

one considering this strategy, I would advise: Make it work for your kids, your content, and your personality. As long as the new focus is student-centered, you are on the right track.

### 10. Continue evolving

Flipped learning has evolved over the past decade and will continue to do so. I've had to make the switch from 3D Game Lab (my old LMS) to Google Classroom. While this has meant a loss of some of the mastery-grading gamification aspects, it has allowed me to be far more responsive in administering content and grading assignments. Flipped learning is based on technology that can change quickly and require adjustments.

Overall, the flip is less about the videos or the projects and more about a mindset. Giving your students as many options and pathways to not only learn the content but demonstrate mastery is what truly flips the control from teacher to student. 

*Daniel Harrold teaches at Baldwin High School in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.*

## Computer Science

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aren't taught computer science at all, and of that 20 percent, the primary reasons are: computer science isn't a part of their school's curriculum (60 percent), there is a lack of funding (30 percent), and it's not a subject on which students are tested (25 percent).

Fifty percent of parents in a previous survey say they believe that among certain skills, coding and computer programming is the most beneficial to their child's future employability.

Teachers say computer science education reaches beyond coding and can help students build important skills. Thirty-eight percent say it helps students with problem solving, and 31 percent say it can help students build logic and reasoning skills.

Teachers also see the act of coding as being a great way their students can learn skills that aren't traditionally associated with the topic: 83 percent of

teachers believe coding can build students' creativity.

Teachers believe computer science can aide to their students' success, but 75 percent are concerned the federal and state governments aren't doing enough to equip schools to build students' skills. Teachers also believe big tech companies like Microsoft, Google, and Apple should help schools build those skills.

An October report from Code.org examines the state of K-12 computer science education and notes that, despite half a million computing jobs sitting open in the U.S., schools still have a lot of progress to make.

Across 24 states, just 35 percent of high schools in the U.S. teach computer science—and minority, rural, and economically disadvantaged students are even less likely to go to a school offering computer science.

To make coding instruction a bit easier, Microsoft launched a new Minecraft Hour of Code tutorial, the Voyage Aquatic, which takes learners on an aquatic adven-

ture to find treasure and solve puzzles with coding. Voyage Aquatic encourages students to think creatively, try different coding solutions and apply what they learn in mysterious Minecraft worlds.

Minecraft: Education Edition also launched a major update this month, which is intended to make it easier to learn and teach coding using Minecraft. The Code Builder Update is now available for all users on Windows 10, macOS, and iPad. Users can code with Microsoft MakeCode and Tynker, and open Code Builder directly in-game with a simple keyboard or touch command. Minecraft Education offers professional development, tutorials and free lessons for all educators—no matter a user's experience level.

Microsoft also announced a new commitment of \$10 million to help Code.org ensure every state will have passed policies to expand access to computer science, and that every school in the U.S. will have access to Code.org professional development—all by 2020. 

# How our district is making math relevant

When you offer targeted, ongoing professional development, teachers can alter their practice

## BY ROGER VANCE

To meet current math standards like the Louisiana Student Standards for Mathematics or the Common Core State Standards, it is no longer enough for students to simply memorize how to do something. They must demonstrate a deeper understanding and be able to explain the “why” behind the “how.”

In Caddo Parish (LA) Public Schools (CPPS), our schools are very diverse, and nearly 70 percent of our students are economically disadvantaged. As in many other districts, our efforts to improve student achievement were hindered by curriculum materials that were not tightly aligned with the new standards and often lacked the tasks, norms, and routines needed to create problem-solving classrooms.

While it may not seem like a big stretch to move to a problem-based curriculum since problems are a fundamental part of math instruction, many teachers (including me) were not taught in the way that the standards now require us to teach. We can no longer show students how to solve two or three sample problems and then ask them to solve 10 to 20 problems on their own. To help them become college and career ready, we need to get them thinking about math concepts in a deeper way and actively engage them in meaningful discussions and problem solving.

Here are a few strategies we have implemented to help teachers make this shift, as well as a few lessons learned along the way.

### Collect teacher feedback to ensure buy-in and improve fidelity.

After the new standards were adopted, we purchased a new standards-aligned math curriculum. It was not implemented with fidelity, however, because teachers found it difficult to use. A year later, we tried another cur-

riculum that was more flexible and easier to use, but it was not tightly aligned to our standards so our test scores remained flat.

After reviewing instructional materials rated as Tier 1 standards-aligned resources by the Louisiana Department of Education, we decided to try Open Up Resources 6–8 Math, an open educational resource (OER) authored by Illustrative Mathematics (IM). Choosing an OER turned out to be a great way to garner teacher buy-in, which is essential to the success of any instructional program.

To prepare for a potential adoption in our middle schools in 2018–19, we provided teachers with detailed information about the curriculum, including reviews by independent organizations such as EdReports.org. In fall 2017, we formed teacher committees and solicited feedback. Over winter break, I added links from lessons in the new curriculum to our district’s scope and sequence documents. At a CPPS professional development day in February 2018, I showed teachers a lesson and we walked through an activity. I also asked our teachers to try at least one lesson in their classrooms during the upcoming spring semester and provide feedback on a Google Form. These teacher testimonies provided a lot of momentum when we made the decision to adopt the curriculum district-wide.

### Provide as much professional learning as you can.

In June and July of 2018, we offered a two-day professional learning session with IM Certified facilitators. One of the things that made the experience so effective was that the facilitators asked teachers to participate in the lessons as both teachers and students. As teachers

worked through the problems themselves, they developed a greater understanding of how to prepare their instruction to actively engage students in the math. We do not think we could have made the shift to a problem-based curriculum without this type of professional learning.

We also invited paraprofessional educators to a two-hour workshop on the new curriculum and it was a resounding success. This school year, several teachers have told me that our paraprofessionals are more involved simply because they had a chance to review and work through the material.

To provide ongoing support, we offer professional learning throughout the year. In October, I held a district-wide video conference using the Zoom platform. During this hour-long session, our middle school math teachers shared their challenges and successes, which gave me ideas for future professional learning topics. At CPPS’s next professional development day in January 2019, we will host a mini-conference that will focus on strengthening teachers’ content knowledge in areas where students are struggling, based on our assessment data. As with the summer training, IM Certified facilitators will join us in this effort.

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# The story of a magical musical app

Here's a secret for helping your students become deeper learners

BY SHAWN DUFF

In the midst of the ed-tech revolution, teachers are need to make informed decisions about what brings value to the classroom. As a geography teacher at Monrovia High School in California, I'm interested in finding ways to prepare students for the 21st century while teaching them about the complexities of the world around us.

Teachers at Monrovia value being able to instill students with the skills they need to be successful outside of the classroom, a task that we've been able to achieve through an individualized approach to learning—and an acceptance of digital tools.

## Breaking the tech barrier

Most educators are familiar with “the battle of the cell phone.” We're faced with the tough call of whether to ban or embrace technology. Because students will need to be digitally literate to be successful in the workplace, I sought a way to keep things relevant, engaging, and valuable through technology.

My solution was to find digital learning tools that are fun and produce valuable learning opportunities. For my classroom, the best option was to find educational mobile apps that students can use on a smartphone or tablet.

Since parents are often dealing with the same conundrum of phone usage at home, finding apps that bring value to students' phone time became the mission.

Individualized learning through music

All students identify with music. Being fascinated by the concept of the Earworm effect, where a song gets stuck in your head long after it's stopped playing, I wanted to find a music-based educational app that would use this strategy while staying aligned to my lesson plans. The answer came in the form of Studytracks, an app that allows students to explore different subjects through relatable, catchy tracks.

Studytracks has more than 1,300 songs available covering a wide range of subjects, making it the perfect test for teachers



at Monrovia. Students are able to work at their own pace through different tracks, using it to retain what they are learning in class.

Most importantly, this resource is customizable, allowing me to use it as a supplement to lesson plans, as a homework assignment, and as a studying tool. Students were struck by their newfound ability to retain knowledge through listening to music rather than reading from a traditional textbook.

Unprompted, students began exploring subjects outside of geography. To me, this is testament to the value of edtech, with the ability to inspire students to look beyond the basic requirements to see the value of broadening their knowledge.

In conjunction with Studytracks, I used Google Classroom to collaborate and share data with students. I brought gamification to life through Kahoot! and made lesson plans interactive with Nearpod.

The combination of these tech-based resources helps my students understand curriculum in a way I haven't previously seen. Students are now taking ownership of their learning and are able to identify where they are struggling—giving me the ability to offer more support where it's needed.

Best of all, students feel motivated to learn. Studytracks has a leaderboard where

students can compete through quiz scores, giving an extra incentive to do well on exams. Motivation paired with the right resources is resulting in a transformational change across curriculum.

## Incredible results

After implementing a music-based approach to learning last year, out of 19 students who passed the AP geography exam, 15 used Studytracks. Two of the three students who had the highest score of five used the app on a regular basis. In addition to this statistic, more than 75 percent of students who earned a passing grade in my geography class last year used the tool in and outside of the classroom.

I feel empowered to help students in a way that I couldn't before. One student who previously struggled with reading was able to work at his own pace at home. Listening to music gave him confidence and increased understanding.

This initial success has inspired my school to continue to see where we can go with the help of digital learning tools. We've seen the tangible value that edtech can bring, and we're going to continue to see how to harness it. **eSN**

*Shawn Duff is a geography teacher at Monrovia High School in California.*

# IT leaders, admins still fear network attacks

Digital resources are widespread in classrooms, but IT leaders still struggle with protecting district networks

**BY LAURA ASCIONE**  
Managing Editor, Content Services

Balancing access to educational resources with security needs remains a top challenge for school district IT leaders, according to new findings from the Speak Up Research Project for Digital Learning.

Seventy-one percent of district administrators and IT leaders are concerned about the security of their network against malicious attacks or misbehavior, as outlined in the data, which comes from a collaboration between the nonprofit Project Tomorrow and cloud security provider iboss.

The top concern with cloud applications among technology leaders is ensuring data privacy (58 percent).

Last fall, Project Tomorrow asked district administrators and school and district IT leaders around the country about data privacy concerns and the current use of cloud computing among students and teachers.

School systems across the country are experiencing a digital transformation, with students and staff increasingly bringing smartphones to school and connecting them to their schools' wi-fi networks. Students are leveraging more online content and social media for communication than ever before. Administrators face the challenge of securing students whose data is now across multiple clouds and whose accessible from mobile devices at school and at home.

"Most administrators say the effective use of technology in school is extremely important to preparing students for the future," says Dr. Julie Evans, CEO of Project Tomorrow. "As more technology is introduced, and at a time when hacking is a serious concern in most industries, we see schools taking this issue very seriously. No one wants to put student data at risk."

In addition to the 57 percent of district IT leaders struggle to keep access open while still protecting students, teachers, and staff, school IT leaders also grapple with a lack of technology expertise among teachers and administrators (55 percent), keeping up with the pace of technology adoption (43 percent), students and teachers circumvent-

cent), using student data to inform instruction (73 percent), social media use for communications with parents (65 percent), and digital content such as videos, animations, and simulations (54 percent).

In the future, IT and tech leaders predict a few key digital initiatives will grow faster than others in their districts:



*Fifty-five percent of IT and tech leaders in urban districts identify "safeguards to protect privacy of digital student data" as a top requirement when planning for new digital initiatives.*

ing existing policies (39 percent), and securing mobile devices both on and off premises (29 percent).

Fifty-five percent of IT and tech leaders in urban districts identify "safeguards to protect privacy of digital student data" as a top requirement when planning for new digital initiatives.

IT and technology leaders say the top 5 digital learning experiences in today's classrooms include cloud-based communications and collaboration tools (85 percent), online assessments (77 per-

cent), flipped learning (54 percent), blended learning (53 percent), competency-based learning (47 percent), OER (44 percent), online PD for teachers (43 percent), digital games within instruction (42 percent), and 1:1 mobile devices in class (37 percent).

An overwhelming 97 percent of district administrators say effective use of instructional technology in school is important for preparing students for future success. **eSN**

# 4 keys to supporting college and career readiness

Here's how a K-8 district establishes a strong foundation for postsecondary success

BY MICHAEL BALLONE  
AND MICHAEL BOWMAN

Preparing students for college and a career is the mission of every public K-12 school system, and this work begins by establishing a strong foundation for success in the early grades.

At Marlboro Township (NJ) Public Schools, a K-8 district, we are doing several things to ensure that our students are on a path to college and career readiness before they move on to high school. Our efforts seem to be paying off, as all of our elementary and middle schools are rated by the state as either “shows progress” or “excels” in terms of reading and math achievement. Moreover, we have the largest number of students in our area who are accepted into highly competitive vocational schools.

Here are four strategies that we believe are essential to any college and career readiness initiative.

## 1. Be sure all students meet rigorous academic standards.

A new generation of state standards has been designed to ensure that all students graduate from high school ready for college and a career. Under these more rigorous standards, students are expected to read more complex texts and reach greater depths of knowledge than before. So, the first step in any college and career readiness initiative is to be sure students are on track for meeting these high standards.

We use common district assessments to track our students' progress toward meeting state standards in ELA and math. Students in grades 1-8 take the same assessment at least four times a year, and sometimes five, depending on their grade level. We use these common

assessments to identify the skills and standards where students are either struggling or excelling.

Teachers use this information to differentiate instruction in small group settings in order to enrich, remediate, or reinforce grade-level skills. Furthermore, our district data team uses the information to shape professional development and inform how we teach.

For instance, in analyzing the results of our common math assessments one year, we noticed that 40 percent of our fifth graders did not realize that “.6” and “.60” referred to the same number. We traced this problem back to the fourth-grade math textbook, which notes that adding a zero to the end of a number increases the size of the number by a factor of ten. When these students moved to fifth grade, many took this knowledge and applied it in a way that seemed logical to them but was incorrect. This was an eye opening experience for us. We would not have known this was a problem without our common district assessments to evaluate instruction.

In light of this knowledge, we revised our units of study when teaching place values, so this misconception wouldn't happen again. Administering common district assessments, and using the data to inform our instruction, helps us assess where we are as a district and make continual improvements to drive higher achievement.

## 2. Get students thinking about careers at an early age.

We believe it's never too early to begin exposing students to various career options. Talking about potential careers in elementary school expands students' vision of possibilities while encouraging them to set personal goals.



It also helps connect what they are learning to the real world, giving this knowledge more context and answering the question: “Why do we have to learn this?”

Many of our teachers use a live-streaming and videoconferencing service called Nepris to connect students with experts in the field. If students are studying weather, for example, the teacher might have a meteorologist connect with the class on Nepris to discuss what her job entails. Students can ask questions that are significant to them, which makes the learning more tangible and provides insights into various career paths.

In addition, we use Achieve3000 to give students personalized instruction in nonfiction reading and writing that is precisely tailored to each child's Lexile reading level. With Achieve3000, students can see which Lexile scores are required for specific careers, giving them ideas about possible career goals. As students move to middle school, counselors meet with them to discuss career pathways they might want to explore further.

## 3. Develop the “soft” skills that will enable students to be successful.

Surveys show that “soft” skills such as communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking are highly coveted by employers. Each year, the National Association of Colleges and Employers asks hiring managers which attributes they value most beyond a

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# Are your edtech tools really working?

A district administrator shares how to get a handle on edtech management

BY CYNTHIA ALTEMUELLER

Elkin City Schools (ECS) is my home. It's a small district, located near the North Carolina border, with three schools and about 1,200 students. It's a small, tight-knit community full of passionate leaders, dedicated teachers, and inspired learners. We rank considerably well in the state almost entirely across the board. We're ranked 7th or better for ELA in grades 3-7. We're also 10th in the state for ACT scores, 12th for high school math, 8th for English II instruction, and we're 3rd in the state for biology.

As a small district, we're proud to be recognized among the top academic school systems in North Carolina. Despite our strong academic standing within the state, however, we know there's always room for growth. At the end of the day, we want to be number 1 in all areas. Attaining this goal comes down to two factors: 1) the people we have in place that deliver the instruction and 2) the apps and tools they're using to differentiate lessons and embrace our support of the whole child.

I believe ECS's teachers are one of our greatest assets. But determining if we're using the best piece of technology for every student in every instance has often been a challenge.

Edtech is a crucial aspect of the vision we have for our students: to "ignite the desire to learn in every student by providing them a unique, varied, and authentic learning experience." This is directly tied to the technology our students are exposed to. We're constantly asking ourselves, "Does this tool ignite the desire to learn? How is it unique? Varied? Authentic?" These are the questions that matter to our administration because they matter to teachers and the learners who we want to prepare for lifelong success.

## Getting the right data to go deep

Understanding the impact of our digital solutions is where our edtech manage-



*Edtech is a crucial aspect of the vision we have for our students: to "ignite the desire to learn in every student by providing them a unique, varied, and authentic learning experience."*

ment system, LearnPlatform, plays a key role. Before we purchased the platform, people on the curriculum side and the technology side wanted and needed to know which edtech tools were being used, what we were paying for, and what was actually working for our students.

We knew there were a lot of free apps that teachers swore were responsible for raising test scores and lots of others that I believed were actually hindering results. Without any real data to support these beliefs, decision making was a challenge. How do you decide what to purchase, what to get rid of, and what to use for a particular set of students without any evidence to back you up? It was just a guessing game at that point.

LearnPlatform helped us take control of our edtech management district-wide. It gave us a lot of the data we needed to support our edtech decisions, with regard to budgets and classroom use. We believed in tools like Discovery

Ed, IXL Math, and Star Reading and felt they were driving academic achievement for many of our students. With an edtech management system in place, we were able to see real analytics behind their use and justify the costs associated with each of them.

To be able to streamline our edtech use and to be able to support and find out where our money was being spent—and how wisely it was being spent—were huge benefits, primarily for a district our size. Obviously, we want tools that complement the skills and content being taught to hopefully raise test scores, but that's not enough. We need to make sure we're buying and using edtech that is unique and provides authentic learning experiences.

There are a lot of programs out there, free and paid, that can claim to raise a test score. But at the end of the day, we don't believe that's what it's all about. We want tools that differentiate instruction and

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## Working

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embrace the whole child to help prepare our students for success both within and outside of the classroom.

We also need to be sure the products we support are being used with fidelity. That doesn't just mean sign-in logs or a timesheet either. We need to have visibility into the number of edtech products being used across our schools, who among our students and teaching staff are accessing and using these products, and how often they're being used.

The more information we have, the better we can support budgetary decisions. At one time, that didn't seem possible. But again, we've been able to generate all of this information through LearnPlatform. It's also had an incredible impact on our teacher request workflows. Today, anyone who wants to pilot a new program or try a great new edtech tool they've heard about can easily submit a request through the platform for review and approval. It's made things simpler and more efficient for everyone.

At the end of the day, we want to allow our staff to get the most out of their edtech and ensure that tools are relevant to content standards. We want to help them make informed decisions when they try, buy, and measure classroom technology. And most importantly, we want to be able to verify, with concrete data, that the products we're using are working for our students.

Bottom line, if we're not getting student learning out of a product, we're not going to purchase it or continue paying for it. That's what matters most and that's the benefit of having a district-wide edtech management system. Today, we have the ability to show data that supports our decisions with evidence, and that's truly invaluable. It's helped the administration, our teaching staff, and our students tremendously. 

*Cynthia Altemueller is chief academic officer of Elkin City Schools in North Carolina. Follow the district on Twitter @elkincity*

## Relevant

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In addition, each month we offer a two-hour virtual session to provide teachers with a deeper look into both the mathematics and routines within each unit of the curriculum at each grade level.

### Changing math classrooms

As a result of our efforts, teachers now have a different idea of what math classrooms should look like. They understand that it is beneficial to engage students in productive struggle and to promote discourse and collaboration to help them develop their mathematical thinking skills. They see how real-world contexts and connections are increasing students' interest in math. When I visit classrooms, I see students making con-

nections between concepts and procedures, rather than simply memorizing procedures.

I realize that as a math supervisor I may be biased, but I believe math is the most important thing we teach and that students learn a great deal about problem solving in general by problem solving in math. Our goal is to not only improve achievement in math but to help students develop the skills to become productive citizens. By moving to a problem-based curriculum and providing teachers with the resources they need to make that shift, we are well on our way. 

*Roger Vance is the math curriculum specialist 6–12 for Caddo Parish Public Schools in Shreveport, La.*

## Readiness

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strong GPA and specific technical skills required for a job. Problem-solving and the ability to collaborate as part of a team were the top responses.

To ensure that students develop the soft skills they'll need for success, our curriculum emphasizes practice in listening and collaborative problem-solving. We use the Google's G Suite to support student collaboration. Also, we have adopted programs from the Center for the Collaborative Classroom that support the social-emotional skills—such as listening carefully, disagreeing respectfully, and criticizing constructively—that students will need for effective communication.

### 4. Foster independent learning.

Helping students become independent learners prepares them more effectively for the rigors of college and, ultimately, a career. It also ensures that students will continue learning long after they graduate—essential in today's rapidly changing workplace.

Inspired by Google's "20% Time,"

we've started a program in which students in some Friday classes work on projects of their choice. In the past, students have designed video games, conducted historical research, and planned a nonprofit organization during this time.

Not only are students becoming self-directed learners through this process, but they are learning more about themselves as well. For instance, some students realized that they need to be more open to constructive feedback. This self-awareness will serve them well in whichever career they choose.

Preparing students for college and a career requires a total team effort, with contributions from faculty, staff, and administrators. By adopting these four key strategies, we are giving students a strong foundation for success when they continue their studies in high school—and beyond. 

*Michael Ballone is the director of curriculum and instruction for the Marlboro Township Public Schools in Marlboro, New Jersey. Michael Bowman is the curriculum supervisor for ELA, the gifted reading program in grades K-3, and the honors programs in grades 6-8.*

# 6 ways to find the motivation you've lost



## BY ANGILEECE WILLIAMS

Feeling unmotivated is a common challenge. Our motivation is what drives us to meet our goals and losing that sense of determination can leave us feeling confused and frustrated.

There are many reasons for motivation depletion—it can be circumstantial, environmental, emotional, mental, etc. However, rediscovering your spark doesn't have to be difficult—sometimes we just need to make simple adjustments in order to find it.

Here are six easy tips to help you find your motivation if you think you've lost it:

### 1. Get moving!

When you're feeling unmotivated, find ways to start moving. Incorporating movement into your day is not only beneficial to your physical health, but to your mental health and emotional health as well. Studies show that physical activity boosts our memory and thinking skills, and other benefits to physical activity include better sleep, reduced stress, and increased self esteem.

Adding movement to your day does not have to be complicated or time consuming—it can be done right in the classroom. Rock out to your favorite song, take a quick walk around the block. Find what works best for you and your schedule and get your students involved, too.

Ideas for incorporating movement into your day include: jumping jacks, stretching, or running in place. Use your

students as inspiration by assigning tasks around the classroom or by doing simple exercises as a group. Get motivated together!

### 2. Get a little creative

Creativity helps us to find our motivation because it helps to get rid of that pesky inner critic. Creative expression is one of the most honest forms of self expression and it allows for us to form a deeper connection with ourselves and the people around us.

Creativity helps us to enter into the "flow state." Flow state is a term used in positive psychology to describe the state in which one becomes completely immersed in a challenge or project. As we meet and overcome challenges while we create, dopamine is released into our brains.

Flex your creativity muscle right now by doodling, scrapbooking, and journaling throughout the day.

### 3. Daily intentions are your friend

An intention can be defined as a purpose, something that is intended, an aim, or a plan. Everything in life that occurs starts with an intention. Intentions are powerful because they help us to remain focused while on the road to achievement, and they provide us with insight and mental clarity as we move throughout our day. Intentions provide meaning, and meaning provides significance; when you intend to do

something, intentions help us to realize the significance of what we're doing.

Setting a daily intention may be the perfect thing to help you reflect and refocus. Check out these tips for creating your intention journal.

### 4. Evaluate your surroundings

The next time you're in a motivational rut, evaluate your surroundings. There could be numerous environmental factors that contribute to a lack of motivation. Our environment has a major influence on our mood, and under certain conditions can be detrimental to our executive functioning. Our environment affects how we interact with others, our stress, our motivation, etc. If you find that your environment is affecting you negatively, then consider making changes to your surroundings.

Making positive changes to our environment can mean adopting a new work space or going for a walk; it can also mean hanging up inspirational posters or purchasing a desk diffuser. For more options, check out these tips on bringing the positive energy back to your environment.

### 5. Find moments for pause

Take a moment to reflect on your life and all your responsibilities, all the calls and texts you receive, and all the media you consume. Have you ever realized that we're constantly overloaded in our day-to-day? How can we expect ourselves to work through challenges and see the bigger picture if we're constantly dividing our attention? A key to finding your motivation is to routinely find time for pause.

Go off the grid, mute the notifications on your phone, sit in silence, focus on nothing but your breathing, find time to simply be. It's important to give yourself the space and time to exist and to reflect. Finding moments for pause can be difficult, but promising yourself just a few moments of pause each day is helpful in the long term.

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### 6. Focus on your students

Sometimes when we're feeling unmotivated, it helps to focus our attention elsewhere. The new year brings opportunities to reflect on the ways we have grown over the past year. Focus your attention on your students and their individual progress. By focusing on how much our students have grown and the role we've played in this growth, it becomes a transformative experience that allows your classroom community to recharge and refocus as a whole.

Make this a fun experience by setting up a reward system. Celebrate individual growth by handing out certificates, small rewards, or by having students mark their growth on a growth calendar.

### A final note

The next time you find yourself feeling unmotivated, do not be discouraged. By making small changes in your approach to life and its many challenges, rediscovering your motivation is no trouble at all. 

[*Editor's Note:* This article was first published on the Move This World blog.]

*Angileece Williams graduated from Kent University where she focused on public relationships and applied communications. A writer who is passionate about shifting the conversation surrounding mental health, Williams currently works with Move This World, a social emotional learning program that provides PreK-12 educators and students with digital tools to strengthen their social and emotional well-being in order to create healthy environments where effective teaching and learning can occur. Through evidence-based, developmentally appropriate video tools, Move This World ritualizes a daily practice of identifying, expressing, and managing emotions.*



## 4 ways to focus on edtech in 2019

New resource guide highlights strategies to put edtech initiatives at the top of the to-do list

**BY LAURA ASCIONE**  
Managing Editor, Content Services

Integrating edtech isn't always easy, but it doesn't have to be overwhelming, either.

Planning is essential to any ed-tech program's success—without proper planning, entire initiatives can flop.

A new resource from mobile hotspot provider Kajeet outlines some of the biggest steps to take in planning for edtech.

### 1. Show us the edtech funding

Innovative and inspiring ideas for edtech initiatives that will transform teaching and learning still need financial support. This might come in the form of federal funding or grants—but it must come from somewhere, especially as education leaders continue to identify funding issues as one of the biggest roadblocks to successful tech programs.

Funding guides and grants can help you get your search started.

### 2. Integrate and understand edtech in the classroom

According to Kajeet data, 79 percent of students use devices in the classroom daily, so it's important to know how to effectively integrate it and understand its full potential.

Targeted PD focusing on integrating ed tech, along with tapping into valuable resources such as library media

specialists, can help a tech program reach success.

### 3. Bring wi-fi to the buses

Wi-fi access on school buses doesn't just help the students who ride the buses—it brings wi-fi access to surrounding communities and neighborhoods through designated Homework Zones. School bus wi-fi lets students use personal or school-provided devices to complete homework or collaborate with peers. One district saw bus referrals decline 45 percent after installing wi-fi on buses.

### 4. Focus on closing the Homework Gap

Most teachers assign homework that requires the internet, but many students don't necessarily have access to a device, or the right device, with a large enough screen or enough data to complete homework. Even if students have the right devices, unreliable home internet access or no access at all hinders their achievement and ability to complete homework and other projects or research. Because it tends to impact low-income and rural students harder than others, the homework gap can intensify other income or access issues these students and their families face.

Leveraging ed-tech funding to address the homework gap can help, with a few key strategies in place. 

# I gamified my classroom and students are soaring

BY AMANDA MOORE

An average child today will have played 10,000 hours of video games before the age of 21. If playing games is part of our culture, even part of our identities, then it stands to reason that students can be highly motivated by game-based learning opportunities. So what if we make classrooms the game?

Gamification means using game-design principles such as cooperation, competition, character development, and point scoring in a non-gaming context. In the classroom, it can be as straightforward as transforming learning activities into games or a more subtle application of game-design principles to learning tasks.

Gamifying your classroom can be as simple or as complex as you choose to make it. Some teachers choose to create their own game for their classroom in order to customize features including backstory, characters, rules, and objectives. At the same time, there are many user-friendly apps that teachers use to simplify those features.

As a classroom teacher, I gamified my classroom because I needed an engaging way to deliver the online lessons I created for students during reading and math workshop. I was able to turn my online lessons into an adventure with a storyline, obstacles, and learning challenges. I had read research about the benefits of gamification, but I was still surprised to see such a remarkable transformation in my classroom. In just a few months I saw amazing benefits!

## Social-emotional growth

I've spent that last few years implementing different vocabulary and integrating specific read-alouds to help my students develop a growth mindset. In particular, I wanted my students to develop grit and perseverance—a mindset that welcomes challenges and does not give up easily. When I gamified my

classroom, I realized that the nature of gameplay promotes positive challenge and helps my students practice and apply a growth mindset.

One of the most amazing shifts I noticed was my students' response to failure. Rather than feeling defeated when failing at a task in our game, my students have returned to the task with renewed determination, rising to the challenge with a positive attitude. They are more willing to listen to and apply the feedback I give them because they are determined to master skills and level up.

## Engagement and motivation

Not of all students are motivated by the grades they earn, but most are willing to spend hours working to beat a challenging level in their favorite video game. My students are excited to work online every day, even asking me for extra work so that they can earn points to level up. With students asking for additional work and persevering through tough learning challenges, it's no wonder that my learners have shown so much academic success.

One of my students last year struggled to complete school work and would avoid working at home also. After we gamified our learning tasks, he showed his parents his work, asked for help at home, and displayed new focus at school. I was so encouraged to see this young man become excited to learn.

## Positive relationships and stronger community

Playing with my students broke down social barriers that usually take a significant amount of time to overcome. Building a positive community within a competitive gaming situation is critical. Friendly competition is great, but what's even better is a collective community that is genuinely interested in the learning of everyone involved. One way that we build our community is through collabo-



orative battles within our game. When the class is counting on every student to work hard and be prepared, students are motivated to invest in their peers.

## My tool of choice

I began gamifying my classroom by using Classcraft, a gamification platform in which students work collaboratively and independently. Each player customizes their own avatar that they work to develop by earning points, and teams work together to support one another's learning and development. Students and teams can earn points in a variety of fully customizable ways, allowing teachers to reinforce the learning and community behaviors their students need.

There are many different apps available to help teachers with gamification. Some have specific focuses like behavior management or academic progress. What I like about Classcraft is that it reinforces so many aspects of my classroom: positive social interaction, collaborative learning, behavior management, personalized academic lessons, and of course fun.

Classcraft's quest feature allows me to turn my online lessons into an adventure with a storyline, obstacles, and learning challenges. As students earn points and level up, they unlock rewards such as choosing a new seat in class, obtaining extra time on an assignment, or upgrading armor and pets for their avatar.

In all, I'm so pleased with the impact gamification has had on my students. They are shining, and of course, we are having so much fun along the way! **eSN**

*Amanda Moore is a fourth-grade teacher in Indianapolis, Indiana. Find her on twitter @teachforthewin.*

# Student wellbeing & SEL are more important than you think

**BY DR. HENRY G. BRZYCKI  
& ELAINE J. BRZYCKI**

[*Editor's note:* eSchool News is thrilled to partner with The Brzycki Group to help our audience navigate the growing body of work and best practices in student wellbeing and social-emotional learning (SEL). These are important topics for eSchool News, and we're excited to work with the Brzycki Group, who have provided leadership to student wellbeing for more than 30 years. We want to be the central source for our audience and help highlight the great work institutions are doing to address these issues and make wellbeing a core part of student learning.]

Through monthly articles on the eSchool News and eCampus News media platforms, The Brzycki Group & The Center for the Self in Schools will cover the latest psychological, educational, and wellbeing models, policies, and practices in SEL and student wellbeing. These models address the psychological, emotional, and physical well-being of children and can be applied to K-16 classroom teaching best practices, curricula design, counseling best practices, and educational leadership.

Education professionals across all levels of K-16 education want to make a real difference for students, and many are aware of the growing bodies of work in SEL and student wellbeing. Yet there is general misunderstanding about what these bodies of work mean and how to use them to produce mental health and wellbeing outcomes through schooling. Additionally, there are numerous models from which to choose, such as SEL; multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS); school-based mental health curricula; bullying and school violence prevention programs; anxiety, depression and suicide prevention and treatment models; trauma informed instruction; school climate programs; whole child education; student success pro-

grams; life coaching; and academic advising; among others. We often hear educators ask, "Where do I start?"

## An integrated wellbeing framework

One significant reason for the confusion is that these topics are written about and researched by separate professions within K-16 education—such as classroom teaching, school leadership, clinical psychology, school psychology, academic research, and non-profit SEL services, among others. The issues are described from the perspective of each separate profession, without a common framework or model that grounds and integrates them across the K-16 schooling experience. Educators need new clarity around how to produce mental health and wellbeing through educational processes, along with an integrated framework for educators to apply across K-16 education.

Another challenge is that SEL and student success are most often viewed narrowly through the lens of student achievement and academic outcomes. However, the research shows that positive academic outcomes follow wellbeing outcomes. The overarching framework for SEL, student success, and student well-being is grounded in the psychology of wellbeing, and it is time to put wellbeing first to empower resilience and success across the lifespan.

## The compelling need for mental health through schooling

Life for most of us in today's world takes a toll on our emotional, psychological, and physical wellbeing. Research demonstrates that people are not emerging from our educational system with the mental framework and associated mental capacities to adequately meet the overwhelming demands of modern life. This inadequacy leaves most people with grow-

ing levels of anxiety and depression; disconnection from their experiences of joy, love, happiness, and inner peace; and a lack of sense of purpose in life with related personal and professional meaning.

The issue of mental health and wellbeing is becoming more and more acute as life in modern society becomes more and more complex. K-16 students have expanded needs and more mental and physical challenges and illnesses. We are not adequately addressing or measuring these needs and challenges. As a result, we are seeing dire and overwhelming statistics on bullying, hate crimes, trauma, anxiety, depression, sexual assault, substance abuse, suicide, behavior-based physical illnesses, and more.

## Wellbeing is at the core of learning

We are proposing an innovative contextual view that places student mental health and wellbeing at the center of all schooling processes. From this perspective, student success across the entire K-16 educational experience can and should be measured by mental health and wellbeing outcomes, not simply academic achievement or graduation and retention rates.

We can expose everyone in our society to mental health and wellbeing best practices. We can teach all school-aged children, adolescents, and young adults how to be healthy, build social-emotional learning and student wellbeing practices into K-16 classrooms, and integrate efforts across the entire K-16 experience.

Research demonstrates that people's success comes only partially from the intellect, and it is more important to develop optimism levels, social supports, and the ability to see stress as a challenge instead of a threat. The lens through which we see the world creates our realities—from the inside out—and the K-16 educational system has the ability, and responsibility, to help

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# How to think like a leader

Check out the five stages of the blueprint for success: vision, goal, action plan, action, and reflection

**BY MATTHEW JOSEPH, ED.D.**

Schools are experiencing a dramatic shift from how they've been run and structured for over a century. Leaders must establish direction, influence others, and initiate sustainable change as they navigate the ever-evolving landscape of education. Such leadership requires a dynamic combination of positive mindset, influential behaviors, and effective skills. Stepping into a leader role requires a change in thinking from "How can I be the best for me?" to "How can I be the best to help my people do their jobs more effectively?"

School leadership, which is the process of enlisting and guiding the talents and energies of teachers, students, and families toward achieving common educational goals, is about thinking differently, not just acting differently. If you do what you've always done, you'll get what you've always gotten.

All too often, we focus on what we're comfortable with—the strategies and methods we've used for years. But as education evolves, we must be willing to modify or update our approach. As hard and uncomfortable as this may be, we must think about our approach to think like a leader.

To think like a leader is to design a blueprint for success that is cyclical, dynamic, and able to change in time with the reality of the school environment. A blueprint for success is not a strategic plan that sits in a binder on the shelf. Rather, it is a process whereby a leader thinks through all the steps and plans an effective implementation strategy.

## Blueprint for success

I believe a blueprint for success consists of five stages: a vision, goal, action plan, action, and reflection.

### Vision

Effective leaders vividly describe

their vision for the future and paint a clear picture of that destination to others. A vision inspires people to work towards a common goal. They build teams and define the steps to get there. A clear vision helps get the team back on track if along the way you go astray with your action steps or attitude.

You hear a lot of people say: "I will believe it when I see it." Think of vision as the reverse of that statement. If you believe in your vision and model it every day, others will see the vision and have clarity on your direction. True vision provides a roadmap for the school and its stakeholders by providing a picture of success. Effective leaders clearly communicate this vision to the school as a means of inspiring, motivating, and engaging people.

### Goal(s)

By setting high, clearly defined goals, effective leaders can measure the process and take pride in the achievement of those goals. Seeing forward progress helps motivate you to keep at it, even when the going gets tough. Small victories will give you the self-confidence you need to recognize your own abilities in achieving the goals you've set.

Ensure goals are set high. I like to say if someone doesn't laugh at your goal(s) because they think it is out of reach, then the goal is not set high enough. Les Brown wrote, "Shoot for the moon and if you miss you will still be among the stars." I encourage you to set your goals sky high.

### Action plan

An action plan is a roadmap for how you are going to achieve your goal(s). The goal(s) should be broken down into steps and an assigned priority. Identify a person or team responsible for the completion of the goal and a way to track



progress; consider a method to make notes to document said progress. Additionally, a starting and ending date should be a part of each action plan. A leader can have an amazing vision and clear goals, but without the plan to get there, the blueprint is not solid and will lead to a lack of clarity and unorganized implementation.

Developing an action plan cannot be done in isolation. Look at all aspects of your vision and be sure to enlist a cross section of voices and personalities. These voices will be the champions and cheerleaders of moving from action plan to action.

### Action

What separates an effective leader from an unsuccessful one is the implementation of ideas into action. The time to act is when the vision is set, the goals are developed, and the action plan is strong. Effective leaders stay true to the vision and action plan because the time spent developing the plan will pay off and the results will be miraculous. Don't overthink this step. When you're ready, turn your action plan into action.

### Reflection

Almost everything we do in education requires an evaluation and reflection. Reflection takes many forms and is an integral part of education and personal growth. Great leaders/teachers constantly reflect on their practice. They alter their plans, units, interactions, and attitudes. In a profession as challenging as teaching, self-reflection offers lead-

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students develop their own unique lens.

Transformative models and high impact practices are available. We can create wellness and the better society we envision. Please join us throughout 2019—and read our monthly articles on eSchool News—as we open a conversation with K-16 educators to transform our mindset to produce positive student health and wellbeing outcomes. **eSN**

*Dr. Henry G. Brzycki and Elaine J. Brzycki have more than 30 years of experience providing leadership to the fields of education and psychology. They co-founded The Brzycki Group & The Center for the Self in Schools, an innovative think tank that provides thought leadership on emotional, psychological and physical well-being outcomes through education, with a mission to impact the human condition. Their three academic best-selling books represent the future of integrating well-being into K-16 education: Mental Health for All Toolkit (2019); Student Success in Higher Education: Developing the Whole Person through High-Impact Practices (2016); and The Self in Schooling: Theory and Practice: How to Create Happy, Healthy, Flourishing Children in the 21st Century (2013). Your thoughts and ideas are welcome at Henry@Brzyckigroup.com.*

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ers and teachers an opportunity to think about what works and what doesn't. Creating time for reflection gives leaders a chance to see their vision in action and determine next steps with actual data.

Effective leaders focus reflection on the impact of the actions on the school/district, the staff, and on him/herself. Reflection can take many forms. It can be a few minutes at the end of each day (who you talked to, what was said, what happened as a result of the vision and actions) or it can be an assessment of data collected over many days/weeks.

It may help to have a set of reflection questions to guide your thought process:

- How frequently am I communicating my vision and priorities?
- Can my staff articulate my vision and priorities?
- Am I supporting my staff on our path to achieving our goals?
- Am I leading or managing?
- How am I making a difference?

Regular check-ins on the action items help you see where you are in the cycle of progress. Are you on schedule? Did you budget correctly? Is the work aligned with the goals and intended objectives? If the actions are a



little off course, you might need to make a simple change or do a deeper recalibration. Regardless, you won't know until you've reflected on your progress.

A leader's success is about helping others grow. It's about making you staff smarter, bigger, and bolder. Nothing you do as an individual matters as much as how you nurture and support your team and help increase their self-confidence. Success starts with thinking like a leader and creating and sharing a blueprint for success. **eSN**

*Matthew Joseph, Ed.D., is the director of digital learning, informational technology, and innovation for Milford Public Schools in Milford, Mass. He has written multiple articles for eSchool News and is the author of The Power of Us: Creating Collaborative School Communities. Follow Matt on Twitter @MatthewXJoseph.*

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