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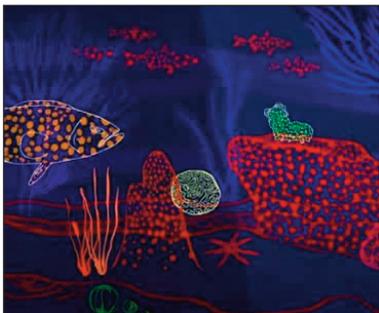
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Lessons and leadership during the switch to online learning

BY ROBERT LOW

Two months after the COVID-19 crisis forced educators across the United States to leave their classrooms and start teaching online, the scope of the changes and challenges has now become clear, and educational leaders have started to identify what's working and what still needs improvement.

During a recent edLeader Panel, the superintendent of one of America's largest school districts spoke with a former state superintendent and other education leaders about key issues affecting students, parents, and educators, including digital access and equity, online privacy, and funding.

Overall, the panelists are optimistic that the transition to online learning will hasten the



adaptation of technologies and teaching methods that will better prepare students for 21st century careers. And while initial plans are being developed for students to return to class-

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Promoting SEL skills and a sense of community during COVID-19

BY LAURA ASCIONE
Managing Editor, Content Services

The nation's abrupt shift to remote learning in the wake of COVID-19 has left teachers, students, and parents scrambling to find balance in their daily lives. And while maintaining academic learning is important, it's just as important to focus on social and emotional learning (SEL) skills to help students maintain their mental and emotional well-being.

SEL skills are among the top priorities at the St. Thomas School, a PreK-8 Seattle-area school that went virtual the first week of

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Making progress on equity, even during the pandemic

BY ROBERT LOW

As the COVID-19 crisis has forced schools to close their buildings and move online, inequities in access to technology, books, and even food have become more apparent. Still, there are ways educators can continue to support the learning needs of their full range of students and make the education they provide more equitable.

During a recent edWebinar, Cornelius Minor, a Brooklyn-based educator and staff developer, and Dr. Jennifer Williams, a professor at St. Leo University's College of Education, identified ways that teachers can increase their understanding of equity issues that may affect learning needs, in order to respond with effective solutions.

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rooms in the fall, the need for effective online education will not only remain, but will be more important and better integrated going forward.

Changing the timespan from decades to days

The integration of new technologies in schools has been an ongoing process that sometimes seems to take longer than it should. Tom Luna, the former state superintendent of Idaho, remarked that “it took 20 years to get the overhead projector out of the bowling alley and into the classroom,” which makes the quick transition to online learning required in March of this year all the more remarkable.

Dr. Jack Smith, superintendent of schools in Maryland’s Montgomery County, explained how his district facilitated the transition for its 160,000 students—some of whom had no computers

issue, educators and students now engaged in online teaching and learning have new types of issues to contend with. Privacy is one key concern, as students and their data need to be protected online, but many teachers and students are also seeing and hearing what happens inside each other’s homes on a daily basis, which they may have never been prepared to do.

To deal with these types of situations, the panelists emphasized the need for clear and easily-understood privacy policies, and transparency about what students and their parents should expect from remote education. Students also need support and guidance about online behavior, including what can or should not be shared via social media.

Preparing for an uncertain future

Based on recent discussions about reopening schools in the fall, Dr. Daniel Domenech, executive director of the American Association of School

issues and what can help to resolve them. Meanwhile, the district is also moving forward with a professional learning program for educators that is focused on blended learning.

Linnette Attai of Playwell, LLC also encouraged districts to provide new professional learning, with an emphasis on helping educators deal with issues such as privacy and student participation that they were trained to handle in the classroom but probably not online. And for district administrators, she believes listening will be a crucial part of the process as they develop “the next iteration of education that will work in each locality.”

Luna emphasized the importance of making parents feel comfortable with online education, first and foremost by taking steps to keep it safe and secure from predators and hackers. Knowing that many parents are also concerned about the privacy of student data, he believes there should be transparency about what data is being collected and why, with educators being prepared to

Based on recent discussions about reopening schools in the fall, Dr. Daniel Domenech, executive director of the American Association of School Administrators, believes that only limited numbers of students will be back in the classroom at any one time, so there will be continued switching back and forth between remote and on-site education as part of a blended-learning approach.

or connectivity at home, while others in affluent suburbs live with a variety of devices and have high-speed WiFi.

Knowing the lack of digital access would severely impact the education of students in lower-income households, the district decided to empty the “Chrome carts” used to bring Chromebooks to classrooms and set up drive-through distribution points where students could receive computers and connectivity devices. More than 45,000 households received computers in this way, and the district now uses a case-management approach to reach out to students who are not logging in for classes.

While digital access remains an

Administrators, believes that only limited numbers of students will be back in the classroom at any one time, so there will be continued switching back and forth between remote and on-site education as part of a blended-learning approach. This will require further funding and technological solutions to deal with the vast inequity between the students who have full and fast access to online education, and the many students who still do not.

Dr. Smith recommends using the community and its knowledge base to obtain information, anticipate issues, and develop solutions. He has started having small-group discussions with school principals to learn about key

explain how the data serves educational purposes.

From a state-level perspective, he pointed out that a constitutional requirement to provide uniform access to education may require states to provide additional funding for digital access. There will also be a need to revisit foundational elements of public education finances, such as funding based on attendance.

Despite all the challenges of remote education, there was agreement that it has become even more important at a time when applying for a job, receiving training, and working with colleagues are all being done online.

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About the presenters

Dr. Daniel A. Domenech has served as executive director of the American Association of School Administrators since July 2008. Daniel has more than 36 years of experience in public education, 27 of those years he served as a school superintendent. Prior to joining AASA, Daniel served as the senior vice president for National Urban Markets with McGraw-Hill Education. In this role, he was responsible for building strong relationships with large school districts nationwide. Prior to his position at McGraw-Hill, Daniel served for seven years as superintendent of the Fairfax County, VA, Public Schools, the 12th largest school system in the nation with 168,000 students. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Hunter College in New York City and a Ph.D. from Hofstra University in Uniondale, N.Y.

Linnette Attai is the founder of PlayWell, LLC, a global privacy and marketing compliance consulting firm. Linnette brings more than twenty-five years of experience to the work, building organizational compliance programs, assessing technologies, providing training, government relations, and managing incident response communications. She also serves as virtual chief privacy officer and as General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) data protection officer to a range of organizations. Linnette is a recognized expert in the youth and education sectors and speaks nationally on data privacy. She is a TEDx speaker and author of the books, “Student Data Privacy: Building a School Compliance Program” and “Protecting Student Data Privacy: Classroom Fundamentals.”

Dr. Jack Smith began his tenure as superintendent of Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland on July 1, 2016. A dedicated, lifelong educator, Dr. Smith has been a teacher, principal,

curriculum director, and a local superintendent of schools. His goal has always been to provide all students, regardless of their background, with options and choices upon graduation. Dr. Smith’s career began as a teacher in Richland, Washington. In 1992, he relocated to Tokyo, Japan, where he served as an international school principal. He returned to the United States in 1998 and joined Calvert County Public Schools, where he served in numerous leadership roles and as superintendent of schools for seven years. In 2013, he was named Maryland Superintendent of the Year. Dr. Smith was appointed Maryland interim state superintendent of schools in September 2015, having served as chief academic officer with the Maryland State Department of Education from 2013 to 2015.

Tom Luna is the former Idaho Superintendent of Education. He was elected Idaho State Superintendent of Public Instruction in 2006 and served two terms. While serving as State Superintendent, Tom was elected President of Council of Chief State School Officers, an organization made up of all 50 state chiefs. In 2009, Tom was appointed by the US Secretary of Education to the National Assessment Governing Board. Tom was also a member of Chiefs for Change. During Tom’s years as State Superintendent, Idaho passed arguably the most comprehensive education reforms laws in the country. Some of the accomplishments included modernizing collect bargaining laws, creating a career ladder for teachers, expanding school choice by providing facility funding for charter schools and removing arbitrary laws that capped growth. Idaho created the Fast Forward program that gives high school students up to \$4100.00 to pay for college credit-bearing courses. Tom worked with educators to create the Idaho Math Initiative and partnered with NASA and Idaho Teacher in Space Barbara Morgan to create the Idaho Science and Aerospace Scholars Academy.

About the host

Ann McMullan is Project Director for CoSN’s Empowered Superintendents Initiative. Ann served as Executive Director, Educational Technology in the Klein Independent School District, near Houston, Texas until September 2013, when she and her family moved to Los Angeles, California. For 16 years Ann led the district team that provided professional development on technology and 21st century instructional strategies to 4,000 professional educators serving 50,000 students. Ann served as co-chair of Texas Education Technology Advisory Committee which developed the Texas Long Range Plan for Technology, 2006-2020. Today, Ann is based in Los Angeles working as a public speaker, writer, and education consultant focused on leadership and planning to meet the needs of today’s students. Ann serves on the Project Tomorrow advisory council and is a leadership consultant with Executive Service Corps of Southern California, serving non-profit associations. Ann co-authored Life Lessons in Leadership, a guide for leaders ages eight to 88.

Join the community

Professional Learning & Practice is a free professional learning community on edWeb.net that presents edWebinars and hosts online discussion forums on a wide range of issues on professional learning and educator practice.

This edWeb broadcast was sponsored by The ProEthica® Program. The recording of the edLeader Panel can be viewed by anyone at <https://home.edweb.net/webinar/pd20200504/>. 

Robert Low has worked in educational publishing for more than 30 years. His experience ranges from editing and product management to online advertising and content development. He also works with edWeb.net to write articles on their professional learning edWebinars.

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Progressing to a “better normal”

Acknowledging the widespread desire to “return to normal,” Minor pointed out that would also result in the continuation of recent trends such as the underrepresentation of females in science and technology, and the high rate of school suspensions for students of color. He then explained specific techniques that educators can use now to improve outcomes for students who are at disadvantages due to factors such as race, economic class, and language proficiency.

In particular, the current need to reinvent the way educators teach provides an opportunity to adapt rules, policies, and customs that can lead to inequitable outcomes for specific groups of students. Pointing out that some children

Minor also cited a recent response to data on secondary students at an urban school, which found that many girls were not attending after-school sessions designed to improve their performance on chemistry tests. Interviews with girls who did not attend revealed that because the sessions were from 3 to 6 PM during February, a number of parents felt it would not be safe for the girls to walk home from the sessions in the dark and therefore stopped them from attending, so the time was changed and attendance improved.

Finding solutions in time

Williams noted that many teachers are realizing how adaptive and creative they can be due to the current circumstances, and the same understanding can be applied to finding solutions for diverse students’ learning needs. This should not be seen as a quick and easy way to achieve perfection, but rather a

to jumping in. Teachers need to be able to pivot and respond, especially to distress signals, but there should also be a proactive approach to considering how best to engage different students in the learning process, and to make sure they all feel noticed and have their achievements recognized.

As for when to slow down or speed up, Williams emphasized the importance of being mindful of the presence of “flow,” and protecting periods of active and engaged learning so that a rigid schedule does not become a barrier to effective education. This requires flexibility in regard to time and thought, and may also require more communication with administrators, parents, or others so that they understand the educational value of what is happening.

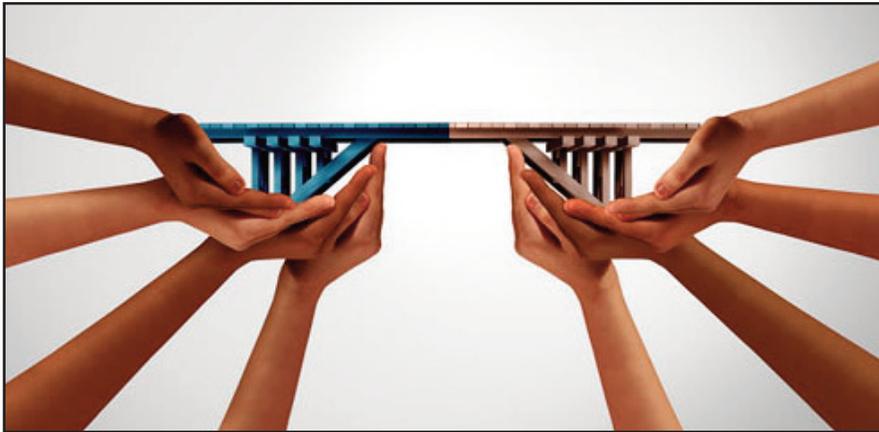
In closing, Minor cited the importance of “academic pluralism,” with students being able to learn and demonstrate mastery through multiple means of engagement, representation, action, and expression.

About the presenters

Cornelius Minor is a Brooklyn-based teacher and staff developer. He works with teachers, school leaders, and leaders of community-based organizations to support equitable literacy reform in cities across the globe. He has been featured in Education Week, Brooklyn Magazine, and Teaching Tolerance Magazine. He has partnered with The Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, NYC DOE, ILA, and Lesley University’s Center for Reading Recovery and Literacy Collaborative. Whether working with educators and kids in Los Angeles, Seattle, or New York City, Cornelius uses his love for technology, hip-hop, and social media to bring communities together. As a teacher, Cornelius draws not only on his years teaching middle school in the Bronx and Brooklyn, but also on time spent skateboarding, shooting hoops, and working with young people.

Dr. Jennifer Williams is a professor at Saint Leo University’s College of

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are active learners, and that educators need to think about approaches that will support their achievement, Minor mentioned a recent experience in which young students were asked to sit still during a 20-minute read aloud.

Knowing that some students have no difficulty doing that, but it can be challenging for others, Minor explained that he had created opportunities for students to respond through movement and talking, which can improve the academic and behavioral performance of students who need to engage in active and social comprehension.

process of invention and successive iterations with the understanding that work on equity is a work in progress.

Many teachers have traditionally found time management to be a challenging issue, and now may be under even greater time pressure as they adapt to teaching during the pandemic, so Williams recommended focusing on three key questions in regard to time: when to “jump in,” when to slow down, and when to speed up.

Making sure that diverse students’ interests and values are represented should be a key consideration in regard

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Education and the co-founder and executive director of Take Action Global, an organization designed to inspire change by providing opportunities for students around the world to take action on social good causes through education. Recognized as a transformational leader in education, Dr. Jennifer Williams has dedicated herself for nearly 25 years to the field of education through her roles as an education activist, professor, school administrator, literacy specialist, and classroom teacher. She speaks, writes,

and consults on practices that develop global perspectives and social good through creative uses of technology, and her research interests include innovations in teaching and learning, equity and diversity in education, and social action. Jennifer is inspired every day by teachers and students that are catalysts for making the world a better place!

Join the community

Leadership 3.0 is a free professional learning community on edWeb.net where school and district leaders collaborate on innovative strategies to help teachers grow professionally, advance

student learning, and improve communications with all stakeholders.

This edWeb broadcast was sponsored by Scholastic Education, Digital Solutions. The recording of the edWebinar can be viewed by anyone at <https://home.edweb.net/webinar/leadership20200423/>. 

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March. Head of School Dr. Kirk Wheeler champions the importance of SEL skills, community, and a sense of belonging to unite the school, both in person and when the school suddenly went virtual.

St. Thomas School already had a one-to-one K-8 Microsoft Surface laptop program in place, ensuring all students had a device when learning went remote. Teachers use Microsoft OneNote to tailor students' learning experiences and push out readings, tests, worksheets, and videos directly to students. Middle and high school students also use the tool to submit homework. St. Thomas School uses Microsoft Sway in its early learning center to deliver links, videos, and updates to parents.

"I'm a big community culture person—it's such a powerful human need," Wheeler says. "One of my big concerns when we went remote was that we'd lose community and our sense of belonging. I didn't want students, faculty, and parents just floating out there."

The school's teachers, specialists, and staff employ a number of strategies to keep developing students' SEL skills and to continue cultivating a sense of belonging—even while students are



learning from home.

"Part of what schools provide for families, and I think we forget this, is a sense of belonging, routine, ritual, and those elements are part of what helps us manage anxiety. I think when you lose the routines and rituals school offers, you suddenly really feel adrift," Wheeler says. "So we're building off things that already existed."

1. Find a way to keep special routines going

School staff identified rituals and routines in place when everyone was meeting on campus and attempted to approach those routines differently

given everyone's virtual environments. Just continuing some of those simple routines have already made a difference for students and teachers.

St. Thomas School is a nonreligious independent school founded by an Episcopal church, and every morning the school holds chapel, which Wheeler says is more of a community meeting. Before schools physically closed, everyone at St. Thomas School gathers for 30 minutes to meet and focus on their goals, their values, and to gain a sense of belonging in the school community.

"We launched chapel virtually," says

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Skipping the screen: A virtual lesson from Hong Kong

For virtual learning to be successful, educators can try to give students a break from their screens

BY CONNIE KIM

Hong Kong has been conducting remote schooling for nearly 12 weeks. In that time Hong Kong International School (HKIS) has delivered over 200 hours of daily lessons online, across all subjects, from language arts to culinary arts, PE to science, religion to Chinese.

But a couple of Wednesdays a month, middle school students at HKIS push aside their laptops and turn off their tablets. These are Wellbeing Wednesdays, which means no screens all day.

Pulling the plug on classroom time was not an easy decision – it took time and some trial and error. Adjusting to virtual learning, which was implemented in little over two days at HKIS, has required us to upskill, develop new strategies, and consider radical solutions more than ever before.

Back in February, when virtual learning began, we went through several iterations of our schedule to make learning as efficient as possible, and we consciously took proactive steps to make sure that our students, and our faculty, could have productive offline time.

Even so, after two months, it became clear that students and teachers, and even our parents, were still spending too much time in front of screens. Everyone reported screen fatigue. It was at this point that we finally made the move to go offline for an entire day. We chose a Wednesday because it split the week, and helped students break up concentrated teaching blocks with more creative and physical activities away from their devices or computers.

The strategy has proven to be a success and has been key foundation in our ability to support our community and provide the best holistic education we

can during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to our Wellbeing Wednesdays, we continue to integrate other wellbeing blocks, including time with Pastoral Care student groups and a screen-free afternoon, into the school calendar.

As schools in the US near the one-month mark for online learning, students and teachers may soon also face screen fatigue, and while switching off for a whole day may not work for everyone, there are other areas where teachers can take action to ensure screen time does not dominate in a negative way:

Increase efficiency of class time

To make each moment on screen high-value, we asked our teachers to hone down each lesson's learning objectives to 4-8 minutes. Not only did the sharper lessons reduce students' overall screen time, but teachers could also better capture students' attention in class. For teachers, the adjustment has been difficult, but they now tell me their lessons have improved and are more impactful. Nearly three months down the line, we're even ahead of schedule on our curriculum.

Teach live and pre-recorded video classes

We have gone through several iterations of our schedule based on teacher and parent feedback. If we had to roll out 100 percent virtual schooling again, I would start with our current bell schedule, which combines live classes and pre-recorded lesson videos, and has short offline breaks throughout the day. The schedule has many benefits, including reduced screen time for students and increased cooperation amongst teachers who are team-teaching and sharing resources.



Provide engaging offline activities

Art, music and PE teachers, as well as librarians and counselors, have supported parents and students by providing activities to make offline time fun and productive. Art teachers ask students to create using materials found at home. Music teachers manage practice time. PE teachers host friendly fitness competitions. Librarians give reading recommendations and even mail library books to students. Counselors suggest family activities and tips to structure the school day. There is no single answer – instead, we have tried to build up a range of options that provide variety and a change of pace throughout the day. Remote does not have to mean “the same”.

Have a reprieve from screens

On our Wellbeing Wednesday students can read for pleasure, be active and exercise, and catch-up on schoolwork only if necessary. Teachers have the chance to work on lessons and catch up on work, and parents do not have to be in-house tech support. This is a chance for everyone to connect back to their families and refocus for the second half of the week. Take a breather.

Frequently survey your school community about the virtual learning experience

We have conducted thorough surveys of our parents and students on a

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Using PBL to develop 21st-century skills

PBL challenges students to address real-world issues and take those new skills with them for the rest of their lives

BY SANDY SWARTZ, M.ED.

In today's classrooms, students need more than academic knowledge to thrive in college, careers and beyond. As a result, educators are dually tasked with increasing core subject comprehension and developing 21st-century skills, especially in STEM. Project-based learning (PBL) is designed to do both.

By inviting students to solve real-world challenges in their own community, we can draw the connection between these modern skills and the changing world around us.

It's safe to assume we all have a general understanding of PBL, and many of us have likely experimented with its use in the classroom. However, adopting PBL as regular practice is not an overnight task.

To transition from a traditional approach, consider using TGR EDU: Explore, a collaborative initiative between TGR Foundation and Discovery Education. This is how a project-based learning environment can be implemented in the classroom.

Define 21st-century skills and goals

What exactly are the skills that young people need to master to be successful after school? The National

Association of Colleges and Employees identified key college and career competencies as soft skills such as problem solving, leadership and work ethic, in addition to basic technical skills, such as digital fluency.

It can be helpful to remember these focus areas as the four Cs of 21st-century skills when outlining your PBL approach and activities:

- Critical thinking
- Creativity
- Collaboration
- Communication

Lessons that require students to tap into all four skill areas simultaneously are most effective for immersing them in the kind of real work environment that they will soon enter.

Implement best practices for PBL to flourish

The core of every project-based lesson is a cooperation between students and teachers to answer the question, "How do we work together to solve problems?"

Finding the answer should involve all four Cs: creativity helps us imagine an effective solution, because there isn't usually just one correct way to solve a project-based question. Critical thinking draws the connection between the proj-

ect and real world, addressing why it matters. Finally, collaboration and communication are both required of every team member in order to incorporate the best of everyone's ideas in a collective solution.

Let's break down why each of these skills are critical to students' lifelong development:

- Problem-solving in the context of a specific project forces students to assess their metacognitive strategies, or way of thinking, and in turn develop a greater understanding of how they learn. With this awareness, students can visualize how to navigate the path to success through any challenge, in or out of school.
- Students create and internalize productive work habits, especially the organizational and workflow skills required to work on a team and find applicable answers.
- After gaining the knowledge, awareness and skills from a project-based lesson, students can almost always apply their flexible learnings to a great range of settings, like other subject areas.
- I've noticed a significant increase in students' motivation and self-esteem by working in team settings.

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biweekly basis to understand, anonymously, how they are managing the screen time at home. We ask: what is working and what is not? We check up to see if there are external issues such as whether technology glitches or the volume of work are causing extra stress. We give an opportunity for people to vent or ask for what they need. Then we use this information to refine our

approach and to offer solutions. As an administrator, these surveys have been invaluable to my decision making.

In the space of a few days and weeks, a virus changed the way that schools operate and have to deliver education. There will be more changes ahead, and if we are honest, as educators we are still figuring out how to adapt in the best way. But the one point we have learnt so far in Hong Kong is that by proactively managing screen time we can better balance education, creativity and wellbeing during COVID-19.

We are making some of our home learning resources available for free to teachers and parents. Please visit Hong Kong International School's special home learning resource webpage at <https://www.hkis.edu.hk/homelearning/overview> 

Connie Kim has been an educator for 23 years, 8 of which she has held the title of principal. 2020 is her first year at Hong Kong International School, where she is the principal of the Middle School.

PBL

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Students who had lower drive in the classroom started to speak up and do so confidently.

To set up students for success, teachers must set clear expectations, especially if you are first exploring project-based activities with your class. Students need to know what to work toward in order to feel motivated to get there. Before diving into a PBL lesson, establish a few cooperative learning ground rules:

- Everyone should do their best to participate.
- Even in a team, each member is held accountable for their project responsibilities.
- While sharing knowledge is important, listening is more important.
- Pay attention to your problem-solving techniques and consider how they would translate to a real-world problem.

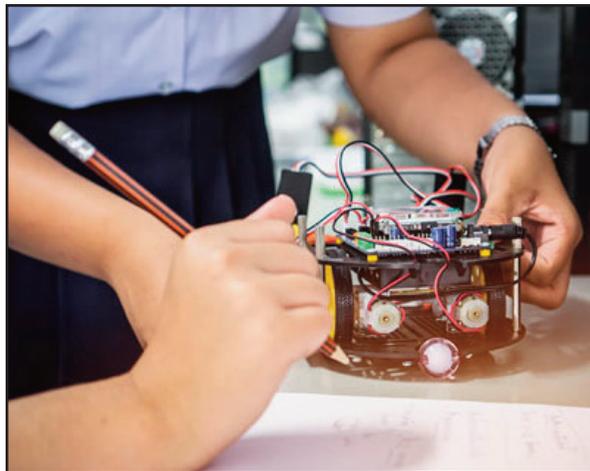
Be a leader of authentic experiences

In order for students to conceptualize what the four Cs look like in action, you must bridge the gap between classroom and the real world. Once students understand how projects in class can apply to overcoming challenges in their everyday lives, lessons become more meaningful and lasting.

One way to draw this critical connection is to lead by example. This can look different depending on your schedule and commitments, but a few ideas include:

- Join a professional association focused on technical skills development.
- Seek out summer employment in a technical skills-based environment.
- Find a volunteer opportunity that builds or uses technical knowledge.

With a firsthand perspective, you'll better be able to illustrate exactly how jobs leverage the skills learned in school. More importantly, you'll likely



identify areas that require additional focus in your classroom so you can appropriately prepare students.

In addition to modeling techniques, connect students with their communities to create an authentic learning experience. Ask students, “what challenges are in or around your school, neighborhood or city?” When students are invited to draw from their own experiences, they have more voice and choice in the problem-solving process.

Address common challenges to PBL

Each classroom has its own set of obstacles that can hinder a cooperative learning environment. In any team-based learning scenario, students must interact with one another and, more importantly, listen to each other's ideas. Recognizing the contributions of others doesn't come naturally to everyone, especially young children. I consider it my responsibility to facilitate and restore balance.

Here are some examples of challenges you might encounter in the classroom. If a team is one-sided or being dominated by one or a few students, consider assigning a ‘side quest,’ or a smaller task within the lesson for that student to work through while the rest of the group works toward the larger solution. If students are shy and struggling to be heard, give the group sentence starters to share their thoughts.

To maintain focus on the mission at

hand, you might find success with a ‘division of labor’ chart for the group to assign roles and be held accountable for their part of the project. This way, everyone is working toward a smaller goal to meet the larger goal.

Recap

The real-world applications of project-based learning are endless and, in the case of today's students, essential for lasting success in college, careers and life.

Recall the four Cs. Put these skills to the test with PBL so students can discover approaches to problem-solving and learn how to translate them to their own local communities, or globally. PBL can be the launchpad for students to grow as learners and become enthusiastic about finding creative solutions to improve our world.

Looking to get started now? Consider this lesson plan to introduce your students to PBL.

The TGR:EDU Explore resources are available at tgreduexplore.org and through Discovery Education Experience's Corporate Education Partnerships channel. In response to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, Discovery Education is offering schools and school systems not currently using the company's digital services free access to Discovery Education Experience. Schools accepting this offer will have access to Discovery Education's dynamic K-12 learning platform and its ready-to-use digital lesson plans, activities, and standards-aligned resources through the remainder of the school year. For more information, visit Discovery Education's comprehensive Virtual Learning resource dedicated to helping educators adapt their instruction to meet today's needs. 

Sandy Swartz, M.Ed., is an Instructional Technology Trainer in the St. Tammany Parish Public School System.

How to employ a differentiated mindset when teaching STEM

Differentiated instruction is a vital component of STEM education—here's how to maintain a differentiated mindset while teaching

BY ERIC MOORE
AND JASON PORTER

When we facilitate professional development events, there's often a common theme: teachers understand the importance of active STEM teaching and learning, but don't always know how to implement it in a way that supports the diverse needs of their students. In our work with TGR EDU: Explore, a partnership between TGR Foundation and Discovery Education, we provide guidance to educators on how to prepare students for success through active, engaging instruction.

Differentiated instruction is a critical part of providing an equitable, effective STEM education. When instruction is differentiated, students are able to actively explore careers in STEM, hone their individual skillsets and build confidence.

Here's how to employ a differentiated mindset when teaching STEM.

Mindset shift required

A shift in mindset is key to implementing differentiation in a STEM classroom. One of the best ways to help students achieve higher level learning is to employ active learning strategies during instruction. Active learning involves students creating and discovering during class, and connecting findings to their personal knowledge and experiences.

We must provide students with an environment where they can contribute to the conversation and learn from one another. A one-way lecture simply isn't as beneficial as collaboration.

Here's a quick breakdown of some different active learning methods:

- **Inquiry based instruction:** Making observations, asking questions, analyzing data, engaging in argument, sharing findings.



- **Cooperative learning:** Discovering how to learn from each other by working in groups.
- **Experiential learning:** Learning by doing; authentic learning experiences.
- **Project-based learning:** Empowering students to think critically, creatively solve problems, collaborate as members of a team and communicate with peers to explain how they solved a problem.

When it comes to teaching STEM, project-based learning is one of the most effective learning strategies you can use. Educators who implement project-based activities into STEM are not only engaging their students in the learning process, but are also emphasizing The 4 C's of 21st Century Skills – critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity. Teaching these skills is critical to STEM instruction.

Equity isn't equality

Before we dive in to the benefits of differentiation, it's important to understand that equity does not mean equality. Equity isn't about giving every student the same amount of support – it's making sure every student has access to the amount of support they need as individuals. Differentiated instruction helps

us achieve this level of individualized support.

When we fail to meet the challenge of providing quality and equity in school, we are contributing to the achievement gap. The implementation of effective differentiated instruction enhances the learning process, and can lead to improved student outcomes and achievements.

Defining differentiation

Differentiation isn't a recipe for instruction, and it's not a specific instruction strategy. It's a mindset for teaching and learning. Differentiation is grounded in the belief that students who are the same age widely differ, and these differences have a huge impact on how they learn.

Students learn best when they are pushed by supportive adults, can make a connection between curriculum and their interests and life experiences, feel like learning opportunities are authentic, and, most importantly, feel they are significant and respected in the classroom.

Educators who have embraced a differentiated mindset are planning what students learn, how they learn it and

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how they will show what they have learned – allowing students to focus on the actual learning process in a way that makes sense to them. They are facilitators of the learning process.

We also suggest educators work to build a culture of reflection and goal-setting. Goal-setting is key to making project-based learning work. Teachers must build an environment where stu-

Differentiated instruction is a critical part of providing an equitable, effective STEM education. When instruction is differentiated, students are able to actively explore careers in STEM, hone their individual skillsets and build confidence.

dents feel comfortable reflecting on their individual progress, and setting their own goals. No matter the subject, we must celebrate student achievements of every size.

Strategies for creating an engaging STEM classroom

To employ active learning and differentiation in STEM instruction, we've compiled the following strategies.

#1 Ask driving questions

Begin lessons with thoughtful questions. These benefit students by sparking interest, inciting a sense of challenge and helping to guide learning. In turn, driving questions also benefits educators by providing structure to project-based lessons.

#2 Create teachable moments with activity stations

Teachers are not bystanders during project-based learning. Instead, educators can set up teachable moments by incorporating activity stations or centers during lessons.

Imagine that students are learning about droughts, and have been tasked with finding a solution to the issues caused by them. You could start by setting up stations with different resources for students to explore to build upon the

knowledge they already have. One station may have print articles, another may offer video sources on a computer.

Next, you could have a collaborative station where students share what they've learned with each other. And finally, you can set up a modeling station, where students can visualize their solution to the problem by sketching it out.

When students move from station to station, they are building knowledge as they go. All learners are able to grow through this process.

#3 Differentiate student teams

Teams are important because they allow students to bring their own strengths to a group, while building communication and collaboration skills.

Many parts of STEM learning are challenging – when students work together, they are able to bring their own knowledge to the table while also learning from their peers.

There are three strategies to differentiate student teams. Rather than sticking with one method, we suggest using each, since they all have benefits.

- **Homogeneous:** Grouping students by level. This is helpful for providing additional support to the student groups who need it most.
- **Heterogenous:** Grouping learners of varying levels. This is beneficial because students are able to learn from one another.
- **Voice & Choice:** Students self-select their groups. This is valuable because students are able to own their groups and use their voice to make a decision.

Let's recap

Differentiation is a way to facilitate learning for the diversity of learners in your classroom. Project-based learning is an active strategy that facilitates differentiated instruction. It's important to remember that differentiated instruction is a skill that can be learned and improved upon – it's not a set strategy, it's a mindset. Practice will make it permanent.

Working towards a differentiated mindset will benefit you and your students. By creating engaging, active STEM classrooms, we are helping students achieve success in college, career and life. 

Eric Moore and Jason Porter are STEM Educators and Directors at TGR Foundation.

COVID-19 exposes inequities in rural districts

Learn how to lead the digital transformation in rural districts—during crisis and beyond

BY STACEY PUSEY

The current crisis has highlighted the disparity between students with and without equitable access to technology, especially in rural districts and schools. While most teachers are being asked to take their lessons directly to the students' homes, many administrators know that the challenges in their district go beyond whether or not students have enough devices to do their classwork.

During the edWebinar “Leading Digital Transformations in Rural School Districts,” the presenters talked about how the COVID-19 situation amplifies the obstacles rural districts and schools face transitioning to a 21st century learning environment.

One of the first challenges rural districts face is broadband access. Whether during a typical school year or now, many families don't have home Wi-Fi, and kids must find alternative ways to complete online work outside of school hours. Normally, many rural districts work with local libraries and businesses to give students Wi-Fi hotspots. Now, they are employing creative methods, such as expanding the reach of the school's broadband so students can do work from the parking lot or in the surrounding area, having off-duty patrol cars become hotspots across the district.

Teachers have also been doubly challenged with the quarantine. Already, many teachers—even younger ones—don't have the skills to integrate tech into the classroom. While they may be proficient in using edtech, they don't know how to create comprehensive lessons to incorporate edtech in the classroom. With not all kids having the same access, teachers must figure out how to develop lessons to accommodate all students.

Similarly, before the crisis, all of the presenters were working with their

boards and communities to show them edtech in a positive light and help them understand the importance of using tools in school that students will use in college and the workforce. However, many parents never wanted any tech in the house, or only wanted their kids to use it in a limited capacity. Today, the parents see the value and are more supportive of the digital transition. And just as they are getting creative with Wi-Fi access, the schools are also working on ways to get devices to all students. At Maury County Public Schools (TN), for example, families can check out Wi-Fi-enabled devices for two weeks at a time. There are some controls on the devices, but students can complete the required work.

A final challenge—again, whether or not during a crisis—is compassion for the families and students while still ensuring an effective education. The presenters emphasized constant, consistent communication with all constituents, explaining what edtech tools the school is using, why they are using them, and the expectations for the students. Let them know that the teachers are still there for the families; the edtech is just there to support the learning.

Most important, be understanding of different families' predicaments. The nature of the quarantine means many kids will have skills gaps, as well as social emotional issues, to address in the coming school year and beyond. Schools may need to approach the digital transition one family at a time to make sure all students receive a high-quality and effective education.

About the presenters

Ann Linson is in her ninth year as Superintendent of East Noble School Corporation serving 3,600 students in rural northeast Indiana. Her previous



experiences include being a classroom business teacher at the high school and post-secondary levels, assistant director of a vocational cooperative, principal at East Noble High School, and assistant superintendent at East Noble School Corporation. Ann earned her bachelors, masters, and Ed.S. degrees from Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana. She was selected to participate in the Future Ready Superintendent Briefing with the U.S. Department of Education Secretary in October 2016. Ann also attended the 2014 White House Connected Superintendents Summit and was named a 2012-2013 NSBA Technology Leadership Network 20 to Watch Educator. During Ann's leadership at East Noble School Corporation, the district received the Indiana Chapter of CoSN's Excellence in Vision Team Award, was selected as a Project Red Signature District and selected to the Digital Promise League of Innovative Schools.

Dr. Chris Marczak is the superintendent of schools for the Maury County Public School system in Tennessee and a 2017 NSBA “20 to Watch” educational technology award recipient. Dr. Marczak leads trainings across Tennessee in district and principal professional development, SMART goal implementation, professional learning communities, and the impact of social media on the superintendency. Dr. Marczak is also an adjunct professor in Nashville, TN, where he teaches in doctoral programs for both educational leadership and technology in educational leadership. Prior to coming to Maury County, Dr. Marczak was the assistant

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8 STEM learning challenges students can do at home

STEM learning is critical for students' academic and future success— here's how to continue it while schools are closed

BY MANDI DIMITRIADIS

I was chatting with my brother the other day about how things are going with my two nieces learning at home while their schools are closed due to COVID-19.

My 13-year-old niece, Sophie, has continued to follow a typical school schedule each day with her school delivering a full learning program online. Her high school is doing a wonderful job providing lessons and activities to keep her motivated, learning, and engaged. She is enjoying this new way of learning, although she does report that hands-on subjects such as music and science are not quite as much fun sitting in her bedroom as they normally are at school.

Meanwhile, my younger niece, Elizabeth, has not been quite as enthusiastic about completing the workbooks and suggested activities sent home from her primary school and is needing a lot more encouragement from her parents. This started me thinking about how students might keep learning problem-solving, design thinking and other STEM skills while they aren't physically with their peers, teachers, and special equipment at school.

Recently, Elizabeth turned 11 and was given the gift of redecorating her bedroom complete with a new loft bed with a built-in desk from IKEA. As my brother described the afternoons he and Elizabeth worked together to assemble the flatpack furniture, rearrange her bedroom and find new storage solutions, it occurred to me that Elizabeth is onto something!

She's been having the ultimate STEM learning experience. As she works hard on the challenge of creating her new bedroom, she's been solving problems, thinking creatively, collaborating with others, and developing other essential skills for STEM learning suc-

cess. She's had to apply her knowledge and understanding of math, science, technology, and engineering concepts in a meaningful, real-world context that she cares about.

I'm not suggesting that we all rush out and buy new flat-pack furniture or embark on unplanned home renovation projects, but Elizabeth can give us some clues about how we can help children continue to learn STEM skills from home.

So here are 8 ways to bring STEM experiences to home learning:

Challenge One: Think about how you can solve problems that matter to you.

Many children can't leave the house to join in with their favorite hobbies at the moment. They are missing their sports, dance, art, music and other activities. What activity do you miss the most? How could you continue to do this activity while you stay at home?

Challenge Two: Think about creative new ways to do things in your everyday life.

While we are spending more time at home, we are bound to take more notice of our surroundings. How could you make your space more exciting and interesting? Could you rearrange your bedroom furniture in a new creative way? Using digital tools to make a 3D plan of your new layout is a great way to use your mathematical thinking.

Challenge Three: Don't settle if you are not happy with something.

STEM skills help us to solve problems and do things in better ways to help ourselves and others. Can you design a better way to do a chore or task



around the house? Could you invent a new food preparation utensil or a tidier way to store your favorite toys so you can access them more easily?

Challenge Four: Work as a team.

Most children are spending a lot more time at home with their families during the COVID-19 crisis. Families make great teams! Who is in your family team? Dream up a family challenge to work on together. You could create a new garden plot outside or invent a fun game for the whole family to play together. Maybe every member of the family could design their own 3D game piece to play your new board game.

Challenge Five: Find experts to learn from.

Scientists, engineers, and inventors learn from others. They often look at the ideas others have come up with and try and make them even better. We hear lots of stories in the news about scientists and other experts addressing problems related to COVID-19. What can you learn from these stories? What problems can you help solve? Could you design a new face mask that is comfortable to wear? What about a safe way to press buttons and open doors without physical contact? See 10 Coronavirus Design Challenges for more ideas.

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Challenge Six: Be resourceful and think for yourself.

There are lots of projects children can get involved with at home where they can develop and apply their STEM skills. These might be projects assigned by their teachers, or self-directed and family-based projects like Elizabeth's bedroom project. Working on STEM projects at home may mean having to be flexible and adaptable if equipment and tools usually available at school are not easily accessible. This is a great time to be creative and find your own ideas and ways to work on projects. Do you have any old or junk materials at home you could use to create a new invention?

Challenge Seven: Learn new skills when you need them.

It is always more effective to learn a new skill within an authentic context. There are probably some great opportu-

nities for children to learn new skills and how to use specific tools to add to their STEM learning repertoire while they are home from school. What new skills can you learn as you help around the house? Can you use the screwdriver to help hang a picture on the wall? What about the food processor or gardening tools?

Challenge Eight: Use technology.

Most of us have access to some kind of digital device and we are probably finding we have more time to spend using technology at the moment. It can be tempting to spend hours playing games, watching videos and consuming content that other people have created. The COVID-19 crisis is a great time to revisit the way we use our devices. How can we use available technology to create rather consume content? What 3D masterpieces can you create using digital tools and software? Can you tell your own unique story as a video, blog, or animation?

At the moment there is no such thing

as a typical school day for most children. Lessons and learning activities look different as teachers, students and parents find ways to keep learning from home.

Some types of learning such as reading, math, and writing seem easier to fit into home-based learning than some of the more practical areas, especially STEM. However, if we focus on the types of skills and experiences we want children to learn through STEM, there are many great activities children can do at home. Who knows—they might even learn some skills they wouldn't have otherwise had the opportunity to acquire. **eSN**

Mandi Dimitriadis is the award-winning Learning Director of Makers Empire, where she helps educators teach Design Thinking and STEM via 3D design and 3D printing. Makers Empire is currently offering a free Learning at Home course for teachers, students and families.

7 thought-provoking TED-Ed Lessons to break up online learning boredom

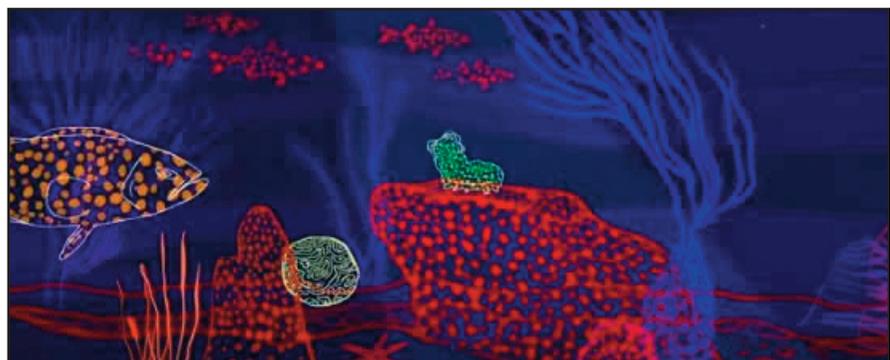
BY LAURA ASCIONE
Managing Editor, Content Services

Most schools across the country are still operating remotely, and as the days tick by, it's easy for students and teachers to feel as if they'll never return to the physical classroom. Teachers and parents looking for engaging learning resources might find TED-Ed Lessons helpful while schools are still virtual.

The TED-Ed platform is especially cool because educators can build lessons around any TED-Ed Original, TED Talk, or YouTube video.

Once you find the video you want to use, you can use the TED-Ed Lessons editor to add questions, discussion prompts, and additional resources.

Here are a handful of TED-Ed Lessons covering plant life, crazy sea



creatures, bodily functions, and more.

1. Why is my leg asleep? Have you ever had an arm or leg fall asleep and then experience that poking feeling when you moved? This lesson will explore why we experience these feelings. Watch the video by SciShowKids and then complete the lesson.

2. Which is better: Soap or hand sanitizer? Your hands, up close, are anything but smooth. With peaks and valleys, folds and rifts, there are plenty of hiding places for a virus to stick. If you then touch your face, the virus can infect you. But there are two extraordi-

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superintendent in Oak Ridge Schools in Tennessee, a district lead principal with Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, an elementary principal, and an elementary teacher with Wilson County Schools and Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools. McGavock Elementary, where Dr. Marczak served as principal, earned Reward status by being one of the top 10% elementary schools in the state of Tennessee in 2012.

Glenn Robbins is Superintendent of Brigantine Public Schools in New Jersey. His passion is harnessing a school culture that thrives on design thinking skills, innovative digital spaces, high caliber professional development, exponential thinking, BYOD/1to1, and makerspaces. Glenn encourages all students to have a voice, not only in building a school culture, but also in designing student-led courses. He was named as a Digital Principal of the Year by NASSP for exhibiting bold, creative leadership in his drive to harness the potential of new technologies to further learning goals for staff, students, and the school community. Glenn has been recognized by numerous organizations for his innovative

technology implementation methods and has been a featured speaker at numerous events across the globe. By empowering students and staff to have a growth mindset through design thinking, while implementing digital tools, we better prepare them for the profound shifts that they will encounter in life.

About the host

Ann McMullan is Project Director for CoSN's Empowered Superintendents Initiative. Ann served as Executive Director, Educational Technology in the Klein Independent School District, near Houston, Texas until September 2013, when she and her family moved to Los Angeles, California. For 16 years Ann led the district team that provided professional development on technology and 21st century instructional strategies to 4,000 professional educators serving 50,000 students. Ann served as co-chair of Texas Education Technology Advisory Committee which developed the Texas Long Range Plan for Technology, 2006-2020. Today, Ann is based in Los Angeles working as a public speaker, writer, and education consultant focused on leadership and planning to meet the needs of today's students. Ann serves on the Project Tomorrow adviso-

ry council and is a leadership consultant with Executive Service Corps of Southern California, serving non-profit associations. Ann co-authored *Life Lessons in Leadership*, a guide for leaders ages eight to 88.

Join the community

Super-Connected is a free professional learning community on edWeb.net for school superintendents, district leadership, and aspiring district leaders.

This edWeb broadcast was sponsored by ClassLink and co-hosted by CoSN and edWeb.net. The recording of the edWebinar can be viewed by anyone at <https://home.edweb.net/webinar/supers20200413/>. 

Stacey Pusey is an education communications consultant and writer. She assists education organizations with content strategy and teaches writing at the college level. Stacey has worked in the preK-12 education world for 20 years, spending time on school management and working for education associations including the AAP PreK-12 Learning Group. Stacey is working with edWeb.net as a marketing communications advisor and writer.

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narily simple ways you can keep that from happening: soap and water, and hand sanitizer. So which is better? Alex Rosenthal and Pall Thordarson investigate.

3. Can plants think? Have you ever thought about how complex plants are? Can they actually think like we do? Watch this asapScience video and learn how plants think.

4. This sea creature breathes through its butt: Is it a fuzzy sock? An overripe banana? A moldy tube of toothpaste? No! In fact, it's a humble sea cucumber: a brainless, fleshy form surrounding a digestive tract, and bookended by a

mouth and an anus. And while it might look odd, its daily toil paves the way for entire ecosystems to thrive. Cella Wright journeys to the bottom of the ocean to explore the lives of these sausage-shaped wonders.

5. The bug that poops candy: Aphids can reproduce incredibly fast: they can make 20 new generations within a single season. And that means lots of poop. Some aphid populations can produce hundreds of kilograms of poop per acre— making them some of the most prolific poopers on the planet. We know this poop as the sweet, syrupy liquid called honeydew. George Zaidan explores the wonderfully weird life of an aphid.

6. Make your own secret ink!

Chemical reactions occur all around us, but they only occur under particular circumstances. What causes a chemical reaction? What must be present for a chemical reaction to occur? Let's find out together!

7. How the world's longest underwater tunnel was built: Flanked by two powerful nations, the English Channel has long been one of the world's most important maritime passages. Yet for most of its history, crossing was a dangerous prospect. Engineers proposed numerous plans for spanning the gap, including a design for an underwater passage more than twice the length of any existing tunnel. Alex Gendler details the creation of the Channel Tunnel. 

Here's how SEL helps with digital stressors

BY STACEY PUSEY

Today's 24/7 access to technology has brought many benefits, from online collaboration to improved parent-teacher communication. But that 24/7 environment has also brought increased stress to students' lives as issues they encounter at school, especially on social media, follow them home. In the edWebinar "How Digital Stressors Impact Student Learning," Jamie Nunez, Bay Area regional manager at Common Sense Media, explained what digital stressors are and how social-emotional learning (SEL) can be used to combat them.

Typically, technology doesn't start out as a stressor. Instead, said Nunez, students approach most tech devices with curiosity, and even excitement. They become digital stressors, though, because of how students navigate the digital space.

First, 24/7 presence means students never have a break, or they may feel anxiety when they're not online. Moreover, most children often use technology late at night, which means they're often handling whatever they find on their own.

In order to help students deal with digital stressors, educators must first understand the main issues:

- Receiving mean and personal attacks
- Being impersonated or hacked
- Being outed, shamed, or humiliated
- Feeling smothered by someone's digital communications
- Breaking into someone's account or phone, which also includes the pressure to remember login information and to remember to log out
- Feeling pressure to comply with intimate photos—or intimacy in general—in the online space

The answer, though, isn't to just tell students to ignore digital communications. As part of their SEL curriculum, teachers should practice skills that offer solutions to digital dilemmas:

- Create a safe space for students to share issues. For instance, some schools have a text message service; at another school librarians collect

anonymous student notes; then the librarians lead a Q&A with students.

- Allow students to voice and name digital stressors instead of pretending they don't exist. Use visual guides with young children; for older students, educators may need to name stressors they have faced to help normalize them.
- Foster digital curiosity in school instead of banning it. Even schools that don't allow general phone use during the day can have a 15-minute period each day where the teachers give kids specific tasks to complete on their phones.
- Highlight students who model digital resiliency or digital empathy skills. Nunez says many schools recognize exemplary digital citizens.
- Integrate technology and social media into lessons where appropriate to model good citizenship.

Finally, Nunez's top recommendation is to integrate SEL into the school's pedagogy and make digital skills a regular part of the lessons. Using an SEL curriculum, teachers can introduce a digital dilemma and model solutions with kids. Then, the skills teachers want students to learn for in-person interactions become the same skills that students feel confident using online.

About the presenter

Jamie Nunez is the Bay Area regional manager at Common Sense Education and supports school districts in their efforts to implement digital wellness initiatives. For the past 17 years, Jamie has redefined education practices by designing creative learning networks for educators and families. As a former high school teacher, school administrator, and after school director, Jamie has facilitated hundreds of professional development workshops on student engagement in digital spaces. The common threads across his career are the beliefs that learning is most powerful when it's founded on a child's

experience outside of the classroom and engagement is most impactful when it fosters their digital identity. Jamie holds a doctorate in international comparative education from Stanford. When not working, Jamie can be found in public places teaching his 4-year-old daughter how to give compliments to strangers.

About the host

Jennifer Ehehalt is the Pittsburgh regional manager at Common Sense Education. She is responsible for helping school districts build a culture of digital citizenship among educators, students, and their families. She designs and delivers professional development for preK-12 educators that focuses on the implementation of Common Sense's K-12 digital citizenship resources along with how to integrate technology into the classroom. Through her work, she has had the opportunity to share best practices by presenting at ISTE, ASCD, PETE & C, TRET, ICE IDEAcon and GAETC.

Join the community

Digital Learning & Leadership is a free professional learning community on edWeb.net where you can share, learn, and discuss ideas and best practices to enhance teaching with technology.

This edWeb broadcast was hosted Common Sense Education and sponsored by Symantec. The recording of the edWebinar can be viewed by anyone at <https://home.edweb.net/webinar/commonsense20191106/>. 

Stacey Pusey is an education communications consultant and writer. She assists education organizations with content strategy and teaches writing at the college level. Stacey has worked in the preK-12 education world for 20 years, spending time on school management and working for education associations including the AAP PreK-12 Learning Group. Stacey is working with edWeb.net as a marketing communications adviser and writer.

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Wheeler “It’s a very powerful routine. We use chimes to call everybody to focus their attention on our school community, and we’re doing that remotely as well. We also light a candle, and I invited students to safely light a candle during our virtual chapel to talk about the meaning of light in our lives.”

2. Use small group meetings to check on emotional well-being

At the middle school level, Wheeler says students continue to have small group adviser meetings, and those meetings are often emotional check-ins covering topics such as homework, life skills, organization and self-care, and staying focused during extended screen time.

Teachers in younger grades are hosting synchronous learning sessions. If students cannot attend those sessions, which Wheeler says can sometimes be challenging, teachers record those sessions and also record welcome videos and story hours.

“Also in those younger grades, smaller groups of 3-4 students have a 20-minute lesson with their teacher,”

says Wheeler. “That really allows the teacher to take the pulse of how the kids are feeling.”

3. Keep in touch with teachers—adults can feel pressure, too

“I hold a meeting every Tuesday morning with all 75 of our faculty and staff—we use chat quite a bit,” notes Wheeler. “For example, I’ll ask everyone to write one word that describes how they’re feeling now that school will remain remote for the rest of the year. When you watch that chat flow, you get a really good gauge on how everyone is feeling. We do that with students as well.”

4. Make time for virtual special events and spirit days

Learning specialists, learning support associates, and counselors are holding virtual one-on-one sessions with students, but they’ve also created their own fun meetings for students. Those fun sessions include a Monday hot chocolate club, and a meeting where students bring an item, such as a stuffed animal, and have a chance to share it.

5. Be flexible

“Whether it’s around a sense of belonging, community, or academic, it all goes back to flexibility,” Wheeler says. “One of our mindset shifts has been trying less to replicate what we do in school and now do it online, but rather recognizing that we might want to approach this differently. We’re thinking about instruction, teaching, and learning quite differently.”

As for the fall, Wheeler says the school community is hopeful it will return to campus in September, but will follow state mandates and guidance.

“Having said that, we’re already in conversations focusing on what we would do differently and what have learned so far, so we can shape the fall if we have to make decisions or if we were mandated to not open,” he adds. “What if we open in September and then in November, there’s a second wave and we’re required to go remote for a month? We’re absolutely in those conversations. At this point, we have a little bit more time to think, plan for that, and do what we’re doing even better.” 

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