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eSCHOOL NEWS

K-12 HERO AWARDS





Kevin Hogan,
eSchool News
Editor-at-Large



K-12 HERO AWARDS

Back when the **eSchool News Hero Awards** program was hatched last spring, the hope was that these words would be written in the past tense—that the pandemic had passed—and schools were back to normal. Unfortunately, we know that's not the case, which may make it more important than ever.

Many myths have been busted in the course of this crisis: Teachers and administrators have (hopefully) discovered newfound respect from parents; The perception of technology as bogeyman—replacing teacher jobs—has instead shown that edtech is an important tool to assist them; and maybe most importantly, access to the Internet has proven essential for every student.

These three grand prize winners, plus all the finalists listed here, are testament to those busted myths. The descriptions of preparedness and planning, of swift responsiveness and going the extra mile (literally), and of empathy for students and staff are the metrics our judges used to decide the incredibly difficult choice of who to highlight. After all, every teacher, every principal, every IT department member has been and continues to be a hero during these difficult times.

I hope these stories can inspire you, embolden you, and support you as we continue to try and serve students through this ongoing crisis. I want to congratulate every school that was nominated as well as the edtech providers that sponsored them. And I want to encourage everyone to apply for next year's awards, which will be opened next month!

–Kevin Hogan, eSchool News Editor-at-Large







Nominee: Brevard Public Schools

Nominated by: PDQ.com

Everyone likes a good scare on Halloween, but for the Brevard Public Schools IT team, October of 2020 brought a scare they'd never before experienced. At 10 p.m. on Halloween night, Barrett Puschus, the Director of IT for Brevard Public Schools, received a call from an unknown number. Because he was outside listening to music with his family, he ignored the call, only to see a message appear in his inbox. When he listened to the message, the Microsoft DART team (Microsoft's cybersecurity arm) let him know it had flagged the Brevard School system with metrics that indicated the district was experiencing the onset of a ransomware attack.

Barrett's leadership and commitment to cybersecurity has helped to protect the data of one of the largest school districts in the country and the fourth largest district in Florida.

Barrett immediately called the rest of his team, waking many of them up so they could shut the entire system down. They worked over the next several weeks to evict the intruders from their system. Then, Barrett worked closely with the district's cybersecurity insurance company to find the exact point of entry for the malware. After identifying that the attack was enabled by phishing, Barrett worked across the district of 74,000 students and nearly 10,000 staff to tighten security protocols and prevent another incident. In fact, earlier this year, the same group of hackers tried to attack the system again, and the Brevard IT team worked for a week to protect the district.

Barrett's leadership and commitment to cybersecurity has helped to protect the data of one of the largest school districts in the country and the fourth largest district in Florida. Having started his career in the classroom as a teacher, Barrett understands the importance of maintaining a reliable, secure network that minimally impacts a teacher's ability to focus on teaching. In fact, earlier this month, Brevard Public Schools was one of six US K-12 public school districts awarded the IBM Education

Security Preparedness Grant. This grant will sponsor an IBM Service Corps team of volunteers to provide BPS with a range of security services valued at $500,000.

On top of Barrett's work to secure the Brevard Public Schools network this past year as the district navigated the global pandemic, Barrett has been an active champion for cybersecurity at all K-12 schools across the country. He has used his experience to help educate other K-12 IT professionals through media appearances and webinars. We believe that Barrett's work at Brevard makes him a K-12 hero who should be recognized this year.



"We really started to put a focus on the security. My entire career here, we've been securing the walls, the border, with COVID we had to turn it inside out. We had to re-enable things so people could do things from home."

–Barrett Puschus, Director of IT, Brevard Public Schools





kajeet®

Nominee: Navajo Preparatory School

Nominated by: Kajeet

Navajo Preparatory School (NPS) is the only Navajo-sanctioned college-preparatory school for Native American students. Through its rigorous, innovative curriculum as well as its commitment to instilling a deep appreciation of the Navajo Language, culture, and history in its students, NPS is providing opportunities to and shaping the futures of Native students.

When COVID-19 forced NPS to shut its doors in March 2020, the entire technology department quickly mobilized to ensure learning continuity in a completely virtual environment. This proved especially challenging as its student population spans the whole Navajo reservation, including some of the most rural areas of New Mexico, Utah, and Arizona.

The first step was to ensure every student had access to safe, reliable internet connectivity. For those without fixed broadband internet access at home, this meant immediately dispersing Wi-Fi hotspots. However, not every student knew which wireless network worked best for them. In these situations, the technology department faculty members would drive out to a student's home to physically test different carriers. When no networks were available, faculty did on-site roof-mounted cellular antenna installations. Satellite installations were completed when the exterior cellular antennas were not successful.

In most cases, traveling to a student's home was no easy feat. Some students lived as far as three hours away or in remote areas with no listed address, which meant faculty had to rely on GPS coordinates to find their home. And with some students living off dirt roads, it was not uncommon for faculty members to get stuck in the mud as they navigated to or from a student's home.

In traveling to students' homes, faculty quickly became aware of the challenges students faced balancing schoolwork with home responsibilities, and how much they relied on the school for food and education supplies. To support students, NPS would use school buses equipped with Wi-Fi to run weekly routes to deliver a week's worth of dry food as well as art supplies, books, laptops, and other educational materials.



At the end of the school year, the coordinated and heroic effort by Navajo Preparatory School ensured students had the resources they needed to thrive, both online and at home.

To support the multi-carrier connectivity needs of a dispersed student population, NPS turned to Kajeet. Kajeet SmartSpots, Wi-Fi hotspots designed for students, are compatible with all major North American wireless networks, meaning students in need could pick the best network based on their specific location. Additionally, Kajeet provided the Wi-Fi for NPS school buses, enabling students at the beginning of the pandemic to use the bus Wi-Fi to download or send large files until Kajeet was able to offer unlimited data plans.

At the end of the school year, the coordinated and heroic effort by Navajo Preparatory School ensured students had the resources they needed to thrive, both online and at home.





TROX™

Nominee: San Diego Unified School District

Nominated by: Trox

As the second-largest district in California, San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD) has more than 121,000 students enrolled across its 181 schools. The district's student population is extremely diverse. Nearly 6,000 teachers are in classrooms at the district's various education facilities, which include 117 traditional elementary schools, nine, K-8 schools, 24 traditional middle schools, 22 high schools, 49 charter schools, 13 alternative schools and five additional program sites.

With so many students from a variety of backgrounds, equity is a critical issue for SDUSD. That's why the district is transitioning from a 1:1 device cart model to a 1:1 device take-home model. Every student from pre-K through 12th grade has access to a device--a decision that served the district well when the coronavirus pandemic forced it to close its schools in March 2020. SDUSD's Instructional Technology Department was nicknamed the "First Responders" due to its proactive approach to COVID-19. From showing teachers how innovative technology could help improve learning outcomes to ramping up workshops geared toward preparing educators to teach online, this small but mighty team of six went above and beyond to make an impact during unprecedented times.

In late February 2020, SDUSD's Instructional Technology team provided district leadership with a plan for curating enrichment activities for students to complete in the event students would be sent home. By March 6, the team had curated standards-aligned curriculum for students to access from home.

In March, the team developed a public-facing website and curated more than 200 lessons for students to engage in at home. Later that month, the team began an extensive professional development initiative. During this time, the team set a clear vision for distance learning. Teacher volunteers were recruited to lead courses and develop workshops. Timing was crucial: The team aimed--and succeeded in--training more than 5,000 educators prior to April 27, the first day in which the entire district moved to remote learning. From April 27 through May 28, the Instructional Technology team continued to offer workshops and online office hours to support educators with distance learning needs. For several weeks, the Instructional Technology team trained up to 1,000 teachers a day.



In addition, SDUSD has relied on Trox, a leading edtech provider, to help it roll out nearly 2,000 Boxlight boards, documentary cameras, and webcams in its classrooms throughout the past year, which helped educators who preferred to teach from their classroom. When the district moved to simulcasting learning in April 2021, that technology made a huge difference in helping teachers remain connected to their students, whether they are on or off campus, according to Julie Garcia, SDUSD's Director of Instructional Technology. Going forward, professional development to help inspire teachers to use new hardware and software tools will continue to be a priority in any learning environment.

"Now more than ever, it's important to help our students become good digital citizens," Garcia added. "Technology should be front and center as we use what we learned during the pandemic to support students, track progress, facilitate collaboration and ensure students are engaged in authentic learning."

Technology should be front and center as we use what we learned during the pandemic to support students, track progress, facilitate collaboration and ensure students are engaged in authentic learning."

–Julie Garcia, SDUSD's Director of Instructional Technology

K-12 HERO AWARDS FINALIST eSCHOOL NEWS

Nominee: Clint ISD

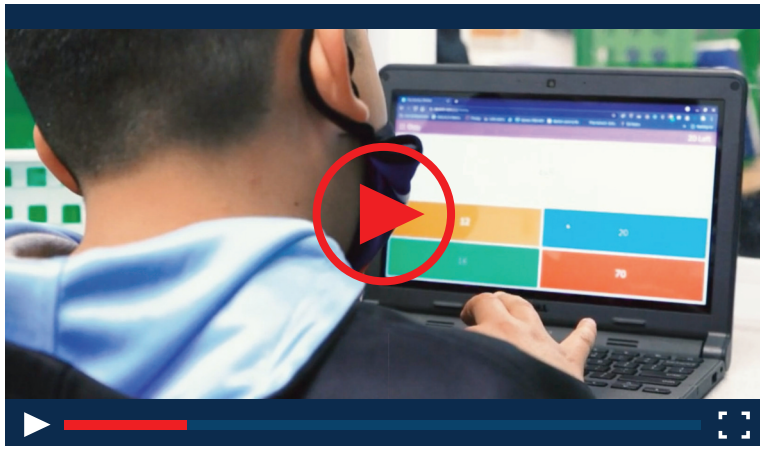
Nominated by: FrontRow

frontrow

About a year before the pandemic hit, Clint ISD, under the guidance of Superintendent Dr. Juan Martinez, was updating the technology on all its campuses. In the wake of a mass shooting off campus that left Clint ISD student Javier Amir Rodriguez dead, safety of the students was among the primary concerns. Opting to use FrontRow's campus communication platform, Conductor™, along with ezRoom classroom communication systems, as well as cameras in each classroom for safety and professional development, the district revolutionized how it communicates. By the time the project was finished, the pandemic hit, and Clint ISD quickly realized that the systems set up to improve communication and learning on campus were the perfect solution for students' remote learning via Zoom.

Dr. Martinez and staff had already done much of the groundwork to lessen the impact of the pandemic--without realizing it. Their work to improve access to high-speed internet in the community paved the way for online learning. In-class cameras became online teaching aides and educators were able to utilize their classroom audio systems to improve intelligibility online.

Ultimately, students were able to experience a similar level of social and emotional learning online as they did in class, thanks to Clint ISD's ability to quickly pivot its pedagogy via the flexibility of its classroom and campus communication system. As students began to return to the classroom under a hybrid



synchronous learning model, new hurdles popped up, such as the need to practice social distancing in the classroom. With even sound coverage, the additional distance between educator and students was easily overcome. Classroom audio systems rose to the challenge. Teachers were able to manage their in-person and online students while moving about the room without fear of students missing information or instruction.

Clint ISD is a case study in effective emergency planning and management. Thanks to the dedicated staff, and a focus on student safety and learning, the schools in the district are more prepared for the types of unpredictable and unprecedented challenges faced by schools over the past couple of years.

https://gofrontrow.wistia.com/medias/1evnjf7ccz

K-12 HERO AWARDS FINALIST eSCHOOL NEWS

Nominee: Kanawha County Schools

Nominated by: Second Life Mac

Kanawha County Schools in Charleston, W.Va., covers about 900 square miles, and some of that area is rural. The district has just over 25,000 students in grades pre-K to 12 in 68 schools, and about 1,800 teachers plus support staff.

When the state's governor made the decision to close schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the district was on spring break. Leah Sparks, executive director of technology for Kanawha County Schools, was concerned that the schools might not re-open during the school year.

The Kanawha district provides iPad for each student in grades 4-12. In addition, many of the district's elementary schools used Title 1 funds to purchase 1:1 devices for students as young as kindergarten.

Only students in grades 6 and up are allowed to take their devices home. This meant that many students didn't have a device at home when the school closures were announced. It also threw a wrench into plans to refresh the district's fleet of aging digital learning devices.

Sparks immediately started spearheading a plan to distribute iPad to students who needed them, as well as to students who had turned in broken devices. Her team distributed devices to kids in several different ways, including sending them on school buses with meal deliveries.

One roadblock Sparks encountered was internet access. Sparks' team worked with local internet companies to offer free service to families in need, and also promoted Wi-Fi hotspots available at each of the district's buildings. Buses also were equipped with Wi-Fi so they could be deployed as mobile hot spots.

With many of the district's students learning remotely, getting older iPad returned and upgraded was going to be complicated.

Sparks partnered with Second Life Mac to develop a safe way to collect and refresh devices. Using Second Life Mac's Touchless Trade-in™ process, students with school-owned devices received a unique QR code on their iPad that was scanned during a drive-through trade in event.

The QR code identified the student and the device, and recorded that the device had been returned. The old device was placed on a conveyer belt from the student's vehicle, and it was received at the other end by a rep. New devices were handed out by another rep.

Used devices were sealed in boxes and sent back to the Second Life Mac warehouse, where the devices were sanitized, all data was removed to NIST standards, and devices were refurbished and resold via wholesale and retail channels.

https://secondlifemac.com/touchless-trade-in/

Nominee: Coachella Valley Unified School District

Nominated by: Second Life Mac

Coachella Valley Unified School District (CVUSD) serves students in a 1,250 square mile area in Riverside County, Calif. The district, which includes 21 schools, encompasses a fast-growing population, which is predominantly Hispanic. Approximately 40 percent of the student population is Spanish-speaking, and 90 percent receive free or reduced lunch.

While not an affluent district, the school board and district leaders, many of whom are first-generation residents of the United States, understand the importance technology plays in delivering a high-quality education to students.

For this reason, the school district adopted a 1:1 digital learning program for students to foster learning and show students the world of possibilities beyond the mountains surrounding Coachella Valley.

Like many districts with a 1:1 program, sustaining technology is crucial. Aging devices that are slow and cannot access current software can have a negative impact on learning. Unfortunately, the pandemic hit as district officials were planning to update their district's technology. With classrooms closed, getting used devices back from students and new devices distributed would be a challenge.

Undeterred, Israel Oliveros, director of technology for CVUSD, moved forward with plans to outfit students with new iPads. In order to fund the new technology purchase, the district decided to sell back their current fleet of 23,000 devices to Second Life Mac, which worked with the district to create a safe environment for the exchange of devices.

Oliveros brought Second Life Mac's unique Touchless-trade-in™ program to the valley and worked with the company to plan this massive technology transfer. Twelve trade-in events were held in three different locations over the course of a few weeks, so each of the district's 23,000 students had an opportunity to drop off their used device and get a new one.

Students with school-owned devices received a unique QR code on their iPad that was scanned during the drive-through trade in event. The QR code identified the student and the device and recorded that the device had been returned. The old device was placed on a conveyer belt from the student's vehicle and it was received at the other end by a rep. New devices were handed out by another rep.

Used devices were sealed in boxes and sent back to the Second Life Mac warehouse, where the devices were sanitized, all data was removed to NIST standards, and devices were refurbished and resold via wholesale and retail channels. If a device could not be refurbished, it was recycled with zero e-waste in landfills.

https://secondlifemac.com/coachella-touchless-trade-in/

K-12 HERO AWARDS FINALIST eSchool News

Nominee: West Rusk Independent School District

Nominated by: ManagedMethods

Managed Methods

When COVID-19 forced schools into a completely remote learning environment in March of 2020, school district IT teams lost complete visibility and control of the school activity taking place online. This was largely due to the fact that students and staff were accessing school resources off of school networks—relying on cloud applications like Google Workspace and Microsoft 365 to stay connected to school.

Cody Walker, Director of Technology at West Rusk Independent School District, and his IT team knew that they had little visibility into what was happening within their Google Workspace environment. School documents were being created, shared, and stored in both shared drives and individual drives. These documents could contain sensitive information, such as personally identifiable information, credit card info, health information, and more. For students, these documents weren't always created for school purposes, which also created a safety and privacy risk.

Teachers at West Rusk relied heavily on Google Classroom in order to keep their students connected and to continue teaching. However, the teachers aren't as tech-savvy and had trouble with properly setting up their Google Classroom courses. Students weren't enrolled in the correct courses, oftentimes they were in the wrong classroom, and teachers didn't know how to fix the issue.

It was clear to Cody and West Rusk that the IT department needed a way to help support teachers in their virtual classes with Google Classroom. They also needed more visibility into what activity was taking place inside Google Docs, Slides, Sheets, Meet, Chat, and to see what is stored in Drive—especially when all students and staff are off-network. That's when Cody found ManagedMethods and brought in the platform to help monitor and control West Rusk's Google Workspace environment.

With ManagedMethods, Cody and West Rusk now had visibility and control into the cybersecurity, student safety, and data privacy risks taking place inside Google Workspace--cybersecurity risks like phishing, malware, ransomware, data loss, and account takeovers. Cody and his team are also able to detect student safety signals such as cyberbullying, self-harm, discrimination, threats of violence, explicit content, and domestic abuse that may be hidden within text and image content inside Google Workspace apps.

Another added benefit of bringing in ManagedMethods for Cody and West Rusk was the platform's ability to monitor, control, and report on the activity taking place inside Google Classroom, Meet, and Chat.

West Rusk was struggling to provide a safe and secure learning environment to all its students and staff during the COVID-19 pandemic. The work Cody and West Rusk's technology team did with ManagedMethods to help make safer schools during trying times is what makes them deserving of a K-12 Hero Award from eSchool News.

https://youtu.be/oCAkgEsUT-0

K-12 HERO AWARDS FINALIST eSchool News

GREENVILLE COUNTY SCHOOLS
Inspire | Support | Prepare

Nominee: Greenville County Schools

Nominated by: Gaggle

gaggle

When South Carolina closed school buildings across the state last year, Jeff McCoy and his team sprang into action, working diligently to accommodate the district's educators and students. As the Associate Superintendent for Academics at Greenville County Schools, McCoy knew how important it was to keep students engaged in their education from wherever they were. He quickly launched the district's virtual learning school, ensuring continuous learning for 23,000 students from the onset of the pandemic. Getting one-third of the district's students set up with e-learning in mere days was no easy lift for McCoy's team, but these efforts showcased their dedication to both students and academics.

Throughout the pandemic, McCoy and his team continued to implement, coach, and support professional development courses for the educators in the district. Approximately 2,000 educators participated in these sessions to ensure they were successfully engaging students in their education during the pandemic. This allowed both educators teaching remotely and those teaching in the brick-and-mortar environment to continue with their PD efforts during this unpredictable time. McCoy's commitment to creating and sharing best practices with educators throughout Greenville County Schools showcases his tremendous dedication to teaching and learning. The vast number of educators voluntarily joining the virtual learning sessions is a testament to his passion for education.

Last October, McCoy and his team made digital safety top of mind for the district. After seven months of navigating the pandemic, they had witnessed so many struggling students and knew that action was necessary. Being unable to see students face to face made it nearly impossible to protect and support all of the students within the district, but McCoy and the senior leadership team recognized the importance of safeguarding students—especially in regards to depression and suicide. Knowing they could be missing something, and just how unacceptable that idea was, McCoy heightened the district's digital safety efforts to ensure students were being taken care of. This included altering the OnTrack process, a whole-child approach for early warning response with a team of school personnel to intervene with struggling students. At the first sign of a struggle in the virtual environment, students in distress are identified, preventative action is taken, 1:1 mentors are appointed, and the OnTrack team intervenes to provide the necessary supports to ensure student safety and well-being.

Educators like Jeff McCoy make us all proud to work in education. His passion for teaching and learning—even in the toughest of times—is truly inspiring. Thanks to his efforts, students were able to remain engaged and safe throughout the pandemic. Whatever next year brings, the students and educators within Greenville County Schools are lucky to have his expertise and dedication as we move forward from this unusual time.





Nominee: Tippecanoe School Corporation

Nominated by: Screencastify

Screencastify

We spoke to Sarah Margeson of Tippecanoe School Corporation about her past, present, and future use of Screencastify. Her tech-forward approach with a priority on video learning positioned Tippecanoe for success before and during the pandemic.

Sarah has been Coordinator of Connected Learning at Tippecanoe for nearly six years. In her role, she is responsible for professional development across the district and introducing innovative new technologies and best practices with teachers.

Before her current role, however, Sarah taught math for six years. That's when she learned how valuable simple creative tools like Screencastify can be for educators.

With that experience in mind, Sarah continues to prioritize tools that have simple yet powerful features that allow creators to focus on their creations. And in her current role, she continues to turn to Screencastify to provide teachers with video creation tools that can be used for in-person as well as blended learning models.

Tippecanoe School Corporation has been using Screencastify as a tool for in-person learning for multiple years. So, when schools around the world began to shut down in March 2020, the district was able to ensure students wouldn't miss a beat and teachers would be able to create successful learning outcomes.

"We had been planting the seeds with Screencastify for a few years," Sarah said. "And then when everything happened in March, we already had the golden ticket that we needed. We told our teachers, 'You don't need to learn anything new, because we already have the thing you need.'"

During her time as a math teacher, Sarah used the flipped classroom model, utilizing video as part of her homework assignments. This background gave her an understanding of how Tippecanoe teachers and students could specifically use and benefit from creating videos. And with Screencastify Record and Edit, students and teachers had the ability to easily create professional looking videos--both before March 2020 and right out of the gate during the pandemic.

However, Tippecanoe School Corporation consists of 19 schools, about 13,500 students and 1,600 staff members, so any tool used district-wide must be simple to implement for a large number of users and also simple to use for students of all ages and teachers of all skill levels.

"I didn't want it to just be our fifth graders that can use this, I want it to be everybody. And I want the teacher and student experience to either work well together or be the same," she said.

Her district will continue using the tools as it moves back to in-person learning and focuses on innovating with new ways it can use video for in-person learning.

K-12 HERO AWARDS FINALIST eSCHOOL NEWS

Nominee: Taylor School District

Nominated by: Trox

The Taylor School District, in the Michigan town of the same name, prides itself on its vision of being the innovative destination district where ALL succeed. Nearly 5,800 students attend classes at one of the district's eight elementary schools, two middle schools, and high school.

The district's staff is and always has been dedicated to learning and using technology in the classroom, according to Tracy Carroll, a School Improvement Coordinator who is part of a team of four supporting pre-K through 12th-grade teachers and school staff members with professional development and best practices to increase student achievement.

But nothing could have sped up the district's adoption of technology-based education the way the spread of COVID-19 did. While the dream was to eventually become 1:1, that reality was a ways off pre-pandemic, Tracy explains. When the district's schools were forced to transition to online learning in March 2020, access to devices was paramount. All the schools worked together to pool available laptops and iPads. At the time, the district was able to provide one device per family. By September 2020, every student had his or her own device for continued learning--due much in part from support from Tierney, a leading education technology provider that has delivered approximately 2,000 Chromebooks to the district since the start of the pandemic. The district has collaborated with Tierney, which merged with Trox in May 2021, on technology needs for six years.

While teachers, students, and parents struggled at the beginning, Tracy was struck by everyone's willingness to adapt as quickly as possible to the new normal. "At first, we received countless Help Desk tickets and calls from parents, even grandparents. I even received calls directly from middle schoolers who were doing everything they could to get into Google Meet to join their class. I was just floored by everyone's persistence." Eventually, virtual learning became easier for educators and students alike. "It was really impressive to see how the students were helping each other and their teachers out. Our initial challenges really turned into successes," Tracy says.

Google Classroom and professional development support from Tierney have helped staff members and students thrive in a remote learning environment. While the district is offering hybrid learning, about 30% of its students have since returned to campus, Tracy says. Teachers stay in communication with parents on a regular basis using a system called Remind – something that Tracy doesn't think will ever go away. "The pandemic moved things faster and farther along for us. We're now 1:1 and excited to see what's on the horizon in terms of technology adoption."

One key takeaway? Tracy says students learned more soft skills in the span of a year that would otherwise take them so much longer. "We keep hearing about learning loss, but our students learned how to use new technology, handle glitches, and take responsibility for their own education. When they return, we'll meet them where they are at academically but for now, let's celebrate how much they've achieved against all the odds."

K-12 HERO AWARDS FINALIST eSCHOOL NEWS

WOODRIDGE SCHOOL DISTRICT 68

Nominee: Woodridge School District 68

Nominated by: Screencastify

Screencastify

While Tarah Tesmer has spent the past several years as Instructional Technology Specialist at Woodridge School District 68, she has also spent time in the classroom and knows the value of technology for students and teachers in creating the best possible learning outcomes.

Screencastify has nominated Tarah for a Hero Award because of her ongoing commitment to providing her district with the best tools to position it for success well into the future.

“Pre-pandemic, we learned a lot about how important consistency with all of our tools that we use is, and how we support teachers is going to be key moving forward,” Tarah said.

However, it’s more than just providing the best technological tools for Tarah. She also needed to make sure that everyone was able to use them.

“We are close to a 46% free and reduced school district, and we worked with our families and our IT department to make sure we had equitable access to Wi-Fi this year,” she said. “But when we couldn’t ensure that they always had that access, we said [that for] things that they might miss instructionally or, just in terms of relationship building, to record that with Screencastify so that they could watch it anytime and not just be anchored to that one class.”



In doing so, Woodridge School District 68 was able to create an environment that maximized learning potential during the most difficult period it had ever faced.

“I know it sounds cliche, but we are family,” she said of her district. “And people talk about the bright spots. And they also talk about things that don't work. But when things are working, everyone’s voices are heard. Everything just takes off.”

We hope you will consider Tarah Tesmer for a Hero Award, considering the difference she makes every day in ensuring technology is available to every student and every teacher - even in the most challenging of times.

K-12 HERO AWARDS FINALIST eSCHOOL NEWS

Nominee: Hannibal School District #60

Nominated by: Trox

The Hannibal School District #60 is located 116 miles northwest of St. Louis, Missouri, in a town of the same name with a population of nearly 18,000 people. The district has approximately 3,700 students and comprises an Early Childhood Center, five elementary schools, one middle school, one high school and a technical school that serves its high schoolers and students from six other area sending schools.

The Hannibal School District #60 employs nearly 600 staff members, including nearly 260 teachers. When the pandemic forced the district to move to an all-remote learning environment in March 2020, it was not at all prepared, says Superintendent Susan Johnson. “I don’t think I’ll ever forget what I was doing on March 16, 2020, when we had to make the decision to move to all-remote instruction. At that moment, I felt the weight of the world on my shoulders.”

First and foremost, Johnson and her team needed to devise a way to communicate to parents, students, and staff members. She also began quickly assembling a list of every group within the community that could play a role in ensuring that students could continue their education in a healthy, remote setting.

“For a year now, we have hosted weekly calls with representatives from the mayor’s office, local hospital, health, and social services departments, United Way, and more to address the needs of our student population. It’s amazing to see how everyone came together to support us,” she says.

While one of the district’s elementary schools was nearly 1:1, it was far from being able to provide every student with a mobile device to use at home. However, with the help of Trox, a leading edtech provider, every staff member and student from the second grade through the 12th had access to a Chromebook within six months of going remote. In the spring of 2021, the district was able to outfit its K and 1st graders with Chromebooks.

“We were able to rely on our contact at Trox to find available device inventory. The compassion Trox had for helping us during this trying time was incredible,” Johnson says.

With professional development, online instruction became easier for the district’s teachers. Concerned about learning loss and understanding the importance of staying connected with our students, our teachers worked diligently to remain a part of their students’ daily life. Johnson says that one takeaway from the impact of the pandemic is a renewed appreciation for educators. “Some people look at teachers and think they have an easy profession. The fact that they have had to adapt to first a shortage of technology and then an onslaught of new virtual classroom solutions--all while getting through their lessons--really shows how resilient and committed our teachers are."

K-12 HERO AWARDS FINALIST eSCHOOL NEWS

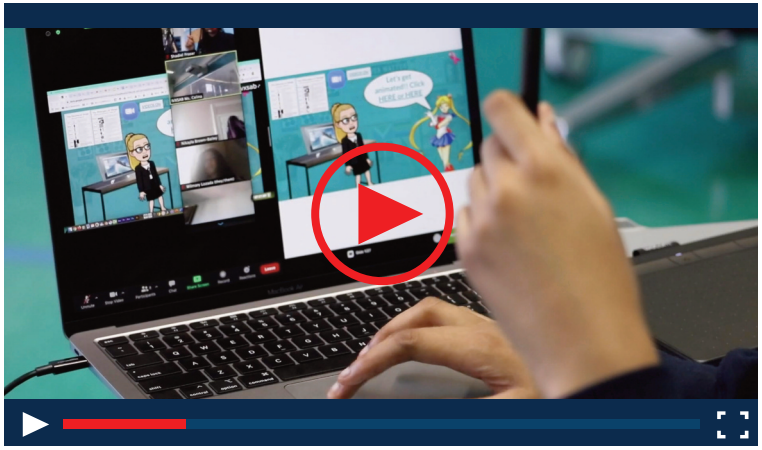
Nominee: Brooklyn Emerging Leaders Academy

Nominated by: Wacom

As a ninth grade STEAM teacher at Brooklyn Emerging Leaders Academy (BELA), Celina Bertoncini was assigned the task of creating and teaching a brand-new STEAM program--during the height of COVID-19. BELA is an all-girls public charter school located in Brooklyn, New York, which provides a rigorous college preparatory curriculum. To meet the needs of students and the restrictions of teaching during a pandemic, Celina created a STEAM Pathways program for her school.

The school offers three pathways for students: Computer Science & 3D Design, Biomedical Science & Anatomy, and Digital Media & Art. Celina's 9th grade students take courses that introduce each pathway to students and let them explore each topic to determine which pathway they'd like to select for 10th-12th grade. During this school year, Celina's classes were a mix of remote and traditional learning, so she knew she would need to find virtual alternatives to the traditional lessons she taught and how she interacted with students. She was determined to find solutions that worked in any scenario, whether it was hybrid, completely virtual, or in-person.

One example of the many creative lessons she created to engage students, no matter the learning environment, is the "Dream Room" lesson for teaching about 3D printing. Students create their own sketch of their dream room using a drawing app and their Wacom Intuos tablet. They then have to calculate measurements to make the room and objects proportional. Students create a 3D printable model of the room in the app Tinkercad, and Celina can then 3D-print their designs with the printers in the school. This lesson teaches students about math, design, and coding, and the technology tools used had them enthusiastically completing the lesson. For example, with the Wacom tablet, they are able to draw graphics, diagrams, and sketches and annotate their work digitally. It has been a helpful tool for students online and in the classroom during a school year of hybrid learning.



Throughout the school year, Celina continued to develop innovative and creative ways to engage students and promote collaboration in a mix of traditional and online learning. Like for many educators, Celina juggled switching from virtual to hybrid to in-person learning throughout the school year. Even with these challenges, she never stopped showing up excited to teach her students creative lessons that engaged them in their learning.





Nominee: Fresno Unified School District

Nominated by: Gaggle



Dr. Philip Neufeld has served in a variety of leadership roles in technology, behavioral healthcare, higher education, and K-12. As the Executive Officer, Information Technology at Fresno Unified School District (USD), Dr. Neufeld helps shape the district's educational ecosystems to better prepare students with the knowledge and skills they need for their "#AsYetImagined" futures.

Fresno USD is an urban school district with a high level of poverty, but Dr. Neufeld will point out that the district is rich in diversity and its human assets are strong and full of potential. To help students achieve their full potential, Dr. Neufeld believes it's essential to remove the stigma around mental health challenges and encourage practices that promote personal well-being, interpersonal connections, and inclusion.

Dr. Neufeld, like many other education leaders, faced several transitions during the pandemic, including online learning, hybrid, and looking toward the "new normal." Along the way, he's assisted in the district's efforts to build in layers of practices, supports, and technology for student safety, well-being, engagement, and inclusion. Dr. Neufeld has helped the district develop strong data science capabilities over the years to be strategic and collaborative while driving improvements. Built upon platforms that provide multiple sources of insightful data to the district, Dr. Neufeld is able to turn data signals into actionable insights for Fresno USD to enhance teaching and learning while promoting student mental health and safety.

Dr. Neufeld has worked to better prepare students for their #AsYetImagined futures over five years with a personalized, blended teaching program (PLi). Over 1,000 teachers participated in a PLi cohort or at a PLi partner school. The transformed teaching practices improved students' learning experiences and outcomes, which became the foundation that readied the district to respond to the pandemic. The work for digital inclusion includes a private LTE cellular network to support over 10,000 students. Dr. Neufeld believes in inclusion in all dimensions and for all students—both in and beyond school.

Just as schools provide physical health supports, education, and intervention, the same approach must be taken to ensure students' well-being. This proved to be especially true during the pandemic, as the district's data showed just how much students were struggling with suicide, self-harm, domestic abuse, and other heartbreaking issues. By picking up on digital signals, Dr. Neufeld and Fresno USD were able to provide the necessary interventions to help support students through this particularly tough school year.

When it comes to technology, districts often focus on privacy and security—both of which are important. However, Dr. Neufeld believes that it's just as critical for education leaders to also pay attention to student safety and well-being. His dedication to enhancing and supporting student well-being in today's technological world makes him a standout education leader and K-12 hero.

K-12 HERO AWARDS FINALIST eSchool News

Fort Worth INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Nominee: Fort Worth Independent School District

Nominated by: Xello

xello

Dr. Tonni Grant is a Postsecondary Success Coordinator within the Collegiate Programming and Advisement Department for the Fort Worth Independent School District. She has more than 20 years of experience as a teacher, assistant principal, principal, and coordinator at the campus and district levels.

In her role as a postsecondary success coordinator, Dr. Grant works directly with counselors and postsecondary success specialists, who in turn work one-on-one with students on advanced academics, Texas' College, Career, and Military Readiness requirements, college and program applications, and more.

Reaching every student in a large urban district with 87,000 students is a formidable assignment, but the district achieves it using Go Centers staffed by college and career readiness coaches.

Over the past year, when the district hasn't been able to rely on Go Centers, Dr. Grant and her team have exhausted all forms of communication to keep students future-focused. As the whole world went virtual, she found unique ways to continue engaging with students and achieved amazing work on creating post-secondary plans. This includes putting in extra hours, focusing on 1:1 interactions, and in some cases, home visits.

Despite the challenges and uncertainties faced over the past year, Dr. Grant has helped students in her district continue to chart their path toward the future.

Dr. Grant shines as a leader among the many districts we work with and is making an incredible difference in the lives of her students. She is a tireless advocate for the best possible tools and resources to help in her district, and we very much value her input as we strive to make Xello the best possible college and career readiness platform. What we love most about Dr. Grant is that her work doesn't end in her district. She is committed to helping other district leaders implement similar programs, and is always very willing to share her insights, knowledge and expertise through guest speaking opportunities, presentations, roundtables and more. She is a true collaborator and a humble leader who is shaping the lives of students in her own school district and far beyond.

"All students, regardless of background, have an opportunity to see the same things. It does not matter whether the student is at-risk or a high achiever. The program we've enabled with Xello provides something for everyone. It is a one-stop shop that makes achieving students' dreams fun and engaging, and all without tasking educators with more work." —Dr. Tonni Grant

K-12 HERO AWARDS FINALIST eSchool News

Nominee: Community High School District 99

Nominated by: Cameyo

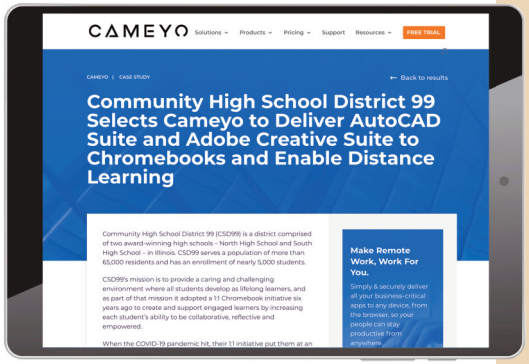
Community High School District 99 (CSD99) has a mission is to provide a caring and challenging environment where all students develop as lifelong learners. As part of that mission, it adopted a 1:1 Chromebook initiative six years ago to create and support engaged learners by increasing each student's ability to be collaborative, reflective, and empowered.

When the pandemic hit, CSD99's 1:1 Chromebook initiative put the district at an advantage when it came to enabling remote learning--but it quickly noticed that there was one key issue. Many courses still relied on at least one Windows application that could not be accessed on Chromebooks. And without access to the physical PC labs at each campus, those courses simply couldn't be fully delivered.

CSD99 needed to move quickly to enable distance learning in response to the pandemic, and its previous experience with legacy Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) and Desktop as a Service (DaaS) vendors had taught it that those technologies were not an option for rapidly enabling remote learning at scale.

Rod Russeau, Director of Technology & Information Services for CSD99, quickly sprang into action to ensure his district's students did not have their learning interrupted.

To optimize its existing investment in Chromebooks, CSD99 is using Cameyo, a Virtual App Delivery technology, to provide students with access to a variety of Windows applications that range from typical productivity apps to more graphics-intensive applications like the AutoCAD Suite and the Adobe Creative Suite--including Photoshop, Illustrator, and Lightroom--all from their Chromebooks. Students get access to the full desktop version of the software, all from within a browser tab, with a seamless user experience that doesn't require any change in behavior.



"The students have had such a great experience with Cameyo that many requested to maintain access so that they could continue to utilize the applications to work on their projects throughout the summer," said Russeau.

"Cameyo has helped us ensure that--even after the pandemic--our students may continue to have access to all of their critical applications anytime and on any device," said Russeau. "This has helped us level the playing field and makes our 1:1 Chromebook initiative even more effective by ensuring every student has uninterrupted access to their applications, without relying on a PC lab."

K-12 HERO AWARDS FINALIST eSchool News

Nominee: Wausau School District

Nominated by: Illuminate Education

Wausau School District has undergone a 'paradigm shift' in how educators use data to drive improvement. Response to Intervention (RtI) Specialist Julie A. Oehmichen and her team of dedicated educators worked tirelessly throughout this past year to meet the needs of every learner in every type of learning environment--analyzing student information and turning data into action.

In Wausau, educators use a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) that focuses on three levels: improving universal instruction for all learners (Tier 1); delivering targeted, small-group intervention for students who need additional support (Tier 2); and providing intensive, individualized interventions for those who need further assistance (Tier 3).

As a district, they utilized their Illuminate resources to systematically reach all students and pivot when the need arose, whether in-person or remote. Julie has stated, "In many districts, data is used as a hammer to punish teachers and schools. We think about data not as a hammer, but as a flashlight. We want it to help us shine a light on what's working and how we can improve instruction to increase the success of our students."

Additionally, their administration requested and participated in a unique learning opportunity this past spring with Illuminate's Learning and Development Team. They learned how to look at their data with an equitable lens and created action plans to ensure their practices and programming are meeting the needs of all students, no matter their ethnicity, gender, or disability.

"Our end goal is to see student growth. We want to make sure the interventions we've put into place are a good use of the students' time and are making an impact. Using data is helping us make more meaningful decisions so we can move forward as a classroom, a school, and a district."
—Julie A. Oehmichen

The mission of Wausau School District is to advance student learning, achievement, and success, and the district does this by focusing on the whole child, with a strong focus on educational equity. The district's efforts are focused on creating personal and academic success for each child, because it recognizes that it is creating learners and leaders who will take us forward into a time of incredible change and progress.

K-12 HERO AWARDS FINALIST eSCHOOL NEWS

PUTNAM COUNTY CHARTER SCHOOL SYSTEM inspire. innovate. excel.

Nominee: Putnam County Charter School District

Nominated by: Illuminate Education

illuminate education

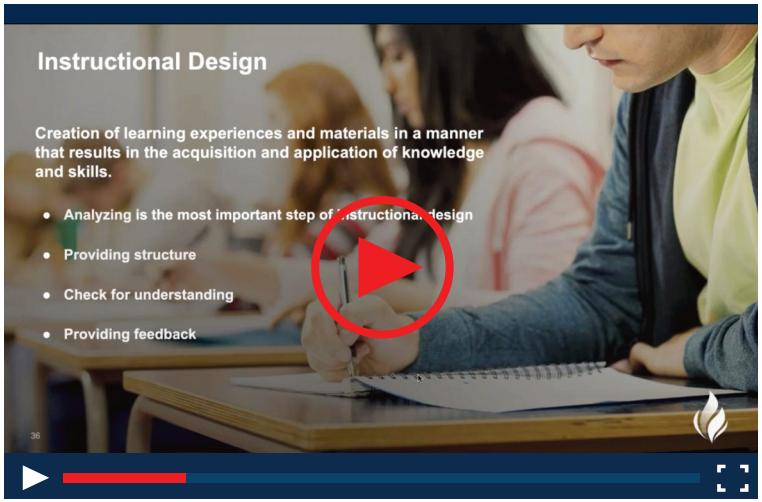
Accountability Support gurus Beth Bacon and Kathy Smith are tireless advocates for the students and staff of the Putnam County Charter School System (PCCSS) in Georgia. Both Beth and Kathy actually retired from educational leadership years ago but have returned in this capacity because of their desire to see improved results in student capabilities and intelligence. And their methods have proven effective.

PCCSS is a district of over 3,022 students, serving a student population that is 95% economically disadvantaged. The district has been invested in data-driven decisions for more than eight years. A key area of focus has been developing common assessments and instructional practices that are tightly aligned to standards mastery and data, which are used for decision-making at every level of the district.

As a result of this relentless work, students' universal screening scores are currently trending above national average--despite the disruptions of COVID--and the district's graduation rate has shot up from 80.55% in 2017 to 90.3% in 2020. To support these successes, the PCCSS team requires tools that bring clarity and confidence to daily decision-making and that are flexible to their unique local assessments, reporting needs, and problem-solving processes.

Beth, Kathy, and the entire PCCSS team have harnessed Illuminate solutions to help move the district forward with personalized, student-centered learning, equipping their team to drive teaching and learning decisions for standards mastery, collaborate around whole child data, effectively flag students who are at risk, track interventions, and provide timely, targeted supports for both students and staff.

Also, a fun fact about Beth and Kathy: In addition to the myriad responsibilities they undertake for PCCSS, they also organize an annual summer camp program for students. This just goes to show the level of dedication they have to educating and enriching students, academically and in a social-emotional capacity.



K-12 HERO AWARDS FINALIST eSchool News

Nominee: Leander ISD

Nominated by: HID Global

Leander ISD, located outside of Austin, TX, has 42,000 students and 2,800 full time teachers. There are over 40 buildings within the district bordering Austin, Round Rock, Lakeway, and Georgetown.

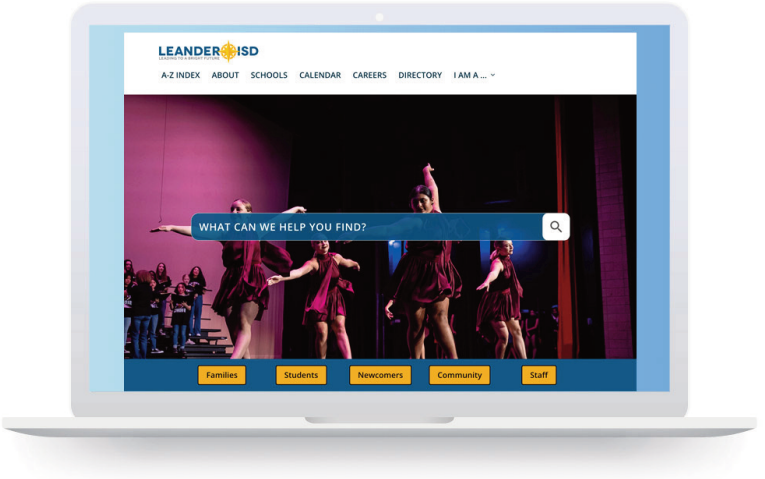
At Leander ISD, Darla Humes is responsible for the following Teams:

- District Emergency Management and First Responder
- District Wide Threat Assessment
- Risk Management Strategies and Oversight
- Property & Casualty Insurance.

Darla led the School Physical Safety and Security modernization and upgrade efforts with the assistance of Security Manager James Hindman during the earliest stages of the COVID pandemic. In March of last year her team undertook a districtwide access control initiative that covered nearly 1,000 HID Signo Card Readers and several thousand HID Seos credentials.

This project, during the worst, most unpredictable and uncertain time imaginable, was designed, implemented, and managed with a combination of remote and onsite work by the team to accomplish it before a back-to-class decision was made by the Texas Education Agency for Texas districts.

Using resources from Open Options, 3Sixty Integrated in San Antonio, TX, and HID representatives, the LISD Team was able



to implement a phased installation approach with the staff and students working remote. By the time a return-to-class option was implemented by the district, the major areas had been renovated and the district was able to implement much-needed COVID protocols such as Contact Tracing and Reporting, touch-free access to buildings, and integrated video surveillance to assist disinfection crews, maintenance, facilities, food service, and nursing staff (temperature checks and rapid COVID testing.... on time and on budget.

The strategic thinking, combined with timely and proper planning of Darla and her Risk Management teams, including Security Director Russell Bundy and Security Manager James Hindman, were a huge win for the district, its employees, its students, and the community.

K-12 HERO AWARDS FINALIST eSchool News

NOVA SCOTIA

Nominee: Nick Baskwill

Nominated by: Unruly Studios

unruly STUDIOS

Nick Baskwill works with hundreds of elementary, middle, and high schools across Nova Scotia to drive technology integration and the adoption of innovative tools for tech and computer science education. Since 2015, when the government mandated that computer science be integrated into grades K-8, Nick has spearheaded the adoption of computer science education across classrooms including with robots, microcontrollers, and block-based coding apps like Scratch. He understands how to introduce tools that make the subject feel relevant and approachable for both students and teachers, who often have never coded before themselves.

At the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, Nick ran a pilot with Unruly Splats, a STEM learning tool that combines learning to code with active play. He ultimately helped 50 schools across Nova Scotia implement Unruly Splats to code and play games during in-person and remote learning and across subject areas including PE, math, and music.

Nick accomplished this impressive roll-out during a pandemic that continued to cause disruption to the regular school calendar through the end of the school year. He had to get creative to integrate computer science in a way that took into account periods of remote learning, challenges with student engagement, and teacher capacity for trying new things in the midst of uncertainty.

Nick demonstrates an infectious passion for technology and a deep understanding of how to drive adoption of innovative tech tools that enhance the curriculum students are learning on a daily basis.

Some of Nick's top tips for technology integration include:

- First, conduct a pilot with invested teachers you know are excited about new technology and will give honest feedback.
- Provide training at the beginning and throughout implementation to ensure teachers feel supported and confident. This may include group onboardings, webinars, PD sessions, lesson plans, and prebuilt examples.
- Identify an objective goal that you can measure for success. For example, 80% use in schools throughout the period of your trial.
- Find ways to integrate the same learning tools in a cross-curricular manner to drive more student engagement and teacher buy-in.

K-12 HERO AWARDS FINALIST eSCHOOL NEWS

OKLAHOMA STATE DEPARTMENT of EDUCATION JOY HOFMEISTER STATE SUPERINTENDENT of PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

Nominee: Joy Hofmeister, Oklahoma State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Nominated by: Rave Mobile Safety

RAVE MOBILE SAFETY

As COVID-19 swept across the nation, many schools moved student and staff safety to the top of their priority lists. However, as many schools focused efforts solely on testing and case counts, Oklahoma State Superintendent of Public Instruction Joy Hofmeister never stopped thinking about the holistic safety of Oklahoma's nearly 700,000 students and more than 85,000 teachers and staff.

A proponent of full-time in-person learning, Joy worked tirelessly through the summer of 2020 to ensure Oklahoma public schools were able to reopen in the fall. With safety top of mind, she was constantly evaluating ongoing cases and evolving situations in schools throughout the state, and reminded students, teachers, and other staff of the importance of following best practices like washing hands. At almost every news conference, she was asking the public to do their part so students could get back to learning, promoting safety along the way.

With COVID-19 on the retreat, Joy turned her attention to the long-term mental and physical health of her students. Just recently, the Oklahoma Department of Education announced the use of $35 million in pandemic federal relief dollars to help districts hire more school counselors, licensed school-based mental health professionals, social workers, and recreational therapists. The School Counselor Corps is a program for which Joy has been advocating for years. Oklahoma children suffer from the highest rates of trauma in the nation, and schools have long needed more counselors to support students. Joy saw the pandemic as adding more trauma to student mental health and worked to provide additional resources to address their social-emotional needs and ensure they are on track for academic success.

Joy's holistic approach to student safety also includes the state's innovative use of the Rave Panic Button, a school safety app that, with the push of a button, sends important information to 9-1-1 centers, on-site personnel and first responders in the event of an emergency. As schools look forward to a more traditional school year in the fall, Joy wants to ensure schools are safe and connected via the Rave Panic Button, knowing that it can make a huge difference when responding to an emergency. Joy played an integral role in making Rave Panic Button available to all Oklahoma K-12 public schools and 9-1-1 centers to enhance school safety and security at no cost to the schools. Thanks to her dedication in promoting the program across the state education and law enforcement communities via email campaigns, news conferences and school-by-school safety assessments, the Rave Panic Button is implemented in public schools across the state with countless stories of impact.

Joy has always put Oklahomans at the forefront of school safety. With COVID-19, this goal was certainly challenged at times, but Joy never forgot her longer-term mission. Throughout the pandemic, she has had student, teacher, and staff safety top of mind--and she's ready to tackle any other obstacles that may come.





Nominee: Ron Clark Academy

Nominated by: Promethean World

Promethean®

The Ron Clark Academy (RCA) is a highly acclaimed, nonprofit middle school located in Southeast Atlanta. The Academy has received both national and international recognition for its success for creating a loving, dynamic learning environment that promotes academic excellence and fosters leadership. The school's 4th-8th grade students represent various socio-economic and academic backgrounds and communities from across the metro region.

RCA is composed of groundbreaking educators committed to creating a dynamic learning environment to promote academic excellence and leadership for their students. In the RCA educational revolution, the RCA community considers technology integration with curriculum and teaching processes an essential part of its education revolution and has leveraged Promethean technology to innovate classrooms to maximize student engagement, improve academic achievement, and foster teacher-student relationships. RCA avoided remote learning growing pains by embracing technology ahead of the pandemic through the previous implementation of Promethean in the general teaching process. With the Promethean ActivPanel already in place, RCA was able to not only combat the challenges of remote learning from the pandemic, but students were able to thrive with engagement.

RCA's math department head, Dr. Camille Jones, is utilizing Promethean's interactive panels to spark student curiosity with video games aligned with lessons. Additionally, Carrie-Jo Wallace, a math and art teacher, capitalizes on Promethean functionality by integrating digital art across lessons. By using the Promethean ActivPanel to demonstrate suggestions on student art and allowing students to interact with the board directly to experiment, students see all they can accomplish in real-time and their confidence soars. Science teacher Daniel Thompson revels at how the ActivPanel's functionality and ease of use has allowed him to focus on students as opposed to dealing with panel interface issues. With embedded tools like the Timer app, Thompson has been able to match student energy and encourage students' management of their own time for working through class activities. Thompson also highlights how the Spinner app allows for randomized student selection to avoid any students feeling unfairly singled out in Socratic scenarios.

RCA educators were able to support all types of learners (auditory, visual, kinesthetic) through the capabilities of the Promethean ActivPanel. With Promethean, teachers at RCA have revolutionized the ability to provide instruction and support for all students, regardless of learning style. With the pandemic shift to hybrid environments, RCA was and remains ahead of the curve with Promethean technology integration to engage students inside and outside the classroom.

K-12 HERO AWARDS FINALIST eSchool News

Nominee: San Bernardino City Unified School District

Nominated by: Hazel Health

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced San Bernardino Unified School District—along with almost every district in the nation—to flip from in-person to remote learning overnight. San Bernardino, a district with over 50,000 students and 88% of those students eligible for free or reduced lunch, had significant challenges to overcome in order to continue serving students as school buildings shut down.

That sudden, jolting change meant students and their families needed even more support at home. San Bernardino USD's Student Wellness and Support Services team stepped up to the challenge and made it a goal to support and engage students' families through health and wellness services. Partnering with telehealth provider Hazel Health, the district put together a robust health and wellness plan in a very short timeframe.

The plan consisted of several key strategies, and the most important was letting students and their families know that free health and wellness services were available. A lot of families started to get COVID-19 fatigue from the numerous emails about the pandemic, so it was crucial to 1) emphasize that the health and wellness services were free and 2) build trust with students and their families.

The Student Health Wellness and Support Services team worked throughout the summer, putting together resources, learning the warning signs and risk factors around mental health concerns in youths (and adults), and collaborated with educators to identify where social-emotional learning (SEL) topics made sense in instructional lessons—all in addition to monitoring the pandemic.

With remote learning still in place the following fall, San Bernardino USD took full advantage of its relationship with Hazel Health and expanded health and wellness services districtwide to 72 schools across San Bernardino—connecting students and their families with counselors, checking in on students and their families, and offering resources throughout the 2020–21 school year. The districtwide team effort made all the difference.

The Student Wellness and Support Services team credits the focus on students' health and wellness to several important discoveries. For example, the team was able to discover that one of its students had a very serious, life-threatening, diagnosis—something that might've gone unnoticed otherwise. In addition, the partnership provided reliable, valuable information about COVID-19 for students and their families--an especially important initiative with misinformation and a sense of nervousness in the community.

Today, Hazel Health is embedded in the fabric of the San Bernardino community and works closely with San Bernardino USD. The district now sets strategic goals around students' health and wellness and is working with Hazel Health to support student attendance in the future. This coming school year, Hazel Health will work closely with SBCUSD as students return to school sites for the first time in 16 months.

K-12 HERO AWARDS FINALIST eSCHOOL NEWS 2021

Nominee: Newark Public Schools

Nominated by: Lexia Learning

Lexia® ALL FOR LITERACY

In the early weeks following school closures due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, education customers like Newark Public Schools did an amazing job of pivoting their instructional model to keep students learning while they quickly transitioned to remote learning.

It was also the strong leadership they exhibited that was so critically important in enabling educators to effectively maintain their students' continuity of learning as instruction moved from in-person to at a distance.

The first step they took was to expand their use of Lexia Learning's Lexia® Core5® Reading and Lexia® PowerUp® Literacy throughout the districts K-5 and K-8 schools (serving over 20,000 students across 41 schools) after the district's trial subscription successfully helped teachers both within their classrooms before the pandemic and with remote learning that began in March 2020.

The district also decided to support educators through that critical time by ensuring strong, ongoing implementations of the literacy programs as teachers adjusted to remote teaching by expanding access to just-in-time professional learning resources.

"We were using Core5 in just six of our elementary schools prior to the pandemic," said Dr. Mary Ann Reilly, assistant superintendent for Teaching and Learning. "When COVID-19 hit and our schools transitioned to remote learning, we were able to quickly expand Core5 to all our elementary schools. The program was flexible enough to enable us to provide continuity of instruction to students remotely, targeting literacy gaps and even accelerating learning. And we remained confident that our students would continue to make gains with good teaching and Lexia."

It was the district's thoughtful implementation of Lexia Academy, the company's eLearning platform offering on-demand professional learning courses, that drove the teachers' incredible resilience during that difficult time. The district gave educators access to "anytime, anywhere" support that helped them develop best practices for meaningful instruction for remote learning. Newark educators embraced courses on topics like Structured Literacy, remote teaching strategies, and effective reading instruction for students with dyslexia--all meant to help students experience gains, not losses--during the quick move away from face-to-face learning.

"Professional development around Structured Literacy is something that must be provided to all teachers. Lexia Academy provided high-quality, asynchronous professional learning that fit educators' schedules whether they were working in the classroom or virtually," added Erica Paich, Special Assistant, North Ward Leadership Team, Newark, NJ Public Schools.

There's no doubt that during the difficult challenges of the past 16 months, the Newark Public School system demonstrated what it takes to be a hero--it championed the needs of students and teachers alike; it was courageous in tackling the challenges of remote learning. And in light of all of the upheaval, teachers and students delivered outstanding results.

2022

K-12 HERO AWARDS

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