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2023 Excellence in Equity Awards

Reclaiming Authentic Social Studies for the Next Generation
Micah Miner

An Education Veteran’s Perspective: Protecting Students & Protecting Privacy
Al Kingsley

Why “Do” SEL If It Doesn’t Improve Students’ Classroom Behavior?
Howie Knoff

Harnessing the Positive Power of Social Media
NASSP

Unlocking Advocacy: The Critical Role Teachers Can Play in Shaping Education Policy
Patrick Brennan

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INDEX OF ADVERTISERS - 44
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I remember delivering papers every day after school as a middle school kid, listening to my new Discman in the early 1990s. It was a terrific way to get some money, especially during winter break, where the tips I received were big cash for a young kid. It also helped that I had inherited the paper route from my older brother, and he had a good reputation that I also inherited. I would eventually pass it down to my younger brother. The neighborhood knew me and my family. My dad was a long-time middle school teacher and my mom, who was also former teacher, ran a childcare out of our house in the small town I grew up in. We were also a part of a large church for the area.

In my hometown bubble I felt known, understood, and safe. In addition, my parents had adopted two Korean siblings who were older than me. They were into having a diverse family and wanted us to love all humanity in our world. My history lessons were mostly about me and people like me, Eurocentric and based on the white American experiences, with some sampling of African American history since the demographics of my town was about 30% African American. I felt comfortable, but I was already an avid reader and into different perspectives, which were encouraged by my family. They also encouraged me to be a critical thinker and to always learn from others.

It was on my paper route where I first listened to Rage Against the Machine's first album. The song titles, including “Killing in the Name Of,” “Know Your Enemy,” “Freedom,” “Wake Up,” and others, were mind-blowing and eye-opening, not to mention it was the first time I was listening to an album with so many explicit lyrics. At the time, my parents were unaware of the album and its contents, but I started questioning every history lesson after hearing it. The most impactful song for my future as a history educator and now a district administrator whose responsibilities include overseeing social studies came from their song “Take the Power Back.”

It is important to note that as a professional
adult, I do not agree with the explicit language and statements that the band’s sound and lyrics call for or condone extreme actions people may take from the lyrics. What I do want to point out is that the song’s critique about the curriculum we teach in U.S. history in many places throughout the country is at the very least an incomplete one, and at worst we commit educational history malpractice by teaching false or misleading history. The rage against a single narrative Eurocentric history focus that was being taught in schools was profound, and the band displayed their rage of this simplistic and unbalanced historical approach through the band's vocals, guitars, and drums. It was a palpable feeling of mistrust, defiance, and feeling ignored, unrecognized, and ultimately unheard to the curriculum being taught, and this lack of acknowledgement of the pain, violence, and conflicts that has been inflicted on groups of non-European heritage across the past 400 years of well-documented colonial expansion, cultural genocide, and a slavery-ridden past. This is the message that is completely understood from the song lyrics and across other groups in our society, and it needs to be addressed.

History is full of these different narratives, perspectives of oppression, wars, conflicts, genocide, and violence between European groups, and European and non-European groups, and a plethora of these primary and secondary resources is both accessible and well-documented. As I grew up, I learned more about these competing historical narratives in my own personal study.

Much of these histories are not taught in schools at all. I could fully understand the reasons why the band was so angry, since it is true that these diverse factual stories and narratives have almost always been ignored over the years of history and social studies instruction. The band’s cultural heritage includes Mexican American, biracial with both Kenyan and White background, among others. It is also true that the guitarist, Tom Morello, has a social studies degree from Harvard and his mother was a social studies teacher.

Imagine going to history class every day and you and your family’s stories, struggles, and triumphs are never mentioned, or if they are it is in a disparaging or condescending way.

This anger the band members experienced as students is a critique that I think should have been taken seriously back then in the 1990s. For years it seemed like educational scholars, policymakers, and instructional designers were listening and there was a large push for a more inclusive curriculum, including multiple voices and perspectives, and research into finding the cultural narratives and stories that were more representative of our larger democracy, especially as we are becoming more multicultural and now there are more non-white students in our public schools curriculum than white, so it was expected that this shift would continue. Then, it surprisingly and jarringly stopped and reversed course.

The past few years have seen an extreme uptick and shift back to more Euro-centric views, false or incomplete narratives of U.S. (United States) history, and book banning in libraries and schools, designed to silence multicultural and more inclusive approaches to teaching U.S. history in various places across the country. This was culminated in two particularly important news stories last spring the College Board backing down to Florida's political pressure over their AP (Advanced Placement) African American History pilot class, and the NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) report on how our students are performing at historically low levels in history and civics.

Another recent summer example is the newly adopted Florida standards benchmark for middle
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school students found in SS.68.AA.2.3, which states as a benchmark clarification, “Instruction includes how slaves developed skills which, in some instances, could be applied for their personal benefit” (Florida Department of Education, 2023).

Obviously, we are in a historical and civics educational crisis that needs to be addressed. Nobody is saying that there should be zero European American representation, which is not what is being recommended. Instead, we need to take a more wholistic and broad representation of balanced histories. After all, we are the most diverse country in the world, and the histories that we teach in the curriculum should also show that diverse representation.

Over the years, the battlefield of social studies has been beset by the crossfire of political ideologies, leading to a historical narrative that's often sterilized, whitewashed, or skewed toward a singular perspective. This unilateral viewpoint limits the narrative, omits various experiences, and hampers the mission of education to foster critical thinking.

The band's anthem, "Take the Power Back," resonates even more strongly in this context, serving as a rallying cry for social studies reform. To heed this call is to fight for a narrative that doesn't shy away from hard truths and injustices, one that fosters critical thinking by painting a comprehensive picture of how past events have shaped the present and will influence the future. We must prioritize diversity, inclusion, and social justice, amplifying silenced voices to enrich our collective understanding.

Authentic social studies are not about rote memorization. We need to equip students with the tools to connect the dots between past and present, understanding and critiquing the status quo. Our curriculum must recognize and
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celebrate the diverse experiences of indigenous communities, women, immigrants, Black, Brown, and Asian American communities, and LGBTQ+ individuals, as their stories form an integral part of our nation’s history. We cannot overlook the living testaments of different perspectives documented in primary and secondary sources — that would be educational malpractice.

Empowering educators is vital to this transformation. They need resources, training, and support to navigate nuanced discussions. Empowered educators foster empowered students, promoting curiosity, critical thinking, and empathy. Omitting histories and perspectives undermines learning and divides society.

Reclaiming the narrative and “taking the power back” in our classrooms is a daunting task amidst dissenting voices. Yet Rage Against the Machine’s urgent cry of “No more lies” cannot be ignored. As we strive for diversity, equity, and inclusion, we must remember the classroom is the frontline. By fostering a comprehensive and diverse curriculum representation, we shape future generations to build a just society.

To those already fighting, keep going and don’t give up. To those wavering, take a stand. To those unaware, open your eyes and join the movement to reclaim authentic narratives for the next generation. The road ahead involves pressures and resistance. Yet the call to “take the power back” is more crucial than ever — a call to reimagine social studies as a subject encouraging discourse, analysis, and empathy. As we strive for justice, let us remember the classroom is the battleground. By promoting inclusive curriculums, we “take the power back,” equipping students to build an equitable society.

Micah Miner serves as the District Instructional Technology & Social Studies Coordinator at Maywood, Melrose Park, Broadview School District 89. He believes equity matters, not just globally, but locally and all students deserve equity and access in education and life. Micah has served as a teacher in K-12 settings in both regular classrooms and alternative schools, as a social studies department chair, instructional technology coach, adjunct professor in social studies and instructional technology, and as a school and district administrator. He can be reached on social media @minerclass on Twitter, his LinkedIn profile here and his email micah.miner@maywood89.org.
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The 2022 State EdTech Trends survey and report is the first attempt to track how state education agencies and policymakers are adapting to a digital world post-pandemic while also identifying state priorities relating to technology and education.

SETDA is the principal association representing U.S. state and territorial educational technology and digital learning leaders.

Through a broad array of programs and advocacy, SETDA builds member capacity and engages partners to empower the education community in leveraging technology for learning, teaching, and school operations.

The 2023 survey is underway. Look for the new report in September!

For more information, please visit setda.org, LinkedIn, or Twitter.
Landmark College is one of the only accredited U.S. colleges designed exclusively for students who learn differently (LD), including students with learning disabilities (such as dyslexia), ADHD, autism, or executive function challenges. The Putney, Vermont-based institution combines research-based learning strategies and academic support to prepare students for the rigors of college-level work.

Over the course of nearly 40 years, Landmark College has evolved from a 2-year to a 4-year liberal arts college, offering associate and bachelor’s degrees in a variety of disciplines, with optional minors and concentrations. The philosophical approach to “meet students where they are” has also led to the development of several short-term summer programs for high school and college-age students, as well as partial credit options that provide new students with a more gradual transition into college life.

Online programs continue to grow as well. For several years, the College has been partnering with high schools to offer dual enrollment courses to students with LD, and educators have been able to earn post-baccalaureate credentials through the online Certificate in Learning Differences and Neurodiversity. Now with the recently created umbrella brand LC Online, the College has also introduced a fully online first year of college, called College START, that can lead to earning an online associate degree in either liberal studies or business.

academic advising sessions while engaged with the advising curriculum. As students progress in their coursework, they become increasingly independent and meet with their advisor less frequently. Students pursuing their bachelor’s degree work with degree specific advisors. The academic advisor is central to the system which supports individual student performance.
Centers for Academic Support

Landmark College’s Centers for Academic Support offer unparalleled support to students who learn differently, at no additional charge. The Drake Center for Academic Support is the first place students turn for help with reading, writing, and study skills. Academic support centers within individual departments offer drop-in support and one-on-one scheduled appointments with Landmark College faculty. The College’s Educational Technology Services and executive function coaching services are also housed here.

Counseling & Health

Counseling Services are available to provide support to students dealing with stress and other personal, social, or academic difficulties. Health Services offers support for physical issues.

Integrated Services for Students with Autism

Students with autism who are academically prepared for college may still face significant challenges navigating the social curriculum and adjusting to the more fluid routine of the college student. Landmark College recognizes the need to provide additional programming to assist students with autism to meet their college goals. Our integrated services model for ASD support services provides a structured living and learning environment that combines an effective pedagogical approach with tailored social and other programmatic supports.

Library

The Landmark College Library offers walk-in assistance as well as one-on-one appointments to assist students with research projects and developing information literacy. The Library building offers a welcoming space conducive to individual and small-group study, as well as resources to support students’ curricular and extracurricular needs and interests.

Undergraduate Degrees and Curriculum

Landmark College offers a diverse selection of courses in anthropology, English, business, communications, humanities, philosophy, psychology, history, literature, math, science, foreign languages, theater, video, music, art, physical education, and other disciplines.

For all entering students, the curriculum sequence begins with skills-development courses, designed to address the key areas of writing, reading, communication and study skills. Self-management, as well as the development of self-understanding and self-advocacy, are also important parts of this first-semester curriculum.

Initial courses are offered at non-credit and credit levels. This allows students to be placed in classes where they are able to succeed, from the start. Due to our rigorous academic standards, more than 50% of incoming students begin in non-credit courses, with most moving into credit courses after one or two semesters.

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An Education Veteran’s Perspective: Protecting Students & Protecting Privacy

By Al Kingsley

There's a stark difference in how schools in the United States and the United Kingdom handle student safety and privacy. And while I'm not an attorney and my advice certainly cannot be construed as legal guidance, I not only run an edtech company with a significant presence in the U.S. and U.K., but I am also a school governor in the U.K. I’m one of those people who is responsible for making sure British students are protected when using school devices. The U.S. and UK have very different opinions and regulations about how this is done.

In the UK, the schools have a “duty of care” for each student, that includes being held liable for any student who harms him or herself or another person. U.S. schools, on the other hand, act in loco parentis for students during the school day. Schools and individuals are not legally responsible for a student's actions outside of school unless they have prior awareness of the danger.

In addition, while both sets of schools are governed by their country's education rules, a hodgepodge of state and local rules govern districts in the U.S., meaning schools here have considerably more leeway in terms of what...
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actual programs and protocols they use. The U.S. is quite literally the Wild West when it comes to safety and privacy in education.

The biggest difference between the two countries when it comes to student safety is a philosophical one. What is a safe, equitable way to monitor students? UK schools keep track of their students' behaviors online in a variety of ways, such as keyword monitoring as well as monitoring students' web and app usage. U.S. schools can employ the same techniques, but have to balance those actions against the country's general wariness about protecting student privacy. Overall, the UK’s data protection act is stricter than any law in the U.S. because it controls how personal information is managed by organizations, businesses, or the government.

This difference between both countries was brought into stark relief just last year when the White House released a nonbinding white paper that covered, among other things, “continuous surveillance” of students. The paper discouraged policies where technology could impinge upon students' right to privacy, as well as those that could perpetuate inequity - two rights that we all agree should be protected.

My argument however, is that these systems don't have to be an either/or choice. Schools in the U.S. should effectively use technology to monitor students, as long as they follow a few critical tenets. Statements from U.S. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona late last year indicate that he agrees.

At the time, Cardona called for technology tools used by schools to monitor students to be free of biases while clearly telling parents exactly what is being monitored. His department expects to release even more specific recommendations later this year. These recommendations, as outlined in a White House fact sheet, will “introduce guidelines and guardrails that build upon existing education data privacy regulations as well as introduce new policies to support schools in protecting students when using AI.”

I think it is important to take a fresh look at factors in support of student monitoring before delineating non-negotiable rules that hamstring it to such a degree that it cannot be effective.

Schools in the U.S. do use software to keep track of student behavior online. In the U.K. all schools use such software. The monitoring includes a variety of things from websites visited to search keywords. Knowing this information and allowing software to recognize threats and alert school officials allows schools to for example, head off potential or realized bullying incidents, which is far more prevalent than most of us realize. Nearly half of children aged 13 to 17 have experienced cyberbullying, according to a 2022 survey by Pew Research Center.

Recently, there have been increases in hate speech directed toward minority groups, religious affiliations, and students who identify as LBGTQIA. The U.S. Department of Justice has created a toolkit specifically to help schools prevent and respond to these incidents.

Such activities do not have to be done using a broad brush, however. While some software will simply flag troublesome words or phrases, other programs can contextualize this content by showing screenshots of how the phrases are being used. An even more advanced tool can use “contextual intelligence” to analyze these risks and grade them by their urgency in an alert to a school official. The contextual intelligence used to guide the technology is supervised, monitored, and adapted as needed by qualified district staff who are specifically trained on guidelines for student safety and privacy protocols.

Having this information not only is important to helping individuals but it gives school administrators a broad view and the ability to determine if programs to counter such threats - like professional development and public
information campaigns - are effective. They can spot and monitor trends both positive and those that can be troublesome or even dangerous.

Now, let’s consider what key elements should be part of every school’s security plan for its students. The first is transparency. Students, teachers, administrators, and especially parents, should easily understand how students are being monitored, what data is being collected, and how it is being used.

Schools should go beyond this to ensure that students or guardians have a right to file a complaint if they think any monitoring takes away the student’s right to privacy. Clearly spelling out the rules assures parents and avoids misunderstandings. These same plans should detail what a school is not monitoring and which information about students will not be kept.

Of equal importance is the school’s obligation to teach students how to be responsible digital citizens. This covers everything from how to keep their personal data safe online to how to behave properly with peers and adults. Students are also taught how to validate the authenticity of material they read online and what steps they should follow before sharing a post or a story. The same tools that are used to monitor students can be used to teach students about how data about them is collected and used. For example, your school’s policies may have a different set of rules if a student is using a district-issued laptop on campus, or a private smartphone at lunch. Students likely aren’t aware of these differences and because there are many permutations, it’s incumbent upon the school to be clear.

Al Kingsley is an author, podcaster, chair of the Multi Academy Trust cluster of schools in the UK, Apprenticeship Ambassador and chair of his regional Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Board. He is also a 30-year veteran of the edtech industry as CEO of NetSupport. He writes about servant leadership models that school leaders can engage in their schools, including in his most recent book, “My School Governance Handbook,” and upcoming book, “My School & Multi Academy Trust #Growth Guide.”
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Introduction

I am not a big “program” guy when it comes to school discipline programs. That’s because most packaged programs or curricula are not based on proven psychoeducational research, and have not been validated with sound evaluation methods.

It’s also because—even when programs appear valid, they rarely know exactly why or what embedded strategies best explain the positive results. Typically, many programs are “valid” due to a few powerful embedded strategies, and these strategies were valid by themselves — before they were imported into the “new” program.

While its history extends back mid-1990s, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has taken off during the past decade with—based on national surveys—virtually all schools are “doing it.” And with this, many SEL programs have filled the market.

But what are our schools actually doing? And, are the SEL activities focused on and attaining the ultimate SEL goal: Students’ social, emotional, and behavioral self-management?

Said a different way: Are schools’ SEL strategies resulting in students—from preschool to high school—learning and mastering specific interpersonal, social problem-solving, conflict prevention and resolution, and emotional awareness, control, communication, and coping skills?

To a large degree—based on both pre-pandemic and especially post-pandemic school discipline, classroom management, and student behavior data—the answer is “No.”

And part of the problem is that:

(a) no one knows what SEL really is (even though they report that they are “doing” SEL);
(b) many SEL outcomes cannot be reliably and validly measured;
(c) effective student, staff, and school protocols evaluating SEL have not been established; and
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(d) most SEL research is based on correlational not causal analyses.

Relative to (d), for example, the research “proving” that SEL improves students' academic outcomes are correlational. All this research shows is that, correlationally, the students in the schools, grade-levels, or classrooms receiving SEL approaches had a higher probability of demonstrating higher academic skills and proficiencies than students not experiencing the SEL approach.

It does not mean that all students in the SEL schools or classrooms academically outperformed all peers in the non-SEL schools or classrooms. And it does not even mean that the SEL approaches are the reason for the different outcomes. The real reason might involve a third factor—for example, that teachers and/or peers were more positive toward each other because “our school is doing SEL.”

Reviews by Harvard University’s Ecological Approaches to Social Emotional Learning Laboratory and Education Week reinforce the fact that no one really knows what SEL is. Indeed, the Harvard Lab has identified more than 40 different SEL frameworks, concluding that “SEL is in a state of confusion.”

Education Week asked seven national SEL experts to define social-emotional learning (Dec. 22, 2022), including the CEO of CASEL, selected district SEL directors, and the Director of the Harvard SEL Lab above. Their definitions were confusing, sometimes contradictory, laden with jargon, and more academic than practical for teachers and students.

Education Week’s attempt to clarify the confusion, only heightened it.

So where do educators go?

The short answer is: They go back to science and objectively proven practices. They go back to the psychology of emotions, attitudes, and behavior.

The longer answers are in my recent Blog that details the science-to-practice components, social skills, instructional approach, and implementation steps needed for schools' SEL success. To address their school safety and discipline, classroom management and engagement, and student behavior and self-control needs, schools must focus on observable and measurable student outcomes. They need proven psychoeducational practices, not programs that misuse professional development time, school resources, and other staff and student investments.

Howie Knoff, PhD, NCSP, is an international consultant, speaker, and author specializing in school improvement, strategic planning, social-emotional learning, social skills training, multi-tiered systems of support, and interventions with behaviorally challenging students. He has been a university professor (22 years) and State Department of Education federal grant director (13 years), and is currently the National Expert on three U.S. Department of Education School Climate Transformation Grants. The author of 24 books and 100+ articles/book chapters, he was the 21st President of the National Association of School Psychologists. Learn more at www.projectachieve.info.
IEI is committed to supporting the next generation of women in leadership. The Women in Leadership workshop is focused on discussing topics and issues that are relevant to women in leadership roles and those aspiring to be in those positions.

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IEI’s Cultivating Leaders for Equity and Inclusion workshop brings together educational leaders who are passionate about ensuring equity in education and diversifying the makeup of education leaders.

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The Aspiring Superintendent Institute aims to prepare educational leaders for the role of superintendency through mentorship, collaboration, and further development of the necessary leadership skills to run a K-12 district. Graduates receive 55 continuing education hours and a certificate from Howard University after completing classes and capstone.

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This session will recommend action items to improve educator workflow, career satisfaction, and ability to form professional boundaries, while still meeting the needs of schools and students.

Expert Advice on the Student Mental Health Crisis

Presented by: Kristi Dixon, School Counselor and Kansas State Counselor of the Year; Heidi Albin, Teacher and Author, Milken Educator and National Presidential Awardee; and Brett Derickson, Assistant Principal, Carson Middle School, Fountain-Fort Carson School District 8 (CO)

Moderated by Christopher Jenson, M.D.

Join us for a panel discussion and research that dives into the student mental health crisis that has accelerated since the year 2000. Panelists will offer unique views and expert perspectives.

Effective Solutions for Student and Staff Mental Health and Wellness

Presented by Dr. Janine Domingues, Clinical Psychologist, Anxiety Disorders Center and Senior Director of Professional Training, School and Community Programs, Child Mind Institute; Jessica Rosenfeld, School/District Partnership Manager, Ripple Effects; and Bridgette Melton, M.S. Psychology, Client Development Representative | Certified Trauma and Resilience Practitioner-Education, Committee for Children

Moderated by Donna Reichman, Assistant Superintendent, Wayne Township Public Schools (NJ)

Join us for a panel discussion on mental health and wellness resources and solutions for students and staff. There is an urgent need for effective ways to mitigate the mental health crisis.
July 17-21, 2023
12-1 pm Eastern Time

Effective Solutions for Student and Staff Mental Health and Wellness

Presented by Sara LaHayne, Founder and CEO, Move This World; Reagan Rogers, M.S., Psy.S., National Director of IMPACT, Invo Healthcare; and Maria Barrera, Founder and CEO, Clayful
Moderated by Dr. Robin Knutelsky, Director of Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, and Human Resources, Northern Highlands Regional High School (NJ)

Join us for a panel discussion on mental health and wellness resources and solutions for students and staff. There is an urgent need for effective ways to mitigate the mental health crisis.

Myndful: How Students Used AI to Create an App for Mental Health Resources

Presented by the Myndful.AI team from Metuchen High School: Ashvin Trehan, CEO; Jared Wyetzner, COO; and Siddharth Paul, CTO.
Moderated by Lisa Schmucki, CEO and Founder of edWeb.

The student creators of Myndful.AI will discuss how they developed the world's first machine learning chatbot, dedicated to serving the mental health needs of high school students.

Recordings and podcasts are now available.

CLICK HERE
Harnessing the Positive Power of Social Media

Telling a school’s story on social media can be powerful. Just ask principal Michael Randolph. Randolph is in his sixth year leading Leesburg High School in Leesburg, FL, and he has helped to transform the community’s perception of the school simply by using social media.

For instance, the graduation rate at Leesburg High has risen nearly 20% since Randolph took the helm. It’s a figure few would have thought possible in the years that preceded his tenure when the school was battling a less than stellar reputation.

In August 2019, Randolph realized he needed to change the narrative and started posting one positive story per day on his school’s Facebook account. He dubbed the effort #180DaysOfJoy, and it’s been going strong ever since. “Our goal was to share the amazing things happening inside Leesburg High School,” he says. “It has evolved, and now I can’t just choose one positive thing. I choose multiple things every day.”

Randolph says that in sharing the positives occurring at Leesburg High, the goodness only has multiplied. His school has received additional community support, found new funding sources, and increased its ability to recruit high-quality teachers because of such uplifting storytelling.

To find these stories, Randolph collects them by walking around his school and being present in the hallways. “I have to be intentional to go seek these items,” he says. “It has helped me as a principal; I never leave Leesburg High School without thinking about the best part of my day.”

On a larger scale, Maine Principals’ Association Executive Director Dr. Holly Blair shares a positive story from a Maine school every day on her Twitter account, Instagram and the association’s Facebook page and website. “I was tired of only hearing about the negative things going on in education—not just in Maine but throughout the nation,” Blair says. “There are so many more great, amazing, positive things going
on in schools that people just don’t know about.”

Her Twitter feature, “Maine’s Positive Story of the Day,” features a highlight from one Maine K–12 school every day. Blair does not have to work very hard to solicit content for the feature; principals are eager to share their good news with her, so she can share it with others. “It takes 10 minutes out of my day, and to have that come back 1,000-fold in pride in schools, districts and communities, it’s powerful, and it makes the educators feel good.”

Maine’s Positive Story of the Day also has generated some unexpected benefits for school leaders. “It’s started to shift how people think,” she says. “I tell my members, ‘You are each other’s best resources.’ Through sharing on my Twitter, principals have started contacting each other and saying, ‘Now I want to do this at my school.’ It’s ended up becoming a networking thing.”

Another of Blair’s reasons for highlighting the positive? Too often she sees educators being unfairly criticized by community members and in the media. “We are not unlike any other state that is seeing groups of people who are anti-education,” she says. “You know how you combat it? Show them what’s good! Let’s get the stories out in front of them.”
Unlocking Advocacy: The Critical Role Teachers Can Play in Shaping Education Policy

By Patrick Brennan

In the American education system, legislatures make the laws that govern education in their states. These policymakers shape the education landscape, especially through district funding. The actions taken by state legislatures and governors can significantly impact large school initiatives, such as improving infrastructure, curriculum, testing, teacher retention, early literacy, equity, and better screening for reading barriers like dyslexia. These are actions that would result in higher academic success for all students, especially those who are marginalized or have learning challenges. Many policymakers are receptive to hearing from educators about policy decisions and future policy considerations. They welcome input from educators and administrators who can add personal experiences and “on-the-ground” perspectives. By vocalizing priorities and advocating for students’ needs, legislators can amplify the voices of their constituency and utilize that information to strengthen and influence their state’s education system.

EDUCATION – A BIPARTISAN ISSUE

The bipartisan commitment to education is exemplified in the recent three COVID relief bills the federal government passed in 2020-2021 providing nearly $190 billion dollars in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding to K-12. Education funding remained in every draft of the bills, regardless of political party affiliation. This legislative effort showed real commitment to teachers, administrators, literacy coaches, and staff who continued to operate during the unprecedented pandemic. Educators and legislators worked together to support student learning and ensure professional development is focused on critical needs, including literacy and understanding the science of reading. Additionally, these funds allow states to develop programs to provide more teaching support and technology resources, and many states have introduced policies aimed at increasing teacher salaries.

ALL POLITICS IS PERSONAL

Educators engaging in advocacy can promote the teaching profession and raise awareness of the critical role that educators play in society. Tip O’Neill, a former Speaker of the House of Representatives once said, “All politics is local,” and I suggest that “All politics is personal.” Educators have genuine stories to tell, especially those who have shared experiences around sensitive and pending issues with hot button topics. Through the establishment of a feedback loop, educators and policymakers can collaborate in an authentic and sincere manner. And note, conversations between people who think differently are much richer in accomplishing objectives.
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GETTING INVOLVED

By sharing experiences, policymakers and the public will have a better understanding of the challenges and rewards of the teaching profession. Below are three ways educators might advocate:

• Reach out to local and state representatives, Governor’s offices, or Superintendent/Commissioner of Education to share concerns and ideas.

• Participate in grassroots advocacy efforts, such as letter writing campaigns, phone calls, and social media, to bring attention to critical issues.

• Build relationships with policymakers and community leaders to ensure concerns are heard and addressed. These relationships can also help educators learn more about the specific goals of their legislators that they may not be aware of.

BUILD STRENGTH IN NUMBERS THOUGH PARTNERSHIPS

As the United States motto “E Pluribus Unum” reminds us, we are stronger when we come together. One way to build strength in numbers is to connect with other educators, partners, and advocacy groups who share similar goals. Legislators are more likely to take notice when they hear from many people about an issue rather than just one.

ISSUES TO ADVOCATE FOR

Prevention, Early Detection Screening, Whole Child LiteracyTM

By focusing on prevention we can drastically change the trajectory of so many children who slip through the cracks in our education system. Through engaging in preventative measures, “not only does the student benefit, but ALL of society benefits.”

As an example, our team at Learning Ally is working with the Florida Legislature and Florida State’s Center for Reading to scale a screening and early detection program that would be made available to all kindergarteners through third graders at no-cost. This cutting-edge literacy screener has been built by Reach Every Reader, a partnership between
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Join for FREE!

Easy-to-read formats: audio, audio + highlighted text, braille, large font, and more.

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the Harvard Graduate School of Education and MIT. Given the importance of early detection, we want to replicate this process in other states so that more children can have affordable screening available to them. We are also piloting the Learning Ally/Reach Every Reader Screener program in South Carolina in partnership with the Legislature, University of South Carolina, and the South Carolina Department of Education.

Every educator wants to ensure that each child has what they need and is ready to learn when they sit down at their desk. This not only involves academic support but also includes cognitive, social, and emotional support. At Learning Ally, we refer to this comprehensive perspective as Whole Child Literacy™, which we incorporate into our work on behalf of educators and in advocating with the states. By adopting this approach, we can share our insights with states and legislators to help them understand what a child's experience is like in school and their surrounding environments. This enables us to identify opportunities based on their priorities and ensure a complete commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) is reflected.

EDUCATORS... MAKE YOUR VOICES HEARD

Advocacy for education is a powerful tool that can affect real change at the local, state, and national levels. While some may view advocacy as a daunting task, anyone can get involved and have an impact regardless of their position. You will achieve a greater sense of connection with your legislators and fortify your own mission to help all students succeed. Through advocacy, more legislators will have a clearer picture of your needs. In turn, students will enjoy a more equitable and successful education journey, and teachers will benefit from having a more prosperous and fulfilling teaching profession.

Make your voices heard!

Patrick Brennan serves as the Vice President of Government Relations for Learning Ally, a national nonprofit working with U.S. schools to solve the literacy crisis. His mission is to meet with and work with U.S. state legislatures, departments of education, and governors to drive legislative initiatives meant to create student-focused solutions in support of struggling readers. Patrick uses his congressional experience to help organizations engage in the policy process to create conditions for students to succeed regardless of who they are, how they learn, or where they are from.
Discovery Education has established collaborative relationships with a variety of like-minded corporate partners that are committed to supporting equitable access to college and examples of diverse career paths. Together, we can help students receive what they need to succeed in college and the workplace.

These featured programs provide a variety of free resources to help students with the knowledge and academic preparation needed to enroll in college and succeed after high school.
Navigate the college financial aid process using **Financial Pursuit**, an online module for teens.

TGreduExplore.org

**TGR EDU: EXPLORE**

Highlight STEM careers using **career profile videos** to inspire teens to explore a fulfilling career in STEM.

SiemensStemDay.com

**SIEMENS STEM DAY**

Engage your classroom with **real-world career activities** that showcase the STEM skills that lead to career success.

STEMCareersCoalition.org

**STEM Careers Coalition**

Analyze data in **Career-o-Matic** to identify the elements involved in selecting and pursuing a fulfilling job.

IgniteMyFutureInSchool.org

**IGNITE MY FUTURE**

Foster a new generation of scientists who are inspired to **improve the world with science**.

YoungScientistLab.com

**3M Young Scientist Challenge**

Uncover the wide range of **STEM careers** found in the copper industry and how your interests and skills apply.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Page(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benetech/Bookshare</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capstone Interactive</td>
<td>10-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discovery Education</td>
<td>41-42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driving Force Institute</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>edWeb.net</td>
<td>32-33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e-Therapy</td>
<td>16-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaggle</td>
<td>26-27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landmark College</td>
<td>46-47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Ally</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigate360</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texthelp</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varsity Tutors</td>
<td>4-5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We also thank our wonderful circulation partners:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Page(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CASE</td>
<td>6-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CoSN</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEI</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAGC</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NASSP</td>
<td>34-35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SETDA</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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