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K-12 HERO AWARDS





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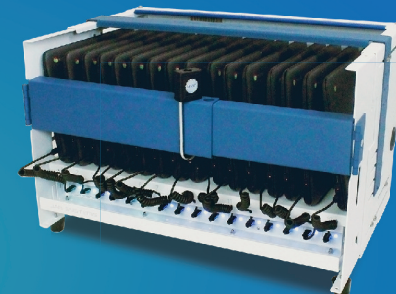


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Kevin Hogan,
eSchool News
Editor-at-Large

K-12 HERO AWARDS

In the course of the past pandemic years, many myths have been busted: Teachers and administrators have 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 featured here, are testament to those busted myths. The descriptions of preparedness and planning, of swift responsiveness and going the extra mile, 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 challenging times.

I hope these stories can inspire you, embolden you, and support you as we continue to try and serve students. 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, opening later in 2023.

—Kevin Hogan, eSchool News Editor-at-Large





Nominee: Ann Hughes, [Linda Tutt Learning Center](#)

Nominated by: [Ripple Effects](#)

The challenges that students face at Linda Tutt Learning Center in Sanger, Texas are tough.

Ann Hughes is tougher.

As she told the Houston Chronicle earlier this year, "I bet on the outsider because when I win, I want to win big."

Ann's students struggle with myriad challenges, including issues such as depression, hyperactivity disorders, and anger. Troubled students frequently come to Linda Tutt from other districts in the state as a last resort. In short, Ann's program is the last hope to get these kids on the right track.

In her previous role as Director of Social Emotional Learning & Behavior Intervention for Linda Tutt and her new role as Director of Student Intervention for Sanger ISD, Ann has limited resources, both from a funding and personnel perspective. However, she meets those challenges both holistically and creatively. She stops students each day to engage in meaningful conversations about their lives. She taps into programs like Ripple Effects for Teens, which has modules that address a wide range of issues, including mental health, personal trauma, and academic challenges.

Ann has designated individual rooms throughout campus dedicated to giving students space to regroup. There's a Movement Room to work off excess energy and a Chill Out Room for relaxation. Music, yoga, and dance are other key elements that she incorporates to reach her students, encouraging sing-alongs and dance parties.

To fill the gaps in funding and personnel resources, Ann has spearheaded community partnerships with local churches and charities, which provide counseling support not available at school. These collaborations have resulted in students honing their agriculture skills at community gardens and learning how to run a business via a nonprofit grocery store.

Preston Westbrook, who graduated from Linda Tutt in May, still volunteers at the store, having found a sense of purpose through his work there. When he first transferred to the school, he had severe anger issues stemming from abuse and an unstable home life, including 26 foster homes. He often ran onto the roof of the school to escape, telling CBS News Dallas, “That’s how I’d get away from people when I would get mad.”



He credits Ann and the programs at Linda Tutt with helping him through those dark times.

“I’ve ripped off door hinges when I was 9. I’ve punched holes through doors,” Preston told the station. “Without Ann, I wouldn’t be here . . . she understood what I went through.”

Students like Preston, who were on track to drop out of school or had tantrums and threw trash at teachers, have gone on to attend college and cultivate successful careers. They learn important life skills while uncovering their own value as a person. All because Ann “bet big” on them.

As Ann’s colleagues recently told the Houston Chronicle, she is “a dealer of hope.”

Ripple Effects is proud to nominate Ann as a K-12 Hero for her unwavering dedication and creativity. While she may not wear a cape, she rescues students every day.

“I’ve ripped off door hinges when I was 9. I’ve punched holes through doors. Without Ann, I wouldn’t be here... she understood what I went through.”

—Preston Westbrook, Student,
Linda Tutt Learning Center



IDENTITY
AUTOMATION

Nominee: Daniel Olivas, Network Analyst, [Austin Independent School District](#)

Nominated by: [Identity Automation](#)

The pandemic has accelerated the transition to remote and hybrid learning, and it made school districts the number one target for cyberattacks. As the fifth largest school district in Texas, Austin Independent School District was no exception. Guided by the motto “AISD Anywhere,” the district used the pandemic as an opportunity to provide over 100,000 students, teachers, staff, parents, and other users with secure access to classroom tools from any Wi-Fi network.

As Network Analyst at Austin ISD, Daniel Olivas led the implementation of an identity-centric zero trust security strategy that ensured this access was not only user-friendly, but secure. Unlike traditional, perimeter-focused approaches to security, Austin ISD’s zero-trust approach assumes all network traffic is untrusted until an identity has been verified—a critical step to securing a digital ecosystem that can be accessed from anywhere.

To tie Austin ISD’s digital ecosystem together and orient it around digital identities, Olivas leveraged the district’s long-time Identity and Access Management (IAM) platform, RapidIdentity, to grant individuals access to needed applications, while connecting data from those applications back to the correct digital identity. Acting as the new perimeter of Austin ISD’s digital environment, RapidIdentity has helped Austin ISD bolster security and become a leader in K-12 authentication and zero trust.

Austin ISD is seen as a technology leader among its peers, recently hosting a user group for Texas school districts that Olivas helped lead on the topic of “Creating an InfoSec Culture Centered on Digital Identities.” As Network Analyst, Olivas was on the front lines in designing and implementing this identity-centric approach to secure anywhere, anytime access.

Some of the results achieved include:

- 1) User-friendly login and authentication for all students: RapidIdentity provides Austin ISD with flexible authentication that can be tailored to the unique needs of different user populations. For kindergartners and special education students in particular, the ability to authenticate using a QR code combined with Pictograph authentication has made edtech tools more accessible, while still adhering to security best practices.
- 2) Reduced learning loss: As long as a student has their Chromebook and Wi-Fi access, they can engage in personalized learning from any location. Teachers have also been empowered with self-service capabilities that allow them to reset passwords right from the classroom, expediting learning instead of waiting for help desk assistance.
- 3) Enhanced security: Austin ISD has become a K-12 leader in zero-trust and authentication. Its identity-centric approach balances the need for greater security that keeps learners and educators safe online with the need to ensure equitable and user-friendly access.
- 4) Less downtime: Because Austin ISD takes a cloud-first approach to their digital ecosystem, the district doesn't have to worry about system downtime during emergency weather conditions, such as the 2021 Texas power crisis.



Guided by the motto “AISD Anywhere,” the district used the pandemic as an opportunity to provide over 100,000 students, teachers, staff, parents, and other users with secure access to classroom tools from any Wi-Fi network.



Nominee: Kim Leblanc, [Calcasieu Parish School Board](#)

Nominated by: [Bluum](#)

Conventional wisdom would say that economically disadvantaged schools across the country would need to think twice before making a major investment in technology. However, not all districts in that predicament have a technology director like Kim Leblanc.

Calcasieu Parish School Board is the fifth-largest school district in Louisiana, resting in the southwest part of the state. In total, the district serves 29,500 students across 60 elementary, middle, and high schools. It is a 100 percent CEP district, which means that every student is eligible for free lunch based on the economic poverty data submitted to the federal government.

However, Calcasieu Parish School Board's Chief Technology Officer, Kim Leblanc, has developed a system for providing the type of technology in classrooms that one would only expect in affluent schools. Behind Kim's leadership, Calcasieu Parish conducted a thorough needs assessment before purchasing more than \$4.1 million in technology and technology professional development with federal

The investment included 400 3D printers and the professional development necessary to advance STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics) education, most of which came at no cost to the district.

funds under Title I and Title IV to implement the technology within the existing curriculum. The investment included 400 3D printers and the professional development necessary to advance STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics) education, most of which came at no cost to the district. It also is developing a STEM bus with fun technological gadgets to enhance student learning.

"Technology is continuously evolving, so we need to give all of our students equal opportunities to succeed," Kim said. "We wanted to provide them the technologies that enhanced their critical thinking, collaboration and creativity so that they can compete both academically and in the modern workforce."

Calcasieu Parish's Training Tech Center, led by Kim, was already instrumental in introducing new technology to its classrooms, including robotics and a computing device for each student and teacher. Armed with a philosophy to "make it happen in the classroom," Calcasieu Parish and Kim are committed to preparing its students for STEAM careers, illustrated by its investments in student design competitions, summer tech camps and the STEM bus. The students are already utilizing the 3D printers in classrooms to solve real-world challenges and develop 3D designing skills within projects.



"Technology is continuously evolving, so we need to give all of our students equal opportunities to succeed. We wanted to provide them the technologies that enhanced their critical thinking, collaboration and creativity so that they can compete both academically and in the modern workforce."

—Kim Leblanc,
Chief Technology Officer,
Calcasieu Parish
School Board



Nominee: Alex Seage,
Christopher Columbus High School
Nominated by: Samsung Electronics America

SAMSUNG

Alex Seage built a career leading technology and innovation in the cruise industry, which also provided him with a deep understanding of the technology needed to improve the experience for cruise guests. In January 2021, Seage decided it was time to leap into the education field, leveraging the skills he acquired to make a difference at his alma mater, Christopher Columbus High School. With the goal of modernizing the school's IT infrastructure for the ever-evolving pandemic era, Seage joined CCHS as a Senior Director of Technology and Innovation.

CCHS is a private, Roman Catholic, college-preparatory high school, conducted by the Marist Brothers in the Westchester census-designated place of Miami Dade County, Florida. When onboarding, Seage saw firsthand how teachers were under great stress as they struggled to create crucial engagement and ensure students weren't feeling left behind in the classroom. At that moment, a top-down approach to create a "Campus of the Future" was devised by adopting smart signage within lecture halls, hallways, athletic facilities, and executive conference rooms to transform the entire campus. Under his leadership, CCHS was one of the first schools to implement Samsung's Flip 3 whiteboard in 2021. Samsung's Interactive Whiteboard was ready out-of-the-box and was an easy-to-use product for educators to easily provide personalized experiences. Seamless integration with teachers' education platforms helped to immerse students in their learning material.

As CCHS introduced this product to the campus, faculty were able to learn how their teachers wanted to incorporate

collaborative experiences using technology and content-driven media that could be delivered in a quick and meaningful manner to hold students' interest. The staff now uses the interactive display to create and present lesson plans and share content with students utilizing their own tablets. Teachers have also expressed positive feedback using the technology, underscoring how it led to more collaborative learning experiences for students. The ability to offer two-way communication and collaboration between students and teachers is no longer a pipe dream – by Seage utilizing Samsung's products, CCHS was able to provide the technology and infrastructure to make this dream a reality.

The positive results in the classroom have led to other expansion opportunities across the CCHS campus. The school recently built a new center for science and arts outfitted with new, cutting-edge Samsung solutions that provide an ideal space for students to foster STEM skills, such as critical thinking, communication, and creativity. Additionally, Seage has put forward creative ideas to implement Samsung technology beyond the classroom, including a production studio, wayfinding, and even integrating the technology into the school's sports program.

Seage has played an instrumental role in transforming an ordinary campus into one that truly embraces the meaning of being "smart." He has successfully built the architecture for a connected campus that enhances the campus experience, drives operational efficiency, and provides education in a manner that all can access. And for Seage, the best has yet to come.



Nominee: [Arlington Independent School District](#)

Nominated by: [Identity Automation](#)



IDENTITY
AUTOMATION

Arlington Independent School District (AISD) has a population of more than 61,000 students. With a highly-engaged faculty and array of learning opportunities that foster each student's unique interests and talents, the district's goal is to have 100 percent of AISD students graduate exceptionally prepared for college, career and citizenship. The district seamlessly combines the strength of a large school district with innovative approaches and focused support to help students articulate and achieve their dreams.

Arlington ISD has always been forward-thinking when it comes to its district technology strategy, and the district's Assistant Superintendent of Technology, Eric Upchurch, has been the driving force behind much of its innovation. The district's ability to quickly and efficiently supply devices to students, ensure remote access, and provide educational resources is a model other districts can follow.

When the pandemic started, Upchurch knew this would permanently change how students learn. The challenge was how to quickly adapt to the circumstances and make sure all students in the district had easy, affordable, and quick access to the technologies needed to succeed throughout the school year and in years to come.

Led by Upchurch, the technology team coordinated across district departments to ensure a speedy roll-out of 1:1 devices. Whether it was participating in device-day pickup or hosting and coordinating meet-the-teacher drive-throughs, the entire district staff stepped up to provide for nearly 61,000 students.

Internet hotspots were also set up so the thousands of students who otherwise wouldn't have internet could maintain classroom access and ensure the continuing equity in education.

"It's really been incredible," said Upchurch. "The staff has worked really hard to get through this. The campus technology people, the assistant principals, school staff, it's been a big task. They've done a great job."

Additionally, Upchurch is constantly looking for innovative new technologies that can help the district. His team likes to beta test new technologies to explore the benefits for all of their end users, including security technologies that help keep the district safe.

Arlington ISD has also made a big push in its Technology Enrichment program. The program gives students technology skills that can lead them into the future. This includes access to the latest technology applications that can have real world applications. The district also holds several events inviting staff to learn about technology tools and strategies for the classroom.

Arlington Independent School District is an edtech integration leader both districtwide and in the classroom, and other districts can look to AISD for inspiration. Ultimately, from Upchurch and the technology team to leadership districtwide, AISD knows how important technology is in today's learning environment and wants every student to have the same opportunity to be successful.



Nominee: Becky Alexander,
Morris Elementary
Nominated by: Istation



Becky Alexander is the principal at Morris Elementary School in Morris, Oklahoma. She has inspired change at the school by leading its faculty and staff to embrace technology and enrich their strategy toward 21st century learning. Alexander seeks new opportunities to use technology within classroom lessons regularly. She implements programs like Istation to give her teachers an advantage in providing data driven instruction and strong, effective interventions.

Alexander inspires an innovative approach to learning by embedding interventions led by Istation's assessment data into the school's daily instruction. These interventions ensure that students are being equipped with the best possible skills practice to achieve academic growth. As a result, Alexander has seen significant growth in her students.

Inspired by Alexander's success, educators at Morris Elementary also use Istation's reports and printable resources to promote academic growth in reading and math. With reliable, actionable data, educators at Morris Elementary are able to provide targeted instruction. Additionally, student motivation is high, as they are able to track their monthly growth and celebrate successes. As a result of these successes, Alexander



presented at The Cooperative Council for Oklahoma School Administrators Conference on the effectiveness of this intervention, inspiring educators state-wide to follow her lead.

Alexander continues her commitment to improving the educational community by being an active member of Istation's Red Cape Community, which allows her to collaborate with educators nationwide on best practices, and provide feedback directly with Istation on the classroom needs of educators.



Nominee: Carmen Alvarez, Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District

Nominated by: Age of Learning



Ms. Alvarez is the Early Learning Director for Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District (HCISD), a few miles from the U.S./Mexico border. The district serves an economically-disadvantaged community with about 80 percent of the students eligible to participate in the free and reduced-price meal program. In fall 2020, 61 percent of children in prekindergarten were classified as academically “at risk” and she has witnessed the impact a lack of readiness for kindergarten and beyond has on students. Therefore, Ms. Alvarez and her colleagues looked for ways to solve that challenge.

In the fall of 2019, HCISD launched a universal full-day pre-K program for 4-year-old children at no cost to families. Affordability is the number one deterrent to enrolling in pre-K, so they dedicated the resources to make it accessible to everyone in the community. Through this program, HCISD began to instill a strong foundation in literacy and math in these young learners.

Shortly after the program started, COVID-19 forced the district to rethink how it could academically support the pre-K students. While remote learning was difficult for all, the youngest learners faced particularly acute challenges when in-school learning was no longer possible. The priority was to ensure that district closures would not negatively impact pre-K students’ academic growth and development.

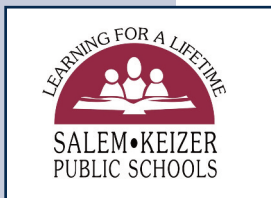
Under Ms. Alvarez’s leadership, pre-K classes began using an adaptive, mastery-based math program, My Math Academy, to

strengthen young learners’ foundational math knowledge, and inspire their love of learning. Furthermore, due to remote learning, Alvarez turned to the technology solution to equip educators with insights and tools to personalize and accelerate learning at-home and in the classroom.

HCISD teachers quickly saw positive changes in how students were building math skills. The pre-K students using My Math Academy during the 2020-2021 school year nearly tripled their skill levels, while kindergarteners participating in the program increased their skill levels by 50 percent. And perhaps most impactful is that due to learner variability, each student was at a different starting point in learning, yet every student mastered all pre-K skills and continued well into kindergarten. HCISD even had children entering kindergarten the following year learning math at a second-grade level!

Based on the overwhelmingly positive results, HCISD expanded the use of My Math Academy and began a pilot of My Reading Academy. The district is already seeing improved reading skills among students.

District officials expected the pandemic would drastically increase the number of students falling behind in their learning. However, more than 850 children enrolled in HCISD’s universal pre-K program, and HCISD students are now performing better on math and reading compared to cohorts in previous years, and their math results are above the national average.



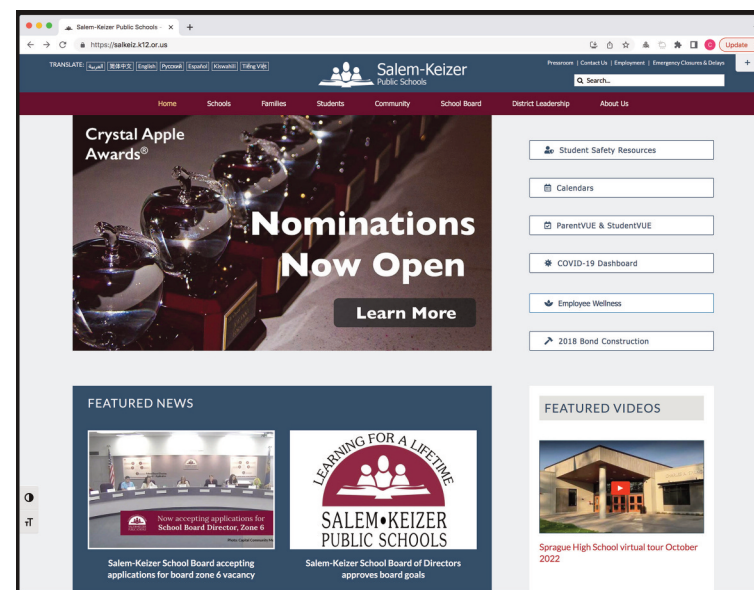
Nominee: Chris Moore, Salem-Keizer Public Schools Nominated by: [EmpowerU, Inc.](#)



Chris Moore is a heart-centered leader who works tirelessly to support the needs of all staff and students. He is intentionally and strategically focused on expanding access to effective social-emotional and mental health support holistically throughout the district--a huge undertaking in a district of 40,000 students.

Chris is extremely thoughtful in his selection of partnerships and is always thinking strategically about how the programs and supports he implements will fit into the greater picture of driving whole child success. He is collaborative with his partners and his school sites, making the right connections at the right time, resulting in integrated program implementation to leverage the greatest impact and drive big outcomes.

Chris helps his school sites, staff, and students tap into their highest potential every day by meeting them where they are with belief in them and unconditional positive regards--connecting them with resources like EmpowerU and working with them to identify where and how EmpowerU programs can best support their unique needs and challenges.





Nominee: [District 49](#)

Nominated by: [LearnPlatform](#)



The number of digital tools used by districts rapidly accelerated during the pandemic as schools transitioned to remote learning, causing challenges for both teachers and administrators.

Leaders at District 49 (D49), one of Colorado's fastest-growing districts, knew they needed to work collaboratively to ensure that the education technology tools used across their system were delivering value for students and teachers and that they were doing so safely.

To better understand edtech use across the district's system, the district's tech team set up a district Inventory Dashboard, provided free from LearnPlatform. Within days, they realized that students and teachers were using more than 2,000 edtech tools systemwide. They knew they needed to establish clear processes for managing this amount of edtech use effectively.

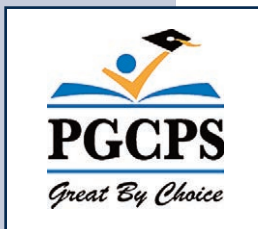
In particular, they wanted to be able to encourage consistent practices across school buildings, ensure compliance with Colorado's student data privacy requirements, reduce frustration and confusion among stakeholders (including parents and staff), and begin to evaluate the impact of edtech on student outcomes. At the same time, they wanted to maintain local decision-making autonomy among their four zones.

While several district-wide teams, including Learning Services, Purchasing, and Data and Performance, worked together to identify and select LearnPlatform to help them achieve their goals, Melissa Riggs, D49 Education Technology Specialist within the Learning Services team, ultimately led the LearnPlatform implementation.

She and her team have worked closely with the LearnPlatform team to:

- Create a district library of their top edtech tools
- Keep stakeholders (teachers, staff, and parents/guardians) informed of the approval and privacy statuses for those tools
- Establish a clearly defined, efficient process for requesting and reviewing new edtech product requests to ensure curricular alignment, technical compatibility, and data privacy compliance
- Evaluate product usage, cost, and student achievement to better understand how well key edtech products are working for all D49 students
- Reduce the financial and human costs associated with managing and vetting edtech tools
- Make it easier for teachers to find and select edtech products to use in their classrooms

D49's thoughtful rollout of LearnPlatform, led by Melissa, has made D49's use of edtech more manageable, thoughtful, and consistent; ensured compliance with state student data privacy regulations; and optimized safety.



Nominee: Dr. Elizabeth Faison, Prince George's County Public Schools Nominated by: [AllHere](#)



We are nominating Dr. Elizabeth Faison, Associate Superintendent of Student Services at Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS), for leading a transparent, honest, and thoughtful interrogation of what stands in the way of authentic partnerships between families and schools. PGCPS' focus on transformational practices has led to the district's quest for innovative approaches to removing barriers to student success.

Dr. Elizabeth Faison has held leadership positions for over 16 years at PGCPS, one of the nation's largest school districts with 208 schools and more than 136,500 students in Maryland. As Associate Superintendent of Student Services, Elizabeth ensures PGCPS's diverse student population receives holistic support that includes school health, mental health, psychological services, homeless, home and hospital teaching, home schooling, restorative approaches, international admissions, bullying prevention, and attendance.

As the gap between home and school widened during the pandemic, Elizabeth led the funding of programs that ensure every family in her district receives the support they need by establishing new touchpoints that reach students and families wherever they are. This includes the adoption of AllHere, a 24/7 texting-based chatbot that provides personalized support so that every family can get questions answered within seconds or be escalated to a support staff member within the district. This chatbot, affectionately named by students as J.A.R.V.I.S (Just A Rather Very Intelligent System), allowed PGCPS to also provide

real time answers to parents' inquiries as well as provide students with a way to alert the district to personal crises.

In recent years, Elizabeth has spearheaded a district-wide initiative to drive awareness around attendance, one of the top drivers of student success. Rather than fall back on outdated, often punitive attendance intervention strategies, Elizabeth has taken important steps forward to reimagine attendance strategies that acknowledge the unique circumstances of each child and family.

Traditionally, school absences are assumed to be a result of disinterested families when the real causes more often are language barriers, parents working multiple jobs, and poor internet access, among a host of other obstacles. Over the last decade, family engagement leaders like Elizabeth have championed a shift in how our education system treats chronic absenteeism, from a punitive to an empathetic approach that treats families as crucial components to their child's success.

Elizabeth expertly and compassionately convened the district's attendance task force, bringing together families, students, educators, and policymakers in support of a high-quality system of supports around attendance and overall student achievement. Elizabeth's leadership in PGCPS shows the way toward a more liberatory, solidarity-driven, strengths-driven, and equity-focused engagement practice that supports student services excellence for all children."



Nominee: Dr. Nick Migliorino, Norman Public Schools

Nominated by: Rave Mobile Safety



In the wake of the tragedy in Uvalde, TX earlier this year, school administrators across the nation began assessing ways to protect students. Elected officials also started doubling down on safety measures, including the Governor of Oklahoma, who issued a statewide mandate this summer requiring more than 1,800 public K-12 and charter schools in the state to implement Rave Panic Button by September 1. Oklahoma is not new to Rave Panic Button – the state is coming up on its third year of working with Rave to protect students and staff.

Dr. Nick Migliorino, superintendent of Norman Public Schools, has been the catalyst for school safety technology in Oklahoma for years and continues to keep the safety of students and staff at the top of his priorities today.

In 1999, he was awarded the Governor's Humanitarian Award for his service to students during the May 3, 1999 tornado that damaged Westmoore High School. Since then, he has had a long and successful career, taking on more challenging roles along the way, ultimately becoming the superintendent of Norman Public Schools in 2017. Before taking on his current position, Migliorino served as the school's Assistant Superintendent for Administrative Services and Chief Technology Officer, which entailed overseeing all technical aspects of the district. In this capacity, Migliorino worked with the district's technical services staff, site teachers, leaders, and other external stakeholders to expand the district's use of technological resources. As part of this work, he also oversaw

bond projects and managed the district's maintenance, transportation, child nutrition health, and technology divisions.

A firm believer in the fact that technology can make a difference in the ways that schools connect and protect students, Migliorino co-founded School Connect, a company that provided a web-based platform for schools to create their own mobile-messaging applications. The company was sold to Jostens, Inc. in 2012 and the platform continues to serve districts across the nation as School Way.

Dr. Migliorino worked tirelessly to ensure that Norman Public Schools was among one of the first Oklahoma school districts to use the Rave Panic Button application, 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. Norman Public Schools implemented Rave Panic Button before Governor Kevin Stitt declared the executive order and served as a resource to many other districts who had questions about the benefits of Rave Panic Button. Today, as of this writing, 92.4 percent of Oklahoma schools have opted in to use the Rave Panic Button app, and nearly 88 percent show as live users which means school personnel have "geo-fenced" their campus, named their buildings, and added some staff into the system.

Migliorino's values and vision have helped the Oklahoma school system to be the safety leader that it is today.



Nominee: Ed Kemnitzer,
East Williston Union Free School District
Nominated by: Bluum



Since the recent pandemic and subsequent federal spending regarding technology tools in the classroom can be overwhelming to many schools and their leaders, many school administrators have clamored for an education technology partner to help navigate those choppy waters. With the need for guidance on what and how to purchase technology to truly help improve learning outcomes at an all-time high, the company Bluum launched Strategic Advisory Planning Services for its education partners this past year.

It is a three-phase process in which the company's technology and education experts help school districts assess where there is a need for edtech and how they should implement it into their schools at little or no cost. But in order to launch services such as this, trusted partners and education technology experts at the schools are needed to provide the feedback necessary to make the program truly valuable for educators.

That is where East Williston Union Free School District Director of Technology, Innovation and Information Services Ed Kemnitzer from New York came in. Ed was one of the early adopters of the service provided by Bluum and helped pilot the program for eight months. Ed selflessly volunteered his time

and energy to assist the Bluum Education Services Team with countless insights in developing these services for schools.

Although Ed said that the experience was beneficial to learning more about what his district needed as well, his knowledge in strategic planning, budgets, working with the school board, federal funding, and other acumen were invaluable to the Bluum team as they designed their programs. Ed understands that districts scratch and claw for every technology dollar in their budget and the counsel he provided Bluum will allow the company to assist countless others in those efforts.





Nominee: Emily Herring,
Fairfield City Schools
Nominated by: EmpowerU, Inc.

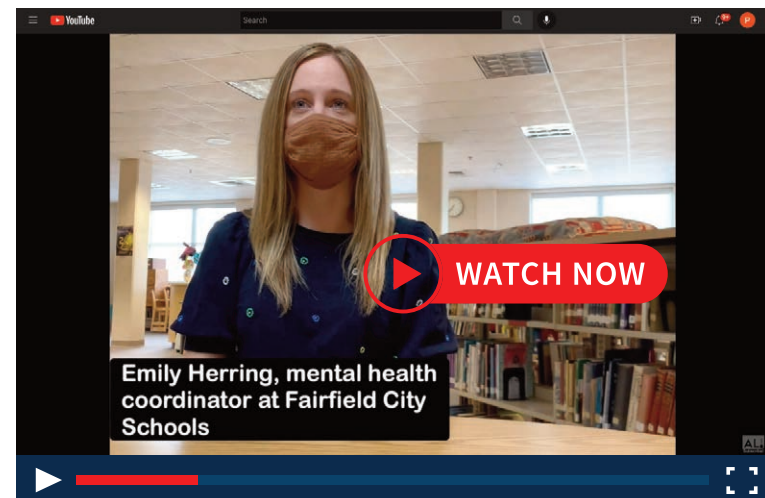
Emily Herring is a champion of students!

Emily works tirelessly to support the needs of all students--particularly students who are struggling in the traditional school setting and who have been temporality transitioned to an Alternative Learning Site.

Emily has taken it upon herself to generate grant money to connect students at the ALC with EmpowerU to feel empowered to transition back to their traditional school settings with more resilience and coping skills.

Students from Emily's district who take EmpowerU share feeling increased self-value and confidence.

Emily helps students tap into their highest potential every day by meeting them where they are at with belief in them and connecting them with resources like EmpowerU to support them as a whole person.



Emily works tirelessly to support the needs of all students—particularly students who are struggling in the traditional school setting and who have been temporality transitioned to an Alternative Learning Site.



Nominee: [FlexPoint Education Cloud](#)

Nominated by: Mary Stevens, [Florida Virtual School](#)



The vision of Florida Virtual School (FLVS), a fully accredited online K-12 public school district, has always been to transform education worldwide. To that end, FLVS launched FlexPoint Education Cloud, enabling them to partner with schools and districts around the nation and worldwide to help them quickly and effectively transition teachers and students to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

In the 2020-21 school year, the FlexPoint team helped more than 160 new schools and districts around the nation launch their first online learning programs during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Plus, to help educators who were new to online learning during, FlexPoint helped train more than 14,000 education professionals nationwide, equaling more than 500 hours of professional development.

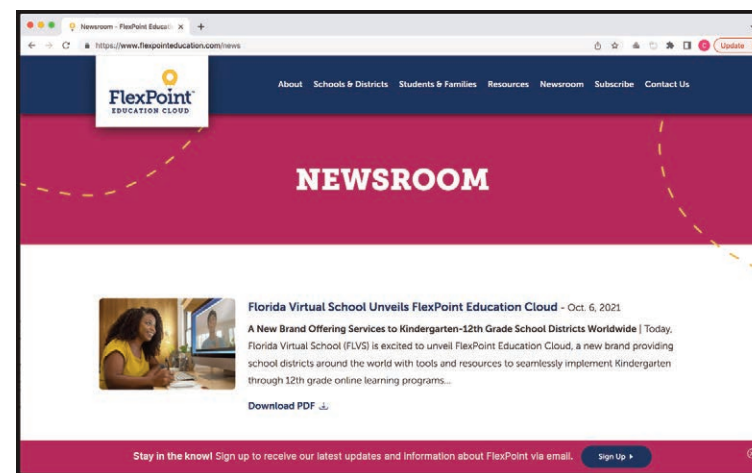
In Florida, FLVS saw success through state testing results and surveys. The 2021 state testing results showed that FLVS students scored 21 percent higher in English and 11 percent higher in math than the state average. Additionally, FLVS supported Florida schools and districts by training more than 10,000 teachers statewide and provided ongoing support.

To help even more students, families, and educators around the nation who were new to online learning FLVS launched the Online Learning Community (OLC). OLC gave educators the

resources they needed and offered an online community where they could ask questions, connect with others, and feel confident as they educated students in a virtual environment.

Additionally, in response to COVID's substantial impact on mental health, FLVS added nearly 50 student services professionals to support students and families, providing them with resources, webinars, and trainings to help them through a time of great change and stress.

During the pandemic, FLVS went above and beyond to support students, parents, and educators in Florida and across the nation—putting students at the center of every decision they made.





Nominee: [Florida Virtual School](#)

Nominated by: [SAP Concur](#)



It's with great pleasure that SAP Concur nominates Florida Virtual School (FLVS) and Kelly Goodman, Expense Management Manager, for the eSchool News K-12 Hero Award. We believe that Florida Virtual is a great choice for the award as they have embraced technology to become one of the world's leaders in online education.

FLVS has been leading the way in K-12 online education since 1997. They provide a robust, award-winning curriculum to public, private, charter, and homeschool families and school districts nationwide. They are accredited by Cognia and offer supportive online learning to students both in Florida and around the world.

FLVS's 5 core values—Excellence, Innovation, Community, Balance, and Communication—energize and guide its team members in their daily pursuits to achieve their vision.

FLVS's 5 core values--Excellence, Innovation, Community, Balance, and Communication--energize and guide its team members in their daily pursuits to achieve their vision. They lead online education worldwide with innovative digital solutions that individualize learning for each student, and they equip students for success by developing and delivering highly effective digital learning through an intuitive online platform.





Nominee: Cory Hocker,
Golden Eagle Charter School
Nominated by: Kajeet



We are nominating Cory for his commitment to ensuring connectivity for students in need during the ongoing fire seasons in California. Cory ensures their school is prepared to serve displaced students in need of connectivity during wildfires.

Most recently, while experiencing the McKinney Fire, he was moving equipment from the red zone while managing connectivity and access for students. Wearing the many hats of an IT Director is challenging enough, and Cory goes above and beyond each year to assist students during fire season and evacuations, which are unpredictable and can be devastating for students when they are relocated.



Wearing the many hats of an IT Director is challenging enough, and Cory goes above and beyond each year to assist students during fire season and evacuations, which are unpredictable and can be devastating for students when they are relocated.



Nominee: [Green Bay Area Public Schools](#)

Nominated by: [JAR Systems, LLC](#)

JAR SYSTEMS

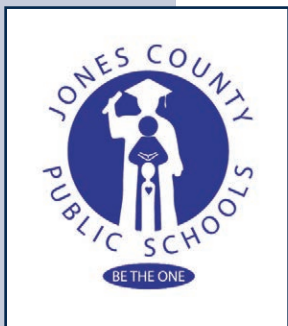
JAR Systems has chosen to nominate Green Bay Area Public Schools for the K-12 Hero Awards due to its unrivaled commitment to student success. Green Bay recently invested in 20,000 Chromebooks to move the district to a 1:1 student-to-device ratio to advance students' productivity and learning in classrooms.

Due to the mass increase of devices, the district began to experience some difficulties with keeping the devices charged and ready for learning. To combat this issue, the district purchased Adapt4 Charging Stations for its secondary schools to alleviate the challenges of uncharged devices in the classrooms. The yellow power banks included in the Adapt4 Charging Stations allowed students to charge their devices at the desk without the district needing to modify infrastructure or create fire/trip hazards with power cords. In turn, this increased productivity and reduced disruptions to learning in the secondary school classrooms.

In the district's elementary schools, the main priority involved keeping students' devices charged while maximizing space in the classrooms. To achieve this, Green Bay took the initiative to purchase Essential USB-C Charging Stations that are designed to fit various device sizes and types, which allowed teachers to maximize space in the classroom. The Essential Charging Station can also be wall-mounted, saving even more classroom space compared to that of a traditional cart and allowing for an ideal learning environment.

Green Bay Area Public Schools not only took steps towards a 1:1 student-to-device ratio during unprecedented times, but it also recognized potential disruptions to learning and took the initiative to alleviate these challenges. Green Bay's initiatives display its commitment to student success by providing an idealistic environment for learning. During an unprecedented time of uncertainty, Green Bay Area Public Schools went above and beyond to educate students when demands on schools and districts were thought impossible. JAR Systems would like to nominate Green Bay Area Schools for the K-12 Hero Awards to recognize its dedication to its students' prosperity and learning.





Nominee: Hardee County School District

Nominated by: JAR Systems, LLC

JAR SYSTEMS

JAR Systems is nominating Hardee School District (FL) for its exceptional response to rapid change in its students' and teachers' requirements for digital learning. The district serves a diverse population in a rural county with many titled government programs and a large ESOL program.

The technology team, led by Director of Technology and Information Systems Todd Markel, has implemented a technology plan that emphasizes equitable learning opportunities and equips students with the resources needed to thrive in a global society.

Coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, they quickly recognized that the wiring of AC adapters into their charging stations was holding them back in several ways.

The wiring and rewiring were costing the district time and resources and the AC adapters were better off used for other purposes. In response, they made a significant investment in upgrading their charging infrastructure. Instead of buying all new stations, they were able to leverage the ones they already had and upgrade them with Quick-Sense USB-C PD Charging Hubs. This effectively eliminated cable management tasks and created a more user-friendly experience for teachers and students in the classroom.

The district's longstanding partnership with JAR Systems helped it toward a path of scalable growth and technological advancement that bolstered its ability to meet the needs of its increasingly digital curriculum.

The technology team, led by Director of Technology and Information Systems Todd Markel, has implemented a technology plan that emphasizes equitable learning opportunities and equips students with the resources needed to thrive in a global society.



Nominee: Heather Magill, Palm Beach County School District Nominated by: Edmentum



When it comes to educators, pinpointing one single superhero power is difficult due to how much they undertake and execute daily. Educators put their energies toward making the world a little bit better, whether it be through a be a global reach or affecting a single student. The purpose always remains—simply support students in finding their way. This is exactly the purpose Heather Magill embodies.

Ms. Magill challenges her students to be their best self and presents opportunities that might never be considered. She provides a world full of possibilities.

Ms. Magill recognizes that not every child comes to the table with equal or expansive experiences and opportunities. To address the disparity, she established the foundation needed to create a viable STEM program with holistic values for her school. It now offers STEM elective classes and houses robotics and coding courses that integrate science, technology, engineering, arts, and math into one learning experience, while reinforcing real-world application. With the Advanced STEM students, she focuses on design engineering projects centered around NASA's Growing Beyond Earth (GBE) trials, where she guides students to collect data on possible plants that could be used on the International Space Station, as well as the Stiles Nicholson STEM Inventor 3D print challenges. Using various expert speakers, programs, and virtual field trips, she demonstrates to students the unique opportunities that extend outside of their community.

Ms. Magill uses the process of instruction to get to know her students, build community, and present possibilities. She guides her students to personal heights in their question-answer-question cycle of discovery. She teaches them how to be limitless in their thinking and to consider the unconsidered. She does this while maintaining a high level of proficiency and mastery in the classroom. Digital resources like Edmentum's Study Island are as much a part of the process as conferences with NASA and collaboration with PBS.

Ms. Magill uses knowledge of her students to find opportunities and outside grants to support the learning at the edges. By partnering with the community to support, expose, and create opportunity, Ms. Magill finds unique learning chances for her students.

These adventures and opportunities work in concert with teaching of standards and the curriculum of Palm Beach County SD. She uses that data derived from Edmentum's Study Island to monitor understanding and learning. She teaches her students to be digital citizens as well as to use technology resources to monitor comprehension, perform critical analysis of content, and build self confidence that quickly translates to academic confidence.



Nominee: [Hemet Unified School District](#)

Nominated by: [Lexia Learning](#)



Hemet district leaders knew they had a literacy issue when their district data showed that only 16 percent of its 22,000 students in TK-12 were reading at or above grade level. And while every school site was a bit different, it was clear that they were dealing with major access and equity issues.

It was at this point that the 26-school district created a new director of literacy and intervention position, taking the stance that reading intervention was needed across most grades.

Working together, the district began to dig in and dive deeper into the root causes of the problem. Ready for a change, they started to broaden their understanding of the science of reading and did a book study on *Shifting the Balance* by Jan Burkins and Kari Yates.

Research led the district to learn more about and select Lexia's Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) professional development suite. It piqued their interest because of its longevity in the marketplace, and it provided them with a program that gave teachers the flexibility to learn on their own time in their own space and from the comfort of their own home. It also brought them together to work collaboratively across district roles.

To ensure a successful overhaul of their professional development platform, district leaders took these steps:

- Developed a plan of action. Beginning January 1, 2022, the district began offering the professional development curriculum to those teachers who requested it. It laid out a plan for the first full year of use and put together a scope

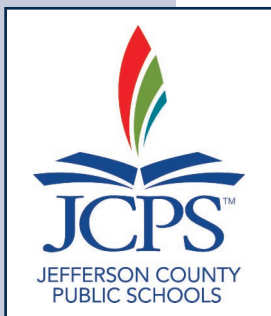
and sequence of professional development that would kick off for the 2022-23 school year, with the first unit starting in March 2022.

- Use cohorts. District leaders established two different cohorts, including a group of 500 "first adopters" out of 1,3000 educators from grades TK-12 that started in March 2022 and a second cohort that started in August 2022.
- Make it worth their while. Teachers are paid hourly for the time spent completing the professional development units and attending the workshops. The district also offers the platform to its administrators.
- Get everyone onboard. District leaders also brought in the district's executive cabinet, special education program specialists, and other stakeholders into the system. It wanted everyone to understand that they are all teachers of literacy—whether they are teaching kindergarten, science class or auto shop.

Embracing a Paradigm Shift

In the end, there is a great deal of talk about equity among students, but where is the equity for teachers? And how are districts providing equitable access to the science of reading and really helping to prepare them and not leaving it to chance?

Hemet USD is a shining example of working collaboratively to drive a paradigm shift in teaching and learning for the sake of its most valuable assets – teachers and students.



Nominee: [Jefferson County Public Schools](#)

Nominated by: [FEV Tutor](#)



Tutoring has received a lot of attention as a key strategy for helping to stem unfinished learning for K-12 students due to COVID disruptions and to close longstanding achievement gaps that have grown even wider during the pandemic. The impacted students are, not surprisingly, the ones who were underserved before the pandemic: low-income students, students without access to technology, special education students, and English Language Learners.

One urban district, Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) in Louisville, Kentucky, was determined to turn the tide for its 96,000 students and launched a partnership with FEV Tutor, provider of online, high-dosage tutoring.

Beginning in December 2020, the district connected its students with intentional tutoring—that being ongoing, curriculum and instruction-based, standards-aligned academic support when and where they needed it. The district was able to rapidly deploy FEV Tutor by implementing swift integrations like Clever for rostering, Single Sign On (SSO), and sharing NWEA MAP Growth data for data-driven instruction.

By reshaping its academic support for students using high impact tutoring and incorporating the Design Principles for Effective Tutoring from the renowned Annenberg Institute, the district was convinced it was on the right track.

To confirm that its efforts were delivering positive results, JCPS activated its NWEA MAP Growth data connection with the tutoring platform and its data analytics team conducted a

Winter-to-Spring AY21-22 academic growth analysis comparing RIT Score Growth across various attendance bands of tutoring participation.

From this intensive yet collaborative effort, amazing results have been realized:

- To date, more than 60,000 hours of live, one-to-one instruction have been delivered to 7,000 students in 116 JCPS schools.
- FEV Tutor participants demonstrated accelerated rates of growth relative to non-participants in both math and reading. Students who participated in recommended dosages of tutoring demonstrated 78 percent accelerated growth relative to non-participants in math and 74 percent accelerated growth relative to non-participating in reading.
- In all, the district demonstrated accelerated, double-digit rates of growth (32 percent) relative to national norms in both math and reading on the NWEA MAP Growth Assessments.

It goes without saying that the real heroes of this story are the students who are making up for the ground they lost over the past 24+ months. But this 'good news' story would not be possible without the heroic efforts of JCPS district administrators and teachers who continue to work tirelessly to implement a successful, high-impact tutoring effort designed for learning acceleration.



Nominee: Jim Perry,
Stapleton School
Nominated by: EmpowerU, Inc.

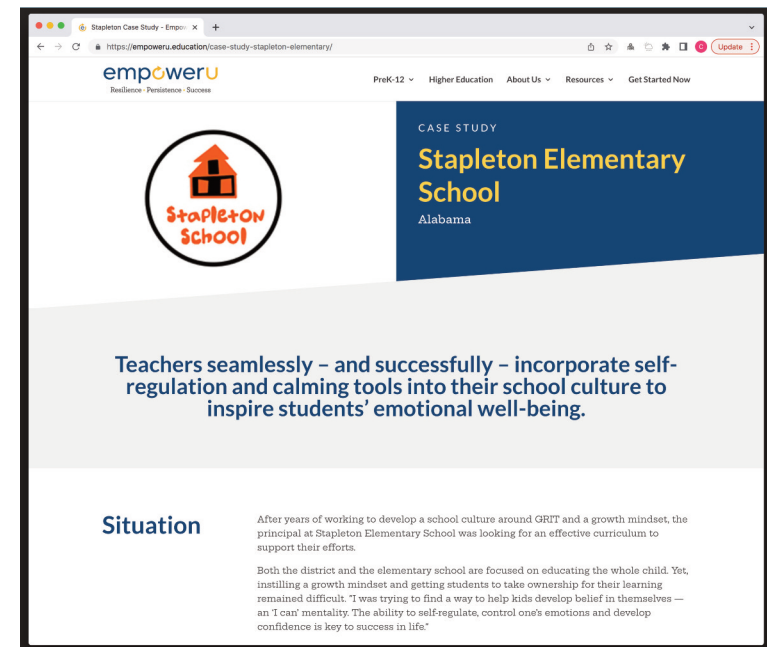
empowerU
Resilience • Persistence • Success

Jim Perry came to education as a second career and has brought such dedication and fresh perspective to his staff, students, and district at large.

Jim wanted to support student well-being and resilience in the face of the disruption and set-back in social-emotional learning that COVID created. Jim embraced EmpowerU immediately. He took the self-regulation and resilience framework and adopted it at a school-wide level. As classroom teachers led classrooms through turn-key lessons and helped students apply what they learned to their goals and challenges, Jim took it even further by having assemblies to showcase the learnings happening in each classroom.

He believes in EmpowerU so much that he helped to present to the larger Baldwin County Public Schools district on the benefits and major changes that he is seeing in his staff and students. His enthusiasm for creating a safe social emotional learning environment is very admirable and his students are so lucky.

Jim is a vibrant leader like Jim Perry, and Stapleton is thriving under his leadership. We love Jim Perry!





Nominee: [Jones County Public Schools](#)

Nominated by: [Houghton Mifflin Harcourt \(HMH\)](#)



Jones County Public Schools in North Carolina has a unique pandemic story. It all started in September 2018. After Hurricane Florence devastated the community and destroyed one of the district's schools, Jones County Public Schools set out to rebuild its school infrastructure, which now includes a brand-new, high-tech, solar-powered K-12 campus. To complement its forward-thinking vision, the district sought a blended curriculum solution that offered a full suite of digital resources accessible from a single platform. District leaders formed the Jones Curriculum Council (JCC), a committee of teachers tasked with researching and evaluating top-tier curriculum solutions. HMH's connected solutions scored highest on the JCC's rubric. The district formed a partnership with HMH—purchasing HMH Into Math, HMH Into Reading, HMH Into Literature, and Waggle programs, along with professional services, which are all accessed via Ed, HMH's learning platform.

As Jones County leaders will tell you, this dynamic, one-stop-shop of connected solutions and professional learning services positioned the district well to face the unique challenges presented by COVID-19 and the 2020-2021 school year. HMH's blended curriculum enabled the district to navigate the shift to remote and hybrid better than most districts.

Every day during the pandemic, Jones County educators provided synchronous instruction to in-person and virtual students daily, a task that would be difficult, if not impossible, without a genuinely digital-first solution. Each class was recorded for parents to review anytime, and in-person students collaborated and engaged with their virtual peers.

It was the innovative thinking of JCPS leadership that set the district up for success. Following that initial decision to focus on digital and with the start of the pandemic and beyond, Jones County principals, teachers, and students all embraced "a new normal." With HMH's blended curriculum and data tools, teachers in Jones County were able to streamline instruction and personalize learning for each student, without having to purchase extra materials or sign in on multiple platforms.

HMH and JCPS developed a safe plan to capture the Jones County experience on video and spoke with some teachers and students using HMH connected solutions during COVID-19. The footage acquired was edited into a series of videos demonstrating the power and benefits of HMH's digital-first, connected solutions in a hybrid learning environment.



Nominee: Juliann Koehn,
Epic Charter Schools
Nominated by: EmpowerU, Inc.



Epic Charter Schools offers online learning to more than 30,000 students in the state of Oklahoma. For years, the school had been searching for ways to reverse the pattern of disengagement, build motivation to complete schoolwork and get students over that finish line at graduation.

With no school counseling team — and teachers weary from other new programs and systems — EPIC needed a partner it could trust to serve Tier 2 students.

Juliann Koehn, Social and Emotional Learning Specialist at Epic, worked to bring EmpowerU to the district and enrolled over 400 students in the program during the 2021-22 school year.

Over 91 percent of Epic students who completed EmpowerU saw a positive impact on well-being, academic engagement, and outcomes, and Juliann is committed to bringing those same results to as many students as possible.

Juliann is passionate about the need to equip students with the tools to be successful and sees the potential in each of them. She works tirelessly to educate others about the importance of programs like EmpowerU to help students become more confident, self-directed, and reach their goals both in and out of the classroom.

In the first few weeks of the 2022-23 school year Juliann has rolled out EmpowerU to over 550 Epic students and counting!

Over 91 percent of Epic students who completed EmpowerU saw a positive impact on well-being, academic engagement, and outcomes, and Juliann is committed to bringing those same results to as many students as possible.



Nominee: Cory Matsumiya, Kamehameha Schools

Nominated by: SAP Concur

SAP Concur 

Kamehameha Schools, headquartered in Honolulu, HI, is the largest private school network in the nation, with a sole mission to educate native Hawaiian children.

Cory Matsumiya, Assistant Controller, has been with Kamehameha Schools for 15 years. Cory was the original “owner” of SAP Concur and the primary champion for getting the solution implemented.

It's with great pleasure that SAP Concur nominates Kamehameha Schools and Cory Matsumiya for the eSchool News K-12 Hero Awards.

Cory, part of a team of 3, which he refers to as the “3 Musketeers,” implemented SAP Concur in 2015 in an effort to drive efficiencies, control spending, and optimize visibility for an organization with 4,000+ employees. Cory exudes an innovative and forward-thinking mindset when it comes to doing the right thing for the organization. He embraces opportunities to make his team more efficient by automating and streamlining processes, is always eager to find ways to improve current processes, and is more than willing to share his experiences with others to help them do better. We are grateful for our partnership with Cory and Kamehameha Schools!

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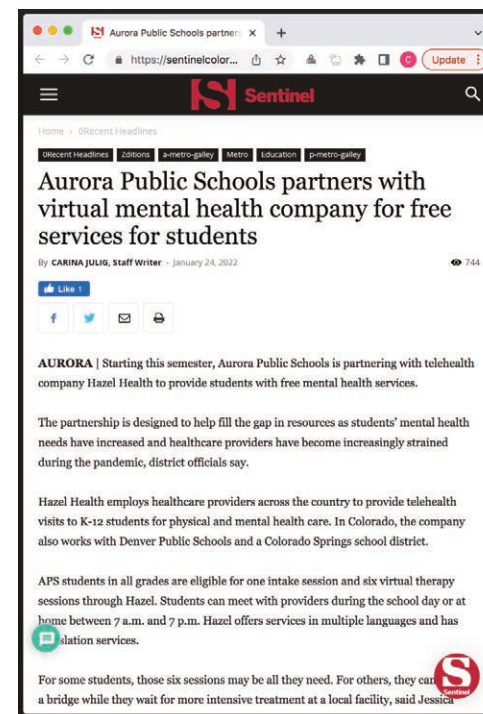
Nominee: Kim Kaspar, MSW,
Aurora Public Schools' AWARE Program
Nominated by: Hazel Health



Hazel Health (Hazel) nominates Kim Kaspar in honor of her dedication to ensuring her students receive care based on what's best for them, not what's easiest for adults. Providing access to mental health care has been a priority for Aurora Public Schools' AWARE Team even before the pandemic. However, as districts nationwide experienced a shortage of qualified health care professionals, the pandemic's impact on students' mental health created an unprecedented need to expand access to care quickly. Based on this need, Aurora Public Schools was in the implementation stage when the Director of Mental Health and Counseling unexpectedly had to take a leave of absence.

Understanding the importance of expanding care in the wake of the pandemic, Ms. Kaspar stepped up to move the work forward. Ms. Kaspar not only ensured the partnership was successful but pushed Hazel to innovate its services to align with Colorado state policy. In Colorado, students 12 or older do not need consent from a parent or guardian to access mental health services. Ms. Kaspar understood that students might not be comfortable getting permission to receive the care they critically needed and pushed Hazel to align its services within the district accordingly.

To ensure the partnership's success, Ms. Kaspar took the Hazel team from school to school across 30 sites to present to the staff responsible for student care. She helped overcome objections and foster collaboration between the schools and the Hazel team. One aspect of the partnership in particular that she highlighted was the ability for Hazel to transition student care to long-term providers as needed. She said, "I hate for kids with mental health challenges to tell their stories to different adults." She values that Hazel makes the experience seamless for students—whom she puts first at every turn. Now, Hazel sees consistent utilization of its services across the district, primarily due to Ms. Kaspar's efforts.



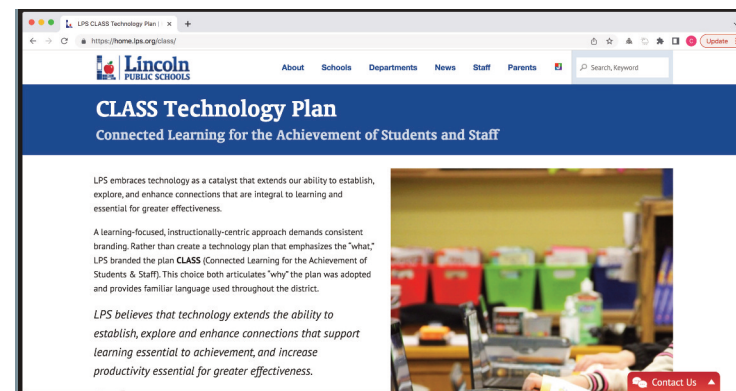


Nominee: Kirk Langer, Lincoln Public Schools

Nominated by: Lightspeed Systems



Kirk is responsible for keeping the students and faculty of Lincoln Public Schools connected and engaged through technology to ensure that learning isn't disrupted. Kirk leads a team of 65 experts, and under his guidance they have accomplished feats such as the procurement of 3,680 brand new MacBook Airs for certified staff, and organizing extensive cybersecurity trainings for staff to keep the district and its students safe. His passion and dedication to bettering his district through the use of technology is commendable and makes him a worthy recipient of this award.



Nominee: Steven Langford, Beaverton School District

Nominated by: Lightspeed Systems



Steven Langford is the CIO of Beaverton School District in Oregon and the President of CoSN, a widely known and well-respected organization within the K-12 edtech world. Under Steven's guidance, Beaverton has created a path of innovation and improvement for other districts to follow.

In addition to this, Steven gladly shares his advice and wisdom on how to implement new programs/systems/projects

successfully. Beaverton successfully rolled out district-wide multi-factor authorization, which is a crucial component to cybersecurity, and something that is not easily done.

Steven's continued approach to innovation in the technology department in his district is inspirational and makes him a worthy recipient of this award.



Nominee: Laura Johnson, Apex Learning Virtual School

Nominated by: Edmentum



Before schools shut down due to the global pandemic, most students had little to no experience with digital learning or online school. Many schools found themselves having to adapt to a virtual setting to survive. As a certified teacher through Edmentum's Apex Learning Virtual School (ALVS), Laura Johnson is dedicated to ensuring every student thrives in a virtual environment. The pandemic tasked her to meet an influx of students who faced new sets of challenges, while maintaining high standards and helping students cope with new learning environments.

For 14 years, Laura Johnson has taught a variety of subjects, including social studies, psychology, and music and art appreciation—all virtually within ALVS. She started as a part-time teacher while she was still at a brick-and-mortar school, where she drove 38 miles each way to teach. Eventually, Laura became the first full-time teacher with ALVS, and she now connects with students all over the globe.

While ALVS has provided rigorous and engaging online curriculum to students in grades 6-12 for many years, the pandemic made ALVS see a sudden influx of 5,000 new virtual students. As one of the school's experienced teachers, Laura volunteered her expertise and contributed immensely by stepping in to assist with interviewing, hiring, and training 125 new part-time teachers to meet the demand.

Laura was also heavily involved in the ALVS/Eastern Shore of Maryland Educational Consortium partnership where she and other educators provided instruction to more than 400 students

to meet state standards, and ensured lessons complied with management's outlines. She supported getting this new grant program off the ground, delivering quality digital instruction and modeling new ways of teaching, and connecting with students for the state. This program will continue this year with the same group of motivated educators thanks to the successful contributions of Laura.

Laura's mantra for being a virtual teacher is "you need to care." During the pandemic, she faced new challenges, such as students being reluctantly thrust into a digital program out of necessity, and not out of motivation or opportunity. However, Laura went out of her way to make connections with these students. Through phone calls that allowed her to get to know them and discover what motivates them, she took the extra steps like providing individualized feedback on assessments and checking not just for completion, but for understanding. For all assignments, Laura responds with affirmative feedback with "glow or grow" information, meaning what students need to be aware of for future assignments or shares what they did great.

Laura shared that some students who joined her office hours or who reached out to schedule time to speak with her did not really need help academically; instead, they just wanted to talk and have someone listen to them. As a parent, Laura knows the value of a teacher who truly cares about each individual student and that is exactly how she chooses to impact students' lives and educational journeys—by making those connections, whether students are 38 miles or 1,038 miles away.



Nominee: Mark Hess, Mary Helen Guest Elementary School

Nominated by: Epson



Mark Hess has served in a variety of roles since he was hired in 1993 by Walled Lake Consolidated School District in Walled Lake, Michigan. Prior to COVID-19, Hess was the executive manager of instruction, technology, and data analysis and was one of the key developers of the district's initiative to revamp its instructional units to focus on the latest research on high-yield teaching strategies, power standards, and embedding technology in each unit. When everyone had to shift to remote and hybrid learning in 2020, Hess' initiative helped schools and staff feel well-prepared to make the transition because many already had confidence when using technology and openness toward instructional technology. In addition, the district already had computers and document cameras for teachers, who took them home to assist in presenting content during remote teaching.

For the 2020-21 school year, Hess' district position was dissolved following new district leadership, so he returned to the school building as the principal of Mary Helen Guest Elementary School. As the school leader, Hess learned new ways to support his teachers with the ups and downs of the constantly changing school year. This included finding

opportunities to offer effective and efficient professional development and encourage teachers to share best practices with each other. Additionally, investing in the best-in-class technologies has always been a priority for Hess. This includes Epson BrightLink Interactive Displays and Document Cameras for every teaching space. Classrooms throughout the district are outfitted equitably with technology and have an adequate infrastructure teachers need for engaging learning environments.

The 2021-22 school year presented new opportunities for Hess as the elementary school was renovated over the summer and every learning space was updated to active learning environments. Hess ensured teachers were prepared and informed about ways to utilize their new classrooms. Teachers were very appreciative to have more flexibility and are seeing an increase in student engagement and participation. Hess has led staff and teachers to create a safe, motivating, and positive learning environment for students. Hess did not use the pandemic as an excuse to stop innovating and instead, stayed creative to ensure the best learning environment for every student.



Nominee: Michele Bledsoe,
Puyallup School District
Nominated by: Hazel Health



Hazel Health (Hazel) nominates Michele Bledsoe in honor of her deep understanding of the youth health crisis and her ability to build the cross-functional buy-in that ensures her students have equitable access to mental health care. Before the pandemic, the Puyallup School District was experiencing capacity challenges in meeting the needs of its students when it came to providing timely mental health care. The pandemic exacerbated those challenges making the requirement more critical. Because Puyallup is a diverse learning community, finding a partner that could provide culturally competent health care was a top priority.

Ms. Bledsoe, director of Equity & Social Emotional Wellness, K-12 Counselors, MV and Truancy, had the vision to be an early adopter of Hazel. She believed in a world where every student in the Puyallup School District had access to timely, quality health care regardless of their family's ability to cover the cost of care. And she put in the work to make it a reality. Ms. Bledsoe did the deep research required of a trailblazer to get buy-in from her board and teams across the district. She also had the foresight to understand that leveraging ESSER funds to expand access to student mental healthcare was fundamental to overcoming the impacts of the pandemic.

Thanks to her dedication, every student in the district—more than 22,000—now has access to evidence-based mental health care. Students can receive care in school or at home in minutes to days versus the national average of months. Since Hazel specializes in delivering culturally competent care, the professionals providing care reflect the district's diversity, which means students and families receive care and support from professionals who understand and value their experiences. Positive word of mouth from families with students who have accessed care is driving the second-highest utilization rate of services out of all our partnerships nationwide. Further, the partnership helped to expand the capacity of overloaded staff dedicated to supporting students' mental health.

Ms. Bledsoe quickly understood that sustainability is essential and laid the groundwork early for transitioning the work to more sustainable funding sources to ensure students throughout the district can continue to access quality healthcare once ESSER funding runs out. Thanks to Ms. Bledsoe, stakeholders across the Puyallup learning community are positively impacted—but most importantly, students now have access to the care they need to have their best opportunity to thrive.

Nominee: Mira Campbell, [FH Miller Jr. PS](#)

Nominated by: [Tools for Schools, Inc.](#)



BOOK CREATOR

Mira Campbell has taken on legendary status amongst the Book Creator team. There are very few teachers out there who continually push the capabilities of our tool like Mira does.

Her work is innovative and pushes boundaries--and she's great at sharing her knowledge with others!

The story behind this nomination comes from a project that Mira ran during the pandemic. They started the project in the classroom, switched seamlessly to remote learning and then finished the project with an in-person celebration that melts the heart!

This was a creative writing project that was differentiated for the various skills, interests, and learning styles of her students, allowing every student to be successful. Mira worked with the class teacher to introduce writing techniques, and then used a writing prompt to generate story ideas. After brainstorming ideas together, they drafted stories in Google Docs before creating fully fleshed multimedia publications in Book Creator.

Mira took advantage of the full suite of tools in Book Creator to allow students to create in the media that worked for them--some kids dictated their books using speech to text; others used drawing and emojis to bring their stories to life. With real-time collaboration in Book Creator, the teachers were able to keep in touch with students and post feedback in their books.

In January 2021, whilst still in lockdown, Mira arranged a class reading over Zoom. They invited the principals to join, and the students got the thrill of sharing their work with a wider audience.

Mira then had students use Flipgrid to record reflections on the book creation process--what they learned, strategies they employed for writing, and a question for Debbie Ridpath Ohi (the author of the writing prompt). These video reflections were embedded at the end of their books. What's more, Mira reached out to Debbie and she gave her own feedback on the books and answered the questions!

At this point, most people would wrap up the project, but not Mira. Mira used the PDF export feature in Book Creator and worked with a local printing company to print physical copies of their books, which she presented to students in a big reveal once they were back in the classroom! The video she put together of that moment may be the best thing we've ever seen Book Creator used for.

Mira is a hero for a number of reasons:

1. She cares about her students and goes out of her way to make projects that work for them on their own individual levels.
2. She works collaboratively with the teachers around her to get the most out of everybody.
3. She generously shares what she has learnt with other teachers.
4. She knows Book Creator inside out and goes above and beyond in the way she uses it in her classroom.
5. She goes the extra mile to give students the best learning experience they could hope for.



Nominee: Neal Kellogg,
Oklahoma City Public Schools
Nominated by: TutorMe



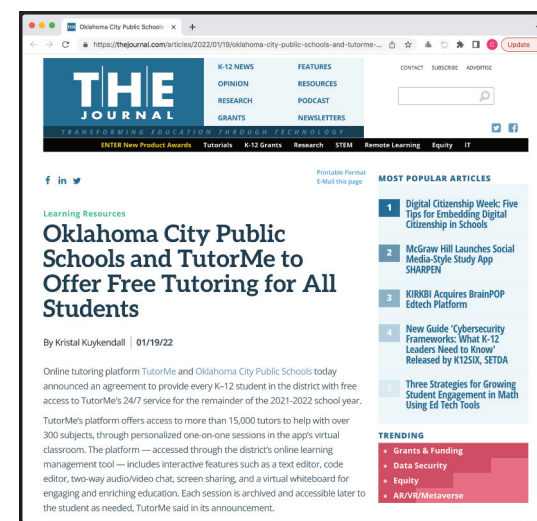
Originally an elementary school music teacher and site lead technology educator, Neal Kellogg is the Director of Educational Technology Services for Oklahoma City Public Schools (OKCPS)—serving 34,000 K–12 students across 33 elementary schools, 12 middle schools, 8 high schools, 4 alternative schools, and 6 charter schools.

Under Neal’s direction, technology at OKCPS is evolving to a more personalized, engaging, and interactive experience, focusing on personal responsibility for self-directed professional learning. A shy student in high school, Neal credits the positive impact his band teacher had on him when he was growing up, which helps guide him today in his role.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Neal prioritized communication first and foremost with students, families, and teachers at OKCPS—the second-largest district in Oklahoma—to ensure learning continued. The pandemic pushed OKCPS to move quick, making it crucial the district kept everyone informed about the direction the district went, along with ongoing changes to better support students.

In March 2020, Neal oversaw the district roll out a one-to-one device program and implement a new learning management system (LMS). While these initiatives can take two years or more to fully scale, the district’s program was up and running by August—just in time for the 2020–2021 school year. During this time, Neal worked with his team to implement solutions to help teachers—including TutorMe, an online tutoring solution—to provide students additional academic support and complement the work teachers were already doing. Neal worked with other leaders throughout the district to help OKCPS adopt, modernize, and move forward in a short period of time.

Throughout the pandemic, Neal’s confident and calm leadership inspired his teammates, while demonstrating natural leadership skills. Neal’s leadership helped guide his team and kept heads above water. Throughout all the change, Neal also fostered a healthy work-life balance throughout the district—recognizing the importance of supporting teachers’ mental health.





Nominee: Scott Mitchum, USD 112 Central Plains

Nominated by: Bluum

USD 112 Central Plains Technology Director Scott Mitchum hails from a family of teachers and a tradition of helping people. Throughout childhood, Scott had a passion for learning, reading, and devouring encyclopedias.

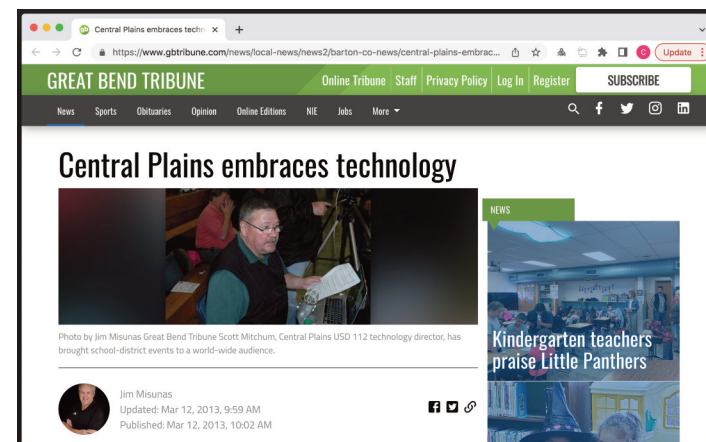
Accepting a golf scholarship to attend college, Scott briefly studied law before receiving a master's degree in library science. After serving as a librarian for 26 years, Scott taught himself computer programming before eventually accepting a position at two junior colleges teaching the subject.

Today, Scott finds himself as the technology director of two districts in Kansas. During the early days of the pandemic, Scott was aware of immediate shortages of N95 masks for emergency care workers and sought out a way to lend a hand. Through teaching his students 3D printing techniques, he realized he could use the printers to manufacture masks, so he and a colleague discovered a mask prototype to model from a doctor YouTube.



After learning of a hospital nearby in Hoisington that had a shortage of masks, Scott began creating masks with 5-6 printers running 24/7, switching out polylactic acid (PLA) in the middle of the night. Each mask took seven hours to print.

He continued to tweak the printers to include weather stripping around the outside to make it air-tight and a HEPA filter from a vacuum cleaner. Scott produced approximately 140 masks and 100 face shields that were used primarily for surgery. Even though the hospital offered to pay him, he politely declined.





Nominee: Shawn Braxton, Cleveland Metropolitan School District

Nominated by: Bluum

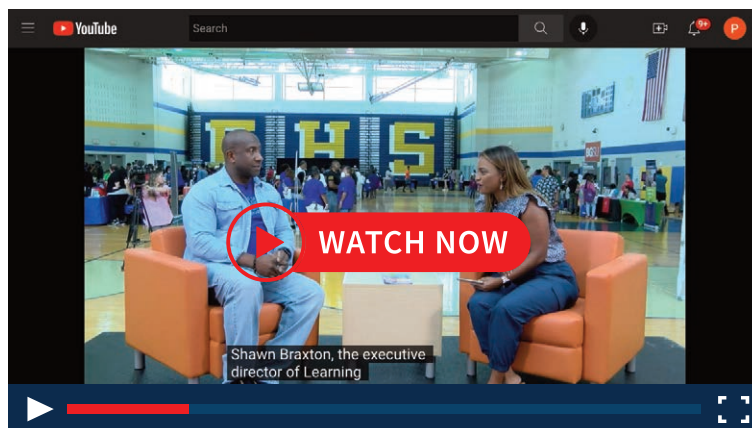


Shawn Braxton is the Executive Director of Learning Technology and Training Services for the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. Shawn has been an integral part of standardizing technology across all 97 schools within the district. Most recently, he created a comprehensive plan to place a Clevertouch interactive flat panel in every classroom that lacked one. Although this project just launched over the summer, 1,081 Clevertouch panels have already been installed

in classrooms that currently had only projectors. By the end of the 2022-23 school year, every classroom will have an interactive flat panel. Shawn is constantly investigating the future of classroom technology and how it could improve student learning and classroom instruction.

Shawn also played an enormous role in the creation of the district's first-ever Tech Fest. Tech Fest was a two-day event in August that allowed students, parents, and the community to visit one of two locations within the district and interact with the district's new technology. This event was also an opportunity for students to engage with educators outside of the classroom, build excitement around the upcoming school year, and have their devices fixed or replaced.

Shawn is a visionary when it comes education technology and how it can change and shape the minds of students. He is a catalyst for his district and is constantly on the cutting edge for new and inventive ways for students and teachers to utilize technology in the classroom.





Nominee: [Spartanburg School District One](#)

Nominated by: [Promethean](#)



Spartanburg School District One spans three cities in rural upstate South Carolina, where nearly half of 5,000 students come from lower-income families. This also means students have limited access to technology and devices at home. Furthermore, less than 22 percent of residents in the district hold a bachelor's degree or higher.

These combined factors have prompted the administrators of Spartanburg School District One to take action to ensure students are equipped for life beyond high school. To achieve that goal, administrators are tasked with exposing students to computers and devices and providing them with the tools and skills needed to be successful post-graduation. However, while many students have limited resources, the district is also tasked with utilizing a limited amount of school funding, which is derived from taxes on businesses within the district, while much of the local workforce commutes to larger cities outside of the tax area.

This has prompted Spartanburg School District One administrators to get creative and be strategic as to how funding is used in order to enable engagement and facilitate movement within the classroom. Dr. Jimmy Pryor, Assistant Superintendent, Accountability and Technical Services at Spartanburg School District One, determined an interactive panel would enhance learning, facilitate mobility, and increase

engagement for students and simultaneously streamline lesson delivery for teachers. To find the right fit, Dr. Pryor launched a pilot program where educators tested a variety of interactive displays. As a result, Promethean's ActivPanel was not only the preferred choice but an easy choice for educators.

It didn't take much convincing for Dr. Pryor to secure an ActivPanel for every classroom within Spartanburg One. The superintendent and school board quickly gave the green light to invest in the new interactive panels. Within the first six months of using the ActivPanel, teachers recognized the increase in student and teacher mobility and student engagement. They also recognized the enthusiasm the panels provide for teachers to deliver quality instruction and felt motivated to expand on their professional development to learn more about the ActivPanel's capabilities.

With four blue ribbon schools, four schools awarded "Palmetto's Finest" by the South Carolina Association of School Administrators, and three statewide top performing high schools, administrators are looking forward to delivering on the promise of post-graduation success for students, too. Administrators district-wide anticipate seeing positive outcomes and improvement as it relates to state-mandated, end-of-course tests, all of which contribute to students' growth and development throughout their Spartanburg tenure and beyond.



EdOptions Academy

Nominee: Tiffany Brinkley, [EdOptions Academy](#)
Nominated by: [Edmentum](#)

edmentum™



For many educators, making the switch to teaching virtually presented challenges. Connecting with students virtually was new to many educators and required an untapped skill set. At a time when human connection was limited but needed, Tiffany Brinkley improved the overall student experience with virtual learning by making personal connections and accommodating students' needs. As a result, she positively influenced student results on high-stakes exams, all while mentoring new teachers.

Our nominee, Tiffany Brinkley, has been an educator for 10 years, with 5 of those being in an online setting through Edmentum's EdOptions Academy. Tiffany has taught various math courses ranging from 6th grade math through AP Calculus.

When a student enrolls in one of Tiffany's classes, she always first reaches out to make a personal connection because she knows this is the key to student success. Instead of beginning the conversation with academics, she asks about their summer, interests, or hobbies. To continue to keep students involved and engaged, she sends out monthly questionnaires on fun topics. These questions and her interest in their answers allow students to feel more comfortable in a virtual setting.

Although she had taught virtually before, Tiffany noticed an increased need for student engagement during the pandemic as students sought out help and connection. Pre-pandemic, Tiffany knew there were students who needed extra support, but now those who didn't typically reach out before were requesting time to meet with her. So, she decided she would

make it easier for students by allowing them to decide their meeting time with her, rather than adhering to a standard set of office hours. She finds this flexibility beneficial for her students and it allows her to better connect them.

In 2021, she made a huge impact on a project working to better prepare students for high-stakes state exams. In the previous year before Tiffany joined, the program did not have any students pass the math exam. By delivering instruction during live Zoom sessions and providing extra support with a study program she helped to develop, Tiffany was able to raise students' passing rate from zero to 15 percent overall on the state exam for Algebra 1.

Because of her stellar contributions, Tiffany was awarded National Teacher of the Year from Edmentum in 2022. She was recognized for her performance as an educator and her dedication to being one of three mentors training and onboarding other math teachers who were hired to meet demands during the pandemic. While helping other educators navigate how to be an effective teacher, Tiffany was described as "the glue that holds us all together" because no matter what challenges arise, she quickly and calmly finds a solution.

By building connections with students and her fellow EOA teachers, Tiffany improved students' experience in a virtual setting, giving them the resources, opportunities, support, and flexibility they needed to adapt and overcome the adversity faced during the pandemic.



Nominee: [Twin Rivers Unified School District](#)

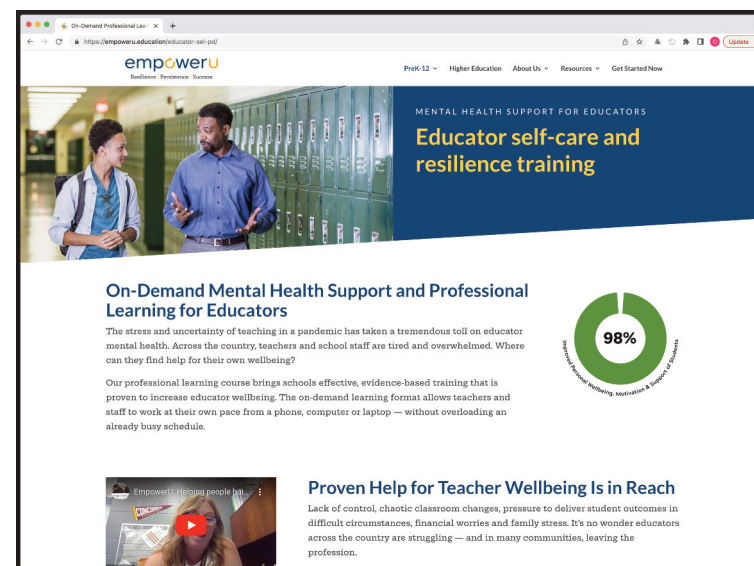
Nominated by: [EmpowerU, Inc.](#)



Twin Rivers has been intentionally and strategically focused on increasing educator and student mental health on a comprehensive level.

District leaders like Christine Flock and Travis Burke understand the critical need to support educator well-being as paramount to improving student engagement, motivation, and outcomes. Their thoughtful selection of partnerships that are collaborative drive them to create programs that go beyond "check the box" solutions and result in integrated programs that drive outcomes.

They work across departments to fully leverage the power and impact of the EmpowerU solution, understanding how each piece fits together to drive whole child success.



Christine Flock and Travis Burke understand the critical need to support educator well-being as paramount to improving student engagement, motivation, and outcomes. Their thoughtful selection of partnerships that are collaborative drive them to create programs that go beyond "check the box" solutions and result in integrated programs that drive outcomes.

2023 K-12 HERO AWARDS

Nominate Your Hero!

Nominations Open Spring 2023

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