

eSCHOOL NEWS

K-12 HERO AWARDS





Laura Ascione,
eSchool News
Editorial Director

K-12 HERO AWARDS

In recent years, education has faced its share of hurdles, including a pandemic that resulted in learning loss still felt in classrooms across the globe, intense teacher burnout and difficulties retaining staff, equity and access challenges, and mental health concerns for students and educators.

The eSchool News K-12 Hero Awards Program recognizes how educators—in all positions and in all classrooms, schools, and districts—greet those challenges head-on.

Winners were chosen for their commitment to education despite obstacles – including achievement gaps, teacher burnout, and funding – and their creativity and innovation in helping all students continue learning while ensuring students felt safe, empowered, and engaged.

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 supported them.

–**Laura Ascione, eSchool News Editorial Director**





Nominee: Tom Lamont, Painting and Design Technology Instructor, [Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School](#)

Nominated by: [TechEdConcepts Inc.](#)

Tom Lamont is the painting and design technology instructor at Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School (BVT), in Upton, Massachusetts.

Mr. Lamont offers his vocational high school students a unique hands-on opportunity to learn about the design industry and to prepare for jobs in the workforce. He integrates today's high-tech training into a visually engaging curriculum using a variety of techniques and creative tools.

Some of the skills Mr. Lamont covers with his students include: the benefits of digital printing, effective design principles, the sign trade (including printing banners, car wraps, floor graphics and safety signs), all aspects of project production, lamination and installation for signs, banners, t-shirt transfers, and wall and floor graphics.

The Painting and Design Technology program at BVT uses Roland TrueVIS printer/cutters purchased from Tech Ed Concepts, Inc. (TEC). "Rolands are the best – you can't beat the quality," Mr. Lamont said. "The TrueVIS has amazing speed and accuracy, and the print/cut feature streamlines our workflow." TEC is the Roland DGA Academic Representative in New England and is recognized for superior service, support, and training.

"We have an opportunity to do some amazing things every day at BVT," said Mr. Lamont. "We've had students compete at SkillsUSA Nationals in Louisville, KY and win gold. As the Environmental Club Advisor, we collected and recycled 650 pounds of single-use plastic bags, which earned our students an invitation and recognition at the State House. Multiple national trade magazines have published articles highlighting the efforts and technological advancements of our shop. Through our co-op program, we have placed students in full-time jobs within our trade area. Our students serve our district communities

through their work on Eagle Scout projects, Gold Awards, sign production for churches and nonprofit organizations, as well as continuing to support our veteran groups with painting and sign projects."

Mr. Lamont's program has earned him the Massachusetts Vocation Association (MVA) New Teacher Award in 2020 and many other industry recognitions, including an article in the January 2021 issue, Sign Builder Illustrated, a national publication. Several of his students were also awarded the prestigious John H. Chafee Student Award by the Blackstone Heritage Corridor for their participation in an interpretive map restoration project in the town of Whitinsville, a project lead by Mr. Lamont that involved the restoration, printing, and installation of a 4' x 3' map of the Whitinsville Historic District.

Mr. Lamont continues to raise awareness to the BVT and local community regarding what his program can provide and offer, making new connections with area businesses, and fostering new excitement in his school for his students and their success.

Mr. Lamont says that he appreciates that TEC is always there to help, and he is thankful for the support. In his words, "I really want to support my students, class, school, and industry as much as I can. I want our program to grow and inspire others to follow, and I would love to help them get there." He has clearly had much success using "innovative education technologies" in his program.



"I really want to support my students, class, school, and industry as much as I can. I want our program to grow and inspire others to follow, and I would love to help them get there.

–Tom Lamont, Painting and Design Technology Instructor, Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School



Nominee: Dr. Jesus Jara, Superintendent, [Clark County School District](#)

Nominated by: [Edmentum](#)

Dr. Jesus Jara is a passionate educator who serves as Superintendent of Clark County School District (CCSD), the 5th largest school district in the nation educating more than 300,000 students – 64 percent of the student population in Nevada.

Since assuming the role of superintendent in 2018, Dr. Jara has been on a mission to move the district from pockets of excellence to an excellent school system, where every student can thrive. It was clear to Dr. Jara that, post-pandemic, his students were struggling.

“Our school district serves a diverse population of students, both geographically as well as from a demographic standpoint. As a result, our students were impacted by the pandemic in a variety of ways that affected their engagement and academic progress,” explained Dr. Jara.

Dr. Jara collaborated with Edmentum to introduce a program focused on accelerating learning in core subject areas, specifically to improve math and reading scores. Elementary and high school students from across the district were part of the initial program.

“In an effort to get our students back on pace, we tested Exact Path to provide remediation as a supplement to our existing curriculum. The results among those students who used these learning pathways clearly indicate the positive impact,” said Dr. Jara.

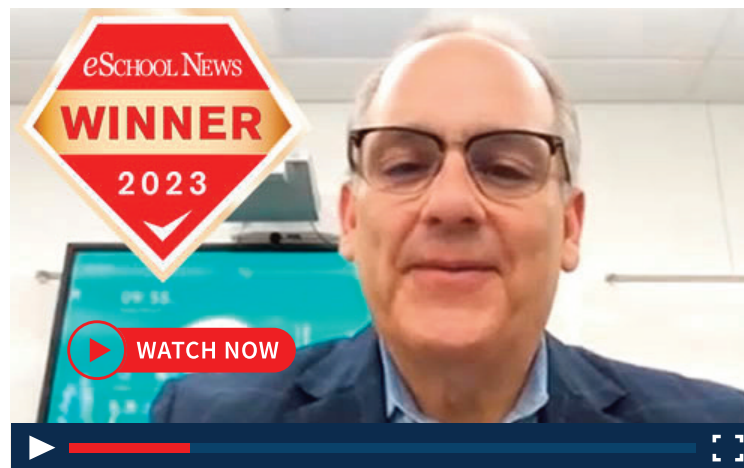
During the 2022-2023 school year, CCSD implemented a research study on Exact Path, with more than 20,000 students spanning kindergarten through grade 10, to assess and improve math and reading scores. Early results in math demonstrated that those students who used Exact Path content and curriculum exhibited higher rates of growth on their NWEA MAP math results, exceeding MAP growth norms, as compared to their peers who did not use Exact Path.



Students who used Exact Path showed a statistically significant impact on math achievement across all grade levels studied. In kindergarten through grade 2, students that completed at least eight skills exceeded math growth norms by three points, a 30 percent improvement over expected growth on NWEA MAP assessments. In grades 3-5, students completing at least 16 skills had the biggest improvement overall, growing 8.7 NWEA MAP points on average. Finally, across ninth and tenth graders, those who completed at least 16 skills increased 5.4 NWEA MAP points on average.

Dr. Jara understands how to support educators in addressing diverse and individual student needs, and provides students the supplemental learning opportunities to get back to grade level. His dedication to professional learning and development for educators has been instrumental in strengthening the district's teaching workforce. By investing in the right tools and aligning curriculum, assessment, and professional learning, he has created a robust framework for student growth and achievement.

Dr. Jara is dedicated to ensuring that every child, regardless of their background, has the opportunity to receive a high-quality education. Driven by his own experiences growing up in Miami-Dade, he passionately believes in the power of public education to change lives, just as it did for him.



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–Dr. Jesus Jara,
Superintendent, Clark
County School District



Nominee: John Arthur, Sixth Grade Teacher, Meadowlark Elementary School

Nominated by: Follett

John Arthur, a sixth-grade teacher at Meadowlark Elementary School in Salt Lake City, was the 2021 Utah Teacher of the Year and one of four finalists for 2021 National Teacher of the Year.

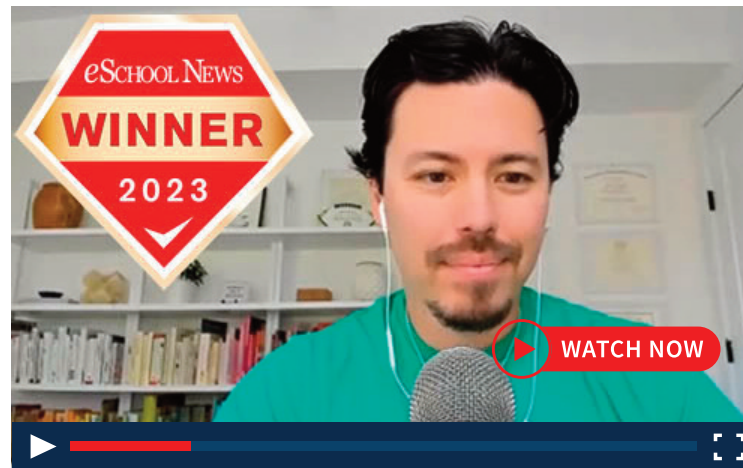
Now in his 10th year of teaching, John's students have gained national recognition as champions for children and immigrants like them through music videos and other digital content they create and share across platforms as @9thEvermore (on YouTube and Twitter/X). Moreover, he uses Kwame Alexander Bookfest book club from noted author Kwame and Follett to help his students see themselves in story, build literacy skills, and allow students to share their experiences and emotions through books.

He consistently encourages his students to take the lead, coaching them as they craft their content and discover the power of their own voices. The kids do everything from writing scripts to selecting music to editing videos to singing and narrating. Topics range from immigration to kids without fathers.

After college, John discovered his love for working with kids while substitute teaching in elementary classrooms. Inspired by those students, he earned a Master of Arts in Teaching and Master of Education from Westminster College in Salt Lake City.

Arthur uses Kwame Alexander Bookfest book club from noted author Kwame and Follett to help his students see themselves in story, build literacy skills, and allow students to share their experiences and emotions through books.

A champion throughout Utah and across the country for his students and fellow educators, he has presented at conferences and spoken on panels for organizations including the National Association for Multicultural Education. He is widely acclaimed for the short videos he creates on social media, advocating for public education and educating the public on upcoming legislation that would adversely impact teachers and students.



A fierce believer that educational equity is not only attainable but a moral imperative, John serves on the Advisory Committee on Equity of Educational Services for Students for the Utah State Board of Education. He is co-director of the Utah Teacher Fellows, a non-partisan nonprofit that engages with state education leaders and policy makers to elevate educators and the teaching profession. Indefatigable and undaunted, he also serves on several WestEd and IncludEd United boards for the purpose of advancing educational equity and inclusion for all students, particularly LGBTQ+ students who don't feel welcome or feel a sense of belonging in school.

“I have witnessed firsthand Mr. Arthur’s commitment to excellence, engaging parents as education partners, and focus on equitable opportunities for all,” Sydnee Dickson, Utah State Superintendent of Public Instruction, said after John earned the state’s Teacher of the Year honor. “I am proud he is considered among the best in the nation.”

The NBA’s Utah Jazz also know a “K-12 Hero” when they see one: In March 2023, they named John the “Most Valuable Educator” and honored him at a home game.

I have witnessed firsthand Mr. Arthur’s commitment to excellence, engaging parents as education partners, and focus on equitable opportunities for all,”

–Sydnee Dickson, Utah State Superintendent of Public Instruction



Nominee: Mr. Tamiko Hatcher, Director of Special Programs, [Akron Public Schools](#)

Nominated by: [Edmentum](#)



Mr. Tamiko Hatcher, a dedicated educator and the director of Special Programs at Akron Public Schools in Ohio, displays visionary leadership and steadfast commitment to implementing innovative education technologies to transform the educational experience for the students in his district.

Mr. Hatcher's commitment to providing equitable opportunities for all students, including those with diverse needs, led him to offer services that cater to both traditional and online learning environments, recognizing that some students require different support structures for academic success. Under Mr. Hatcher's guidance, Akron Public Schools partnered with Edmentum to integrate cutting-edge learning technologies, harnessing their full potential to enhance learning outcomes.

"Our entire partnership has really helped our district to continue to thrive. Our online school and EdOptions Academy, Edmentum Services, has really provided us with the flexibility to meet the needs of families as soon as they arrive. We've had families who just needed some layer of support or to continue to access their education, and the online environment provided immediate response to that," shared Mr. Hatcher.

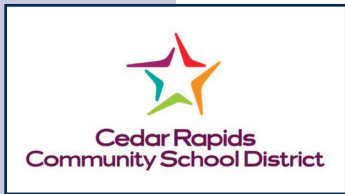
The online program offers a solution to families seeking alternative ways to have students educated, while maintaining the core belief that traditional schooling is valuable and not easily replaced. Mr. Hatcher ensures these platforms are precisely tailored to meet the unique requirements of Akron's

diverse student population so that students can access a quality education in a non-traditional way that meets the needs of their work and home responsibilities.

Being able to access their education online means many students can stay in school rather than drop out because they can balance school and life responsibilities in a new way that works. The implementation allowed Akron Public Schools to stabilize enrollment, provide choices for families, and accommodate students' diverse needs. With EdOptions Academy, over 18,000 students are given the option to access their education through a virtual environment, allowing the district to continue to thrive in the face of unique challenges.

The implementation also helped address challenges with certifications and staffing for their early college high school and STEM high school--when they no longer had a university partner providing physical education credits, Edmentum filled that gap with highly qualified, state-certified teachers and award-winning curriculum. Through the strategic integration of these innovative technologies, Akron Public Schools has witnessed significant improvement in student engagement and academic growth.

By creating a supportive and inclusive atmosphere, Mr. Hatcher has empowered students from all walks of life to unlock their full potential. His visionary leadership, unwavering dedication, and commitment to advancing education through innovative technologies serve as an inspiration to educators nationwide.



Nominee: Michelle Kruse, Content Lead for Libraries, Roosevelt Creative Corridor Business Academy, Cedar Rapids Community School District

Nominated by: Follett



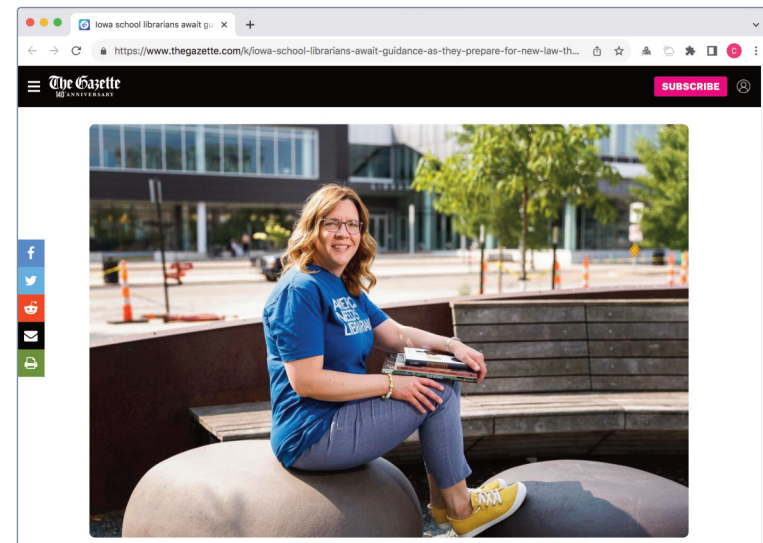
Michelle Kruse is the teacher librarian at Roosevelt Creative Corridor Business Academy (RCCBA), a magnet middle school in the Cedar Rapids Community School District (CRCSD).

As the teacher librarian at RCCBA, Michelle also teaches elective courses in technology and information literacy skills to her students. In fall 2019, Michelle became the Content Lead for CRCSD's 32 school libraries.

At that time, the average age of all library collections in the district exceeded 15 years in age, with some exceeding as many as 20 years in age. The collections also were lacking in materials that reflected the diversity of the students in the Cedar Rapids Schools.

Michelle made a compelling case that improving the age and diversity of the collections would have a positive impact on overall literacy rates in the district. Her advocacy resulted in \$1.5 million in ESSER funds being allocated to school libraries to complete a three-year collection redevelopment project.

In addition to her role as Content Lead for Libraries, Michelle served as President of the Iowa School Association of School Librarians in 2022, and Past President in 2023. Currently, she is also serving a three-year term as a Director on the Executive Board of Iowa Library Association. She has spent numerous hours advocating for school libraries at the state level with many trips to the state capitol to meet with lawmakers.



<https://www.thegazette.com/>



Nominee: **Dr. Dana T. Bedden, Superintendent,** **Centennial School District**

Nominated by: **Lerner Publishing Group**



Dr. Bedden's dedication to promoting literacy in the Centennial School District has been truly inspiring. His approach, focused on equitable access to books and engaging the community, has left a remarkable mark.

One of his standout achievements was creating a committee consisting of teachers, parents, and students to handpick summer take-home books from Lerner Publishing Group. This collaborative effort sparked engaging discussions and valuable feedback. The board members eagerly embraced the opportunity to send these carefully chosen books home with students, highlighting Dr. Bedden's talent for cultivating a shared passion for literacy.

Beyond book distribution, Dr. Bedden's efforts have fostered a genuine love for reading and learning that will undoubtedly brighten Centennial's future for years to come.

Dr. Bedden's inclusive approach and dedication to equity have empowered students and families, leaving a lasting legacy of education and unity that fills us with optimism.



<https://youtu.be/qGDsjLmJF6I/>



Nominee: Michelle Weinraub, Student Health and Wellness Leader, Cherry Creek School District

Nominated by: [Hazel Health](#)



Hazel Health (Hazel) nominates Michelle Weinraub in honor of her passion for nurturing the health and well-being of children, encompassing their physical, mental, and emotional health. Ms. Weinraub displays exceptional dedication to advancing student health within the Cherry Creek School District.

Ms. Weinraub consistently demonstrates an unwavering commitment to the welfare of students, acknowledging that their overall health plays an integral role in their academic success and personal growth. Her work reflects an understanding of the relationship between physical and mental health and its direct impact on a student's learning ability--for students to thrive, they need to feel well.

Ms. Weinraub has made a remarkable impact as the student health and wellness leader at Cherry Creek. She is responsible for establishing the district's partnership with Hazel Health, a telehealth company that provides mental health services to students at no cost to families. The program with Hazel has significantly expanded students' access to therapy, especially post-pandemic, as student demand for mental health support has soared.

When the district first partnered with Hazel, services were offered to middle and high school students through virtual, at-home appointments with licensed therapists. Ms. Weinraub had

a vision to expand the program to serve all students in the district. Her commitment and advocacy drove the expansion of Hazel services to include both in-home and at-school mental health support, plus the addition of elementary schools to the program. This school year, more than 54,000 Cherry Creek students--the entire district--can access teletherapy with Hazel Health because of Michelle's advocacy and ambitious vision.

Under Ms. Weinraub's leadership, the health services department at Cherry Creek has achieved substantial growth. Because of her efforts, the student immunization rate is now at 94.41 percent, and she also established a resource pantry to address the issue of student hunger.

Ms. Weinraub actively engages with students, seeking their input and feedback through the superintendent's Advisory Council of Students. She said, "We need to hear from the people we are serving, and last time I checked, they were students." She values their perspectives, ensuring that the health department's initiatives align with the needs and concerns of the student community.

Ms. Weinraub is an exceptional leader in student health and wellness. Her passionate commitment and innovative programming have made a substantial difference in the lives of Cherry Creek's students.



Nominee: Rod Ruth, Chief Student Services and Secondary Education Officer, Clover School District and former Principal, [Clover High School](#)

Nominated by: [Edmentum](#)



With a wealth of experience spanning over 22 years in the field of education, Mr. Rod Ruth, an outstanding educator and former principal of Clover High School in South Carolina, consistently demonstrates unwavering commitment to student achievement and has left a lasting impact on the students and the community of Clover.

Mr. Ruth's leadership has been instrumental in positioning Clover High School as a standout institution. Despite being the fourth-largest high school in South Carolina, Clover High School maintains its unique charm nestled amidst the rolling farmland of York County. Mr. Ruth's passion for his work and the close-knit community of Clover shine through, creating a truly exceptional learning environment.

Under his guidance, Clover High School has embraced personalized learning and innovative solutions to cater to the diverse needs of the students. By leveraging Edmentum programs, Mr. Ruth has provided flexible options that have transformed the educational experience. Students at Clover High School can access initial credit, credit recovery, and condensed credit programs, enabling them to receive tailored instruction and excel academically.

Mr. Ruth's commitment to student success is evident in the impressive graduation rate of 96 percent--the highest in the school's history. Through his collaborative approach and

effective utilization of Edmentum's resources, Mr. Ruth has empowered students to reach their full potential. His dedication to excellence and steady support have created a culture of achievement and growth at Clover High School.

"This building's been here for over 50 years, and I'll take [members of the community] on tours on Saturdays to see all the programs that we offer here. The most unbelievable CTE program with so many completers and so many programs within that. Again, our fine arts program where we have the top choral program perhaps in the nation. Our drum line just won the world championships in Dayton, Ohio. We have the largest ROTC unit. We have so many unbelievable things going on here, and we treasure that, and in treasuring that, we have to protect that by giving students flexible options to take courses, and Edmentum provides that," explains Mr. Ruth.

Principal Rod Ruth was named South Carolina's 2023 Secondary Principal of the Year. Going into the 2023-24 school year, Mr. Ruth will expand his leadership and dedication to student achievement in a new role as Chief Student Services and Secondary Education Officer with Clover School District, where he will aid in the planning a second high school and a third middle school. Mr. Ruth's consistent dedication, innovation, and commitment continue to prove him an exemplary leader in K-12 education.



Nominee: Cumberland County Public Schools Nominated by: EPS Operations, LLC/School Specialty

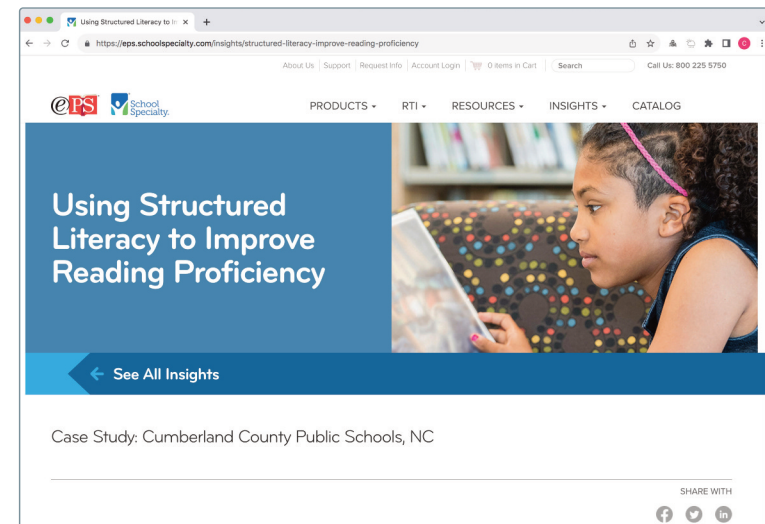


For Cumberland County Public Schools, the fifth-largest district in North Carolina with a diverse population that includes over 25 percent military families, the strategic use of Structured Literacy made all the difference for both students and teachers in addressing disrupted learning due to the pandemic.

“These last two years have been rough,” said Catherine LeCleir-Salas, Instructional Specialist for K–5 exceptional students. She credits the use of EPS School Specialty’s S.P.I.R.E. reading intervention program for their success in maintaining a stable, high-quality reading program in spite of profound disruptions. “The teacher-led lessons include all critical areas of reading, multisensory learning, and mastery of concepts presented in a logical sequence based on language development.”

LeCleir-Salas also gave high marks to S.P.I.R.E.’s flexible professional learning program. “We have used both in-person and virtual professional development for S.P.I.R.E. and found the trainers to be very knowledgeable and supportive,” she said. Cumberland County had 85 to 90 percent teacher participation in using S.P.I.R.E. reading intervention program. “Teachers kept their own data for student progress,” said LeCleir-Salas, “and at the district level we monitored the implementation and performed random fidelity checks on program usage.”

Ninety-seven percent of the teachers recommended the district purchase S.P.I.R.E. for their Tier 3 reading program in large part because they liked how the Orton-Gillingham methodology is applied and that the teacher guides were easy to follow. The curriculum enabled the district to meet state legislative requirements to train teachers in the Science of Reading and successfully incorporate a Structured Literacy approach to student instruction.



<https://eps.schoolspecialty.com/insights/structured-literacy-improve-reading-proficiency>



Nominee: Maria Molinares, Principal of Pre-K Partnerships, [Dallas Independent School District](#) Nominated by: [Age of Learning](#)



Maria Molinares, principal of pre-K partnerships for the Dallas Independent School District, has had a career spanning over two decades as an accomplished teacher and administrator. Maria's unwavering dedication to advancing instruction for kindergarten readiness stands as inspiration for her district and school community.

Her profound commitment to enhancing early childhood education is exemplified through her implementation of Age of Learning's research-backed solution, My Math Academy. Leveraging these adaptive, personalized programs, Maria has created an environment where students thrive. Through these programs, children embark on personalized learning journeys that cater to their unique needs and learning paces, ensuring a solid foundation in math and reading skills.

Maria employs innovative uses of technology to deliver classroom, school, and district success. Her initiatives reflect the best in K-12 education, showcasing how technology can be harnessed to foster student engagement and achievement. By integrating these cutting-edge programs into her curriculum, Mrs. Molinares has not only accelerated educational outcomes but also ignited a passion for learning among both students and educators.

Maria demonstrates visionary leadership, relentless dedication, and groundbreaking approach to education. Through her commitment to language-rich instruction and innovative technology, Maria is shaping the future of education, one student at a time.



<https://twitter.com/PreKIsd>



Nominee: Sean Bevier, Educational Specialist, Elkhart County Juvenile Detention Center

Nominated by: [Follett](#)



Before embarking on his current job, Sean Bevier taught full time in the classroom for a decade, then went on to serve as assistant principal, principal, and head of school.

But his yearning to help those who are underserved and under-resourced resulted in a new position as Juvenile Probation Officer at the Elkhart County Juvenile Detention Center in Indiana, only to be promoted to Educational Specialist five months later.

Upon arrival at the Center, he single-handedly created a school library, and he now oversees the academic needs of two classrooms and has witnessed first-hand the magic of literacy.

“When we can match their ability and interests to books, it becomes a steppingstone toward academic success,” Sean says. “Many of our students say our Center is where they read their first-ever book!”

He said it’s understandable many students who end up at the Center have stories of hurt and trauma, which ultimately led to their poor choices. He recalls one student angry at his father when he arrived but noticed the relationship mending through their phone conversations. The topic of reading came up between the two and the student shared that he read a book, to which the father expressed his joy.

“That ignited this young man,” Sean says. “Although it was difficult for him to read, he checked out another book, then another. At one point, he was looking for his next book and he told me, ‘My dad said he read Gary Paulsen’s Hatchet when he was in school and liked it. Do we have that?’ Thanks to Follett Destiny Library Manager, we found it quickly and he checked it out with a smile on his face!”

Destiny Library Manager is doing its part to assist the Elkhart team to make it easier for the youths to find books they want to read.

“Before Destiny, we had no way to track books,” Sean recalls. “There were books available for the students to read, but they were on shelves somewhere or in boxes. They weren’t catalogued, so there was no way to help the students find what they were interested in.”

The inventory now is at 2,000 and growing, and they’re seeking student recommendations for more.

“As part of our research on juvenile literature, we understand the importance of asking the students and letting their voice be heard,” Sean says. “It is a joy to observe their gratitude when they see the book they recommended added to our shelf.”



Nominee: Lori Romero, Assistant Superintendent, Elementary Education, [Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District](#)

Nominated by: [Age of Learning](#)



Lori Romero is the assistant superintendent for Elementary Education 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.

Recognizing the challenge and looking for a solution, Mrs. Romero and her colleagues launched a free universal full-day pre-K program for 4-year-old children in the fall of 2019. Through this no-cost program, HCISD began to instill a strong foundation in literacy and math in its youngest learners. Shortly after the program began, COVID-19 forced the district to rethink how it could academically support 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.

Mrs. Romero led the effort to bring edtech solutions that accelerate learning into the district’s pre-K classrooms. The district then began using Age of Learning’s adaptive, mastery-based math program, My Math Academy, to strengthen young learners’ foundational math knowledge. 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. 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, an adaptive, standards-aligned reading solution. 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.

In her pursuit of educational excellence, Mrs. Romero's visionary leadership and commitment to innovative solutions have transformed the trajectory of young learners at HCISD, fostering academic growth and creating a brighter future for all students.



Nominee: Bryan Phillips, CIO, Hoover City Schools Nominated by: [Lightspeed Systems](#)



In his role as CIO of Hoover City Schools in Hoover, Alabama, Bryan Phillips is highly engaged and committed, proactively seeking opportunities to contribute to important discussions and decision-making processes within the district. His leadership, participation, and active involvement demonstrate a dedication to staying informed about important issues and working collaboratively to improve student learning.

Bryan's involvement in nationwide leadership events empowers him to apply the knowledge gained from those events to district-wide think tanks and professional development for teachers, facilitating a positive impact on student learning. In introducing design thinking and encouraging teachers to collaborate on solutions to complex issues, Bryan has fostered a culture of innovation and collaboration throughout the district. This approach has allowed teachers to have a voice in creating solutions that are tailored to their unique needs and experiences, which ultimately leads to improved student outcomes.

Bryan's engagement, leadership, and innovative problem-solving strategies have had a positive impact on the district as a whole. However, he has produced a significant impact on teaching and student learning with the following initiatives:

Making available the necessary digital learning tools and resources for remote learning, ensuring teachers were able to effectively deliver instruction and students were able to continue their education without interruption.

Sourcing tech coaches to support teachers and families, increasing the capacity for teachers to effectively integrate technology into their instruction, and resulting in improved student learning outcomes.

Collaborating with industry partners like Google to deliver valuable support and resources to address technical issues and improve the overall technology infrastructure and educational technology tools available to both students and teachers.

Providing internet access outside of buildings and in various locations throughout the community to extend learning opportunities to students who may not have had access otherwise, further supporting academic success and overall equity in education.

Finally, Bryan continues to plan and budget all technology purchases for the district, establishing and maintaining an adaptive technology infrastructure strategy that is highly secure and a safe environment for all in the Hoover City Schools district. Bryan regularly develops, evaluates, and maintains policies and procedures related to technology use, ensuring it is used effectively and responsibly.

Overall, Bryan's leadership activities create a culture of innovation and continuous improvement in the district and ensure technology resources are used effectively and responsibly to support teaching and learning.



Nominee: [Johnston County Public Schools](#)

Nominated by: [Savvas Learning Company](#)



While recent statistics from NAEP (The Nation’s Report Card) show significant declines in math scores across the country, Johnston County Public Schools in North Carolina has defied that trend. Data released at the end of the 2021-22 school year showed the district increased math scores by double digits in grades 3-8, outperforming pre-COVID levels. These gains led the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction to single out Johnston County as the most improved school district in the state. How did the district do it?

Johnston County Public Schools increased its districtwide math scores to above state averages by implementing a year-over-year plan for high-quality mathematics instruction, which included the adoption of Savvas Learning Company’s enVision® series for grades K-12, an evidence-based, classroom-tested core math curriculum delivered on the Savvas Realize learning management system platform.

Prior to the 2021-2022 school year, the district’s assessment data showed math scores were low, contributing to 14 out of 48 schools in the district being identified as low performing in 2019. Johnston County district leaders made it a priority to find out where they were going wrong. They soon realized that their strategy for letting teachers put together their own math instruction was part of the problem. They needed a cohesive core math curriculum that they could roll out districtwide.

After months of research and a successful pilot, the district chose enVision to be that core mathematics curriculum because of its rigor, digital learning components, and engaging lessons. enVision offers an innovative math curriculum that helps educators teach with confidence and inspires students with hands-on, problem-based learning.

Savvas worked with the district to successfully implement enVision and develop a multi-year professional development plan for teachers. After one year of using enVision, Johnston County saw real growth. From 2021 to 2022, it gained 16 percentage points in math proficiency for grades 3-8, and 9 percentage points for grades 9-12, outperforming statewide averages of a 10-point gain in grades 3-8 and an 8-point gain in grades 9-12.

Johnston County educators are confident they will continue to see growth, and they credit Savvas for being part of the “right mix of expertise, resources, and support” that is delivering real results for the district’s students.

Savvas is proud to call out Johnston County Public Schools as an outstanding example of K-12 success using enVision — a true “K-12 Hero” using its innovative education technology.



Nominee: Carol Cleveland, Executive Director, Community Schools, [Kent School District](#)

Nominated by: [Hazel Health](#)



Hazel Health (Hazel) nominates Carol Cleveland in honor of her commitment to the mental and physical well-being of students within the Kent School District. Ms. Cleveland's leadership and vision for equitable healthcare access have been instrumental in expanding access to healthcare services for students across the district.

Ms. Cleveland came into her position under challenging circumstances, including a teacher strike that delayed the start of the school year in August 2022. During this time, parents and educators voiced concerns about the lack of mental health support for students. During a district board meeting, Ms. Cleveland spoke on the importance of mental health services and advocated for a solution: "Our kids who are talented and have so much potential are experiencing needs that are going unmet." Ms. Cleveland recognized the need and became a strong advocate for Hazel Health, a telehealth company that provides mental health services to students at no cost to families.

The district initially launched Hazel in 10 pilot schools in January 2022. Ms. Cleveland relentlessly advocated for equitable access to Hazel's mental health services in all district schools rather than limiting services to a small group. Her proposal was approved by the district's board in October 2022, resulting in the expansion of Hazel Health to an additional 8 schools.

However, there were still 25 elementary schools in the district without access to Hazel's mental health resources. Ms. Cleveland understood the importance of gaining the support and trust of school administrators and mental health staff, so she took it upon herself to personally meet with all the principals at all 25 elementary schools to address their concerns and explain in detail the scope of services Hazel Health could offer. "Out of the 25 principals I spoke to, 21 of them said, 'We want it, we need it, what do we need to do to get it?'"

Through persistent efforts, Ms. Cleveland successfully secured funding to expand to these 25 elementary schools, bringing Hazel services to more than 25,000 additional students in the district.

Ms. Cleveland's advocacy and perseverance extended beyond mental health services as she oversaw the district-wide launch of Hazel's at-home physical health services, where students can meet with a medical provider virtually from the comfort of their own homes at no cost, regardless of insurance status. In June 2023, she successfully obtained board approval for a second year of district-wide physical and mental health services for Kent School District.

Ms. Cleveland's tireless dedication to serving Kent School District has benefited students, families, and school staff in incredible ways. Her perseverance has expanded healthcare access for students, and she has demonstrated what it means to be a leader in K-12 education.



Nominee: Colene Hardy, English Teacher and Instructional Technology Coach, [Lake Forest School Districts 67 and 115](#)

Nominated by: [Logitech](#)



In her dual role as an English teacher and an instructional technology coach for Lake Forest School Districts 67 and 115 in Illinois, Colene Hardy has created a deep, comprehensive, and repeatable approach to edtech in the classroom. She harnesses the power of many platforms, devices, and peripherals to offer her students personalized instruction, inclusivity, data-driven feedback, cross-cultural exchanges, and the support of other educators at their school.

Through virtual labs and field trips, simulations, and scenario-based learning, Colene presents complex concepts to her students in ways they find easier to understand and connect to real-world applications.

In a recent study by the International Olympic Committee, more than half of young people (55 percent) said they enjoyed school more on days they get to do physical activity. Because moving around has been shown to bring many benefits to students, she often designs activities that take her kids outside the classroom, ingeniously folding in the features of her edtech resources. For example, in one activity, she supercharges a regular lesson by having students record explanations of what they've learned on their iPads. Once students in one of her classes had the bright idea of using the magnetic strip on their Logitech Rugged Combo Keyboard cases to stick the iPads to

the metal lockers in the hallway, this already powerful activity began to unlock even more edtech advantages: Now, it reinforces and clarifies students' thinking, gets them moving, allows her to track their progress with the day's concepts, and includes students who might otherwise have trouble holding an iPad steady enough to make a good recording.

This talent for seeing how edtech can transform, rather than replace, traditional methods enhances every decision Colene makes in the classroom. So, she may have her students type in Google Docs with their tablets instead of writing by hand, to offer them the instant feedback of the platform's interactive built-in spelling and grammar checker. But she'll also have them record their screens and annotate their essays with a stylus. This combination approach contains the best of all worlds: It accommodates different learning styles, makes lessons dynamic and interactive, and includes the benefits of handwriting with a stylus, such as improved motor control and better retention.

With her expert knowledge of edtech solutions and her dedication to making schoolwork engaging, efficient, and effective, Colene has set herself apart as a true K-12 hero.



Nominee: **Joey Norris,** Coordinator of Technology Integration, **McDowell County Schools** Nominated by: [Learning.com](https://www.learning.com)



Joey Norris is a true educational hero who returned to his home county in West Virginia to make a difference. He is dedicated to the success of the teachers and students of McDowell County and is a shining example of the positive impact one individual can make in a community.

Amid the pandemic, Joey's thoughtful and deliberate implementation plan ensured the students of McDowell County had equitable access to digital literacy and computer science education. Joey carefully tailored curriculum pathways to meet students' needs. This custom curriculum, which was a new learning experience for most students, delivered the essential skills students needed to be safe online.

Today, Joey continues to provide thoughtful planning to the curriculum and has continued to expand the pathways to include 12 digital literacy concepts. Whether a student's next step is online assessment, core subject productivity, or college and career readiness, McDowell County students enter the environment with a confidence that comes from familiarity with digital literacy concepts.

Joey is also a tremendous support to teachers, providing strong professional development to help them improve their confidence in integrating technology into their core curriculum.

Joey embraces the idea that engaging technology can be leveraged to help students enhance their digital journey, which will prepare them to not just survive but excel in a digital world. Joey empowers students and teachers to achieve great success in the classroom and in the future.

SUCCESS STORY
The Easiest Way to Ensure Digital Equity

MCDOWELL COUNTY SCHOOLS
MCDOWELL COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA

K-12 2,600 students 6 elem schools 3 middle schools 2 high schools 1 virtual school

DEMAND FOR DIGITAL SKILLS
Joey Norris, Coordinator of Technology Integration for McDowell County Schools (MCS), grew up in rural West Virginia and attended the K-12 district. The community thrived on coal mining then, but today, more than a quarter of the county's 20,000 residents live in poverty. To ensure prosperity for the people of West Virginia, the state is striving to equip students with future-ready digital skills to succeed in technology-based businesses that are moving into the state, like Amazon.

Following a career as a mathematics teacher in general education and gifted/talented classrooms, Norris returned to his hometown a decade ago. Now he oversees technology instruction, which includes finding a curriculum to support digital literacy skills – a need fueled by the move to online state testing, and demand to equip students with online safety and digital citizenship skills. For several years, MCS had no such program.

"Even those educators that consider themselves tech-savvy are often intimidated by the notion of teaching computer skills. Without a structured program such as [Learning.com](https://www.learning.com), the students receive little to no digital education," he says.

Norris discovered Learning.com's EasyTech K-12 digital literacy curriculum, and offered to pilot the program as part of the state's Mountain State Digital Literacy Project, which aims to ensure digital equity for West Virginians.

Demographic	Percentage
Hispanic	6%
Black	4%
Two or more races	2%
Asian	1%

https://info.learning.com/hubfs/Marketing/Case_Studies/McDowell_Case_Study_Final.pdf



Nominee: **Jhone M. Ebert, Superintendent of Public Instruction, [Nevada Department of Education](#)** Nominated by: [Discovery Education](#)



The shift to distance education precipitated by the COVID pandemic highlighted challenges including access to technology, professional learning for educators, and high-quality instructional materials. To meet this challenge, in the summer of 2020, Jhone Ebert, Nevada State's Superintendent of Public Instruction, announced the launch of the Nevada Digital Learning Collaborative (DLC).

An innovative initiative designed to bridge the digital divide across Nevada, the Digital Learning Collaborative sought to accomplish the following:

- Work with state partners to establish equitable access for all students to devices and the internet where they live
- Provide high-quality professional development that drives ROI on the state's edtech investment for all educators on tools and pedagogy that create engaging learning experiences online and in a blended model and in all grades and subjects
- Ensure all students and educators have access to rigorous, standards-aligned curriculum, such as that provided by NVDOE partner Discovery Education, to support instruction in both face-to-face, online, and blended environments

While initially created to meet the challenges of teaching in the COVID era, the DLC has become an integral part of teaching and learning in Nevada in the post-COVID world. Through its best-in-class digital resources and powerful professional learning opportunities, the DLC is future-proofing the state's classrooms as it is connecting the education students are receiving in the classroom to the world beyond the school yard.

The Discovery Education resources provided by the DLC are funded in part by a unique public-private partnership with Nevada Gold Mines. Nevada Gold Mines' collaboration with the Nevada Department of Education and Discovery Education demonstrates a long-standing commitment to the state. As a global leader in mining, Nevada Gold Mines directly invests in social and economic opportunities including education, the environment, health, economic development, and cultural heritage. Now in its third year, the DLC and its innovative funding structure has become a model program emulated by other education systems in the nation.

Thanks to the leadership of Jhone Ebert, all public school systems and charter schools across Nevada now have access to dynamic digital resources and supportive professional learning that is helping to support the success of all learners. Ebert's efforts are being emulated nationally, and her department has been recognized for building powerful public-private partnerships that support student learning.



Nominee: Adam Hyman, Media Arts Technology Teacher, Public School 101, [New York City Public Schools](#)

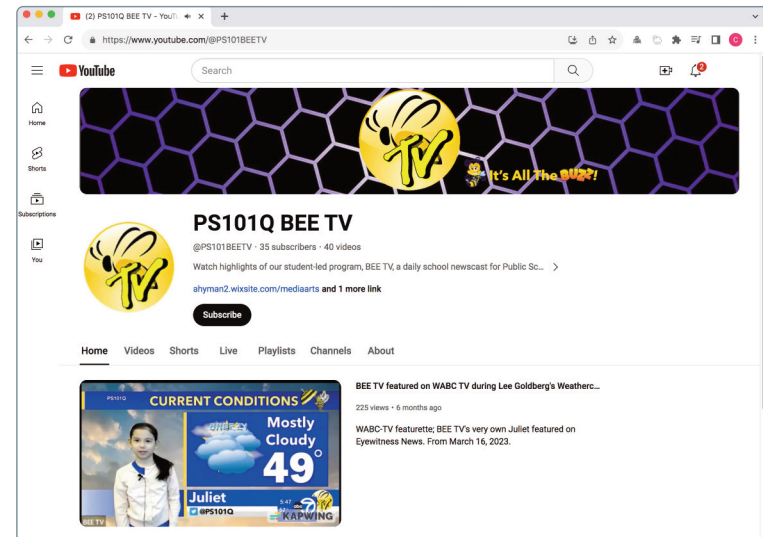
Nominated by: [Logitech](#)

Adam Hyman is a veteran media arts technology teacher who empowers students to create in a way that challenges them, fulfills them, and reflects the world around them. Students today are deeply ingrained in the “creator culture,” with one-third of children ages 8-12 aspiring to be a YouTuber or vlogger. Adam decided to tap into the movement, integrating content creation into the curriculum not only to increase student engagement and school community connections, but also to help students develop self-confidence and prepare them for 21st century careers.

To do this, he created BEE TV, a student-led daily school newscast from Public School 101 in New York City. BEE TV started during the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic as a way to share what was happening at school with families who were at home. The mini broadcast studio within his school uses a Logitech BRIO Webcam and Litra Beam light for a professional-like experience. Local news stations have run several stories on BEE TV as an example of how educators can catalyze creativity and give students ownership over their own learning journeys. These are exactly the goals that Adam has tried to achieve through edtech during his 24-year teaching career.



Adam has School Building Leadership and Education Technology Specialist certifications, and he acts as Public School 101’s Promethean Panel and ClassFlow Lead and Certified Teacher. While teaching media arts technology in Grades 1–5, Adam continues to push the boundaries of edtech forward and discover new, insightful ways to keep his students, and his entire school community, excited about learning.



<https://www.youtube.com/@PS101BEE TV>



Nominee: Aaron Schwartz, Associate Principal, North Scott High School

Nominated by: IPVideo

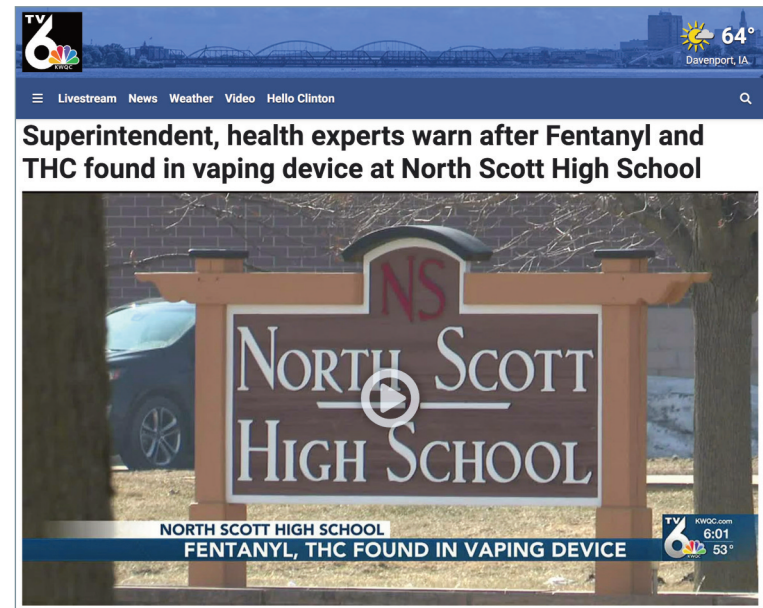


In his role, Aaron Schwartz is always looking out for the students at North Scott High School and investigating solutions to keep a safe and secure learning environment. From active shooter drills to security solutions, he is looked upon by the district to find solutions to keep students safe.

In the 21-22 school year, the district has received more than 20 EMS calls for students who were suffering at various levels, including seizures. The suspicion was that this was related to vaping in the high school restrooms, but it could not be proven, and the student victims were not divulging the source. This created anxiety across the district and community to other potential causes.

Determined to identify and prevent the problem Aaron found a solution in the HALO Smart Sensor from IPVideo Corporation, a vape detection and privacy security device for schools. Aaron pushed the district to trial the product, which led to a full implementation in the bathrooms throughout the high school.

Since installation, the HALO devices served as a deterrent to vaping in the restrooms and no further EMS calls took place. The identification of the problem also put fellow students and the community at ease. Aaron's efforts identified a problem, found a solution to protect students, and provided for a safer learning environment.



<https://www.kwqc.com/2022/02/22/superintendent-health-experts-warn-after-fentanyl-thc-found-vaping-device-north-scott-high-school/>



Nominee: Robert Palazzo, Principal, Panther Valley Elementary School

Nominated by: 95 Percent Group



Owning up to a mistake takes courage. And when you are responsible for helping more than 650 PreK-3 students build the literacy foundation necessary for success in school, careers, and life, admitting it makes you a hero.

Robert Palazzo, principal at Panther Valley Elementary School in rural Pennsylvania, is known for his ability to make things happen for his students. A Title 1 school with 80 percent of students on free and reduced lunch and 20 percent in special education, staying laser focused on ensuring students have the resources they need to thrive is always top of mind for Robert.

This dedication to meeting the needs of his students has served the school well. Since taking over as principal in 2017, Robert has established a pre-kindergarten and forged creative partnerships in the community to raise funds to build a new playground and launch a school-based therapy program.

And so, when it came time to focus on elevating his students' reading scores, Robert was sure he'd found the answer in the principles of Balanced Literacy.

Except, after a year and a half of using this hand-picked program, Robert had to admit the truth: His students just weren't learning how to read.

Robert called a meeting with staff and faculty and confessed the tough lesson learned: What we're doing just isn't working. It's time to try something new.

At the same time, a national movement away from Balanced Literacy toward the science of reading had begun. Robert did research and discovered the One95 Literacy Ecosystem, which is rooted in the principles of the science of reading and evidence-based instructional strategies. The program would give students a much-needed foundation in core phonics.

Paying for the program would require ingenuity--a skill Robert had honed. He reached out to the foundation of a local business already supporting the school and convinced it to repurpose its philanthropy to support the new reading program. Coupled with ESSER funds, Panther Valley Elementary School was poised to make the investment in a new chapter of reading achievement for its students.

The improvements in student reading abilities were immediate and impactful. Not only did reading scores soar, excitement and confidence is evident everywhere. When Robert reminded a student one day not to run in the hallway, the response was, "I can't! I have to run! I'm so excited to learn!"

As Dr. Jonathan Ross, president of the Pennsylvania Principals Association, noted upon Robert's selection to the National Distinguished Principal program, "Mr. Palazzo stops at nothing to secure needed services for his students. As a result, the teachers, staff, and community at large feel a part of something greater than themselves that will undoubtedly shape the lives of a generation of children for the better."



Nominee: [Ramaz School](#)

Nominated by: [RobotLAB Inc.](#)



Ramaz is a modern Orthodox day school that has recently implemented an AI LAB by RobotLAB in their middle school.

RobotLAB worked directly with the Ramaz team to discuss the customization and implementation of their lab. This lab includes various STEM products, modular seating, and curriculum.

The AI LAB is designed to allow students to work in different stations such as: Humanoid Robotics, Industry 4.0, Smart transportation, and VR, among others. These new tools will guide students through multiple programming languages and hands-on experiences with advanced concepts, where robotics and coding become part of their daily learning.



“The AI-Innovation lab signifies a big step for the educational community. We are very excited to share new technology with students for the classroom that will bring them skills for their future careers. Our commitment with education is to provide the latest technology to each classroom while offering the best of breed products and curriculum that is available for teachers. The Innovation lab is a great asset to the Ramaz community and we can't wait to see the amazing results this implementation will bring and transform the entire school” – Elad Inbar, CEO & Founder RobotLAB



Nominee: Daniel Thompson, Science Teacher, [Ron Clark Academy](#) Nominated by: [Boxlight](#)



Teaching at the Ron Clark Academy in Atlanta, Ga., Daniel Thompson's incredible dedication to transformative science education for his students speaks volumes about his drive to enhance teaching and learning. With over 7 years of teaching experience, Thompson's commitment closely aligns with RCA's mission of delivering impactful learning experiences to a diverse student body.

Thompson's teaching approach is visionary, placing a strong emphasis on hands-on engagement and fostering genuine understanding. He skillfully guides his students through captivating scientific exploration, encouraging curiosity and a passion for learning. Thompson's innovative methodologies extend beyond traditional teaching, allowing his students to grasp complex concepts through tangible experiences.

For example, Thompson has leveraged the Labdisc All-in-One Science Lab from Boxlight to elevate the learning experience for his students. This innovative tool, with its unique capabilities, supports Thompson's mission to make STEM education accessible and inspiring for his students. By incorporating Labdisc into his teaching methods, Thompson has amplified his students' engagement and provided them with a glimpse into the possibilities of scientific careers.

Thompson's impact reaches beyond the classroom, as he aspires to empower his students to see themselves as future scientists. This aligns perfectly with RCA's commitment to fostering academic excellence and a positive learning environment. Thompson's dedication to nurturing authentic curiosity and connection to the world of science resonates deeply with his diverse student body.

Daniel Thompson's innovative teaching approach, combined with his dedication to making STEM education attainable and inspiring, highlights his role as an educator who shapes the aspirations of his students. Through his work at RCA, Thompson embodies the values of engagement, empowerment, and academic excellence, making him a true hero in the realm of K-12 education.





Nominee: **Dr. Richard Labbe, Superintendent of Schools, [Sayreville School District](#)** Nominated by: [Age of Learning](#)



Dr. Richard Labbe is the superintendent of schools in the Sayreville Public School District, with a remarkable career spanning 30 years. His exceptional contributions to the field of education and his successful integration of educational technology to accelerate learning for all students are a testament to his commitment to foster educational excellence.

Dr. Labbe's impressive tenure includes 23 years in leadership roles, where he has consistently championed innovative approaches to improve student learning outcomes. In his 10th year as the superintendent in Sayreville and 13th year as a chief school administrator, Dr. Labbe's passion for early childhood education and literacy development shines through. His advocacy for early literacy has been a driving force in shaping curriculum and programs that empower young learners.

Harnessing the power of Age of Learning's adaptive and personalized programs such as My Math Academy and My Reading Academy, he has revolutionized the way students engage with curriculum. By leveraging edtech solutions, Dr. Labbe has accelerated learning, tailored instruction, and provided students with engaging programs that cater to individual learning styles.

Furthermore, Dr. Labbe's advocacy for a response to intervention (RTI) or multi-tiered approach demonstrates his commitment to inclusivity and equity. He ensures that all students, regardless of their background or learning abilities, receive the necessary support to thrive academically. This dedication exemplifies his belief in the potential of every learner.

Dr. Richard Labbe demonstrates transformative leadership, advocacy for early childhood education, and innovative use of educational technology. His impact on the Sayreville Public School District and the broader educational community is immeasurable.



<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC6JjICsrVClIRRepWCy3NA/videos>

2023

K-12 HERO AWARDS

*e*SCHOOL NEWS