https://www.inc.com/justin-bariso/google-career-certificates-plan-disrupt-college-degree-university-genius.html?cid=sf01003

https://www.wsj.com/articles/pandemic-job-market-has-bright-spots-for-recent-high-school-grads-11599989402?mod=hp_lead_pos9

https://www.the74million.org/article/mccloud-marigna-its-not-just-about-policing-3-ideas-for-addressing-systemic-racism-in-our-schools-and-communities/

https://www.the74million.org/article/beyond-the-scantron-inside-our-new-series-on-why-we-test-students-how-testing-can-lead-to-more-equitable-schools-amid-the-pandemic-the-push-to-build-better-assessments/

Essential SEL

Why social-emotional learning will be a priority for districts during the first few weeks of school

GETTYIMAGES.COM/WESTEND61

As educators restart learning this new school year, the focus should be on the social-emotional wellbeing of staff and students, not on immediately making up for lost learning.

That's a guiding principle being promoted by educators and other experts who say everyone needs to process the emotions and traumas experienced over the last several months before instruction can resume effectively.

"We don't want to start the year off by testing students, we want to start the year off by connecting with students," says Ebony Lee, assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction and assessment at Clayton County Public Schools outside Atlanta.

Lee, and many of her colleagues in K-12 leadership across the country, say reestablishing relationships between students and educators will be the priority for the first few weeks of school.

Lessons from Hurricane Katrina

Some conversation may be controversial as teachers and students from different ethnic backgrounds share their experiences of COVID, the killing of George Floyd and other pressing issues, says Ralph Simpson, deputy superintendent for school leadership and improvement at Clayton County Public Schools.

"I would hope that our teachers and educators encourage children to be open-minded, to be critical thinkers and to not just look at an issue from one perspective," Simpson says.

The district created school-level teams to serve as SEL coaches for teachers as classes resume, says Lee.

Research done in the wake of Hurricane Katrina showed that students struggled when schools focused too quickly on remediation, rather than on social-emotional needs, Lee says.

BY MATT ZALAZNICK

DISTRICTS OF DISTINCTION

SEL will extend into the curriculum as well. In a marriage of STEM and social studies, for example, students this year will study the disparate impact COVID-19 has had on people from different ethnic groups.

"The global pandemic has taught us that we have to prepare students for the unknown, and the way to do that is to create thinkers," Lee says.

'We've got to go slow to go fast'

Administrators in Naperville School District 203, where SEL has been entrenched in the curriculum for years, focused first on professional development for teachers.

The goal was to help the educators manage their own stress and recognize the trauma they had experienced during the pandemic, says Christine Igoe, assistant superintendent of student services in the suburban Chicago system.

Educators practiced techniques to help students cope with stress and trauma. Making students feel safe and comfortable as they meet their new teachers has been the district's priority while reopening classrooms, Igoe says.

That includes holding more intentional morning class meetings where students and teachers can discuss challenges they're facing, how they're feeling and other emotions, Igoe says.

Building these types of routines while helping students become more adept at using technology will also smooth the

SEL IN SCHOOL OR AT HOME—The Committee for Children's Second Step SEL programs have evolved to include remote and hybrid learning options for students and educators.

9 ways to boost social-emotional learning

CASEL and the Committee for Children's Second Step program are two of the leading nonprofit providers in helping schools integrate social-emotional learning. Here are some SEL tips for administrators and teachers in the new school year from Mylien Duong, a clinical child psychologist and senior research scientist at Committee for Children (tips 1 through 5), and Karen VanAusdal, senior director of practice at CASEL (tips 6 through 9):

1. Build connections with students through morning meetings and other interactions.
2. Don't speed up instruction right away to tackle learning loss.
3. Give students voice and choice over some assignments and class activities.
4. Be honest and up-front with students if they ask about whether schools will have to close again or other sensitive issues.
5. Allow educators time to cope with their own anxieties and regulate their emotions.
6. Have principals contact every staff member to discuss online learning methods and the issues educators are contending with at home.
7. Hold "restorative circles" where staff can talk about the pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement, the presidential election and other issues.
8. Ask administrators to help educators add anti-racist pedagogy to the new school year's curriculum.
9. Train non-instructional staff to help children cope with stress and anxiety.

transition, should any of the district's schools have to return to online learning full-time.

"We've got to go slow to go fast," Igoe says. "I could teach algebra on the first day but if I don't have kids who feel safe, I'll have to reteach it in two or three weeks when they're ready to learn it."

Student voice boosts SEL

Among the social-emotional stressors for staff and students in East Saint Louis School District #189, the coronavirus "has just been one more thing," says Tiffany Gholson, director of parent and student support services.

Students suffer the trauma of living in a city with one of the highest murder rates in the nation. Nearly two-thirds of them live below the poverty line and they all eat free lunch.

Over the past few years, the district has placed nurses and truancy/homeless specialists in every school. In addition, its schools have reached the recommended ratio of one social worker for every 250 students.

Heading into the new school year, administrators will further integrate SEL into everyday learning, including an expanded bullying prevention curriculum and cognitive behavioral therapy for students in greater distress.

Allowing students to have a voice in the daily lives is another way to improve social-emotional health. The district's Peace Warriors program, which began last year, encourages high school students to learn and practice the principles of peaceful nonviolence inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King.

"Most of our Peace Warriors have experienced a tragic loss in their own families," Gholson says. "Now, they're reaching out to others to try to intercede and mitigate the violence." DA

Matt Zalaznick is DA's senior writer.

SHARE:
DAmag.me/essential

On Civility

Five Rules for Engagement

Education leaders should not avoid weighing in on the hard issues of the day, but who wants to be caught between polar extremes?

BY JASON E. GLASS

As education leaders, we are navigating through a triple threat of arguably the most challenging set of disruptions in our professional lifetimes. We are attempting to restore school in the midst of a global pandemic, to manage catastrophic budget reductions and to lead our communities through difficult and emotional conversations about race and equity.

Any one of these challenges alone would be enough to put a strain on a school system leader, but the combination creates an unprecedented mixture for which there is no established answer or set of best practices. More often than not, we must choose between wicked choices involving excruciating tradeoffs. And getting good counsel is not easy — often the messages we hear are a cacophony driven by fear, self-interest and polarized political agendas.

Genuine community engagement has become increasingly difficult in the current era. The causal forces are complex and interconnected, and they include such elements as the dynamics of social media interactions, the proliferation of fake news designed to ignite political extremism and both foreign and domestic political actors who seek to propagate dysfunction and make consensus difficult.

Taken together, winner-take-all and "damn the opposition" political attitudes have put down deep roots and most school leaders could not

ILLUSTRATION © ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/Z_WEI

be blamed for thinking twice about opening themselves and their organizations up for feedback and critique.

Emotional Feedback

When it comes to school plans in response to COVID-19, looming budget cuts, and racial violence and inequity, all of these issues are bound to elicit deeply passionate feedback. We hear most often (and most loudly) from those on the polar extremes or those who have a personal connection to the issue.

When we asked how our schools should reopen this fall, we heard a great deal from community members concerned about the economic, academic and social-emotional impacts of long school closures or disruptive remote learning models. They demanded schools be reopened fully and with few or no restrictions.

We also heard from community members with genuine concerns about our schools being a vector for the virus and questions about how we keep staff members with comorbidities or older community members safe. It is difficult to argue that any of these perspectives are wrong.

In discussing budget reductions, we heard from staff members who are concerned about their wages being cut or being saddled with unmanageable workloads. And we also heard from parents and students who do not want their services and valued programs reduced. Of course, as education leaders we wish we could ensure all of these — but we also made tough decisions (with our school boards) to get our budgets in line with new revenue realities.

And then there are the deeply emotional conversations happening about race and equity in the wake of this summer's murder of George Floyd and the subsequent civil unrest that took place across the country. We heard from those calling for real disruptions to systems in our society, uities and racial violence. We also heard from those who value law and order and who wanted a "get tough" response to civil unrest. Each of these perspectives wants a better future for our country, but they have very different views on what that means and how to get there.

Confronting Issues

All of these issues are extraordinarily difficult. But meeting them is what leaders must do and our communities are counting on us to navigate them through these challenging times. The probability of making the best possible decisions is increased through hearing from multiple perspectives and viewpoints. Because of this, we are compelled to ask our public the important questions that must be answered and, most importantly, to hear what they have to say.

Education leaders should take on these difficult conversations in our community, but they should not enter this arena without a plan. I offer these five rules of engagement in hopes they will lead to better conversations and better decisions. These rules could be applied in formal political settings, in online discussions and in conversations between neighbors or families.

▶ **Take up issues of real substance and importance, with a genuine commitment to understanding others.** While politics and religion are sometimes taboo subjects at many functions, it is the most difficult and substantive issues affecting our community that we really need to be talking about. We can take on sensitive and complicated issues if we begin by committing to sharing the airtime (giving sides equal opportunities to talk) and listening to each other without interruption. Consider establishing ground rules and norms in these conversations so airtime can be shared and all voices are heard.

▶ **Work toward a shared view of truth.** The facts are going to matter if our issue is of real importance and those facts should be open to critique for bias and subject to validation. Logic matters as well, and conclusions that do not follow from the evidence should be identified. The work here should be toward uncovering truth and not diminishing or attacking a person.

Jason Glass, who has served the past three years as superintendent in Jefferson County,

PHOTO COURTESY OF JEFFERSON COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN GOLDEN, COLO.

which they believe perpetuated ineq- **Colo., believes difficult conversations lead to better decisions on difficult matters.**

JEFFERSON COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN GOLDEN, COLO.

Jason Glass (center) solicits feedback from employees in Jefferson County, Colo., where he spent the last three years as superintendent before becoming state education commissioner in Kentucky.

▶ Recognize the mutually positive but also opposing values.
Some of the most important matters we need to wrestle with are matters of positive but competing values. Take the immigration question as an example. On the conservative side, the values center around such things as security, concerns over drug trade and human trafficking, and the preservation of opportunities for people in the country legally. On the liberal side, there are values around inclusion, the humane treatment of all people and the economic and workforce value that immigrants provide. Both of these perspectives raise valid points for consideration and all of these values come from a positive place, though they can be in conflict.

▶ Look for the third way.
One regrettable aspect of human nature is that we tend to see things in dichotomies: good/bad, wrong/right, left/right, us/them. In reality, the world has a lot more shades of gray, and we can often find creative and mutually beneficial outcomes if we take ideas from all sides. Good decisions for local communities transcend the partisan dichotomy and unilaterally imposed ideas rarely stand the test of time.

▶ Don't feed the "trolls."
In my experience, most people value and appreciate treating each other with dignity and respect. However, there are certainly those who thrive on "flaming" others and who serve as never-ending fountains of criticism, which often is mean-spirited and personal in nature. We less-than-affec- they seek. Consider instead how you can find and engage with those critics who will push thinking forward to better outcomes and who ultimately thrive on building up rather than tearing down.

Mutual Respect

One of the founding ideals of our democratic republic is that we are better able to create and sustain that "more perfect union" through the free exchange of ideas. Genuine civil discourse means that we cannot avoid discussing the tough and important issues — but it does mean that we should strive to meet those issues with a deep and mutual appreciation for each other as human beings.

More often than not, the decisions that come to us as superintendents don't have easy answers. If they did, someone would have solved them long before us. Often, finding the "right" answer doesn't necessarily mean the correct one. Instead, it means the right one for your community and context, and the only way we can know that is to wade into what the community is talking about when it comes to the most difficult issues.

For a final note, when we engage with our communities on the toughest issues, all superintendents need to have thick skin. We have to remember that all the verbal and written arrows hurled our way aren't personal. They are positional ... and they are incoming because the superintendent has the authority to make meaningful and important decisions that affect the lives of students, staff and those in the community. The insults and pressure can wear down anyone, but reconnecting with your students and your family support system are great ways to recharge, re-center and re-focus on what really matters. ■

JASON GLASS is moving in September from

PHOTO COURTESY OF J

Good and sustainable public policy balances those mutually positive yet competing values in a way that reflects our communities.

tionately call these individuals "trolls," and perhaps the most effective thing you can do when you encounter them is to deprive them of the attention

JASON GLASS is moving in September from the superintendency of the Jefferson County Public Schools in Golden, Colo., to Kentucky commissioner of education in Frankfort, Ky.
E-mail: Jason.Glass@education.ky.gov