



On the pulse of 2020

Kanoe Namahoe · January 27, 2020



Unsplash



Restorative justice, student mental health and debates about no-homework policies were among the top trends that mattered to SmartBrief Education readers last year. Here's what we saw with these issues and what we envision happening in the coming year.



The youth mental health crisis escalated.

What happened? Rates of anxiety, depression, suicide and other mental-health issues increased among [children](#) and [college students](#). Experts point to [social media](#),



So this means...what? Increased momentum behind [whole-child instruction](#), [social-emotional learning](#) and [trauma-informed instruction](#), especially at the early grades. Sessions on these topics are commanding standing-room only crowds at education conferences. Look for these discussions to go deeper into the tactics educators -- like [Christine Ravesi-Weinstein](#) and [Mathew Portell](#) -- are using to get ahead of the issue and help students deal effectively with pressure and stress.

Schools reexamined their disciplinary tactics.

What happened? Some schools -- in [Austin](#), [Washington DC](#), and [Pittsburgh and Maine](#) -- implemented restorative justice tactics, to varying degrees of success. The strategy, which involves non-punitive ways of addressing conflicts, aims to help improve student behavior, and reduce suspension and expulsion rates.

So this means...what? More discussion about the effectiveness of this model. Even as more schools consider -- and experiment with -- restorative practices, many educators say there are issues with the approach. Concerns include teachers struggling to manage disruptions in their classrooms and that these disruptions are affecting instructional time. Clearly, the jury is still out and we can expect the debate to continue in 2020.

The homework wars continued.

What happened? Experts continued debating the value of homework as more schools and educators -- like [Kolda Elementary School](#) in Texas and [Scott Anderson at Juda High School](#) in Wisconsin -- adopted "no-homework" policies. Those who support this policy say that eliminating -- or capping -- homework helps alleviate student stress and gives them more time to spend with their families. Advocates for homework say the practice has value -- it lets students practice what they've learned during the day -- provided students are working on assignments that are [meaningful and "thought provoking."](#)

So this means...what? The battle isn't over -- and is not likely to be. But we expect this year will bring more scrutiny and research into what homework should look like -- for rigor and age-appropriate time constraints -- and how effective "no homework" policies really are. We also anticipate more teachers experimenting with this idea at their sites.



eliminate all iterations of the [Common Core State Standards in the state](#). He also asked state education leaders to craft a plan for adopting new math and language arts standards.

So this means...what? Other states may follow suit. [Alabama](#), [Idaho](#) and [Georgia](#) are all considering changes that would affect the use of the standards in their schools. How far this domino effect goes remains to be seen. But with recent research questioning the efficacy of the standards and more decisions returning to local control, it wouldn't surprise us to see more states rethinking Common Core and how (or if) they want to move forward with it.

New Jersey prioritized equitable funding--and was rewarded for it.

What happened? [New Jersey came in first](#) in Education Week's 2019 report card of state education systems, edging out four-time champion Massachusetts. What put the Garden State over the top? School finance. New Jersey [allocates 4.8% of its total taxable income to education](#), invests an average of \$16,543 per pupil and placed seventh on the wealth-neutrality scale, which measures funding distributions among districts in the state. Massachusetts, in comparison, dedicates 3.3% of taxable income to education, spends an average of \$14,529 per pupil and ranked 33rd in the nation for wealth-neutrality.

So this means...what? Funding equity matters. Achievement follows money, as we've seen time and again as wealthy districts outperform their lower-income peers. Expect funding equity to take center spotlight this election year as the candidates -- like [Democratic hopeful Pete Buttigieg](#) -- unveil their education plans, in particular their ideas for improving access and outcomes for learners from disadvantaged areas.

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