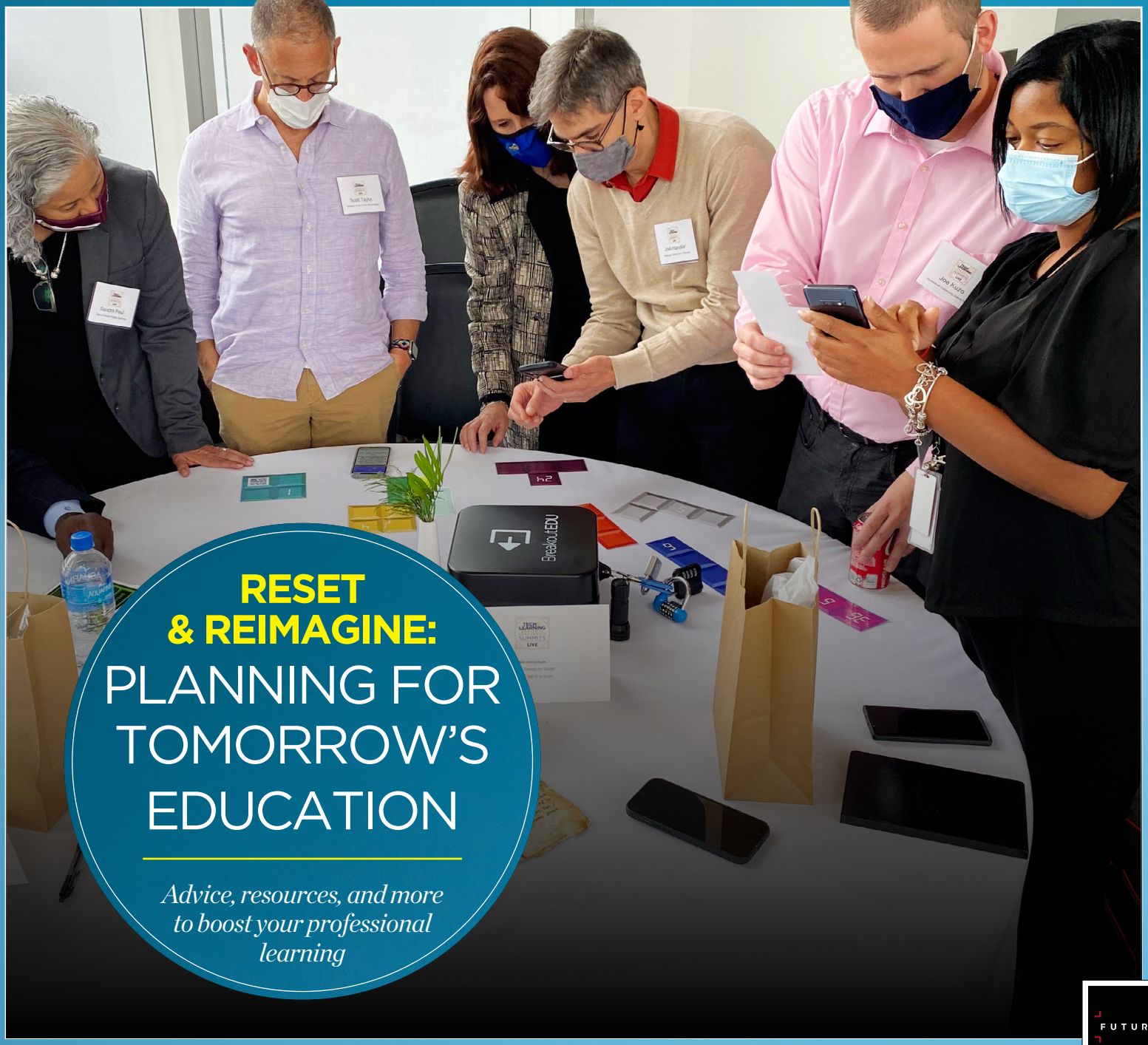
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By Carl Hooker

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by Erik Ofgang and Ray Bendici

Tech & Learning Leadership Summit ReportAt Tech & Learning's recent Northeast Regional Leadership Summit, education leaders came together to prepare for the education challenges ahead. Attendees and panelists tackled topics that included:

- tech and data management,
- learning re-alignment
- rethinking assessments
- data privacy
- changing pedagogy and more.

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Group Publisher
Christine Weiser
christine.weiser@futurenet.com

CONTENT

Managing Editor Ray Bendici
ray.bendici@futurenet.com

Senior Staff Writer Erik Ofgang
erik.ofgang@futurenet.com

Event Development Director
Marquita Amoah
marquita.amoah@futurenet.com

Production Manager
Heather Tatrow
heather.tatrow@futurenet.com

Managing Design Director
Nicole Cobban

Senior Design Director
Cliff Newman

MANAGEMENT

Senior Vice President, B2B
Rick Stamberger

Head of Production US & UK
Mark Constance

Head of Design
Rodney Dive

ADVERTISING SALES

Sales Manager Allison Knapp, *allison.knapp@futurenet.com*

Sales Associate Anne Gregoire, *anne.gregoire@futurenet.com*

VISIT US *www.techlearning.com* **FOLLOW US** *twitter.com/techlearning*

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BOLD PREDICTIONS FOR 2022

By Carl Hooker

Every year I embark on this tradition of trying to be "bold" in my predictions of what the twelve months ahead will entail. Some years I hit the mark, such as in 2015 when I predicted that the state of Texas would end its testing contract with Pearson. Or like in 2019 when I said Netflix would make an EDU version of their platform (ok, that one still hasn't happened…yet).

Still, it's fun to make predictions, so with the turning of the calendar and a new year upon us, why not put something out there in writing to see how right or wrong I will be.

The last two years have greatly impacted my predictions more so than any previous time. With the pandemic, industries far and wide are changing behaviors and practices. Having groceries delivered or meeting on a Zoom call are now commonplace.

All of these changes have also impacted education. The course correction in funding with ESSER funds finally gives K-12 schools a chance to balance out what has been a severely underfunded aspect of our society.

But first, a disclaimer. As I mention in the title, these predictions are meant to be BOLD. It's one thing to say that education will change, but it's quite another to actually specify the method in which it will change.

With that, here are my thoughts on what the year 2022 will hold.

THE GREAT EDTECH BUY OUT CONTINUES

With the influx in ESSER funds, companies peddling education technology are feeling the pressure to grab a slice of the pie before it's all gone. Companies consolidate and partner pretty regularly, and recent trends would indicate this will only accelerate this year. Last year Nearpod was bought out for an astounding $450 million by Renaissance. LineWize expanded its offerings by purchasing classroom management and analytics wizard NetRef and adding the UK filtering company Smoothwall.

Doing this gives companies looking for the next big RFP greater coverage to check those boxes and potentially land a large district such as LAUSD or NYC. With the deadline of ESSER funds coming in 2024 (and likely most of those funds allocated by 2023), I predict this year will see a rapid increase in companies joining forces or buying one another. Will

2022 PREDICTIONS

they all be owned by Pearson or PowerSchool? I'm not sure, but it wouldn't surprise me if by the end of this there are only 3 or 4 big-time players in this space.

THE GREAT RESIGNATION WILL FORCE SCHOOLS TO THINK DIFFERENTLY ABOUT ONLINE TEACHERS

We are in the midst of what many are calling the "Great Resignation," and with the shift to increased remote work, people and companies realize they can do a lot more with less. (Some folks have even realized they can work multiple careers at the same time, like yours truly.) Schools are feeling the pressure from this with both a shortage of substitute teachers and superintendents migrating to retirement at a rapid pace.

One of the biggest obstacles secondary schools face is what can be offered to students in terms of courses. Small districts are limited in offerings based on who is qualified to teach which class. For example, if a group of students wants to take Italian as a foreign language, they have to have a teacher who works physically at the school to be able to offer it. Many school leaders also are burdened by traditional thinking when it comes to hiring, believing a full-time employee is the only way to go. So now you might have a teacher teaching Italian one period per day and then other "catch all" subjects the rest to make up their paycheck.

I predict this year we will see a rise in schools outsourcing course offerings via part-time online instructors. Companies such as ElevateK12 and Rex Academy have already started to realize this, and are providing part-time certified educators to remotely teach some of those hard-to-reach classes. With the shift to 1-to-1 devices, schools will use vacated computer labs to serve as staging ground for students still attending class in-person. Alternatively, students can take a "zero hour" course while at home on their own time, much like you would take a Master Class online.

TIKTOK UNIVERSITY WILL LAUNCH

Those clever dances. Those funny little reaction videos. The insane challenges. Kids (and adults) love TikTok. It's now the second-most social media site used by teenagers (after YouTube). Much like YouTube, people are drawn to this tool for both entertainment and information. My prediction is that this year we will see the launch of what I'm calling TikTok University or TikTokU for short.

This education-friendly version of the popular social media platform will feature teacher influencers rapping to the times tables or dancing on the periodic table. (Yes, I said "on.") Just like TeachersPayTeachers, TikTokU will be a great source of additional revenue for underpaid educators while also keeping students engaged and inspired.

Now if only the next big TikTok challenge would be to surprise your teacher with a coffee instead of destroying the school restroom….

ISTE22 WILL FEEL LIKE A HIGH SCHOOL REUNION

A lot has happened since the last in-person ISTE in Philadelphia in 2019. Jobs have changed. People have gained and lost weight. Educators have gone three years without being able to network and connect in person. And now we are all going to be together for the first time in a long time in America's most epic party city, New Orleans.

> THE CONVERSATION AROUND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND CREATIVITYSHOULD BE HAPPENING IN SCHOOLS YESTERDAY. MAKING CREATIVE OVERLAYS, VIRTUALMURALS, AND LIVING POSTERS MEANS AN EXCITING FUTURE POSSIBILITY FOR HOW KIDSDEMONSTRATE THEIR LEARNING.

WHAT COULD GO WRONG?

For the last three years we've experienced online happy hours and virtual conferences, but coming this summer that all ends (fingers crossed). As someone who's been at a couple of major state conferences in the past month, I can tell you the release of pressure is real. Educators need to mix and mingle with like-minded souls and catch up on old times. We are in the people business and not being around our PLN has really drained us emotionally and mentally. I for one am excited to see the spectacle…er…magical experience that awaits us in The Big Easy.

AN AMAZON "ALEXA" ACADEMY WILL BE ESTABLISHED

Do I think teachers will be replaced by robots? No. Do I think some of our time spent teaching basic facts should change? Absolutely. We are facing a "time famine" in schools yet we still focus much of our day and energy addressing basic facts that our phones or digital assistants can answer. Instead, we should be spending time helping kids ask critical thinking questions and taking risks.

What better way to demonstrate that than by using artificial intelligence in the classroom? With AI, teachers can demonstrate how to get Alexa to listen to you when you want to hear that next great Doja Cat song, or how Google Home can help you figure out what the square root of pi is.

My prediction is that Amazon will take the lead on this and attempt to implement the first-ever "Alexa Academy." Teacher facilitators in the classrooms can help students ask questions, but the room will be outfitted with one-to-one Amazon Echo Dots.

I would recommend for those seriously considering this that for the education addition, each Echo should be given a personalized "wake" word so the Echos don't get confused. I'm sorry, could you repeat that again? I'm having trouble understanding you….

A NEW DIGITAL DIVIDE EMERGES

The gap between those with and without access in schools has rapidly narrowed. The digital divide is still a real thing, but now I'm seeing other trends when it comes to technology use in schools, particularly when it comes to academic support. Underserved communities traditionally use edtech as remediation and repetition practice of core academic areas. Meanwhile, affluent districts promote project-based activities and entrepreneurial classes that employ edtech more creatively.

I wrote a more extended thought piece on this phenomenon recently when reviewing how schools support students struggling academically. With 20% of ESSER funds earmarked for "learning loss," it's natural for edtech to play a role in this recovery.

I think this year we will see a new digital divide emerge in terms of how we are using edtech. The truth is this isn't a new phenomenon, however, now that we are closer to ubiquitous access we will start to see some gaps widening being the haves and have nots.

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2022 PREDICTIONS

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AUGMENTED REALITY WILL PUSH THE NEED FOR NFT EDUCATION

We've all enjoyed playing with our Merge cubes and watching fun little videos using HP Reveal (now defunct), but generally augmented reality (AR) has been largely a consumptive edtech tool, which is why many companies have come and gone when it comes to implementing AR in the classroom (remember Aurasma?) The other major roadblock for AR is that it has been limited to those with iOS or Android devices.

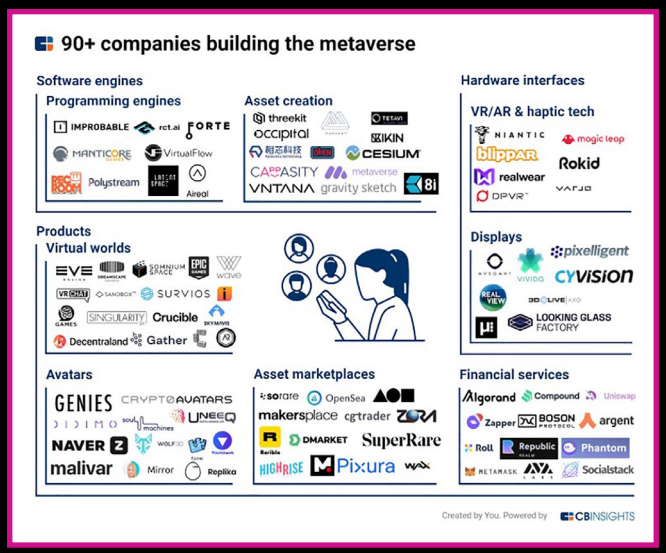
These challenges have kept AR off on the sidelines and saved for those special "Fun Friday" classroom activities. Now with companies such as Australian-based Eyejack and its AR Academy, I predict AR will finally start to shift to the creative side of education. Eyejack even recently became available on platforms such as Chromebooks, giving students another method to create and express themselves. This shift toward device-agnostic use of AR removes one more barrier for what I see will be a major new creative outlet for kids.

The interesting thing about creating in the AR space is that now students can actually sell their virtual creations as non-fungible tokens (NFTs). The conversation around intellectual property and creativity should be happening in schools yesterday. Making creative overlays, virtual murals, and living posters means an exciting future possibility for how kids demonstrate their learning (and possibly earn a few bucks as well).

METAVERSE WILL BE A NOT-SO-FUN VERSION OF READY PLAYER ONE.

The book (and movie) Ready Player One gave us a preview of what this new idea known as "The Metaverse" might look like. Amazing avatars interacting in cool zero-gravity dance clubs and races through New York City with monster trucks were just the periphery, but at the heart of the book was how education was now freely accessible to all with a VR headset.

Companies are now scrambling to throw their energy and money into building this Metaverse (see graphic at right) but will it really be like the book? Will I be able to fly on a luck dragon or play some classic Commodore 64 games in a virtual representation of my childhood home?



I think the short-term experience will be a little clunky and not nearly as fun, however, the potential for what the Metaverse can bring to schools could finally change the face of education. This could potentially create another digital divide when it comes with headsets, and raise concerns for screen-time warriors, but I, for one, am all in. Now, does anyone know a good real estate agent on the Metaverse?

MY NEW BOOK WILL BE A SUCCESS BECAUSE OF FAILURE

Every year I predict I'll write some sort of book. Almost every year that prediction fails. This year is an exception as I just finished my latest book Ready Set FAIL!, which is set to launch in late January 2022 (pre-order here!). This book embodies much of what I believe we need more of in education…failure. I have always taken risks in my life that I think have had a positive impact on either my own learning or that of others. This was not something that was nurtured during my own experience as a student in K-12 or even at higher education institutions.

Just writing this book and having it published is a success in my world (shout out to XFactorEDU publishing for taking a chance on me). We are not going to survive as an institution of learning unless we start making great strides in using risk-taking and failure to help unlock creativity in our students (and adults). My prediction (and hope) is this book will motivate some schools to rethink the traditional method in which we deliver learning to our students.

Speaking of failures, I'm excited to see how many of these predictions will come true in the coming year. Like the Netflix series Black Mirror, all of these seem plausible, if not possible, with the right motivation and creative risk-takers in our space. The future is bright and uncertain all at same time. After all, who could have predicted a global pandemic would bring about a change to our daily lives? That's one bold prediction I failed to make, and I'm okay with that.

Happy 2022 everyone…here's to the future!

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RESET & REIMAGINE: PLANNING FOR TOMORROW'S EDUCATION

At Tech & Learning's recent Northeast Regional Leadership Summit, education leaders came together to prepare the education challenges ahead.

By Erik Ofgang and Ray Bendici

During the recent Tech & Learning Northeast Regional Leadership Summit at the stunning STEM Center of Kean University in New Jersey, educators came together in a relaxed, face-to-face setting to talk candidly about how they're recovering from the impact of COVID and focusing on the needs of students and faculty.

In addition to sharing what's going on in their districts, attendees got to listen and learn about the great work going on throughout the region, including an impassioned discussion of rethinking PK-12 education, featuring Erskine Glover, superintendent of Hillside Public Schools in New Jersey, Dr. Nathan Fisher, superintendent of Roselle Public Schools, and Jeannine Lanphaer, supervisor of science and mathematics for North Brunswick Township Public Schools. The opening panel was moderated by Dr. Sancha Gray, Kean University's Senior VP of Entrepreneurial Ed Initiatives.

At various points throughout the day, attendees were divided into smaller working discussion groups to focus on certain topics and detail what they're doing in their own districts.

"You have to set the tone for your department, and potentially, your whole school system, on what's acceptable and what's not," Doersch says. "And that is really going to make a difference on the retention of diverse employees, if you're lucky enough to get them in the door."

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

In regard to experiential learning, in which students "learn by doing," mostly involving hands-on experiences, and then reflect on the process, summit attendees shared the challenges of trying to provide this kind of instruction within the limits of a pandemic.

RESET & REIMAGINE

For example, Mike Gaskell, a principal in East Brunswick Schools in New Jersey, talked about how his teachers have been using a lot of interactive learning sites, as well as gamification tools and apps, depending on the content area. The appeal is that these tools can be used at home or remotely, and so far it's been a mix.

A challenge with so many tool choices is getting everyone to use the same one. Peter James, assistant director of technology at Plainsboro Regional School District in New Jersey, said, "Sometimes the dam breaks, someone finds one tool, and then shares it with everyone." Consequently, the instruction staff has been focusing on how experiences are constructed and the student reaction, particularly the reflective process, so learning can be properly assessed.

In that vein, Jackie Patanio, edtech instruction lead, New York City Department of Education, talked about the challenge of finding particular tools to boost engagement, because "it looks different for every student." So finding those flexible tools that allow that has been a priority. It's also created a need to rely on vendors for professional development, which comes with its own set of challenges.

At Roselle Public Schools in New Jersey, many lessons are project-based and end with instruction on how to apply soft skills, according to



Evenide Fanfan-Vilcean, supervisor of instructional technology & CTE.

Another educator shared how in their district, students have access to a marine science academy and get to go out on a boat. They also get to pull fish out of the water and actually touch things, which helps them better retain lessons and understand aquatic science and related subjects such as chemistry. They're not just looking at the periodic table, they're literally "in the tank."

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VISIT THE AWARDS WEBSITE TO FIND OUT MORE AND NOMINATE NOW!

RESET & REIMAGINE

CREDIT: FUTURE PUBLISHING



RETHINKING LEARNING SPACES

As learning has been changed by the pandemic, school buildings and classrooms have had to be reconfigured, and in some cases, reconstructed, to accommodate the new ways students have become accustomed to learning.

For example, students were learning on couches, beds, and floors, said Joel Handler, Director of Technology in New Jersey's Hillsborough Township, during a recent Tech & Learning regional leadership summit. He added that some actually learned better this way. "Now they're back to desks," he said, adding that we need to be mindful of those new preferences. "We should remember that kids are kids."

"Do we really want to take this all back to pre-COVID?" asked Jeannine Lanphear, supervisor of science and mathematics at North Brunswick Public Township Schools in New Jersey. "We learned flexibility and it shouldn't go away."

"COVID showed us that we can reimagine the classroom space," agreed Erskine Glover, superintendent of Hillside Public Schools in New Jersey.

To that extent, in New Jersey's Hillsborough Township one of the school libraries was transformed into a cafeteria for half the day, and became a more open area. "We are able to have more meaningful conversations at small tables and pods," said Handler. "Kids are showing a different level of maturity."

In Wichita Falls ISD in Texas, to maximize building and learning space, a recently built high school features an innovative auditorium with ceiling-to-floor partitions that can divide it into as many as six lecture-style classrooms. The flexibility of being able to create smaller spaces allows educators to get more use out of the auditorium than normal.

> COVID SHOWED US THAT WE CAN REIMAGINE THE CLASSROOM SPACE

Physically transforming learning spaces is only part of the equation. Peter James, assistant director of technology at Plainsboro Regional School District in New Jersey, says one of the challenges is getting instruction staff on board to rethink their spaces. "We've untethered the teacher from the front of the room and given them the tools to do that," James said. However, "We may have spaces that have evolved but teachers who have not."

"We gave freedom to students by giving freedom to teachers," said Pamela Nathan, CAO at Plainsboro Regional School District. The district took what worked well during the pandemic in terms of new learning models and let 30 teachers spearhead the effort to spread that across the district.

In Wichita Falls ISD in Texas, many of the newer buildings are designed around pods, which affects instruction. To get teachers to evolve their instruction as well, the district started by supporting 40 teachers who were innovative, and using them as examples to build interest across the district, said Mike Kuhrt, superintendent. "We picked kid magnets, people who kids wanted to be in their classrooms," he said. They were positive and focused on doing what was best for the students.

"Once we got the teachers and had them showing stuff, we then went to principals to get them interested," he said. These changes were never mandated, and the first 40 teachers led changes in PD for the others.

"They just don't know what they don't know," said Shad McGaha, CTO for Wichita Falls ISD, of the other teachers. "So showing them that is critical."





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TECH MANAGEMENT

The pandemic has accelerated the use of technology in education dramatically, requiring IT professionals, school administrators, and teachers to implement, use, and manage devices, platforms, and software on a whole new level.

"We could've given hours and hours of professional development and they weren't picking up on it, and then suddenly they've learned more in a one-and-a-half years than they have previously," said Mike Gaskell, principal in East Brunswick Schools in New Jersey. The challenge is now sorting out what worked and what didn't. And now that many classrooms are more of a hybrid learning environment now, it's important to also find a balance with those traditional tools that are worth sustaining, he added.

The pandemic pushed teachers to try things because they had no choice but now the focus is moving beyond that, said Peter James, assistant director of technology at West Windsor - Plainsboro Regional School District in New Jersey. "So now our role has had to change from, 'Here's how you use this tool,' to 'Well, what are you trying to do with this program?'"

As learning and pedagogy has been changed by the pandemic, so has classroom tech needs.

Daniel Kushner, director of math and science for Middletown Township Public Schools in New Jersey, noted that many teachers have multiple monitors and devices in front of them to cover all the apps they're using, meanwhile students have one small Chromebook with four tabs open and they don't know how to manage it. So getting students up to the speed of learning continues to be a challenge.

James noted that 75% of his district's high schoolers need a device more powerful than a Chromebook, which raises the question of what device is the right one to have there and which one is best to start with in elementary grades. He added that secondary school students are increasingly using their own devices, but if the district could figure a way to have everyone using the same ones, it would be easier to manage in terms of software and security. He suggested that deciding to buy laptops for high school students might work out better for all involved in the long run.

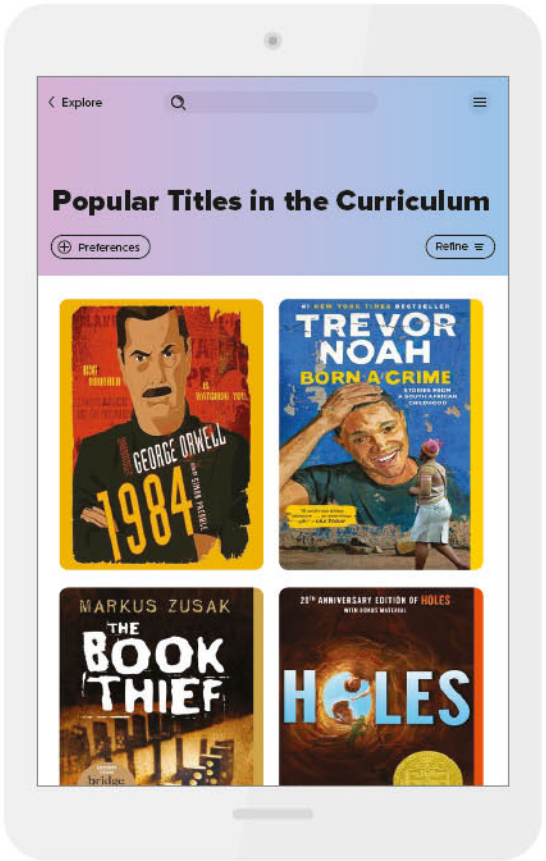
Shad McGaha, CTO of Wichita Falls ISD in Texas, shared how they have used app virtualization for a handful of classes, such as Photoshop or architecture software. In conjunction with that, the district used grant monies to purchase 8gb Chromebooks to provide more computing power for students.

Of course, just providing better technology doesn't automatically solve problems. Theodore Ragavas, director of technology at Monmouth Regional High School in New Jersey, talked about how many of the students in his district don't really know how to use laptops, especially since they're not often exposed to them at the elementary level. He suggested a statewide office that could be tasked to unify tech instruction.

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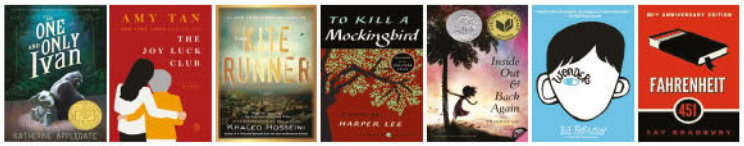




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DATA MANAGEMENT

With the increased use of technology over the past two years, acquiring, tracking, and managing data has become a top priority for all school districts.

One of the biggest challenges is organizing data and providing access to it, said Mike Gaskell, a principal in East Brunswick Schools in New Jersey. He discussed how teachers have had a difficult time trying to navigate data dashboards and understanding exactly what they need to extract from it, a common concern at many districts.

"Sometimes too much data is not good," said Jackie Patanio, edtech instruction lead for the New York City Department of Education-SIBO. With so many different platforms to navigate, trying to find where purposes are served best can be a challenge, as is determining what data set is going to work best.

"What data is relevant to you?" is the question we need to ask, agreed Erskine Glover, superintendent of Hillside Public Schools in New Jersey. "What do you need to be successful with THIS problem?" The goal needs to be to make data easier to use.

Joe Kuzo, director of technology for Quakertown Community School District in Pennsylvania, said that their district works with a company that has been able to provide the specific data they need. "At first we wanted everything, but then as we progressed, we realized that we really wanted what works best for us."

In Roselle Borough Public Schools in New Jersey, PLCs have been created for teachers to get together to specifically discuss data, according to Karen Tanner-Oliphant, the district's supervisor of Research & Assessment. Teachers meet every week and discuss what they see in the district's data collection platforms to help create outcomes.

Another aspect of data management is tied to monitoring return on investment in digital tools.

"One of the hardest things is that not everything you're doing in the classroom is quantifiable," said Frank Ciccitto, assistant director of technology at Owen J. Roberts School District in Pennsylvania. Like many other districts, decision-makers there are using data to make sure that many of the originally free-trial platforms and tools that were implemented during the pandemic are worth investing in over the long term. Part of that is developing a strong vetting process for these tools and platforms that includes the IT department, teachers, and students.

> ONE OF THE HARDEST THINGS IS THAT NOT EVERYTHING YOU'RE DOING IN THE CLASSROOM IS QUANTIFIABLE

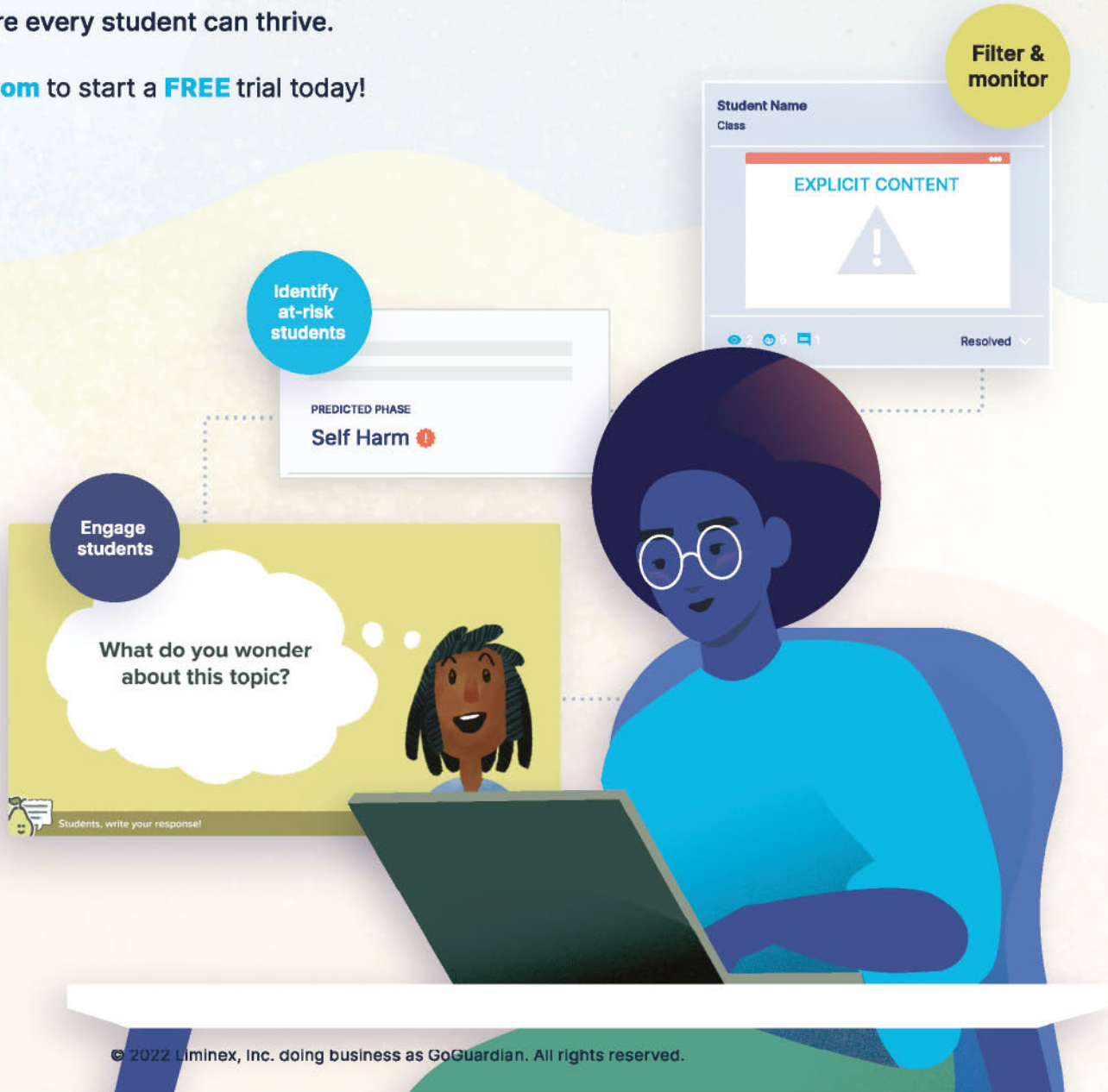
In regard to vetting digital tools, Pamela Nathan, CAO at West Windsor Plainsboro Regional School District in New Jersey, discussed how her team focuses on how students learn and matches the data and tech needs to support that. "We're never married to a tool, but married to a concept," she said.

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CHANGING PEDAGOGY

It is no secret that the pandemic has influenced pedagogy by accelerating existing trends and pushing education in new directions. One trend that summit attendees spoke about at length was a movement in classroom design toward spaces, tools, and furniture that better supports active learning and student voice and choice.

Rick Cave, director of technology for The West Windsor - Plainsboro Regional School District in New Jersey, kicked off the discussion by talking about ways in which classroom redesign has helped power new pedagogy in his district. "Our classrooms are designed very traditionally, so for those teachers who want to do a more project-based, group-based, and student-centered learning, they actually have barriers in the layout of the classroom," Cave told Tech & Learning. However, these new classrooms are designed to eliminate those barriers.

New designs discussed by Cave and others included more comfortable and moveable furniture, allowing teachers and students to access display screens from anywhere in the room and tables designed to foster group and collaborative work.

Evenide Fanfan-Vilcean, Supervisor of Instructional Technology & CTE at Roselle Public Schools District in Union, New Jersey, said that "fidgeters" benefit greatly from things such as the ability to stand up and move rolling stools around the classroom. Henry Dixon, director of operational technology at Roselle Public Schools added that the district has been updating access points to technology to allow teachers to hold classes outside or in areas outside of the traditional classroom.

Summit attendees also shared the challenges with implementing new pedagogy including staff shortages and lingering resistance to change. Successfully implementing longtime solutions has also been challenging. For instance, several summit attendees noted declining math scores within their district. Farrah Mahan, assistant superintendent of Cherry Hill Public School District, shared how in her district they are trying to help students improve math with before- and after-school tutoring, but students have less time outside of school for such efforts than they did 10 or 15 years ago. "Most of our kids are overscheduled and overprescribed," she said.

Some attendees also noted that there is still work to be done in how educators effectively utilize technology in the classroom. "[In lockdown] Teachers who struggled were ones who went from doing whole-class instruction in person and then tried to replicate that online," said Mike Kuhrt, superintendent of Wichita Falls ISD in Texas. "Now all lessons are posted online [even in in-person classes] so if a child is out, they can keep up. Even though our kids may be digital natives, they have to be taught to use tech properly. And we have to teach our teachers how to teach the kids to use technology."



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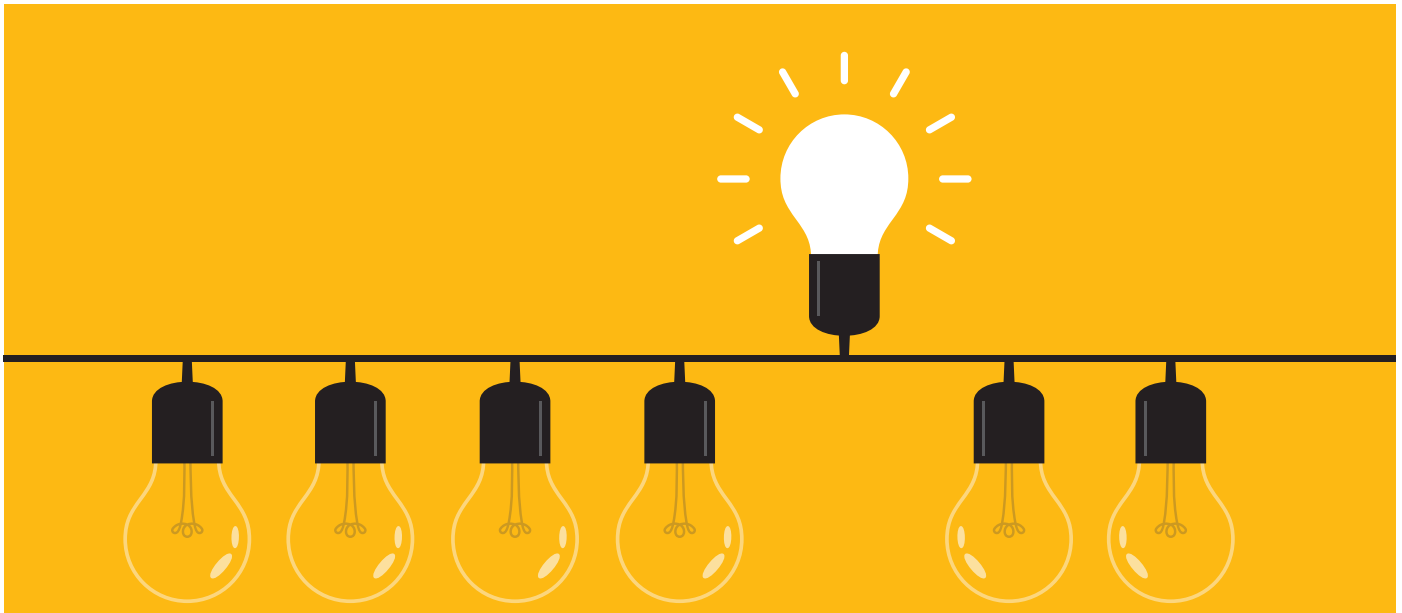
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LEARNING REALIGNMENT

Learning realignment is a term coined by educator Carl Hooker as a less pejorative way to discuss learning changes that have occurred since the pandemic began. He conceived of the term "learning realignment" as an alternative to the more common learning loss. "[Learning loss] implies that students have lost parts of this past year that they'll never get back. It doesn't acknowledge the many other things, mostly non-academic, that students have learned during this pandemic," Hooker wrote.

Summit attendees discussed this broader definition of the type of learning students have experienced since the start of the pandemic. Many attendees noted that their students have grown, though not necessarily in ways traditionally assessed on tests.

"We don't have ways to measure what was gained, and how they grew," said Pamela Nathan, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction for West Windsor-Plainsboro Regional Schools in New Jersey.

"A lot of kids learned awesome life and technical skills while at home," said Evenide Fanfan-Vilcean, Supervisor of Instructional Technology & CTE at Roselle Public Schools District in Union. "They learned how to be responsible. Personal gains that we don't know how to measure. We need to create a space for them to celebrate what they learned. Some kids thrived virtually."

"The pandemic was an amplifier," said Peter James, assistant director of technology for West Windsor - Plainsboro Regional School District. James added great teachers often became greater while those who struggled previously struggled more. "Kids with anxiety were even more anxious. There was trauma there before the pandemic happened."

> A LOT OF KIDS LEARNED AWESOME LIFE AND TECHNICAL SKILLS WHILE AT HOME

Nicole Sapello, director of instruction for Linwood Public Schools in New Jersey, saw a similar amplification of what was already occurring with students. "We didn't see new learning gaps but a widening of gaps that already existed," Sapello said. "Kids who were already behind are further behind." Sapello believes a return to more typical assessments and in-person classes as well as a focus on SEL will help close these gaps.

As districts look to make up for the learning loss that occurred, Daniel Hemberger, assistant superintendent of the Manville School District in New Jersey, said school leaders and other stakeholders need to understand that the pandemic is ongoing. "We're not out of it yet," he said. "It's important to communicate this to everyone. Last year, we were doing the best we could. We don't have the data to say what the loss was. I hope that people recognize that we are still in that crisis. Trying to accelerate them--but it's not reasonable to expect them to get back to exactly where they should be."

Michael Gaskell, principal at Hammarskjold Middle School in East Brunswick, New Jersey, kicked off the discussion by sharing researched back strategies for "deep work" a state of distraction-free concentration that is helpful to both students and teachers. He shared research that showed how people tend to work better in a coffeehouse because the ambient noise creates a sweet spot of mild distraction that helps concentration. Various websites that recreate coffeehouse ambient noise are available, and playing these sounds in a classroom can aid students in focusing. Gaskell also recommended using breathing techniques with students. "Since anxiety is the enemy of optimal learning states, reducing stress and the effects of trauma are the ideal counterpoint," he wrote. "Various breathing techniques are available and I recommend the 4-7-8 method."

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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The culture around professional development has evolved throughout the pandemic for the better, said many summit attendees. Online options have made participating in PD more convenient and scalable, and there is a new spirit of collaboration among teachers.

Michael Gaskell, principal at Hammarskjold Middle School in East Brunswick, New Jersey, shared how his school has adopted an ed camp concept that is powered by teachers helping one another. "Don't ever let a good idea die in a corner of your school," he said. "Teachers have good ideas."

Ed camps give educators a chance to bond and collaborate across subjects. "They realize they can carry ideas across content areas. I think it's probably one of the most powerful ways to get really good PD -- teacher-directed and teacher-led," Gaskell said.

Sandra Paul, director of information technology at Township of Union Public Schools in New Jersey, said her district has had similar success with teacher-led ed camps.

"Teachers learned how others were doing great, innovative things," she said.

Many summit attendees also shared how they implemented successful online PD programs.

Joel Handler, director of technology at Hillsborough Township Board of Education, said virtual PD has gone well. "We've had teachers on their exercise bike participating in the class," he said. His district is considering expanding its online PD offerings, and are drawing on teacher expertise by offering $50 per hour to teach PD classes.

Cherry Hill Public School District is also seeing success with online PD. Farrah Mahan, assistant superintendent, said they host more than 70-plus synchronous PD sessions in the summer using Google Classroom as their LMS.

As successful as some efforts have been, substitute teacher shortages have contributed to staff burnout and made scheduling sessions more difficult. That's part of the reason there is a growing recognition that educator SEL needs to be part of the PD plan in every district.

"We try to have principals build in SEL days at the elementary schools throughout the month," Mahan said. "One size doesn't fit all -- 19 schools, 19 personalities."

The same is true for each individual teacher, and there is increasing recognition from school leaders that educators need to put on their own oxygen masks first before helping others.



"DON'T EVER LET A GOOD IDEA DIE IN A CORNER OF YOUR SCHOOL

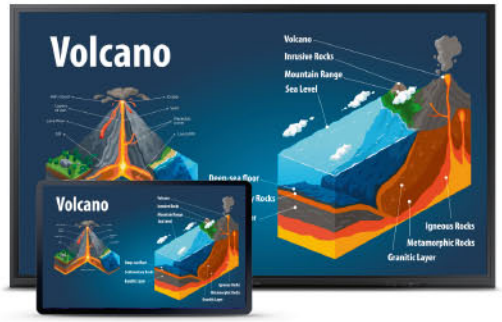


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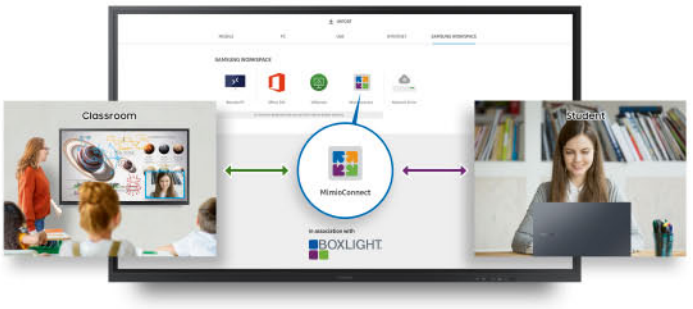
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DATA PRIVACY

Increased technology use in schools and better data gathering means that more should also be done to protect student and educator privacy as schools are increasingly targets of ransomware attacks, phishing scams, and other data breaches.

Between August and September of this year, educational organizations were the target of more than 5.8 million malware attacks, accounting for more than half of all such attacks. Along with retail companies, educational institutions were the most likely to be targeted by ransomware attacks, according to a survey conducted by Sophos, an IT security company.

Henry Dixon, director of operational technology at Roselle Public Schools in Union, New Jersey, says a phishing test of his district showed they were 81 percent phish prone, far above the 16 percent average common to industry. Dixon was able to use that report to get better funding for data security. The district has a five-minute cybersecurity training every Monday for staff and sends monthly fake phishing emails to test employees' ability to guard against them.

Other summit attendees shared how their districts are combating phishing. "We have real phishing tests every day," says Marc Plevinsky, director of technology for Cherry Hill Public Schools in New Jersey. These "tests" come in the form of real phishing emails school employees get.

Joe Kuzo, director of technology for the Quakertown Community School District in Pennsylvania, said though his district does some phishing tests he believes time and money is best spent ensuring the network itself is secure and will not succumb to a phishing attack. "I don't worry about a lot of this stuff because it can't infect anything," he says.

However, other summit attendees shared how they felt the same way about their network security but were hacked anyhow. "For every step that we're prepared, they're two steps ahead of us," said Farrah Mahan, assistant superintendent, Cherry Hill Public School District. Her district colleague, Marc Plevinsky added, "These are businesses that this is their job is to try and find a way in."

Many summit attendees agreed that schools should stay vigilant by conducting robust network penetration ("pen") tests, educating their staff about phishing and other hacking risks, and by opening a line of communication with the appropriate law enforcement agencies in the area around their districts.

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