PAPER

K-12 leadership guide:

8 priorities for 2023

■ **ESSER-aligned**   ▲ **Evidence-based**   ● **Equity-focused**

Introduction

Education is evolving rapidly. And to ensure our students are ready for the future, we have to embrace sweeping changes.

Now is the time for education leaders to stay nimble—evaluating recent progress while embracing novel opportunities that can benefit the system long-term. The approaches and ideas we add, hold on to, or let go of now will make a difference for generations to come.

To advance into the next phase of K-12, the new school year provides us an exciting chance to ask this question: **What's working, and what needs work?**

Over the last couple of years, Paper has talked to nearly 150 educators and leaders nationwide about their challenges, strategies, and dreams surrounding a better future in K-12. In this ebook, we compiled examples from the field along with research and official guidance that speak to ideas of equity, efficacy, and fiscal responsibility in the industry.

As the third installment in this series, Paper™ presents our "**8 priorities for 2022-23**." Each priority is aligned with Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) parameters, evidence-based, and equity-focused. All in all, we're incredibly excited to see how K-12 leaders rise to current challenges and meet them with innovative solutions.

In support and admiration of your efforts,

Philip A. Cutler
CEO, Paper
phil@paper.co | @pacutler

> **Note**: *This ebook wouldn't have been possible without the educational leaders and partners that participated in Paper's interview series, panel discussions, and webinars over the last three years—leaders whose work we are committed to supporting holistically. Thank you for going above and beyond every day for learners and educators everywhere.*

At a glance

Educational priorities for recovery and success in 2023

1 Funding allocation

2 Evidence-based learning acceleration

3 Whole-child and community support

4 Student-centered learning

5 Teacher empowerment

6 Community trust

7 Data and diagnostic systems

8 Real-world preparation

Aligned with:

- ESSER I, II, III allowable uses
- Evidence-based interventions
- Equity-first approaches

And informed by:

- Data and research insights
- State and federal guidance
- Examples from the field

1 Funding allocation

> Flush with massive sums of funding, looming deadlines, and the pressure to show return on their investments, districts must figure out how to responsibly, equitably, and effectively address both the urgent and long-term needs of the K-12 system.

Move toward a sustainability mindset

AASA, The School Superintendents Association, released 2022 survey results from hundreds of district leaders across the country on how they're utilizing federal funds to respond to the pandemic before obligation deadlines.

Three California district leaders told Paper they're shifting their thinking from immediate needs to long-term sustainability. It will be beneficial for districts to zero in on solutions that make a lasting impact going forward. After all, educators are more likely to champion and adopt new technology if they believe it will provide long-term benefits. We're already seeing how educational services such as mental health support, tutoring, and tools supporting data analysis will remain staples of districts' processes years from now.

To roll out successful and long-lasting programs, districts must prepare for the reality that the cost of a device itself is the most affordable component.[1] Two district technology leaders shared tips on managing "total cost of ownership" of new programs and achieving cost neutrality.

Districts should also employ multiple measures for ROI— from stakeholder feedback or user engagement to an academic outcome. Over the long term, assessments like these can be especially useful for determining which applications to keep and which to cut. Additionally, pay attention to any redundant features.

> "
>
> *How does an initiative relate to students and your overarching mission, vision, and values for your school district?*
>
> — *Seth Heeren,*
> *Assistant Superintendent of Business Services, San Jacinto Unified School District, California*

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[1] "Start With Why: 5 Steps for Effective TCO Management At Your District," Paper, April 16, 2021

Zero in on the mission

Three California technology leaders explained to Paper how it's essential to [stay focused on your North Star](#)—and that means keeping aligned with your district's overarching mission. When districts have a clear picture of the educational outcomes they want students to achieve, it's natural for spending decisions to flow from this shared vision.

Bringing teachers and educational leaders into the conversation provides a unique and useful perspective. Regardless of what a specific solution says it will accomplish, educators must champion the technology for students to truly benefit.

> **"**
>
> *I think we have a moral imperative to understand that with every decision we make, we're either closing the equity gap or perpetuating the equity gap. To me, there are no neutral decisions.*

Dr. PJ Caposey
Superintendent, Meridian Community Unit School District 223, Illinois

2 Evidence-based learning acceleration

Learning acceleration is the practice of providing scaffolding and other support to fill critical learning gaps while helping students successfully remain on their intended grade-level trajectories. Researchers have identified a few key strategies that are most promising here: expanded learning time, high-dosage tutoring, and robust relationships.

> ✓ *Student achievement data from 2021-22 shows promising learning recovery trends for students grades three to eight, but it remains lower than expected had the pandemic not occurred, according to NWEA. This trend should offer district leaders "hope and continued urgency" around the issue.*[1]

Implement expanded learning time, high-dosage tutoring, and robust relationships

Expanded learning time—including high-quality summer or after-school programming—can promote positive student outcomes, specifically for high-needs students. Such opportunities should be aligned to specific learning goals and meaningfully connect to students' lives outside of school.[2]

Research points to high-dosage tutoring programs as a key approach for learning acceleration compared to other interventions—especially when they're designed to meet evidence-based criteria for hiring, scheduling, group size, and similar factors.[3, 4]

To help deliver tutoring as cost-effectively, frequently, and widely as needed, districts across the country are partnering with organizations that can support their high-impact tutoring implementations. K-12 leaders need to be confident that the solutions they adopt effectively impact their communities and satisfy the standards of the Department of Education—as well as consider programs that have Every Student Succeeds Act Level IV certification and up.

Build relationships

To support academic, social, and emotional growth, the White House urged districts to use funds from the American Rescue Plan—including state and local funds—to make enrichment and similar programs available to students year-round.[5]

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[1] "Student Achievement in 2021–2022: Cause for Hope and Continued Urgency," NWEA, July 2022
[2] "Restarting and Reinventing School: Learning in the Time of COVID and Beyond," Learning Policy Institute, August 2020
[3] "Using ESSER II Funds To Accelerate Student Learning," State Collaborative on Reforming Education, 2020
[4] "Accelerating Student Learning with High-Dosage Tutoring," Annenberg Institute at Brown University, February 2021
[5] "Fact Sheet: Biden-Harris Administration Launches National Effort to Support Student Success," The White House, July 5, 2022

Unfinished learning will not be remedied through academic interventions alone. Strong, culturally responsive connections can help catalyze healthy development, motivation, and academic outcomes— all while mitigating heightened stress, anxiety, and trauma. A 2021 brief from The Education Trust and MDRC further explores the effective elements of relationship-building strategies in schools, including training, group size, and activities.

"I tell our teachers that every single one of our students needs to have at least one adult in that school they can connect with," mentioned Rick Surrency, superintendent at Florida's Putnam County School District. Providing meaningful and positive interactions with staff members helps students stay fully present during the school day. There might be outside stressors that are weighing on students, but the ability to feel truly seen in the school community can have immense benefits.

Ben Markley, CTO at California's Hemet Unified School District, explained that the fixation on learning loss in education needs to be replaced with an equitable, empathy-first approach. This involves incorporating the perspectives and experiences of families and students into decisions around instructional and grading practices.

> " *Closing achievement gaps is no longer enough. Districts must ensure instruction is highly personalized for every student to accelerate learning, improve whole-child and wraparound supports, and build community and connectedness.*
>
> — *Dr. Ryan Smith, Superintendent, Monrovia Unified School District, California*

> " *Paper is there whenever a kid has a question. Students look forward to working with their tutor, and they can go to school the next day confident and proud of what they're capable of doing.*
>
> **Taneesha Thomas,** *Director of Instructional Technology, Franklin Park School District 84, Illinois*

3 Whole-child and community support

Learning is multidimensional. Districts can position students for success by prioritizing holistic well-being and furthering progress toward true equity and inclusion.

Focus on whole-child support

NWEA and AASA have outlined how districts can provide more targeted wraparound supports for high-needs students, including those with disabilities, learners without a home, and English-language learners (ELLs).

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is a national concern, and district leaders are investing more and more of their funding into such programs. According to interviews conducted by Education Week, SEL experts said that more important than devoting class time to SEL is effectively integrating its skills into everything students are doing— both during and after school.[1] Tied to the success of these initiatives is building a psychologically safe and supportive school culture and climate.

New Jersey's Morris School District uses online tutoring to provide equitable academic support for students who can't access after-school programs because they have to go home and babysit, work, or both. Similarly, California's Val Verde Unified School District, where roughly 1 in 5 learners is an ELL, is concerned about students in need of more resources. Engagement data demonstrates that Paper helps reach them.

> "
> *With Paper, you can get tutoring in both English and Spanish, which is really valuable if you have a Spanish-speaking parent.*
>
> — *Blaise DiGirolamo, Chief Academic Officer, Carmel Unified School District, California*

✓ *Studies demonstrate that students of color, low-income students, ELLs, and learners with disabilities have a higher likelihood of experiencing chronic stress or trauma. Besides this, experiencing trauma early in life can have a negative impact on students' education for years to come.[2]*

✓ *ELLs make up around 10% of the public school population, yet their families often do not have sufficient access to digital resources, school information in their language, or support personnel who can speak with them.[3]*

[1] Lauraine Langreo, "How Much Time Should Schools Spend on Social-Emotional Learning?" Education Week, May 24, 2022
[2] COVID-19 Impact Memo 8: Nonacademic Supports," State Collaborative on Reforming Education, 2020
[3] Learning Beyond COVID-19: A Vision for Thriving in Public Education," National Education Association, March 5, 2021

Invest in maintaining equitable, inclusive practices

To make what they teach relevant to those they teach it to, educators must allow inclusive, identity-safe, and culturally responsive practices and ensure learning is culturally connected.[1]

The Alliance for Resource Equity suggests district leaders ask these three questions: Does each student have access to strong teachers? Does each student have access to teaching practices that are engaging, culturally relevant, and standards-aligned? Does the teacher workforce reflect student diversity?[2]

Superintendent Dr. Elizabeth Lolli shared how her district, Ohio's Dayton Public Schools, looks at disparities surrounding discipline, attendance, graduation rates, and college credit application. For example, is there an equal percentage of white students and students of color taking courses for college credit? If not, what's causing that?

> "Our equity policy spells out that the board, administration, and all of our staff will work together aggressively to eliminate inequitable practices, systems, and structures. … [These] can create unfair advantages for some while disadvantaging others.
>
> — Dr. Anthony Lewis, Superintendent, Lawrence Public Schools, Kansas

Dr. Gudiel Crosthwaite, superintendent at California's Lynwood Unified School District, explained that his team takes time to reflect on its curriculum and ensure diverse perspectives and narratives are included. Students, families, and staffers are also involved in these conversations. In November 2020, for instance, Lynwood's board unanimously adopted a resolution that recognizes Indigenous people and land.

> "We've got to make sure we're not penalizing kids for not having support at home.

Dr. Gudiel Crosthwaite,
Superintendent, Lynwood Unified School District, California

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[1] Restarting and Reinventing School: Learning in the Time of COVID and Beyond | Executive Summary," Learning Policy Institute, accessed July 25, 2022

[2] "Teaching Quality & Diversity," Alliance for Resource Equity, accessed July 25, 2022

4 Student-centered learning

Absenteeism rates are up, and school and college enrollment rates are down. At the same time, learning acceleration isn't the only part of the solution for rebuilding students' excitement for and performance at school. Research suggests that student-centered approaches—and specifically ones that cater to students' individual needs, aptitudes, and interests—are a huge part of the solution for 2023.

Mitigate enrollment and engagement dips

Roughly 40% of the largest school districts in the United States now face staff shortages and school closures due to lowered enrollment, according to the Center on Reinventing Public Education.[1] This has significant implications for revenue.

Some districts are using pandemic funds to boost attendance, curb additional declines in enrollment, and reengage families and students in turn.[1]

Students' achievement and their enjoyment of learning might not be at odds. Although we all want children to learn how to multiply and divide, engaging instruction is both crucial and beneficial. This can be fostered by empowering teachers to balance routine and order with hands-on learning and collaborative problem-solving.[2] Another study cited by The 74 found that getting younger students to do everyday household tasks can improve both vocabulary and eagerness to learn.[3]

Two New York district leaders shared tips for securing students' engagement and boosting motivation in this panel session.

> "
> *I do have a lot of concern about how kids are going to view school. Our question right now as leaders is: What are we doing to inspire belief, inspire joy, and create connection within our buildings?*
>
> — *Dr. PJ Caposey, Superintendent, Meridian Community Unit School District 223, Illinois*

Build student agency

In a Hechinger Report article, the superintendent at Illinois' Rich Township High School District 227 explained that students can move forward post-pandemic as long as we provide new pathways that let them take charge of their own learning.

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[1] Alvin Makori and Christine Pitts, "Enrollment Drops, Staff Shortages Cause Budget Whiplash for Top School Districts," The 74, July 19, 2022

[2] Jill Barshay, "Proof Points: The Paradox of 'Good' Teaching," The Hechinger Report, July 11, 2022

[3] Diana Leyva, "How Getting Kids to Make Grocery Lists and Set the Table Can Improve Their Vocabulary and Willingness to Learn," The 74, December 14, 2021

Student-led, project-based learning that's grounded in curiosity and autonomy can do wonders to help learners reengage with school. As such, it's vital that learners have the opportunity to express their interests. Keeping an eye out for classes that tend to attract the highest enrollment can also help district leaders figure out which topics are most popular. By paying attention to students' voices and choices, administrators at New York's Honeoye Falls-Lima Central School District keyed into successful initiatives like STEAM labs and maker spaces.

Large school systems—including Columbus City Schools in Ohio, Hillsborough County Public Schools in Florida, Boston Public Schools in Massachusetts, and Clark County School District in Nevada—have put online academic supports in place to help students take charge of their own learning and build self-confidence.

> **"**
>
> *We always say the students vote with their feet. We run courses based on what the students want.*

Gene Mancuso,
Superintendent, Honeoye Falls-Lima
Central School District, New York

Embrace newfound flexibility

The pandemic has had a silver lining of allowing schools to reconsider the "when," "where," and "how" of learning—and leaders have significant opportunities to evaluate and improve upon recent innovations to facilitate learning and enrichment. Districts can use relief funding to continue fuelling personalized learning opportunities and supports beyond bell schedules and classroom walls.

Parents have indicated in surveys that if the option for online learning is there, they will take it. Disadvantaged groups are more likely to stay remote, and urban districts are already facing the challenges of this trend.[1,2] To help ensure fewer students drop out simply because they can't be in a school building for six or seven hours a day, Texas' Dallas Independent School District is building on its personalized learning model with a distance learning option for families.[3]

Even before the pandemic, there was a growing call for a shift away from the industrial model of public education to more flexible, engaging, and democratic instructional delivery models. Districts like California's Hemet Unified School District are embracing the recent development of expectations among students and teachers becoming increasingly bidirectional.[4]

[1] Anna Saavedra, Amie Rapaport, and Dan Silver, "Why Some Parents Are Sticking with Remote Learning-Even as Schools Reopen," Brookings, June 8, 2021
[2] Linda Jacobson, "Exclusive: Large Districts Losing Students; Boom Towns, Virtual Schools Growing," Yahoo!, April 6, 2022
[3] "Dallas ISD: Personalized Learning," Texas Learning Exchange, accessed July 25, 2022
[4] "Broadening Your Equity Lens: 5 Practices Beyond 1:1 Devices," Paper, May 3, 2021

5 Teacher empowerment

Rates of burnout and attrition are soaring nationwide, and classroom teachers feel overburdened. This is especially true following the onset of COVID-19 given that school districts rely on educators to ensure learning continuity and to extend themselves well beyond school hours.[1] District leaders must prioritize giving teachers support to do the work they love—and time to get the rest they deserve.

> ✓ *Teachers' stress exceeded the general population's in 2021, suggests a national survey from the Rand Corporation.[1] Likewise, 27% of educators have considered leaving or taking a break from the profession due to COVID-19, according to national research.[2]*

Examine hiring, culture, and professional development practices

The Learning Policy Institute evaluated 35 rigorous studies on teacher-focused professional development and found seven overarching factors that contribute to success.

When pushed into a digital environment, teachers started collaborating and sharing knowledge to redefine how curricula and policies show up in their classrooms— something that was only happening in small pockets before. With this in mind, district leaders must continue to invest in professional learning communities given the powerful impact they can have on staff culture and success.

> " *If we eventually want our staff to look more like our kids, we need to hire more of our kids to be our staff.*
>
> *— Dr. Nick Polyak, Superintendent, Leyden High School District 212, Illinois*

To build staff capacity, leaders at Massachusetts' Boston Public Schools promote learning spaces, common planning time, and other resources so teachers can build community and learn from one another[3]—whether that learning is social, emotional, or cognitive.

Rick Surrency, superintendent at Florida's Putnam County School District, explained that demonstrating trust is an indispensable tool when it comes to supporting teacher well-being. "I think that contributes to goodwill and good mental health because they know they're in a place where people care about them," he said.[4]

[1] Elizabeth D. Steiner and Ashley Woo, "Job-Related Stress Threatens the Teacher Supply: Key Findings from the 2021 State of the U.S. Teacher Survey," Rand Corporation, June 15, 2021

[2] Abigail Johnson Hess, "27% Of Teachers Are Considering Quitting Because of Covid, Survey Finds," CNBC, December 14, 2020

[3] "5 Questions with Dr. Lindsa McIntyre," Paper, July 14, 2021   [4] "5 Strategies for Promoting Well-Being at Your School," Paper, February 25, 2022

When teachers from traditionally underrepresented communities are hired, the entire field benefits.[1] To ensure that teachers better reflect the students they serve, districts can give existing staff a chance to reskill into teaching roles, identify causes of attrition for teachers from specific backgrounds, and proactively build a diverse educator pipeline.

Remove 'extra role stress' to alleviate burnout

Survey data reveals that the typical teacher works 54 hours a week—but would rather spend more of their week actually teaching.[2]

The burden of providing additional academic support as schools emphasize learning acceleration may seem overwhelming to teachers. Luckily, Paper has a guide for K-12 leaders on how to promote teacher wellness and curb burnout in their districts.

Sometimes, teachers are "voluntold" to take on additional tasks—think coaching, chaperoning, or staffing programs after hours. With the stress from these extra roles fueling burnout at alarming rates, districts like California's San Jacinto Unified School District and Ohio's Columbus City Schools are using federal funds to deliver student supports that don't rely as heavily on teachers.[3, 4] Paper's 24/7 tutors help school districts avoid having teachers overextend themselves after hours—all while ensuring students get one-on-one attention.

> "
> *Teachers don't have to stay connected to their email all day long to support students' differing needs. They don't have to stay for three hours providing after-school tutoring anymore.*

Janet Covacevich,
Director of Secondary Curriculum and Instruction, San Jacinto Unified School District, California

[1] Carlon Howard, "Howard: Want to Create a More Diverse Teacher Workforce? Start with the Dedicated Professionals Already Working in Schools," The 74, December 8, 2021

[2] "Madeline Will, "'Disrespected' and 'Dissatisfied': 8 Takeaways From a New Survey of Teachers," Education Week, April 15, 2022

[3] "San Jacinto USD Increases Graduation Rates with 24/7 Tutoring," Paper, accessed July 26, 2022

[4] "Columbus City Schools Takes Teacher Wellness Seriously, in and out of School," Paper, 2022

6 Community trust

District leaders must create organizational identities that clearly communicate the "what," "why," and "how" behind their decisions—and in ways that resonate with their stakeholders. Public relations and scaled communication is especially important during a time when decisions around health and safety protocols, equity practices, and curriculum content are driving unprecedented confusion and division.

Communicate with stakeholders effectively

Hanover Research published this report outlining strategies for strong board-superintendent collaboration.

In this interview with SchoolCEO, Dr. David Miyashiro described how students in California's Cajon Valley Unified School District are invited to share their stories to create a culture of storytelling and spread the word about the district at large.

Kansas' Lawrence Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Anthony Lewis described the crucial steps in building his district's new educational equity policy in partnership with the Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center. His priority? Listening to students, staff, the board, and community members—and setting clear responsibilities.

> "
> *When I started [this job] in 2018,*
> *I did a listening and learning tour.*

Dr. Anthony Lewis,
Superintendent, Lawrence Public
Schools, Kansas

Foster family-school partnerships

Schools with robust family engagement are 10 times more likely to improve students' learning outcomes.[1] Brookings has a playbook for moving the needle on this metric.

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[1] Rebecca Winthrop, Adam Barton, Mahsa Ershadi, and Lauren Ziegler, "Collaborating to Transform and Improve Education Systems: A Playbook for Family-School Engagement," Brookings, accessed July 26, 2022

Schools can succeed in engaging families through authentic listening, trust-building, and sharing power and responsibility.[1] Engagement increases when a district's norms and values reflect families' realities and when families are made to feel welcome and involved in decision-making.[1, 2]

North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools elevates voices at the student, parent, faith-based community organization, and governance levels to redefine how districts are held accountable to their most historically marginalized community members—folks who have long faced a lack of connection, opportunity, and access.[3]

At California's Moreno Valley Unified School District, school-family partnerships strengthened. Attendance at committee meetings (such as the African American Parents Advisory Committee and the District English Learner Advisory Committee) soared due to more people being able to attend via Zoom.[4]

[1] Aneesha Badrinarayan, Linda Darling-Hammond, Hanna Melnick, and Abby Schachner, "Restarting and Reinventing School: Learning in the Time of COVID and Beyond," Learning Policy Institute, August 2020

[2] "Making Families Feel Welcome," Greater Good In Education, accessed July 26, 2022

[3] "Changing the Where, When & How of Instruction," Paper, November 19, 2020

[4] "Widening the Equity Lens: 5 Practices Beyond 1:1 Devices," Paper, May 3, 2021

7 Data and diagnostic systems

When most people think of the words "diagnostic" or "assessment," they might think of exam papers and pencils. But measuring holistic, systemic needs in and beyond the classroom will remain key this year—especially given declining engagement and striking disparities in students' home circumstances.

Collect and analyze a variety of data

Fine-tuning comprehensive diagnostic systems will enable leaders to understand students' strengths and needs at a given point and over time. This can be done through assessments relevant to instruction that also support growth; universal social, emotional, and behavioral health screenings; student and family surveys; and digital tools that can help track student engagement and progress.[1, 2]

It's critical to ensure all students—and particularly high-needs students—view school as a positive environment. Districts can do this by regularly administering school climate surveys. The Aspen Institute's school climate playbook provides helpful examples.

Administrators at California's Val Verde Unified School District were concerned about students in need based on data that suggested most families couldn't afford extra academic help on their own. They promptly adopted Paper to fill that gap. "About 80% of our students are from low-income households," stated Garrick Owen, director of research, in a case study. "And these students made up around 78% of the sessions with Paper tutors."[3]

> "
> *We're consolidating tools across the board, training stakeholders to navigate the infrastructure effectively, and using data and metrics from tools like ClassLink and Paper to inform decision-making.*
>
> — *Matt Penner,*
> *Director of IT, Val Verde Unified School District, California*

Beware of overgeneralization

Discussions around rethinking what our systems measure should also include the equity trade-offs made when relying solely on aggregates of data. "With 35,000 kids, I think one of the dangers is to make policies based on efficiency that aren't founded in the reality of all the kids at home," said Brianne Ford, CTO at California's Irvine Unified School District. "There's danger in making decisions based on averages. Those are the starting points of a conversation rather than the ending."[4]

[1] Aneesha Badrinarayan, Linda Darling-Hammond, Hanna Melnick, and Abby Schachner, "Restarting and Reinventing School: Learning in the Time of COVID and Beyond," Learning Policy Institute, August 2020

[2] Laura Jimenez, "Student Assessment During COVID-19," Center for American Progress, September 10, 2020

[3] "At Val Verde USD, 24/7 Tutoring Engages Disadvantaged Students, Boosts Graduation Rates," Paper, accessed July 26, 2022

[4] "Paper Blog: How Irvine & Moreno Valley USD Built a Culture of 1:1," Paper, November 30, 2020

Districts are investing in tools such as Rally and Paper to gather and derive meaning from student data. Pennsylvania's Richland School District utilizes Paper's 24/7 tutoring platform to get analytics on each student's unique learning gains and gaps. "Teachers can see which concepts students are having trouble with so they can refocus their energies," said Brandon Bailey, director of educational services, in a case study.[1]

> *The purpose of assessments isn't to punish students or burden them with more stress, but to reward them for their efforts or recognize where they need more resources or attention from their instructor.*
>
> — *Ben Markley,*
> *CTO, Hemet Unified School District, California*

> *We're looking at assessment, engagement, and socioemotional well-being data to make our decisions. We want it to be systemic; we don't want it to be a one-and-done because we know that doesn't do anything for the long haul.*

Kaweeda G. Adams,
Superintendent, City School District of Albany, New York

[1] "Uplifting a School Community with 24/7 District-Wide Tutoring," Paper, accessed July 26, 2022

8 Real-world preparation

In 2023, districts must do a tough balancing act: Meeting students' current needs, all while preparing them for the uncertain realities of tomorrow. Schools must work to name, teach, and grow skills that transcend traditionally tested outcomes as students go to school in— and graduate into—the proverbial "new normal."

Rethink evidence of learning

As students return to school this year, the K-12 landscape can rework standard assessment and accountability systems to identify, teach, and foster meaningful skills. Educational collaboratives should work to shift away from deficit-oriented and decontextualized modes of assessment to ones emphasizing applied learning and problem-solving.

Superintendent Mike McCormick warns educators not to use deficit labels with this generation of students. Instead, his district team at California's Val Verde Unified School District believes in balancing traditional practices with innovative avenues for learning.[1] Embracing students' tech-savviness has allowed this district—and nearby San Jacinto Unified School District—to reengage high-needs students and boost graduation rates.[2, 3]

Foster future-readiness

Experts have argued that resilience is the most powerful skill to develop this year.[4] As schools seek to prepare students for success in the 21st-century economy, they should emphasize skills such as self-direction, curiosity, relationships, and a growth-oriented mindset.[5]

Districts have the chance to address how only 52% of people feel high school prepared them for the workforce.[6] Relief funds can be used to provide more engaging learning opportunities that help prepare students for future pathways.

> " We have been reconfiguring our schools to be seventh through twelfth grade to give us a head-start on preparing students for college pathways and career exploration with pre-AP, IB, CTE, dual enrollment, and corporate partnerships.
>
> — *Dr. Lindsa Mcintyre,*
> *High School Superintendent,*
> *Boston Public Schools,*
> *Massachusetts*

> " Paper gives the students more independence.
>
> — *Shamecia Jones,*
> *Elementary School Teacher,*
> *Clark County School District, Nevada*

[1] "Widening the Equity Lens: 5 Practices Beyond 1:1 Devices," Paper, May 3, 2021

[2] "San Jacinto Schools Use 24/7 Tutoring to Increase Graduation Rates," Paper, accessed July 26, 2022

[3] "At Val Verde USD, 24/7 Tutoring Engages Disadvantaged Students, Boosts Graduation Rates," Paper, accessed July 26, 2022

[4] Caroline Bologna, "The Most Important Skill Kids Can Develop Right Now," HuffPost, May 13, 2020

[5] Joel Knudson and Pamela Cantor, "Ensuring Whole-Child Well-Being as a Foundation for Learning," California Collaborative on District Reform, October 2020

[6] Alyson Klein, "Teens Feel Ready for College, but Not so Much for Work," Education Week, September 24, 2019

Dr. Nick Polyak, superintendent at Illinois' Leyden High School District 212, says high school is the "last stop" before students are launched into whatever comes next. To help students explore their passions and receive relevant credentials and guidance, there's an "advisory period" for each high school student throughout their four years. It offers a wide range of support, from help with onboarding into high school to assistance with filling out FAFSAs.[1]

Dr. Romules Durant, superintendent at Ohio's Toledo Public Schools, explained his district's plans for college and career readiness to Paper—including his Young Men and Young Women of Excellence mentoring groups.

Emphasize early childhood education

According to the Learning Policy Institute, research supports the long-term benefits of early childhood education throughout K-12 school and beyond—from greater educational attainment to general life successes. This is especially true for English learners and children from low-income backgrounds.[2] With this in mind, districts can provide access to high-quality programs from birth through school enrollment, a representative and diverse workforce, and a system parents and guardians find easy to navigate.

For elementary school districts like Illinois' Bloomingdale School District 13, a key component of future readiness is encouraging civic engagement and community service in young students. "It builds socioemotional skills and the mindset that they can and should make a difference," explained district Superintendent Dr. Jon Bartelt.

To foster independent thinking early on, Nevada's Clark County School District provides inquiry-based tutoring through Paper—even to its youngest students.[3]

> " *This is probably the first generation of students that have actually become proficient in the tools, skills, and dispositions needed to be successful in postsecondary education and various career spaces.*

Mike McCormick,
Superintendent, Val Verde Unified School District, California

[1] "Superintendents Share 3 Equity Priorities for Back to School," Paper, June 18, 2021
[2] "Early Childhood Learning." Learning Policy Institute, accessed July 26, 2022
[3] "Paper to Serve More than 300,000 in Clark County, Nevada," Paper, July 13, 2022

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Paper partners with school districts to deliver 1:1 tutoring that is equitable, scalable, and cost-effective. Students get unlimited 24/7 Live Help and writing feedback, teachers get insights to tackle individual learning gaps, and administrators get actionable data to inform strategic decisions. Paper's multilingual tutors add an extra layer of support across all content areas and grade levels, in and out of the classroom— so students always have access to expert help exactly when, where, and how they need it. **Learn more.**

Book a demo >