

EDUCATION NEWS UPDATE

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TEACHING & LEARNING

Digital literacy is a must-have skill

Digital literacy has evolved into something now refers to being able to access information and work collaboratively using a range of devices and technologies. Employee training and other tactics can help workers develop their skills, which are especially important given that hybrid and remote work have become mainstream.

Alex Christian. "Why 'digital literacy' is now a workplace non-negotiable." *BBC*. September 26, 2022

<https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20220923-why-digital-literacy-is-now-a-workplace-non-negotiable>

Improving early science education

To better equip pre-K and elementary teachers to teach science, they need better training during teacher preparation, and that training should be followed by long-term support. That's one of the main findings of a **new report by the American Institute for Research**, (AIR), which looks at strategies to improve science teaching in the early grades. Researchers have found several key strategies that enhanced teacher content knowledge, boosted the quality of science lessons, and led to better student outcomes in science. Among these approaches were making sure aspiring teachers have a strong grasp of science concepts, giving science training to mentor teachers, and offering educators long-term guidance as they roll out science lessons. Prior research found that teachers of young children often face many challenges when it comes to science instruction. Although young children are often interested in and engaged by science, teachers do not always receive the right training or resources to support this early interest. Also, science lessons often take a back seat to instruction in other areas such as math and English.

Jackie Mader. "Early Childhood: How to improve early science instruction." *Hechinger Report*. October 5, 2022

<https://mailchi.mp/hechingerreport.org/early-childhood-how-to-improve-early-science-instruction?e=7ce815499a>

FEDERAL/NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

Federal data show extent of school staffing shortages

More than 50% of surveyed public school principals say their schools are experiencing staffing shortages this year, particularly for special-education and elementary-school teachers, followed by math and English as a second language or bilingual education, as well as mental health staff, custodians and transportation workers, data from the National Center for Education Statistics shows. Nearly half of schools with vacancies lacked staff for mental health jobs, which became especially important during the pandemic with a rise in rates of depression and anxiety among students. One major problem in hiring is too few candidates for each job, and in many cases candidates are not qualified, the survey showed. Following the release of the data on Tuesday, the U.S.E.D. announced \$60 million in new grants to help address the shortage and invest in teacher training and development.

Donna St. George. "Staffing shortages continue to plague schools, data shows." *Washington Post*. September 27, 2022

https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/09/27/school-teachers-staff-shortages/?wpisrc=nl_sb_smartbrief&utm_campaign=65FBA7DD-A78E-4185-A826-DB485198B58&utm_content=FC90017E-BDBE-46E1-9321-06A1F5E9E9EE

EPA is increasing investment in electric school buses

The Environmental Protection Agency is increasing its \$500 million investment in electric school buses, announced in May, to \$965 million, and \$1 billion is expected to be available in the coming federal fiscal year. The investment comes as the agency has received applications this year totaling almost \$4 billion in requests for school buses, most of which were electric.

Matthew Daly. "EPA doubles money for electric school buses as demand soars." *Associated Press*. September 29, 2022

<https://apnews.com/article/business-education-pollution-air-quality-climate-and-environment-ad9dc72b1ad662dfb618fcc317728f27>

1/3 of public school students chronically absent post pandemic

A national group that seeks to curb student absenteeism is sounding an alarm after finding that the number of chronically absent students continued to surge even as pandemic closings abated. The organization, Attendance Works, states that the number of students missing at least 15 days of school a year doubled to 16 million in 2021-22 from 8 million students before the pandemic. This means that one out of every three public school children was chronically absent, when most children were learning in person and should have been catching up from the disrupted year of 2020 and the first half of 2021. Before the pandemic, only about 16% of US. School children were

chronically absent. Low-income students have been more likely to be absent, so these new attendance estimates make it unlikely that many low-income children will succeed in making up the ground they lost. Solving chronic absenteeism isn't easy and involves [building human relationships among teachers, parents and students](#).

Jill Barshay. "A third of public school children were chronically absent after classrooms re-opened, advocacy group says." *Hechinger Report*. October 3, 2022 <https://hechingerreport.org/proof-points-a-third-of-public-school-children-were-chronically-absent-after-classrooms-re-opened-advocacy-group-says/>

The other CRT

Sparked by a **viral commentary** in a periodical published two years ago by a conservative think tank, critical race theory (often referred to as simply CRT) has led to many states banning educators from teaching about it in schools. Seventeen states have adopted legal restrictions or prohibitions. However, the theory—which helps people understand the systematic nature and impact of racism—was rarely taught in K-12 schools (at least not until students and teachers started focusing on this news item). A different approach to education that just happens to have the same acronym, *is* relatively common in elementary and secondary schools. **Culturally relevant teaching** is the idea that learning should incorporate at least two different cultures, and that students should not only understand what they are learning but why they are learning it and how it is relevant. Now it is also controversial, in large part because it shares the same initials as critical race theory. One researcher notes the irony that culturally relevant pedagogy is under attack by some of the same critics who support K-12 parental involvement in curriculum.

"The Other CRT." *National Education Policy Center, U. Colorado/Boulder*. October 4, 2022

<http://www.icontact-archive.com/archive?c=1748247&f=3100&s=3172&m=263987&t=683ff6e55fceb8d669aa5ea6b8253ac84d14528c98c4873195440427f0ff88d5>

Schools using solar panels for learning, cost control

The case for school solar panels is one that can appeal to all community members, despite their varying political views and interests. About 10% of schools use solar energy, with many of them paid for and administered by a third party so no upfront funds are needed. Solar arrays are often used to provide shade over playgrounds or parking areas as well as for environmental lessons, and staff can charge electric cars while parked. Solar panels conserve energy, save money and provide new learning opportunities, K-12 leaders say.

Matt Zalaznick. "Made in the shade: Why new energy is building up behind school solar panels." *District Administration*. September 29, 2022

<https://districtadministration.com/school-solar-panel-build-renewable-energy/>

Federal spending on kids expected to decline

Pandemic-era programs gave funding a boost but as the aid phases out, more costs could shift to states and localities, according to a new report from the Urban Institute. Federal spending on children under the age of 19 hit about \$10,700 per child in 2021, a more than \$3,000 increase over 2020. Federal outlays are expected to drop to \$9,250 per child in 2022 and continue decreasing over the next several years as adult entitlement programs, such as Medicare and Social Security, are prioritized, the report said.

Molly Bolan. "Federal Spending on Kids is Up, But Expected to Fall." *Route Fifty*. October 4, 2022

<https://www.route-fifty.com/finance/2022/10/federal-spending-kids-expected-fall/378042/>

American teachers work longer hours than global peers

New international data show how teachers' work lives shifted in the pandemic. As districts nationwide look for ways to recruit and retain more teachers, international data for the 2021-22 school year suggest looking to other countries for ideas on pay and supports.

Sarah D. Sparks. "U.S. Teachers Work More Hours Than Their Global Peers. Other Countries Are Catching Up." *Education Week*. October 04, 2022

https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/u-s-teachers-work-more-hours-than-their-global-peers-other-countries-are-catching-up/2022/10?utm_source=nl&utm_medium=enl&utm_campaign=eu&M=5232196&UID=96285792099d3693ed4680d54&T=7088731

Growing number of states offer mental health days for students

Schools in 12 states across the nation (not including NYS) are allowing students to take [mental health days](#) as a move to try and combat the [mental health crisis kids are facing](#) in the [wake of the pandemic](#). While response to the concept is generally favorable, concerns have been raised about students who would be home alone during a vulnerable time. It works just like a sick day. The student's parents would call the school to let them know their child is sick and needs to stay home. In this case, they would take the day to try to seek care if it is available in an attempt to help them cope with feelings of anxiety, stress or depression.

Devan Markham & Stephanie Haines. "Schools nationwide offer students mental health days." *News Nation*. October 3, 2022

<https://www.newsnationnow.com/us-news/education/schools-mental-health-days/>

Report: U.S. Constitution protects inclusive education

Restricting opportunities for culturally responsive and racially inclusive education may run counter to federal law, according to a report from the National Education Association and the Law Firm Antiracism Alliance. The report states that inclusive education is protected by the US Constitution through the 1st and 14th Amendments, as well as Eesha Pendharkar. "Censoring Race and Racism Lessons Defies Best Practice and May Be Unlawful, Report Argues." *Education Week*. September 29, 2022

<https://www.edweek.org/leadership/censoring-race-and-racism-lessons-defies-best-practice-and-may-be-unlawful-report-argues/2022/09>

NEW YORK STATE

Hiring troubles delay rollout of teen mental health crisis program

The nationwide staffing shortage that has crippled in-patient psychiatric facilities for people under 18 is being now blamed for the stalled rollout of a new statewide mental health program designed to keep troubled teens in their communities and out of residential centers. Though the programs were slated to launch by July 1, just five of New York's 15 planned Youth ACT teams are in operation, confirmed the state Office of Mental Health.

Rachel Silberstein. "Hiring troubles delay rollout of mental health crisis program for teens." *Albany Times Union*. October 1, 2022
https://www.timesunion.com/news/article/Staffing-issues-delay-rollout-of-new-program-1747615.php?PID=Times-Union-HP-state-package&utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_term=header&utm_campaign=alt%20%7C%20capitol%20confidential&cid=5931844424c17c09a3f115af

New NYS system for labeling schools

NYS officials are restarting their system for identifying struggling schools. they want to "shift the narrative" about how low-performing schools are viewed. As part of the shift, this year they plan to relabel schools considered in good standing as "schools identified for Local Support and Improvement, or LSI." The label is similar to those used for struggling schools. The lowest-performing schools will now be called "schools identified for Comprehensive Support and Improvement." The changes are supposed to push for improvements and support for all students, referring to the model as "continuous improvement." The plan will go out for public comment, which could potentially propose additional changes. School accountability determinations won't be released before that process is done. The NYSED will use state test scores or Regents exam results from 2021-22 to look at student performance in math, reading and science, but they won't measure student growth because there isn't more complete data from before last school year. Officials will use older data to look at trends in graduation rates and English proficiency rates for ELL students. These changes are for this school year only, but they could be the start of a more permanent system. The shift is reflective of the Board of Regents and SED turning from a heavy focus on test scores.

Reema Amin. "NY state officials seek to 'shift the narrative' around struggling schools." *Chalkbeat/N.Y.* October 3, 2022
<https://ny.chalkbeat.org/2022/10/3/23386248/ny-state-officials-seek-to-shift-the-narrative-around-struggling-schools>

Gubernatorial candidates on education

The NYS gubernatorial candidates – Kathy Hochul and Rep. Lee Zeldin – disagree on policy for schools. Zeldin is using arguments that Republicans are trying elsewhere. He wants to ban "divisive concepts" from being taught in schools related to race and favors lifting the cap on the number of charter schools in NYS. He also calls for restricting "age-inappropriate" sex education, requiring financial literacy courses in public schools, and civics lessons that "teach students how and why they get to live in the greatest nation in the history of the world." If Zeldin were elected, it's unlikely that he would be able to successfully ban schools from teaching about race since the state legislature is overwhelmingly Democratic and unresponsive of such policies. Hochul has not publicly said if she supports lifting the charter cap. She's repeatedly touted a budget that sent more state money to school districts as the result of an agreement to fully fund Foundation Aid, the state funding formula that sends more money to higher needs districts. She's taken an interest in boosting mental health resources for students, ensuring more children go to college, specifically by expanding college tuition assistance to part-time students in New York, and has attempted to address the teacher shortage by expanding alternative teacher certification programs and temporarily waiving an income cap for teacher retirees who want to return to the profession.

Reema Amib. "Where do Hochul and Zeldin stand on education?" *Chalkbeat/NY*. October 4, 2022

https://ny.chalkbeat.org/2022/10/4/23388109/ny-governor-race-hochul-zeldin-education-curriculum-budget-charters-school-choice?oref=csny_firstread_nj

