

ADVANCING K12

FALL 2025

TECHNOLOGY. CULTURE. LEADERSHIP.



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PAY TEACHERS MORE

SECRETS TO K-12 COMMUNICATION,
AS TOLD BY TWO PROS

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Education for All

Welcome to the fall 2025 edition of Advancing K12.

Learning is a lifelong endeavor, and the education that comes during our K-12 years is the foundation of it all. When students and staff don't have an experience that speaks to their strengths and interests, cracks can form in that foundation.

To keep education dynamic and engaging, it has to be built for everyone. In this issue of Advancing K12, you can find ideas for creating an inviting culture with articles like "Secrets to K-12 Communication, as Told by Two Pros," "How School Culture Slays Chronic Absenteeism," and "Use Predictive Education Insights to Improve Student Growth."

If these articles resonate with you and your district, I encourage you to read further on culture, leadership, achievement, and more at www.skyward.com/blog. Here, you'll be able to keep up on the conversations most important to K-12 education, and find even more ways to build strong foundations for your entire community.

I hope this school year marks a renewal for leadership, faculty, staff, and students, and that the learning that starts today continues far into the future.

My best for the new school year,



Scott Glinski, Skyward CEO



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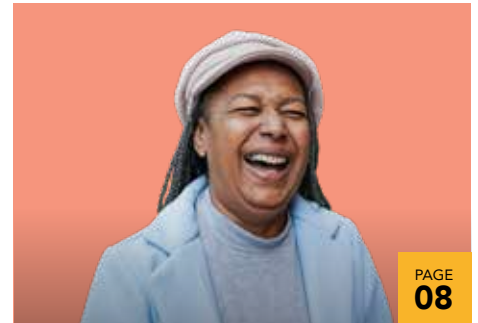
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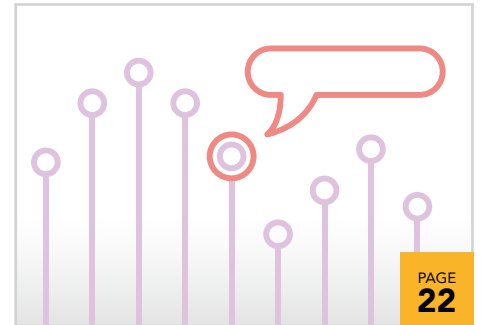
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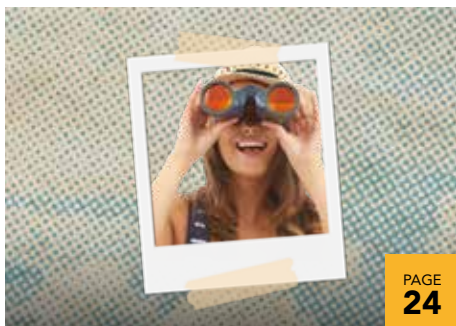
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ABOUT SKYWARD

Since 1980, Skyward's SIS and ERP solutions have helped more than 2,500 school districts save time, connect with families, and empower success. By blending advanced technology guided by actual users with world-class support delivered with a personal touch, Skyward is the clear choice for K-12 leaders who want to spend less time on tasks and more time with students.

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Increase Engagement and Equity
with SIS Translation

Proactive Mental Health in K-12 Schools

Reactive mental health waits for an explosion before responding. Proactive mental health can feel like a lush garden, a structured foundation, and/or a kick in the pants.

Mental and physical healthcare can be nourished outside a school setting, but students spend so much time on campus that it's helpful to take a supportive stance.



Consider these strategies for getting students thinking proactively about their own mental health.

Power to the students

Proactive care gives students a toolbox to care for themselves. It's not about affirmations or prizes (although those types of positive reinforcement can help!). Proactive mental health practice in school is about learning just as much as core curriculum is. Learning to care for their own inner world can help students struggling to know where they fit in a chaotic outer world.

Consider three initiatives designed to get kids thinking about self-care.

1. Coping with big feelings.

This looks like modeling breath work, exploring guided meditation, learning when to ask for help, and knowing when to take a break. These types of de-escalation skills can help students keep each other safe in schools and far beyond. When it feels normal to be out of control, chaos reigns. When keeping calm is a regular part of daily life, those teamwork muscles get stronger. When the language of self-control is learned early on in life, it's easier to become fluent and keep your skills sharp as an adult.

2. Self-concept work for young students.

Encouraging students to answer questions such as *Who am I?* and *What am I good at?* can help students see themselves as important and valid. Unfortunately, educators may be the first adults to ever prompt a child to look deeper into their own self-image. There's no better time to start.

3. Self-investment work for students.

Once students gain a little confidence through their self-concept work, they'll need to ask themselves *What can I do better at?* While it's tempting for students to look at this in terms of GPA, awards, or other quantitative pursuits, in the mental health realm this also looks like improving their social and emotional skills.



Behavior is communication

Whether negative or positive, the way students act and interact with each other is sending a message to their adults. Educators and parents can work together to communicate about student behavior as much as academic performance.

Student information systems (SIS) built for communication eliminate multiple data entry and sends families behavior information quickly through a parent portal, eliminating the need to pick and choose from dozens of communication options.

Proactive strategies backed by measurement and data

It can be tricky to quantify the so-called “soft” skills kids are learning (teamwork, time management, and problem solving, for example). Tricky doesn’t equal impossible, and with some creative management in your SIS, tracking behavior gets easier.

Behavior tracking doesn’t need to be a purely punitive practice. On the contrary, consider using the flexibility your SIS provides to track positive behavior interactions alongside infractions.

Educators and families can recognize students developing proactive and positive social behaviors and skills.

Access to high quality behavior data, whether positive or punitive, helps administrators make decisions about the districts they lead. Educational data analytics provide the insight needed to allocate resources more effectively, to know which students need intervention, and to know when and where to add staff and support in a K-12 school.

Mental health is absolutely a team sport. The rules and players change without warning, and the challenge looks different every day. Schools are tasked with so much, but creating a safe place for students to gain some mental and emotional peace is powerful.

A little strategy and data provides a life-altering payoff in this case. ■



STORY BY

Erin Werra

To read more from Erin, visit www.skyward.com/blog



7 Dimensions of Wellness

Wellness is about more than staying in shape and eating healthy. Explore the seven dimensions, and how to implement them within your district:

Physical

- Plan active lessons, and lessons that take place outside.
- Offer healthy snacks as an alternative to vending machines.
- Impress the dangers of vaping and other nicotine products.

Emotional

- Make time in the day for stress relief and mental wellness activities.
- Incorporate social-emotional learning into the curriculum.
- Establish behavioral norms and positive reinforcement with PBIS.

Career

- Help students explore careers that fit their personalities, interests, and talents.
- Incorporate STEM into the curriculum.
- Start an internship or youth apprenticeship program.

Environmental

- Start a green initiative for your school.
- Fill classroom space with natural light, plants, and calming colors.
- Prioritize play and outdoor activities.

Social

- Encourage team and partner work in class.
- Teach and practice everyday kindness.
- Provide social activities outside of traditional extracurriculars.

Intellectual

- Offer after-school workshops for special interests.
- Set up an incentivized reading program.
- Bring expert members of the community in to share their talents.

Spiritual

- Organize a community service day.
- Incorporate mindfulness and stillness into the curriculum.
- Educate students on all major religions and worldviews.

For the full article, visit skyward.com/blog and search "7 Dimensions of Wellness: How to Incorporate Each."



If the year is a wheel, each school's main office is one of the spokes. It connects every single person in the district and beyond. And the folks who staff the main office? Administrative assistants are the backbone of a great experience at school. They may fly under the radar, but here's how K-12 administrative assistants make school a better place for students and staff.

Data and reporting

Administrative assistants are trusted with keeping records for students and staff. Their access to student information system (SIS) and enterprise resource system (ERP) data is an important part of the health of both systems. Admin assistants are the people entering data: whether it's enrollment, attendance, classroom assignments, schedules, and much more.

When school districts rely on SIS and ERP data to function, administrative assistants' roles in data entry, data mining, and creating reports are crucial. More importantly, administrative assistants need a close and comfortable relationship with both the edtech systems they use and the vendor support teams who are standing by to help.

Resources for students, staff, and teachers

In addition to being the experts on data resources, administrative assistants are the eyes, ears, and hearts of the school district. Education experts in the main office are

Admin Assistants are the K-12 MVP



always fielding questions from all angles: students, staff, parents, the community, the district office, and more.

Connecting people to resources they need is a way of life for these pros, and no challenge is too big.

Finally, ever wonder who creates the beautiful educational data analytics teachers rely on to tell a comprehensive story of student achievement? You guessed it: the data stewards are also the data wizards conjuring up a picture of how students are progressing at school. These visualizations help teachers communicate with families and administrators communicate to the school board and external stakeholders.

Attendance and calendar

One of the main functions folks think of when administrative assistants are brought up are tardy passes, fielding calls about sick students, notifying families of excessive absences, and other attendance functions.

This is a huge chunk of the main office work, but probably not in the way most people think.

Instead, keep in mind the volume of students and grown-ups coming in and out of school. Someone came in late and needs a pass. Someone else forgot their lunch but their parents dropped it off for them. All this communication funnels through only two or three people—multiply that by a whole school's population and that's a ton of things to keep straight.

So while attendance might seem like a gimme to the uninitiated ("Bueller...? Bueller...?"), it's actually a great way to save time and effort with the right tools and processes.

Parent communication and engagement

Again, the main office is the central hub of all knowledge in a school. If parents are to remain connected and engaged, this falls on educators to keep the momentum going—but it also requires a sharp and responsive administrative assistant.

These folks are at school bright and early and often stay late or help out with different back-to-school events, practices, club meetings, community activities, and wrap-around care. Even

if other educators are running instruction and enrichment, someone's gotta be there to answer the front door.

When you're talking about making life in K-12 easier, this is the true measure. Does it make life easier for the administrative assistants to make life easier for everyone else? ■

**Administrative
assistants are
the backbone
of a great
experience
at school.**



STORY BY

Erin Werra

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WAYS SCHOOLS CAN REACH OUT TO FAMILIES

Well-crafted communication takes time, effort, and skill. Luckily, high-tech tools can make sharing messages easy, secure, and clear.



Texting

Send secure texts without personal phone numbers through parent messaging apps.



Push notifications

Your district's SIS can send push notifications right to parents' phones about grades, lunch balances, and much more.



Health screening reports

During the winter sick-day season, parents and guardians can complete online health and symptom reports before sending their students back to the classroom.



Message center

Communicate with students and guardians through the SIS message center, with a record of past communications for reporting.



Auto emails

Automate emails that send when triggered by certain events, like too many tardies or a low grade.



Absence notifications

Guardians can submit an absence request for their child directly through the SIS.



Assignments and gradebook

Schedule, assign, and provide feedback on assignments within the district's learning management system (LMS).



Letters

Draft important letters and messages and post them in online message boards within the parent portal.



Printed letters

For important, hard-copy letters, draft them from built-in templates in the SIS and generate them online.



Parent-teacher conferences

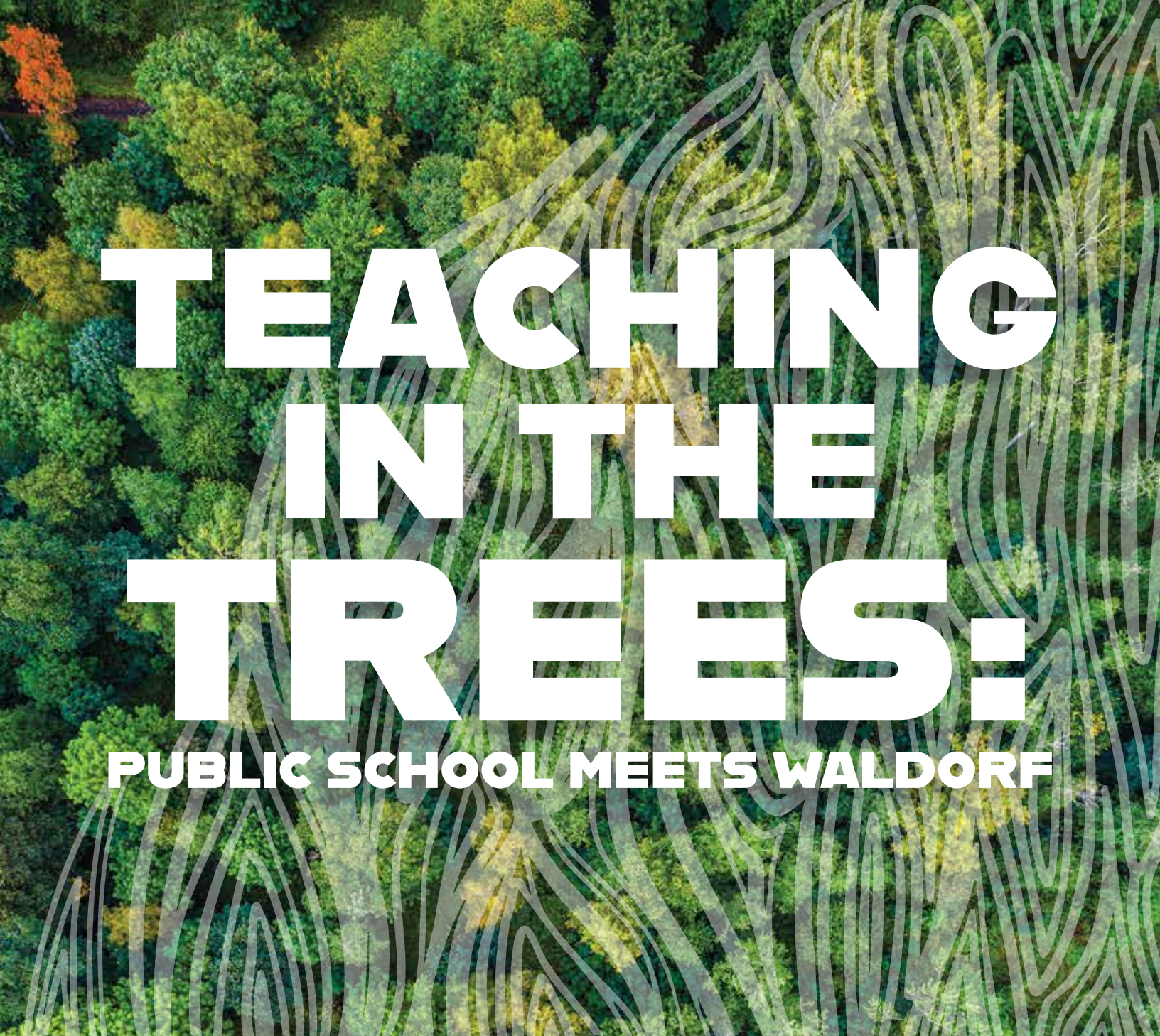
Parents can request a conference through the parent portal. Teachers can schedule and set up a parent-teacher conference online, where everyone can share ideas and updates.



Integrated Third-Party Platforms

There are multiple options for third-party platforms that consolidate district communications into one place and allow parents to choose when they receive updates.

For the full article, visit skyward.com/blog and search "11 Ways Schools Can Reach Out to Families."

An aerial photograph of a lush green forest with some autumn-colored trees in the upper left. Overlaid on the right side of the image is a large, stylized, light green graphic of a tree with many thin, vertical branches.

TEACHING IN THE TREES:

PUBLIC SCHOOL MEETS WALDORF

IF PUBLIC SCHOOL GRINDS IN GRIDLOCK, WALDORF-INSPIRED PUBLIC SCHOOL ROTATES THROUGH CYCLES.

Like the wheel of the year, decision-making, daily routine, and even the very curriculum are designed in ripples surrounding students and moving them through a pedagogy built on specific developmental milestones. Waldorf-trained teachers spend early childhood nurturing and protecting the child's imagination, allowing the child's curiosities to unfold naturally before certain developmental cues indicate they're ready for reading, writing, and academic concepts presented alongside handwork and art.

In the case of Waldorf-inspired public schools, these cycles are braced by state standards and all your typical public school milestones as well. What does this unique approach offer to students and families looking for an alternative? Let's explore the roots of Waldorf education available to public school students.

WHAT IS WALDORF EDUCATION?

Waldorf education emerged 100 years ago when Rudolf Steiner, a German philosopher, started the first Waldorf school for families of factory workers.

If you've never explored Waldorf education, here is a non-expert crash course: Envision a school building, purposefully and beautifully made of simplistic, natural materials. There are no screens to steal students' attention. Students work on a variety of artful pursuits including knitting, poetry, movement, gardening, hiking, and music. Teaching and learning often take place outdoors in nature. Most importantly, teachers focus on meeting the child in front of them at the child's appropriate level of development.

Certain developmental milestones correspond with academic topics in Waldorf schools, such as reading instruction. These echoes of readiness correspond rather well with modern academic milestones. For example, Rudolf Steiner wrote in 1922, *Inwardly the child is essentially quite a different creature up to about the 7th or 8th year, when the changing of the teeth begins.*¹ This is simply one accessible example of Steiner's theory of physical development giving clues about what a child is mentally, emotionally, and spiritually ready to learn in a classroom.

There's so much more to discuss about Rudolf Steiner, the purest form of Waldorf education, and its esoteric roots—including spiritual aspects inappropriate for a public school setting. However, it's possible and productive to capture creative aspects of Waldorf education and implement them in a public school, incorporating movement, artistry, choice, the outdoors, and more. This is the goal of Waldorf-inspired public education, and its important distinction from private Waldorf education. Nearly 60 Waldorf-inspired public schools exist today. Two public school teachers explain the nuances that exist in their Waldorf-inspired classrooms.

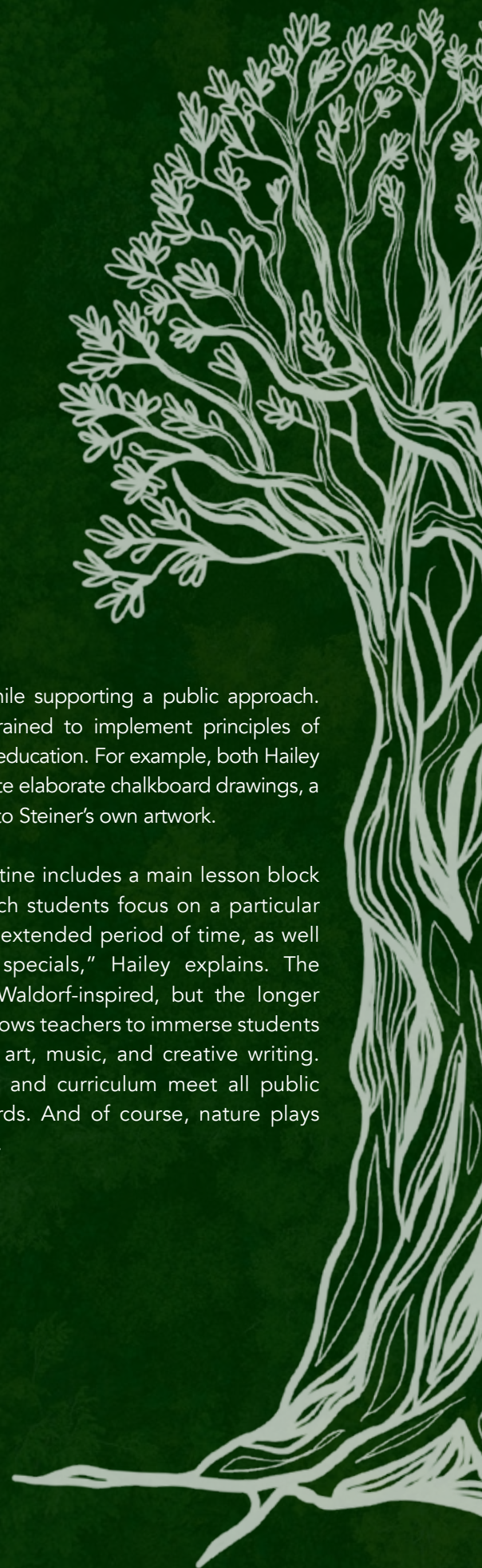
HOW CLOSE IS WALDORF-INSPIRED PUBLIC SCHOOL TO ITS INSPIRATION?

Hailey M. and Taylor G. are co-teachers at Tomorrow River Community Charter School (TRCCS), part of the Tomorrow River School District in Amherst, Wisconsin. While Waldorf principles are heavily ingrained, public school standards are never far behind.

The Alliance for Public Waldorf Education guides its member schools to help keep sacred the private Waldorf

pedagogies while supporting a public approach. Teachers are trained to implement principles of public Waldorf education. For example, both Hailey and Taylor create elaborate chalkboard drawings, a direct callback to Steiner's own artwork.

"Our daily routine includes a main lesson block of time in which students focus on a particular subject for an extended period of time, as well as skills and specials," Hailey explains. The entire day is Waldorf-inspired, but the longer main lesson allows teachers to immerse students in movement, art, music, and creative writing. Skills, lessons, and curriculum meet all public school standards. And of course, nature plays its central role.





Nature is a big part of every day at TRCCS. Students spend time outdoors rain or shine, which is an interesting variable for central Wisconsin. Teachers design lessons meant to take place in outdoor classrooms.

"You have to be purposeful in your teaching. There's a lot of planning involved," Taylor explains. Hailey points out the freedom teaching outdoors offers for the class to naturally cycle between academics and brain breaks. "In breath, out breath. Let them go for a minute then reel them back in."

MAKING DECISIONS IN A WALDORF-INSPIRED PUBLIC SCHOOL

TRCCS has its own separate board in addition to the district school board. Decisions are made at administrative levels with consensus from teachers.

Anything that needs to be done, the teachers hold the task. Because teachers are "holding" the school (notice the language leans more nurturing than hierarchical?), they rely on families to dedicate service hours to their community.

"If there is a goal the school community wants to happen—for example, if we need a new recess space—we need support to make things happen," Taylor explains. The various groups, from administrators to school community members, must reach consensus before moving forward with a new policy or project.

"It's slow-moving, but the decisions we make are really solid," Hailey says.

CLASSROOMS AND COHORTS IN WALDORF-INSPIRED PUBLIC EDUCATION

"The students we're sending off to other districts are impressive, and friendly, and have good social skills, and meet academic achievements. Many of our students are on the honor roll," Hailey explains.

Groups of children, or cohorts, move to different grade levels accompanied by the same teacher in a process called looping.

"Looping is common in different districts, but the systems are much smaller: so you'll loop for two years, then go back [to the starting grade level]," Taylor explained. In contrast, Waldorf-inspired teachers may stick with their cohorts much longer.

"We have a couple teachers who are really passionate about doing the grade-one-to-grade-eight loop with the same class," Hailey comments. "You get attached to [the students] and get to know their families. We do home visits and parents come in for conferences over and over... We really get to bond."

So what happens once the eighth graders move on from TRCCS? Some stay in the same public school district's high school, some have other home districts, and some continue more Waldorf-inspired education in a nearby secondary education charter school. The transition sounds daunting, but students are well-prepared.

"Most are ready for something new, and they're excited about it," Taylor says.

LOW-TECH LEARNING AND OTHER WALDORF QUIRKS

The parent circle hosts socials on campus and shares research about Waldorf-aligned parenting. Many families are already open to an alternative approach.

"We really are not pushing technology until fifth grade," Hailey explains. Teachers encourage families to continue a low-tech lifestyle for kids: minimal technology use during the school week, no video game or television characters on clothing, and no discussion of techy hobbies at school.

Quirks of Waldorf-inspired public education emerge with the elements. Students are expected to prepare for the weather because many components of the school day are spent outside. Natural settings bring natural consequences if kids choose not to wear coats or sport umbrellas during an outdoor rainy recess or academic activities. Low winter temperatures in the Northwoods of Wisconsin demand similar preparation at least four months out of the year.

The deeply spiritual aspects of Waldorf education are not a good fit for public school norms and laws, but peculiar roots climb into classroom management. Hailey describes a method of grouping by personality type: the four temperaments. Taylor explains this method using a metaphor that starts with encountering a large rock in your path on a hike.

Sanguine students are happy-go-lucky rock hoppers who catapult over obstacles and keep going. Phlegmatic students are methodical, logical thinkers who work through problems quietly and deliberately. Melancholic students are likely to hunker down next to the rock and muse upon life's unfairness. And finally choleric children make quick work of yeeting the rock out of their path, then immediately move on to the next challenge. Teachers can use the four temperaments as a Waldorf-inspired lens to choose teaching strategies most likely to resonate with individual students or the cohort as a whole.

"Each class really does have a soul of its own," Taylor muses.

WALDORF-INSPIRED PUBLIC SCHOOL IS A RARE GEM IN CENTRAL WISCONSIN

As our conversation spiraled inward from national alliances to the very soul of each one-room cabin classroom, both Hailey and Taylor had great things to say about the public school district their Waldorf-inspired satellite school calls home.

"I really have to give credit to other project-based learning folks in the district," Taylor emphasizes, speaking as both a teacher and an alumna of the district herself. The principles of Waldorf-inspired public education align nicely with project-based learning gaining popularity in traditional public schools. Waldorf-inspired public school teachers are devoted to meeting students at their unique developmental levels, nurturing their imaginations, and helping them gain the skills and passion needed to become lifelong learners.

TRCCS and the Tomorrow River School District serve a unique role in central Wisconsin where alternative education options are limited. As one of only dozens of Waldorf-inspired public school options, TRCCS makes the district a destination for students and families. ■

¹Steiner, Rudolf. *The Spiritual Ground of Education*, Anthroposophic Press, Great Barrington, MA, 2004, pp. 6.



STORY BY

Erin Werra

To read more from Erin, visit www.skyward.com/blog

There Are No Low-Tech Fields

Industries that were once considered “low-tech” are now desperately in need of people with technology skills. Yet, the education many aspiring trade professionals and others are bringing to the table is less than adequate.

Knowledge of technology is indispensable for every student today, not just those pursuing engineering or computer programming. To help every student succeed, it’s imperative that opportunities to get to know technology are woven throughout the daily curriculum and learning environment. Let’s find out why a tech-rich education can give students an advantage in fields that have historically been seen as “low-tech” career paths.

Auto Mechanics



“Instead of taking 8 hours to diagnose a car, you can do it in 30 minutes.” That’s the impact technology has had on auto mechanics according to Eddie Cathey, an instructor at the Excel Institute, which prepares students for careers in auto repair.

It only makes sense that the qualifications for a good auto mechanic already include increased computer skills. After all, vehicles are becoming progressively more advanced, with computers controlling everything from braking and engine management to navigation and in-car entertainment systems, not to mention the complicated electrical systems that make it possible for hybrid vehicles to be so fuel efficient.

Future mechanic Isaiah Smith put it this way: “Maybe one day you’re putting a new ECM into a brand-new car, and the next day you’re working on some 1985 rusted-out truck.” Problem solving, critical thinking, and computer skills all come together in this high-tech field.

Journalists

Every facet of journalism, from newsgathering to distributing, has changed tremendously over the past few decades, thanks largely to the development of technology. The smartphone lets just about any journalist take on the role of photographer. Digital audio recorders make it possible to record interviews on the fly. Laptops, navigation systems, and smartphone apps also help journalists to become more efficient and stay connected. In the early days of the pandemic, journalists read the news from home offices—complete with a chic bookshelf backdrop.



Social media helps journalists with their research, allowing them to crowdsource and get regular updates directly from people on the scene. When it comes to reaching an audience, social media has contributed to exponential growth. Journalists report with live blogging and create podcasts and vodcasts. They also use platforms like X, YouTube, and TikTok to tell their stories, just like citizen journalists.

Plumbers

The Government of Canada posted a list of “Essential Skills for Success as a Plumber.” Computer use gets its own category on the list. There’s a reason high-tech plumbers are in high demand. The tools they use for diagnosing and fixing problems allow them to work more efficiently and cost-effectively, which provides the customer with an all-around better experience.

Today’s tech-savvy plumbers use video cameras attached to fiber optic cables to look inside pipes and determine where and what the issue is. They use hydro jets to clear blockages and electric drain augers to break up clogs. Plumbers with tech know-how can offer and install more technically advanced and sought-after solutions that save customers money, such as green dishwashers, greywater systems, or sprinklers that automatically shut off based on weather reports. Technicians at a Mr. Rooter Plumbing franchise in Texas use iPads for onsite access to paperwork, photos, and videos, and to see if parts are available.

Outside of the home or business, plumbing companies use technology to track their fleets with a GPS. They are better equipped to plan routes, reduce fuel waste, and ensure that drivers are arriving on time. Brandy Waugh, co-owner of the Amarillo-based Mr. Rooter, has found numerous benefits of her fleet tracking system. “By tracking a technician’s route, I can tell a customer exactly when the technician will arrive,” she said. “If a customer calls in a panic with an urgent request, I can find the closest technician and reroute him... If someone calls and complains that they were overcharged, I can look up the exact time that the technician arrived at the customer’s house and when he left.”



Construction

Tools traditionally used in professions like engineering, architecture, and accounting are now commonplace in construction. Construction workers use design software, lasers, 3D models, drones, spreadsheets, and global positioning systems. They save time and eliminate redundant data entry by incorporating tech that manages payroll, tracks time, and assigns job codes, as well as imports, categorizes, and archives drawings.

High-tech construction companies can communicate more effectively. Smartphones give workers access to important information required for monitoring and controlling costs onsite, and sending quick updates from the field. With software like NoteVault, workers can “call in” notes that will be transcribed and automatically emailed, along with photos, in a daily report to project stakeholders.

Connectivity isn’t just a core part of the construction process—today’s buildings are increasingly smart. The internet of things connects HVAC, electric, and other systems in new buildings directly to a maintenance pro’s smartphone. Construction companies are expected to be able to handle installation and calibration of these smart devices. Even appliances—dishwashers, washing machines, dryers, and refrigerators—can require connectivity to networks in-home.



Farming

Perhaps some of the most staggering changes in recent history belong to the literal fields. Farmers are embracing technology to reduce waste and increase yield. Not only do planting and harvesting change with yield monitoring, but mapping means farmers waste less fertilizer and water. A fairly simple GPS light bar guides equipment so there's no overlap in seeds, fertilizer, pesticides, or insecticides.

On the animal husbandry side of farming, robotic milking means cows are milked when they're primed to produce the most, not on a clock schedule like in the olden days. Milk storage has also evolved. Machines will notify the farmer via push notifications on their smartphone if controls are accidentally changed.

The Technological Edge

As you can see, even if a field hasn't traditionally been "high-tech," knowledge of technology and the ability to use high-tech tools help some professionals gain the upper hand. Prepare all of your students for 21st century success by integrating technology into your curriculum. Your tech-competent graduates will be much more likely to succeed in the years ahead as the tools we use continue to evolve. ■



STORY BY

Casey Hernandez

To read more from Casey, visit www.skyward.com/blog



Technology Coordinator, Jennifer Keith.

SPOTLIGHT

Back on Track: Illinois District Hap



Lincoln Community High School District 404
Lincoln, IL | Enrollment: 723 | Schools: 1

Lincoln Community High School District 404 moves back to Skyward to enhance their SIS experience.

Choosing the right student management system is one of the most critical decisions a district can make—it shapes daily operation, impacts efficiency, and supports long-term goals.

For Lincoln Community High School District 404 in Lincoln, IL, that journey took an unexpected detour. After years with Skyward, a leadership change prompted a switch to a new platform, but the transition didn't go as planned. What seemed like a step forward quickly became a step back, leading Lincoln to reevaluate what they truly needed in a system.

IT STORY

Why Returns to EdTech Provider

Jennifer Keith, technology coordinator at Lincoln, took the wheel in navigating the district's return to Skyward. With a clear vision and a commitment to making the right choice for staff, students, and the community, she helped steer Lincoln back on track—this time with the power of Qmlativ, Skyward's latest platform, to drive them forward.

Skyward had been solving challenges we hadn't even recognized before.

- Technology Coordinator, Jennifer Keith

The wrong turn

Lincoln initially partnered with Skyward in 2007 with their SMS 2.0 platform. However, following administrative changes, some leaders explored alternative platforms. During the 2023-2024 school year, they transitioned to another provider but retained their Skyward account as a precaution.

"At the time, we thought we were making a move toward something better," said Keith. "But we quickly realized that Skyward had been solving challenges we hadn't even recognized before. The functionality and reliability we once took for granted were suddenly missing."

Promises of a smooth data transfer and improved functionality with their new system fell short. While there were minor benefits, such as simplified state reporting and integrations, overall functionality was a downgrade. The experience highlighted the strengths of Skyward that Lincoln had taken for granted.

"We expected an upgrade, but instead, we found ourselves struggling with limitations," said Keith. "Basic tasks became frustratingly complex, and we quickly

realized how much we had relied on Skyward's intuitive design and comprehensive features. We were definitely blessed with Skyward, and didn't realize what we had until it was gone."

Switching gears

Struggling with their newest system, Lincoln decided to go "back" to Skyward, while still moving forward by upgrading to Qmlativ.

"Qmlativ provided improved state reporting, seamless Google Classroom integration, and the familiarity of Skyward's robust platform in an exciting way," explained Keith. "Our goal was to return to Skyward while leveraging Qmlativ's enhanced features. The price of all the benefits and our mental health couldn't be beat."

The transition process to Qmlativ was accelerated to fit the district's urgent timeline, yet the training modules and transition team ensured the process was smooth and well-supported.

Implementing Qmlativ required intensive training and hands-on practice before data migration. Skyward offered excellent support with monthly meetings, clear task follow-ups, and responsive assistance. The accessible training materials empowered staff at Lincoln to learn effectively, even with the tight timeline.

"The support from Skyward was incredible," recalled Keith. "They walked us through every step, answered our questions, and made sure we were comfortable with the transition. Even with the tight schedule, we never felt like we were on our own."

The support from Skyward was incredible.

- Technology Coordinator, Jennifer Keith



“ Coming back to Skyward felt like a homecoming, but with a fresh new interface. ”

- Technology Coordinator, Jennifer Keith

Principal, David Helm and Registrar, Tina Shiers.

Accelerating success

Implementing Qmlativ has been a key step in achieving Lincoln's long-term goals, ensuring that teachers, students, and the community can easily access the information they need.

Among the most significant benefits has been Qmlativ's seamless state reporting.

"It's truly a 'set it and forget it' experience—an absolute game changer," explained Keith.

The platform's intuitive design and user-friendly mobile app have also enhanced engagement, making it easier for students and parents to stay connected.

"Coming back to Skyward felt like a homecoming, but with a fresh new interface," said Keith. "Qmlativ gave us the tools we needed while retaining the reliability we had always valued. The learning curve was minimal, and the improvements were immediately noticeable."

Full speed ahead

Switching back to Skyward and embracing Qmlativ has proven highly beneficial for Lincoln. State reporting processes are now more efficient, and the platform's improved interface has enhanced parent, student, and staff engagement. With outstanding support and intuitive training resources, the district feels confident in its long-term partnership with Skyward and Qmlativ.

"Now that we're fully transitioned, I can confidently say this was the right decision," said Keith. "We're more efficient, better connected, and ready for whatever comes next. This move wasn't just about switching systems—it was about positioning our district for long-term success. We truly have zero regrets!" ■



STORY BY

Cassidy Downs

To read more from Cassidy, visit www.skyward.com/blog

Use SIS and ERP Data to **PAY TEACHERS MORE**

Teacher pay increases dominate the wish lists of administrators looking to reduce turnover, but what if your board (or budget office) isn't on board?

Administrators, superintendents, and their teams looking to make positive change for teachers can use data in their student information system (SIS) and enterprise resource system (ERP) to make the case. Here's what that might look like.

Take stock of what exists today

Just as educators map progress using benchmarks, it's imperative to mark your starting point in your journey to increasing teacher pay. Both in your district and outside it, teacher compensation is going to attract or repel high-performing applicants.

Admin teams use ERP systems to review a district's worth of salary, position, and benefit data and spot trends. Trends are powerful: sharing these high-level insights with board members can make the case for improving salary, and thus retention, at the district level.

Track trends of where the district has been—and where you can grow from here

Recent survey data from the National Education Association shows that a whopping 37 percent of teachers report struggling to make a living wage, and 40 percent

hold more than one job.¹ The survey also reports food and medical insecurity stats among teachers.

Each district has a unique trend report, and not every district has a teacher pay and retention deficit—regardless, taking stock of growth curves is crucial to retaining high-performers. Not only are neighboring districts attractive prospects for certain families, but also for quality educators.

There are multiple trends to compare when determining if compensation remains competitive for your district. These may include:

- Salary and wage information
- Position types
- FTE vs. PTE
- Calendar type (9 vs. 12 month)

Getting a complete picture—quite literally—of the different types of roles and the population of educators and education support staff within the district can be eye-opening for those who aren't in schools day in and day out. To do this effectively, data storytelling really requires images.

Once the trends are displayed visually, presenting and translating the story to boards and the wider community becomes much easier.

Mind the gaps

Identifying trends always conjures up a mental image of charts and graphs moving up, up, up. However, the best part of identifying all these norms is the opportunity to challenge them, find exceptions, and mind the gaps.

Identify the excessive turnover and the rock-solid teams.

Figure out who needs intensive mentorship and who needs an additional set of hands.

The opportunities are waiting to be discovered, and certain sites may need more than others. Being able to parse through district-level data visually allows different people to spot gaps or needs in the data that are hard to identify in raw reports.

Reward those rocking teaching and learning

Now, up until this moment we've been really looking primarily at ERP data—that is, housed in the finance and HR side of school data. Shifting to the SIS side, you may want to identify:

- Usage rates: Are staff using edtech tools?
- Behavior tracking data by building or classroom
- Academic growth by classroom
- Intervention requests by classroom
- Numerous other intricate signs of highly engaged teachers

These pieces of data, along with so many more depending on unique district needs, tell a story about life in classrooms around the district. While it's not the ENTIRE story (teachers defy definition by data alone), it certainly gives a clue as to who is investing in students, and that makes all the difference. Retention based on improving student outcomes is a recipe with great potential.

Every cent is precious in a school district, but none more valuable than salary and benefits for educators. Using SIS and ERP tools to make smart decisions and balance a tighter budget while still investing in teacher retention is a win on several levels. ■

¹"Financial Snapshot: Pre-K-12 Teachers." National Education Association. 2024.



STORY BY

Erin Werra

To read more from Erin, visit www.skyward.com/blog

District Decisions Supported by Data

Support and simplify your district decision-making with engaging, visual data analytics.

Educational data analytics are instant

USE VISUAL DATA TO IDENTIFY:

- How to allocate resources
- How the district is meeting goals
- Future growth trends

Leaders make use of analytics

DATA ANALYSIS TOOLS CAN STREAMLINE:

- Sharing visual insights with shareholders
- Scaling data points at any level
- District transparency and accountability

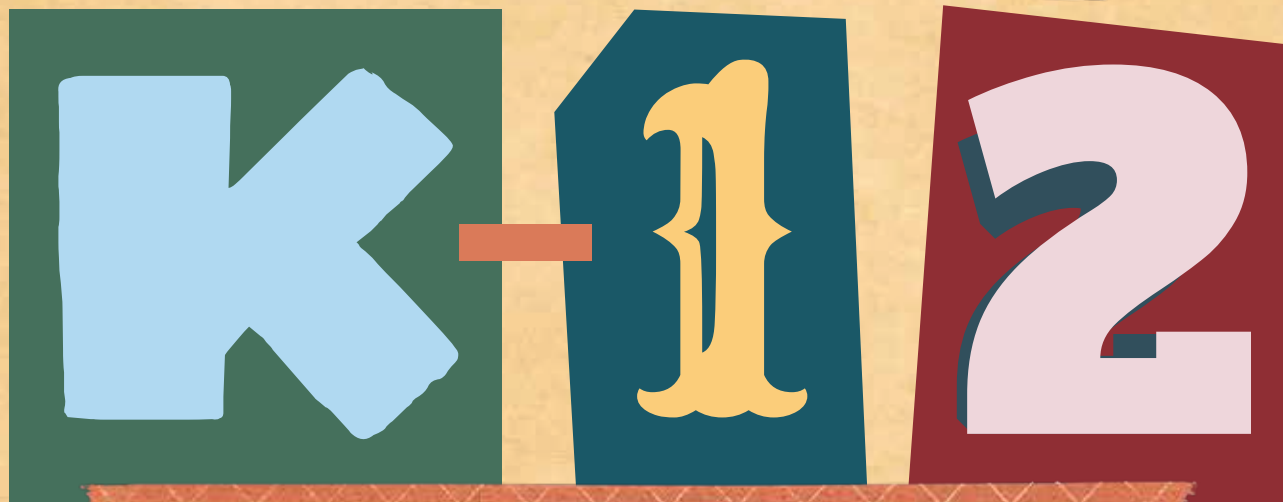
Save time and secure data

DATA ANALYTICS PLATFORMS PROTECT YOUR MOST VALUABLE DATA WITH:

- Role-based permissions
- Multi-factor authentication
- Eliminate redundant credentials

For the full article, visit skyward.com/blog and search "District Decisions Supported by Data."

SECRETS TO



COMMUNICATION, as Told by Two Pros

An invaluable contributor to the health of school districts, communication professionals are still emerging as a regular fixture of district admin teams. These are the folks dedicated to telling the story of each school district to the wider community, including but not limited to creating social and other media, managing crisis communication, and building the district's brand.

National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) membership is 2,500 strong¹, but that number represents only a fraction of the 13,500 regular school districts in the United States. More often, admin teams share the "communication professional hat," so to speak.

Two directors of communication for neighboring K-12 school districts recently shared their perspectives, tips, lessons, and stories.

Gregg Gutschow is the communication director for Tomorrow River School District in Amherst, Wisconsin. Sarah O'Donnell is the communication director for Stevens Point Area School District in Stevens Point, Wisconsin.

OVERCOMING COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES

As schools emerge from the chaos of recent years, communication is evolving and growing past simply pushing information from school to home. Instead, K-12 communication strategy is back to focusing on reaching a wide audience of alumni, current families, and the community at large. This is beyond exciting, but can spell strain for smaller district teams. Both communication pros solve this by enlisting a troupe of content creators.

"Our staff has done a great job of participating—they spot something great, take pictures, come up with a little copy, and send it to social," Gutschow described. "Tell high school students they can help with content creation. They see things from a different viewpoint than adults do."

O'Donnell's teammates across the SPASD district also lend a hand in content creation. "They know our brand, voice, and vision, and what our goals are."

It's easy to want to hop into the conversation and engage all the time, but O'Donnell also emphasized the importance of setting boundaries on your time and energy, especially since social media never turns off.

STORYTELLING MAKES COMMUNICATION MAGICAL

For Sarah O'Donnell, the role means being a memory keeper for the district. "I think the beauty of any comms job is you can get to be the storyteller for a lot of different things. For us in K-12, that means getting to focus on student stories, and teachers' and staff stories," O'Donnell explained.

"For example, a couple high school kids ran a Toys for Tots drive and delivered donations to the community," Gregg Gutschow said. "Those kinds of things are magical and important to share with the community at large." Sometimes these stories are big, exciting moments the community is proud to celebrate, and sometimes communication teams can amplify minor classroom stories. No story is too small to tell, but sometimes it seems like the spectacles get the spotlight more than the classroom-level happenings. "So many things that happen here inside the school are amazing on a daily basis," Gutschow said.



DAILY ROUTINES FOR SMOOTH COMMUNICATION

Like many communication professionals, daily routines include checking media and metrics and using tools to track audience engagement. However, as a small team or a department of one, many tasks make the day go by at a breakneck pace. O'Donnell found success using time blocking to focus on a specific task and dive into the strategy.

"No two days are alike," explained Gutschow. "I oversee fundraising, so I may be very focused on that. But I can balance things from day to day or week to week if I have to focus on something else." Gutschow also checks in daily with his content creators across the district.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Of course, the biggest question in the room is: what does your audience think, and how do you find out?

"They think all kinds of things! You find out by asking them," O'Donnell laughed. "I think so often that people are afraid to ask what people think. They're nervous about what their answer can be. But they're going to think it whether you ask or not."

O'Donnell explained that she uses design thinking for communication. She spends more time defining the problem, the needs, and the perspectives of the audience, then moves on to finding a solution. The district relies on tools like surveys to find gaps in communication.

Over in the Tomorrow River School District, Gutschow explained the grassroots growth of outreach tools including a brand new newsletter, The Falcon's Nest. "The district Facebook page has grown exponentially," he added, crediting his internal team of content creators.

"ONE WEIRD TRICK" IN K-12 COMMUNICATION AND PR

To quote Gutschow, there's no set recipe for a K-12 communication director. Everyone has their own set of skills and tools that works for their district's unique goals. But what's one odd tip that these two PR pros would share?

Gutschow stresses the importance of blending in with the crowd when working to capture the story. "Be a discreet spectator with an eye out for something special," he said. "This will help capture the most authentic story—maybe even better than the one you expected."

O'Donnell is a fan of pre-making communications the district will likely never need, but will have ready to go in an instant just in case. "I overplan, probably. I feel more prepared and can tailor my work to what's happening." ■

¹"2022-23 Annual Report to NSPRA Members." NSPRA, National School Public Relations Association, 2023.



STORY BY

Erin Werra

To read more from Erin, visit www.skyward.com/blog



5

TACTICS FOR LOUD AND CLEAR COMMUNICATION

Effective communication doesn't just happen; it takes careful practice and planning. Push yourself to pinpoint your communication weaknesses and to sharpen your skills.

PLAN YOUR COMMUNICATION:

- **Prepare:** Explore what-if scenarios, as well as potential responses.
- **Prevent:** Take action to combat foreseeable issues before they begin.
- **Protect:** Make a plan to protect against future problems.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT MEDIUM:

- **Personal:** Use in-person conversation or video chat for more connection.
- **Wide reach:** Use email or social media for large audiences.
- **Urgent:** Call or text for instantaneous communication.

BE CLEAR:

- **Be natural:** Write as you would speak—don't overcomplicate it.
- **Double check:** Reread, or get a second set of eyes on it.
- **Be honest:** Send updates every step of the way.

BE CONCISE:

- **Less is more:** Say only what you need to say.
- **Make it skimmable:** Use bullet points and paragraph breaks.
- **Take it slow:** Don't overload recipients with too-frequent communication.

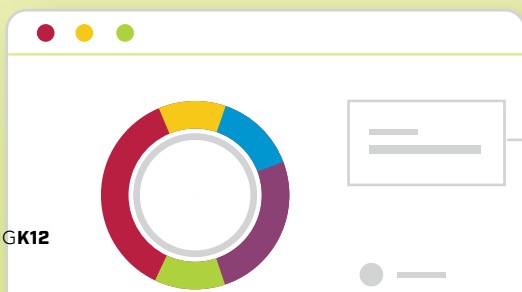
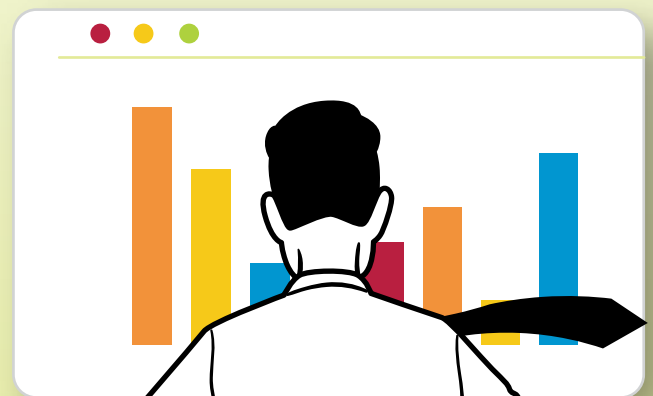
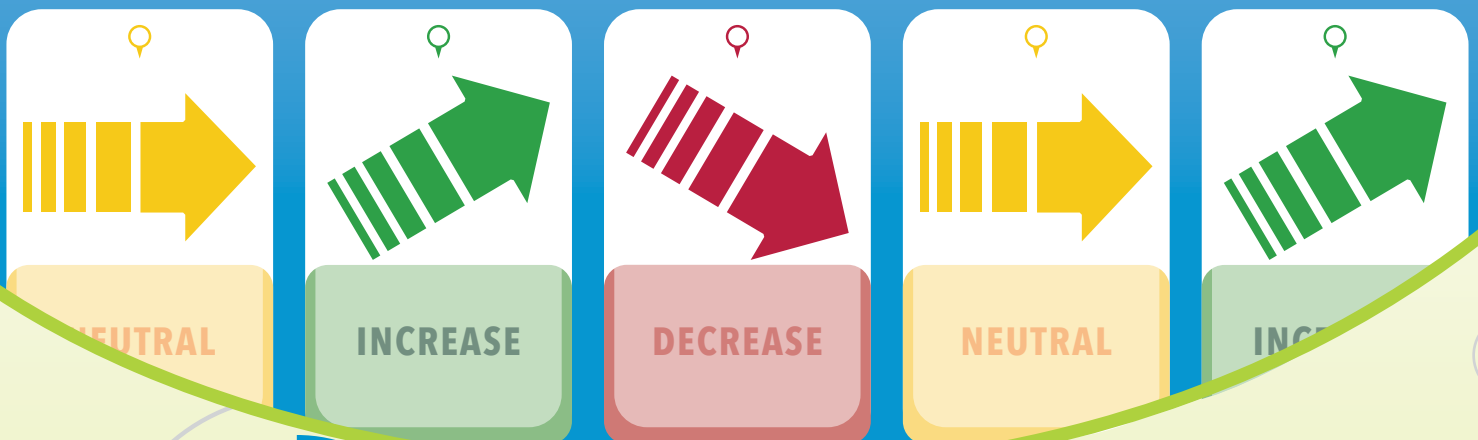
COMMUNICATION GOES BOTH WAYS:

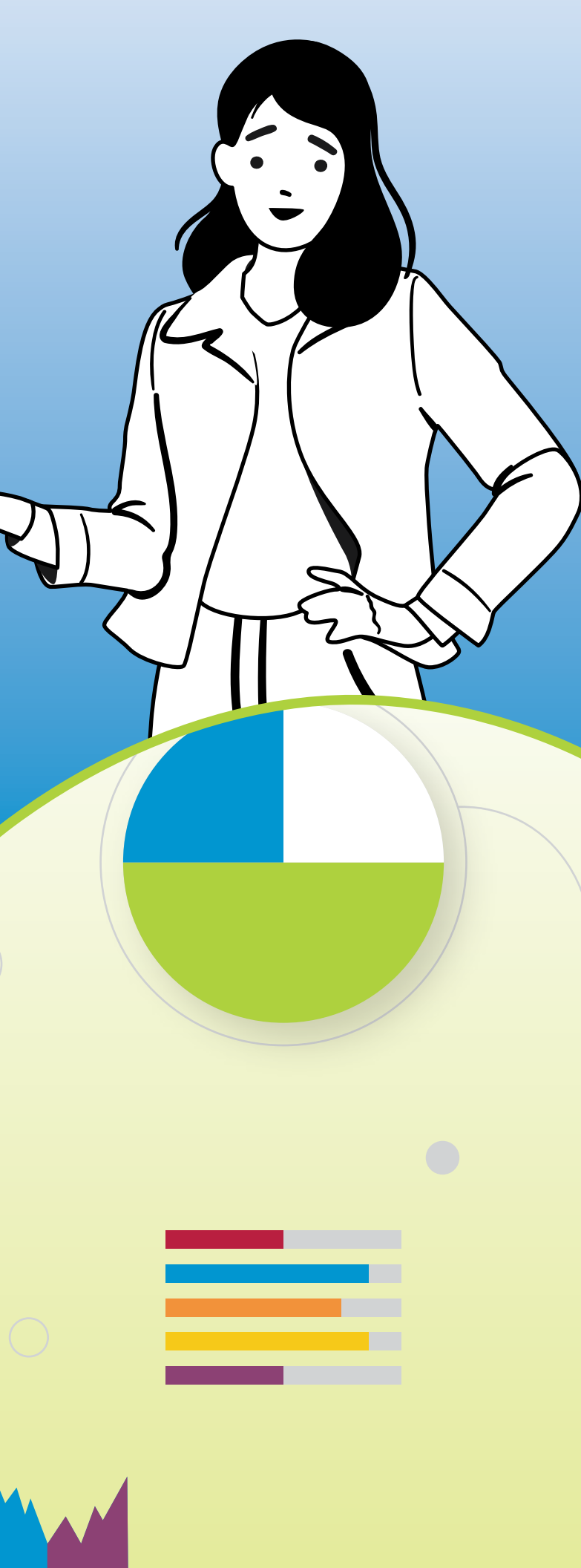
- **Listen:** Show you are hearing and understanding feedback.

USE PREDICTIVE EDUCATION INSIGHTS TO IMPROVE STUDENT GROWTH

It's no secret that schools safeguard a wealth of student data.

Most districts rely on a student information system (SIS) to keep student information such as personal identifying information (PII), demographic data, grades, attendance, behavior, and more. But do all districts take full advantage of their data to track student success?





Why use predictive education insights?

Educational data analytics have come a long way. From teachers marking up beautiful handwritten gradebooks to today's robust SIS solutions, educators are about to dive into predictive education insights. This means that not only is educational data analyzed and displayed so educators can easily read it, but also that data is used to forecast how students will fare if they stay on their current achievement track.

Predictive education insights are made possible through analyzing data in the cloud and presenting it visually—also called educational data analytics.

What do educators use predictive education insights to do?

Each educator wants to help students grow and succeed. Predictive education insights can help create a roadmap or action plan to get students from their starting point to their goal—whether that is grade-level standards or improvement on their intervention plan.

Predictive education insights do not guarantee success. But when expert coaches can plot a potential growth curve, it may inform their strategies for engaging students.

Let's look at an example of what predictive education insights can help educators do.

An example of predictive education insights in action

Let's say a school principal is looking for trends to inform professional development offerings. The principal can gather data about student performance and outcomes, but interpreting the data is a long and tedious process. Instead, using educational data analytics, the principal sees a range of visual interpretations of the data.

From these charts, the principal can see not only a snapshot of student attendance, grades, GPA, and behavior incidents, but also use these analytics to identify and predict trends. When school leaders have a good idea of the direction student achievement is trending, it's easier to select PD for educators to support positive trends or intervene in negative trends. ■



STORY BY

Erin Werra

To read more from Erin, visit www.skyward.com/blog

How School Culture SLAYS Chronic Absenteeism

The more the merrier when it comes to creating school culture. When students aren't in attendance, their particular contributions to school culture are greatly missed.

However, we know there are tons of valid reasons students are unable to get to school (and that schools are always helping solve these issues of access for students). Beyond full tummies, clean clothes, and transportation, there's also the question of whether students feel like going to school.

Hold on now, we think as adults. I might not feel like going to work, but I go anyway. So true. Now consider the reasons we as adults go anyway: perhaps a good connection with a coworker, or the recognition we get from a job well done at work worth doing. How can we ensure students also feel this belonging and esteem?

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs gives us a helpful vision of what makes human brains engage, tick, and grow. After our physical needs for health and safety are met, we're naturally programmed to pursue connections with other people. Let's dive in and explore the cycle of belonging and esteem that can get more students to engage and contribute to their school's culture.



I BELONG HERE

It's really not enough to invite the child to belong—they must *decide* they belong. Four tactics can help this decision emerge.

Messaging lets students and their grown-ups know they're welcome. Educators really get to unleash their creativity here, and this is what is memorable for students and families. This emotional labor of not only creating materials but lovingly arranging them gives people the message: "I see you. You see me. We belong together."

Climate of the school is related to school culture. It's the embodiment of the culture, the feelings left when school culture is done well. A positive and cohesive culture can foster a welcoming environment.

Equity is acknowledging and meeting each student's unique needs.

Warmth, emotional connection, and a friendly smile go a long way. This is work—emotional labor is still labor—and it matters so much when educators put in this overlooked effort. The process of creating belonging is less coercive than it is simply a sincere invitation.

I AM HERE

Do we give kids (oh, and teachers) enough credit for coming to school in the first place? A child in attendance has decided: *I've chosen to come here today ready to participate. I prepared to get here, and got help when needed.*

When we think about it this way, how heroic is it for a relatively new human to get to school? Though the goal is to limit absences and get students involved in creating their own school's culture, getting students to attend can be tricky. Children who feel they belong—that is, they're welcome into the group just as they are—are more likely to attend than those who dread spending hours in a place hostile to them.

For families who need a nudge to ensure their child's attendance, pair behavior science and automation to deliver letters designed to inspire action.

I CONTRIBUTE HERE

A student who belongs feels safe enough to make their own creations, ideas, and assertions in the classroom and school. Such psychological safety permits productive failure.

Failures can be some of the most valuable contributions to the group if we learn from them. Showcasing your own failures from a leadership perspective models the non-linear nature of growth for students only just learning how to learn.

The more student choice and agency are worked into the day, the better. From building schedules to designing their own projects, students are energized by doing their own thing (even if adults think it's pretty out-there).

If you are a dreamer, come in
If you are a dreamer, a wisher, a liar,
A hope-er, a pray-er, a magic bean buyer...
If you're a pretender, come sit by the fire
For we have some flax-golden tales to spin.

Come in!

Come in!

—Shel Silverstein

MY CONTRIBUTIONS ARE RECOGNIZED HERE

When I contribute, I gain recognition and esteem from peers, teachers, staff, and other adults in the building.

Another labor of love teachers are famous for: showcasing student work for many eyes to see. It's not just a design choice; it's the feedback and recognition that students crave once they achieve that feeling of belonging. The next step in Maslow's Hierarchy nudges humans to seek esteem—respect and admiration—from others and themselves.

Part of the learning we do in schools is to learn how to be humans together. Tools like Maslow's Hierarchy can't solve every problem (and definitely not chronic absenteeism in the post-pandemic era), but it's possible to take inspiration and make incremental change for the better.

And after all, that's all that learning is. ■



STORY BY

Erin Werra

To read more from Erin, visit www.skyward.com/blog

This
article also
appeared on
**eLearning
Industry!**

Increase Engagement and Equity with SIS Translation

The root of many challenges in school settings?
Communication.

It's impossible to over-communicate, whether students are young (and prone to breakdowns in communication) or older (and prone to avoidance in communication). Historically, connecting schools and families has presented a host of challenges. The good news? Language barrier no longer has to be one of them. Let's explore translation services in edtech solutions.

Parent and family engagement

Family engagement is important to student success, and yet only 20% of parents report being actively engaged with their students' schools.¹ Most communication professionals are dedicated to engaging more families with school activities more often. To that end, translation services built into your student information system (SIS) can bridge communication gaps for students whose families speak a language other than English at home.

Built-in translation is authentic and mindful

Well-meaning educators may have already created some processes to translate communication into other languages,

which is phenomenal leadership. However, if translation services are built into messaging software, the result transcends a manual translation for a couple of reasons:

1. The service is available in multiple languages.
2. Translation is more conversational with fewer errors.

How to make it happen

1. Use tools you already rely on.
2. Use common browsers for easier access.
3. Choose solutions with translation built-in.

**Only 20% of parents
report being actively
engaged with their
students' schools.**

Accessibility matters

Educators are dedicated to reaching all their students regardless of ability. It's the same spirit with edtech and accessibility. The decision makers in your district must adopt the mindset that their choices are powerful and should provide equal access for all types of users. Whether they are users with a complete or tenuous grasp of English and technology, an edtech solution must contain the tools needed to scaffold users of all abilities. This is called universal design.

Communities matter

Leave behind the language barrier and get all families involved. Neighbors helping neighbors can start at school by providing a certain level of comfort with communication. When families feel that sense of belonging, they feel comfortable taking part in outreach events and family fun at school.

Beyond connection, closing the language gap brings multilingual families into a higher level of parental engagement: sharing their opinions and priorities about the direction the district should grow toward. Better school-home partnerships not only help students achieve more; they also help district leaders know what families need. ■

Better school-home partnerships not only help students achieve more; they also help district leaders know what families need.

¹Hodges, Tim. "School Engagement Is More than Just Talk." *Gallup.com*, Gallup, 25 Mar. 2025.



STORY BY

Erin Werra

To read more from Erin, visit www.skyward.com/blog

Top 3 Myths People Believe About Classroom Accessibility

Universal Design (UD) isn't extra work, it's essential work. Let's clear up the confusion.

Myth 1: It requires rebuilding

Many of your most-used programs already have accessibility features built in.

Look for:

Alt Text: describes images in a readable format, rather than just visual.

Captions and subtitles: Puts text on screen with spoken words.

Myth 2: It sticks out like a sore thumb

Universal design means accessibility for everyone in a natural way:

Built-in access: Natural lights and muted colors fit UD standards.

Flexible fixtures: Adjustable tables and movable seating mean inclusive classroom experiences.

Myth 3: There are more needs than we can meet

Learning leeway: Provide many ways to perceive, comprehend, and express learning to needs beyond disabilities.

For the full article, visit skyward.com/blog and search "Top 3 Myths People Believe About Classroom Accessibility."

7 Resolutions for Edtech

No matter the time of year, it's time to give your edtech a reset:

1. Implement MFA yesterday

Take action to protect your data with multi-factor authentication for all users through edtech vendors.

2. Create or revisit security strategies

Don't wait for a security disaster: plan ahead and take a proactive approach against ransomware, phishing, and other security threats.

3. Revisit data backups

Weigh the pros and cons of hosting your data servers on a cloud backup or on-site, but choose one and back up your data, pronto.

4. Expand accessibility

By insisting on accessible edtech, you will be setting every student up for success, now and in the future.

5. Fight against AI

While AI has its applications, it does not need to pervade every aspect of education.

6. Streamline applications

Cut unused and unnecessary apps, especially those that may pose a security risk to your district's data.

7. Use data to enhance experiences

Use data analytics to find ways to cut wasted time and resources, and improve work and life for your staff.

For the full article, visit skyward.com/blog and search "7 Resolutions for Edtech in 2025."

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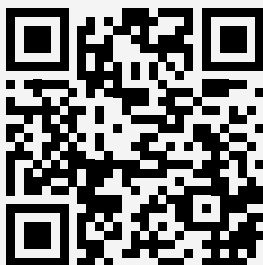
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