CENTER FOR DIGITAL EDUCATION

Reimagining Education: K-12 Districts and the 'Next Normal' for Teaching and Learning

As many schools continue to navigate remote or hybrid learning, it is becoming clear that teaching and learning will not return to what it looked like before the pandemic. In this Q&A, **Mary Schlegelmilch**, Cisco Education Advocate, and **Brad Saffer**, Global Education Lead, Cisco Industry Solutions, discuss what Schlegelmilch calls an unprecedented opportunity "to reimagine what education can and should look like."

>>> As we move out of the pandemic, what will K-12 education look like?

Saffer: The pandemic forced schools to experiment with different learning models. Moving back to the classroom will allow schools to keep the best of what they experimented with, including successful ways to reach students who were not learning while sitting physically in the classroom. Personalizing in a way that allows choice in the learning process is the silver lining of the pandemic. It encouraged experimentation that otherwise would not have happened.

>>> How will hybrid models impact how K-12 schools teach?

Saffer: Everyone talks about hybrid learning, but everyone has a different definition of it. It is important to focus on the student and teacher experience so there is little to no difference in engagement between someone who is on a computer and someone who is in the classroom. K-12 schools also need to help teachers learn how to do this. For example, what is the best way to create a lesson plan when you have 10 students online and 10 in the classroom?

Schlegelmilch: We can truly find ways to engage students differently. This hybrid approach to learning also allows teachers to think differently about what quality instruction and learning time look like. Many students have said they can work on projects and immerse themselves in an assignment for three to four hours at a time to really understand it. You are putting some responsibility back on the students.

>>> In what ways will the benefits of these new approaches extend beyond the pandemic?

Schlegelmilch: One of the key benefits is the use of analytics and data that tells us the learning is happening. We can use the data to understand what students are learning, what they have achieved and how they are engaged. This allows our teachers and administrators to take a step back and think about what they should be doing for the future.

I also see teachers being more creative and inventive with the use of augmented reality applications, like mixed reality simulations for a chemistry lab or a biology lesson through a simulation. These are some of the experiences we may not have jumped to as quickly before the pandemic, but we have realized they are truly beneficial to teachers as they're building their content and curriculum.

>>> How do schools need to rethink their technology infrastructures to address these shifts?

Saffer: For a lot of districts, it is a matter of looking at where they are in their network refresh cycle. Beyond that, they should look at how they can possibly extend networks to students' homes. It is not just thinking about that education experience from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., it is about having 24-hour connectivity so students can do all the things the new learning models allow them to do.

There were a lot of vulnerabilities that came with the rush to put distance solutions in place. Now districts can take a step back and look at their overall IT strategies. They need to put those plans in place.

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