



Council for American Private Education
 1300 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, #190-433
 Washington, DC 20004
 844-883-CAPE (tel)
www.CAPENetwork.org

CAPE member organizations:

- Agudath Israel of America
- Association of Christian Schools International
- Association of Christian Teachers and Schools
- Association of Waldorf Schools of North America
- Christian Schools International
- Council of Islamic Schools in North America
- Council on Educational Standards and Accountability
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- Friends Council on Education
- Islamic Schools League of America
- Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod
- Mercy Education System of the Americas
- National Association of Episcopal Schools
- National Association of Independent Schools
- National Catholic Educational Association
- National Christian School Association
- Office for Lasallian Education, Christian Brothers Conference
- Oral Roberts University Educational Fellowship
- Seventh-day Adventist Board of Education
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
- Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Schools
- Affiliated State Organizations

CAPE BOARD MEETING

September 16-17, 2024

**Hilton Arlington National Landing
 2399 Richmond Highway
 Arlington, VA 22202**

Time	Event	Location
MONDAY, September 16, 2024		
12:00 PM	Lunch	Crystal Ballroom
1:00 PM	Board Meeting Commences	Adams/Madison Room
2:25 PM	<i>Executive Session – Board Only</i>	
2:50 PM	SCN & Corporate Partners Rejoin Meeting	
4:00 PM	Meeting Adjourns for the Day	
5:00 PM	Reception	Crystal Ballroom
7:00 PM	Reception Concludes	
TUESDAY, September 17, 2024		
8:00 AM	Continental Breakfast	Crystal Ballroom
9:00 AM	Board Meeting Resumes	Adams/Madison Room
11:45 PM	<i>Executive Session – Board Only</i>	
12:00 PM	Lunch	Crystal Ballroom
1:00 PM	Board Meeting Resumes	Adams/Madison Room
3:20 PM	<i>Executive Session – Board Only</i>	
4:00 PM	Adjournment	



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 2399 Richmond Highway
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 September 16-17, 2024**

Tentative Agenda

Monday, September 16

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| 12:00 PM – 1:00 PM | Lunch (Crystal Ballroom) |
| 1:00 PM | Business Meeting Commences (Adams/Madison Room) |
| | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Preliminary Items (1:00 PM – 1:15 PM) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) President’s Welcome and Introductions b) Overview of the Next Two Days c) Review of Executive Committee Meeting Summary – May 2024 d) Approval of Consent Agenda <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i) Board Meeting Summary – March 2024 ii) Meeting Agenda for Today and Tomorrow 2) America’s Education System in a Changing Global Context: Jason Dougal, President and COO, National Center on Education and the Economy (1:15 PM – 2:20 PM)* |
| 2:20 PM – 2:25 PM | Break |
| | 3) <u>BOARD ONLY</u> : Executive Session (2:25 PM – 2:40 PM) |
| 2:40 PM – 2:50 PM | Break |
| | 4) Artificial Intelligence and K-12 Education: John Bailey , Founder, Vestigo Partners (2:50 PM – 4:00 PM)* |
| 4:00 PM | Meeting Adjourns for the Day |
| 5:00 PM – 7:00 PM | Reception with Corporate Sponsors (Crystal Ballroom) |

Tuesday, September 17

8:00 AM – 9:00 AM **Continental Breakfast (Crystal Ballroom)**

9:00 AM **Board Meeting Resumes (Adams/Madison Room)**

- 5) **Cell Phones** in Schools: [Zach Rausch](#), Associate Research Scientist, NYU-Stern School of Business and Lead Researcher to Jonathan Haidt (9:00 AM – 10:20 AM)*

10:20 AM – 10:35 AM **Break**

- 6) Blue Ribbon Schools: [Aba Kumi](#), Director, National Blue Ribbon Schools Program, U. S. Department of Education (10:35 AM – 11:00 AM)*

- 7) State CAPE Network Update: [Brian Broderick](#), Executive Director, Michigan CAPE (11:00 AM – 11:25 AM)*

- 8) Board Discussion (11:25 AM – 11:45 AM)

- a) States Without a [State CAPE](#)
- b) CAPE Digital Marketing Effort
- c) 100 Year Anniversary of *Pierce v. Society of Sisters (1925)*

- 9) BOARD ONLY: Executive Session (11:45 AM – 12:00 PM)

12:00 PM – 1:00 PM **Lunch (Crystal Ballroom)**

1:00 PM **Board Meeting Resumes (Adams/Madison Room)**

- 10) **Microschools**: [Darla Baquedano](#), Partnership Microschooling Field Coordinator, National Microschooling Center (1:00 PM – 2:05 PM)*

2:05 PM – 2:15 PM **Break**

- 11) Public Policy Update: Members of the CAPE Monthly Meeting Group (2:15 PM – 3:15 PM)

3:15 PM – 3:20 PM **Break**

- 12) BOARD ONLY: Executive Session (3:20 PM – 4:00 PM)

4:00 PM **Adjournment**

*Sessions marked with an asterisk will begin with a five-minute presentation by a corporate sponsor.

CAPE Corporate Partners

September 2024

Platinum Partners



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Crystal Berry
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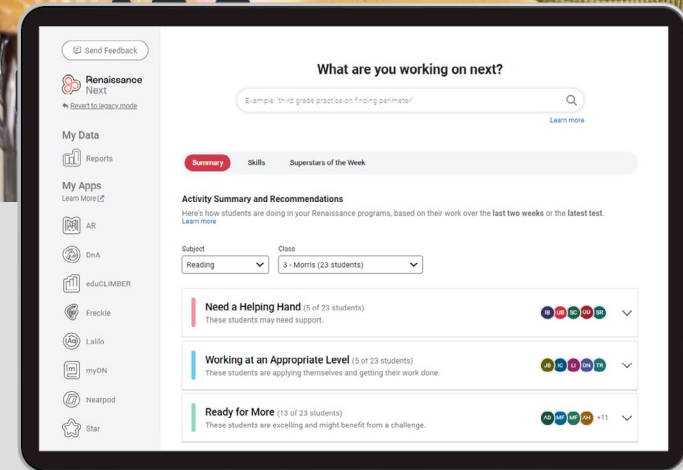
The Renaissance Ecosystem

Support growth and equitable student outcomes

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Next

Teaching made easier

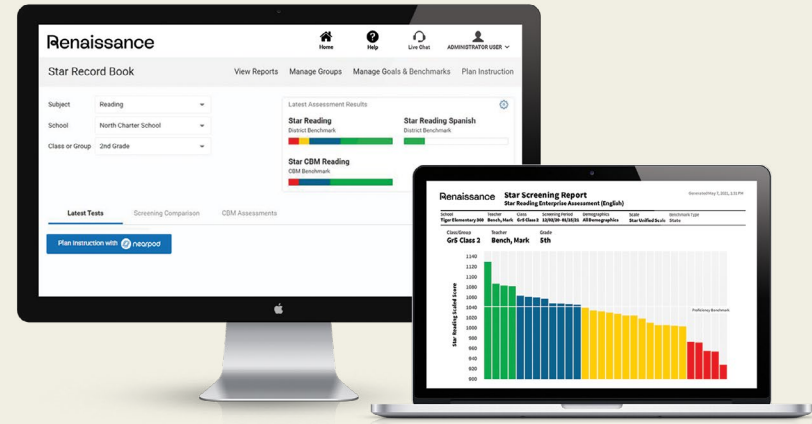
Renaissance Next is transforming instruction by bringing assessment, practice, and instruction data in one place, with actionable recommendations to empower teachers to accelerate learning for all students.

Back-to-School 2024



Accurate Assessment

Confidently guide instruction and improve student learning outcomes with the Renaissance Comprehensive Assessment System



From computer-adaptive tests and curriculum-based measures to norm-referenced assessments and custom-built tests, Renaissance offers a flexible suite of academic and non-academic assessment tools to answer the right question at the right time.

Universal Screening and Progress Monitoring

Star Assessments

(PRE-K–12)

Help pre-K–12 educators identify the early literacy, reading, and math skills students are ready to learn, guide instruction and practice, and measure student growth, in both English and Spanish

Star Preschool Literacy

(PRESCHOOL)

Ensure all students are prepared for kindergarten with research-based assessments that measure critical foundational domains

Renaissance Fundamentals

(K–12)

Proactively identify and address non-academic barriers to student learning and success

FastBridge

(K–12)

Accelerate learning with K–12 screening and progress monitoring assessments for academic and non-academic behavior with intervention recommendations

myIGDIs

(PRESCHOOL)

Support kindergarten success with screening and progress monitoring for early literacy, early numeracy, and non-academic development

Skill Screening and Diagnostic

Star Phonics

(1-6+)

Advance phonics mastery with accurate assessment insight, focusing instruction to ensure mastery in key phonics categories

Screener Classroom Matrix: Phonics Categories by Student EOY

Number Correct

Red - 0, Yellow - 2, Green - 3

Phonics Categories	Taught						Being Taught					
	Con't	CVC	CVCC	CVCe	Digraph	Blend	R-Control	Vowel Teams	CVCCVC	SV Suffix	Prefix	LV Suffix
Teach whole class if categories that have been taught are below 60%	75%	88%	88%	75%	50%	38%	50%	38%	28%	13%	25%	25%
Student Name By Rank												
Brian Johnson	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	1	2	3
Sheena Wright	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	1	2	1	2	2
Ragan Cartland	3	2	3	3	3	1	3	3	3	1	2	3
Tyrell Ward	3	2	3	3	3	1	2	3	3	3	0	2
Kyo Nishimura	3	2	3	2	1	3	1	1	3	0	2	2
Julie Kagawa	2	3	3	3	1	0	0	1	2	2	3	2
Astrid Lindgren	3	0	3	3	2	1	2	1	1	2	2	1
Naoki Chan	2	1	2	1	2							

Classroom Formative, Benchmark/Common Formative, and Summative

DnA

(K-12)

Implement impactful formative practices with flexible standards-based assessments that deliver actionable insights to drive instruction and district-level decisions

Student: Dakota Arreguin (56005630)

Assessment: Math Interim Assessment - A
Test Date: 9/2/2021
Subject: Mathematics
Teacher: Guest, California

58.33%
7 out of 12 points
Standard Nearly Met

Dear Parent or Guardian:
This report communicates how Dakota performed on **Math Interim Assessment - A**. This assessment was administered to measure Dakota's progress in mastering grade/course-appropriate state content standards.

Overall, Dakota performed at a **Standard Nearly Met** proficiency level.

58.33%

Below are area(s) for which Dakota DID show mastery on this assessment.			Below are area(s) for which Dakota DID NOT show mastery on this assessment.		
Area	# Correct	% Correct	Area	# Correct	% Correct
Depth of Knowledge: 1 - Recall	3 / 4	75%	Depth of Knowledge: 2 - Skills and	4 / 8	50%

Below are standards for which Dakota DID show mastery on this assessment.

Description of standard for which student demonstrated mastery	# Correct	% Correct
Interpret a multiplication equation as a comparison, e.g., interpret $35 = 5 \times 7$ as a statement that 35 is 5 times as many as 7 and 7 times as many as 5. Represent verbal statements of multiplicative comparisons as multiplication equations. <small>(CCSS Math Content 4.OA.A.1)</small>	2 / 2	100%



Purposeful Practice & Instruction

Purposeful Practice

Accelerate growth, elevate engagement, and gain real-time insight into student progress with targeted, adaptive, and interactive skill-building

Accelerated Reader

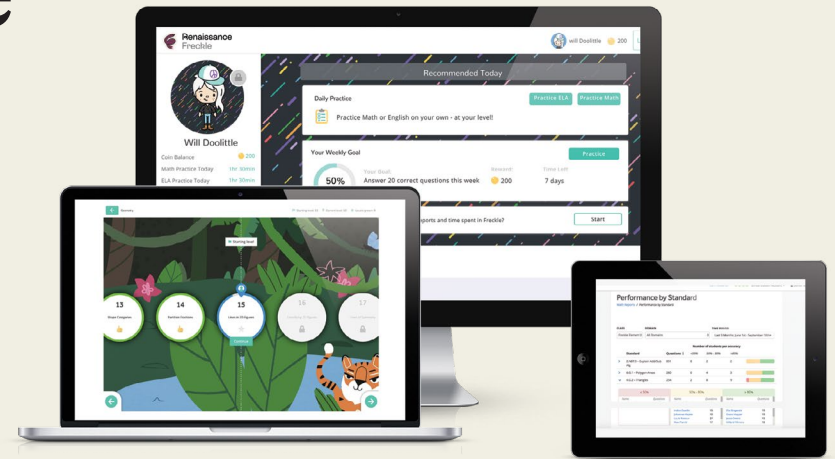
(K–12)

Help K–12 students to become confident, lifelong readers and keep them engaged in independent reading practice as they work toward personalized goals

myON

(PRE-K–12)

Ensure all students have anytime access to high-quality reading with thousands of digital fiction and nonfiction books. Engage students in daily nonfiction reading with high-interest news articles with myON News.



Freckle

(K–12)

Accelerate learning for every student with differentiated practice that meets students where they are and promotes continuous growth with “just right” skill-building in math, ELA, science, and social studies

Lalilo

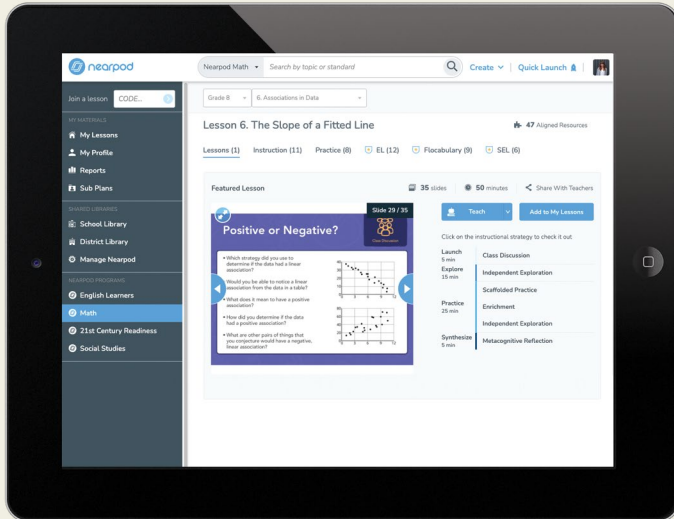
(K–2+)

Build the foundational literacy skills of K–2+ learners with engaging lessons that meet students where they are

Renaissance solutions are used in all 50 states,
plus the District of Columbia

Engaging Instruction

Streamline and differentiate instruction with interactive learning experiences and seamless lesson delivery, all in one place



Nearpod

(K-12)

Deliver engaging teaching and learning experiences with the most comprehensive instructional platform. Drive student achievement through active, rigorous, and data-rich learning experiences that empower educators to support students at every level.



Flocabulary

(K-12)

Accelerate learning and academic vocabulary through rigorous and authentically engaging instructional experiences



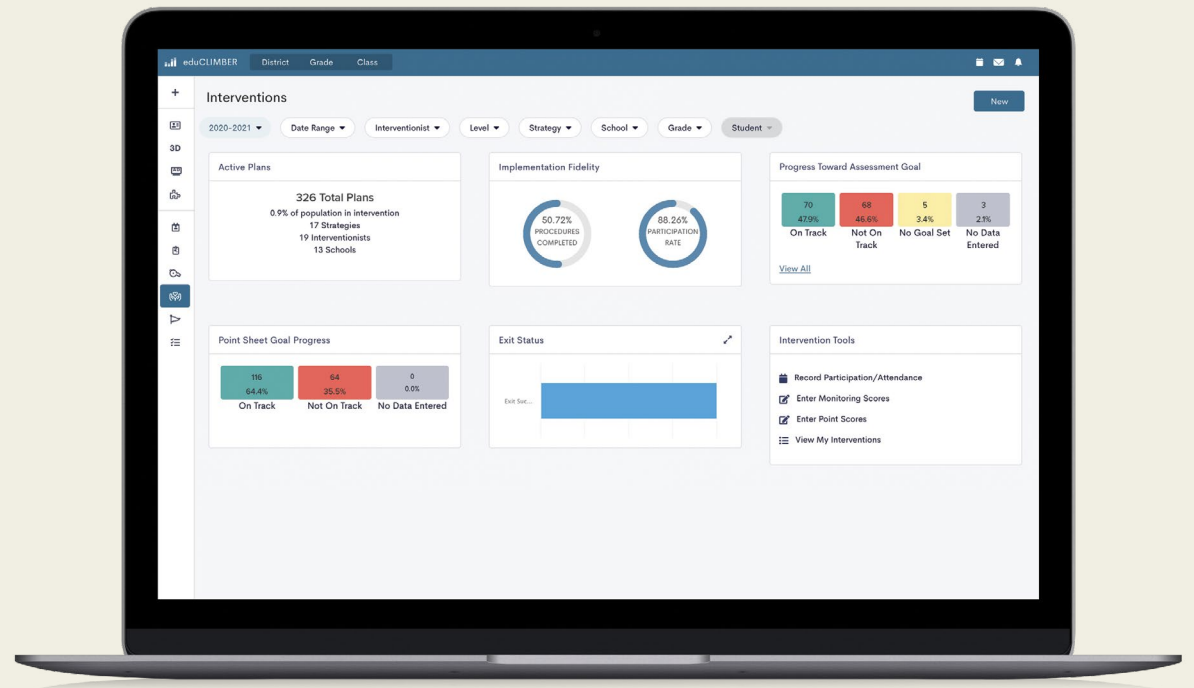
Actionable Insights

Advance student outcomes and drive decisions for schools and systems with whole child data management and analytics

eduCLIMBER (K-12)

Strengthen essential MTSS and RTI practices with an interactive, whole child data management solution that helps educators improve student outcomes

Data Visualizations & Workflow Tools



Customer Success Services

- Customer **Onboarding**
- Customer **Education**
- Customer **Success Management**

“Any coach, webinar, or even online support services have answered my questions or helped me dig deeper into ways to best use the Renaissance products.”

SUSAN LAREAU, MA



Renaissance Analytics

Empower leaders to better understand how Renaissance solutions are being implemented across the district and make data-based decisions to improve learning outcomes for all students

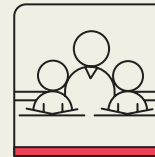
Transform Learning and Support the Whole Child

Our interconnected solutions accurately assess learning and growth, provide insight-driven instruction and practice, and take a whole child approach to data-informed decisions



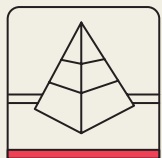
Creating a Comprehensive Assessment System

Inform instruction and improve learning outcomes for all



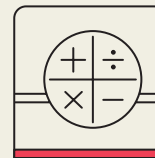
Ensuring Literacy Growth for All

Build an effective literacy framework leveraging purposeful practice to transform students into lifelong readers



Supporting MTSS and the Whole Child

Take a data-driven approach to accelerating learning, promoting equity, and supporting the whole child



Improving Math Outcomes

Equip educators to drive math proficiency for every student

Peabody Public Schools Success Story

CHALLENGE: To implement better universal screening and diagnostic data practices during the pandemic

SOLUTION: Renaissance suite of assessment, practice, and instruction products to advance learning

“It’s one thing for us to have Star Assessments to help inform our instruction, but to have these other supplemental tools—like myON and Freckle—that get students excited about learning is a gamechanger.”

DR. JOSH VADALA,
SUPERINTENDENT,
PEABODY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

[Read more](#)

[Request a demo](#)





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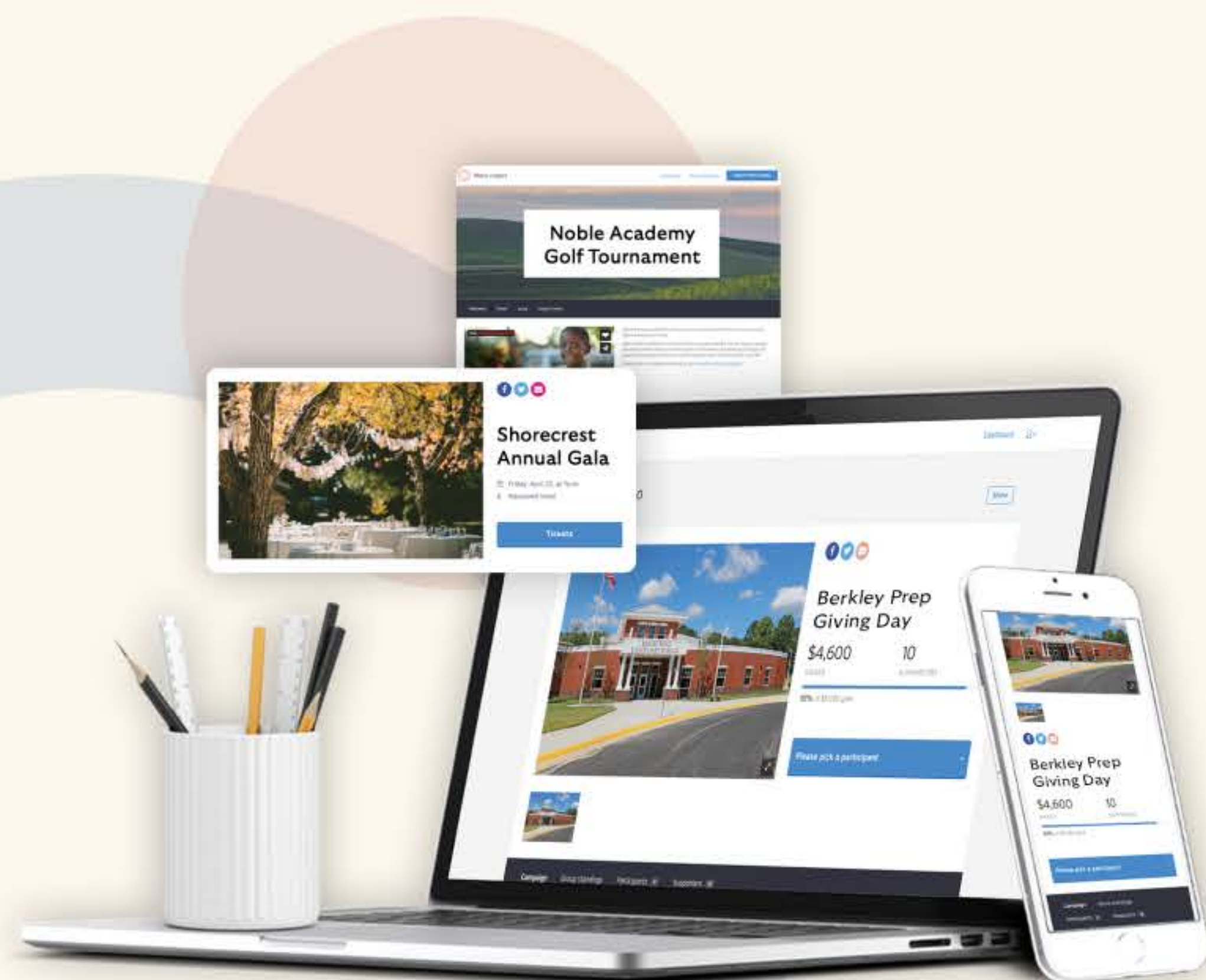


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 Student Fundraising & Back to School Campaigns

 Capital Campaigns

Cellphone bans spread in schools amid growing mental health worries

More large school districts and states are among those banning smartphones during the school day.

🔊 10 min ➦ 📌 🗨️ 1297

By [Laura Meckler](#), [Hannah Natanson](#) and [Karina Elwood](#)

August 27, 2024 at 7:00 a.m. EDT

Students returning to school in a growing number of states and districts are facing tight restrictions and outright bans on cellphone use as evidence mounts of the damaging impact persistent connection to the internet has on teenagers.

In Los Angeles, the second-largest district in the country, the school board [voted in June](#) to ban cellphone use. In Clark County, Nev., the district will require students in middle and high schools to store phones in pouches during the day, starting this fall. Several states — including Indiana, Louisiana, South Carolina and Florida — have enacted legislation limiting cellphone access during the school year. And governors in at least [three other states, including Virginia](#), have called on schools to restrict or ban the devices. Other states have provided funding to support restrictive policies.

Of the nation's 20 largest school districts, at least seven forbid use of cellphones during the school day or plan to do so, while at least another seven impose significant restrictions, such as barring use during class time but permitting phones during lunch or when students are between classes, according to a Washington Post review.

Pressure on school leaders has come from teachers and parents who see cellphones [as a distraction](#), an impediment to learning and a constant toll on students' mental health.

“Everybody has been saying, ‘Take the phones,’” New York City Schools Chancellor David Banks, whose district plans to announce a cellphone ban soon, [told NY1](#) this summer. “It is a major problem. Parents, teachers, administrators and kids. So we’re going to try and get ready to do something that makes some sense.”

The [most recent federal survey](#), in 2021, found that 43 percent of high schools and 77 percent of middle schools prohibit nonacademic use of cellphones or smartphones during school hours. Experts and administrators say those numbers have risen significantly.

Among schools with restrictions, policies and practices vary. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg district in North Carolina allows students to bring cellphones to school but requires they be kept in silent mode while on school property and forbids any noninstructional use including personal calls and texts. The Houston Independent School District requires that phones be turned off. The Duval County district in Florida mandates that students turn off and stow away their phones in pockets or personal bags during class time.

Penalties for violating phone rules usually include confiscation, sometimes requiring parents to retrieve the device from an administrator's office. Occasionally misbehavior yields more-severe consequences, such as exclusion from extracurricular activities or even suspension, for repeat offenders.

Other districts ban use of phones during instructional time — or allow teachers to do so in their individual classes — but permit use during lunch or in the hallways.

The most restrictive polices require students to hand over phones for the entire school day or store them in a locking pouch, such as those sold by Yondr. Demand for the \$30 pouches has skyrocketed, more than tripling this calendar year, the company said, though it would not say how many are in use. The company projects that it will serve more than 2 million students by year's end.

In Los Angeles, officials are exploring how to implement a cellphone ban that will extend through the entire school day.

“Knowing what we know, something must be done,” Alberto M. Carvalho, superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District, said in an interview. “Smartphones and the content students access relentlessly 24/7 are distracting kids from learning and eroding their mental health.”

Walking into lunchrooms, he said, he often sees tables of four or five students where everyone is staring at their phones, rather than interacting with one another.

“It's heartbreaking,” he said.

The pendulum swings back

In 2009-2010, before cellphones became ubiquitous, schools generally barred their use, seeing them as distractions. A federal survey that year found that 91 percent of all schools prohibited nonacademic use of cellphones during school hours.

That started to change as companies began developing applications and programs that allowed cellphones to be used for educational purposes, said Victor Pereira, a lecturer on education at Harvard University. Phones could suddenly be used as a measurement device in laboratories or to play games that test learning. By 2015-2016, just 66 percent of all schools barred their use. Then the coronavirus pandemic arrived, and for many students, phones were a lifeline to learning in a virtual school environment.

But in the years since, as some students began to exhibit a dependency on cellular devices, schools started returning to earlier prohibitions. By 2020-2021, the share of all schools barring use reached 77 percent — although those figures are much lower among high schools.

“Decisions to put cellphones in front of young people at different ages — it’s been a pendulum,” Pereira said.

Lobbying for phone-free schools has spiked. A group of advocates and academics wrote Education Secretary Miguel Cardona in October asking him to urge schools to adopt phone-free policies. A bipartisan Senate bill would create a \$5 million grant program to cover the costs of secure containers for storing phones during the school day. Last year, the White House directed the Education Department to create model policies around devices as part of a youth mental health initiative, though the agency has yet to release them.

In a 2023 advisory, U.S. Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy warned that social media, which children often access through their phones, is a direct threat to mental health. He said social media usage can spur depression, anxiety, body dissatisfaction, disordered eating behaviors and low self-esteem, especially among teenage girls. Murthy suggested parents establish “tech-free” zones in which children cannot access their phones.

A study published in 2022 concluded that taking away phones could help learning. It was based on an experiment in which different classrooms of New York Institute of Technology undergraduates spent six weeks learning with and without cellphones. Afterward, researchers surveyed the students on their mindset and what they learned.

“We found the people who did not have their phones had lower levels of anxiety, high levels of course comprehension and high levels of mindfulness,” said Melissa Huey, an assistant professor of psychology at New York Tech and one of the two authors of the study.

She added that the outcomes she observed among college students would probably be more pronounced for K-12 students.

A push from teachers

Some of the recent push for restrictive policies has come from teachers, who see firsthand how distracting phones can be and who are exhausted from policing student use.

Seventy-two percent of high school teachers reported that students getting distracted by cellphones was a “major problem” in their classrooms, according to a fall 2023 Pew Research Center survey. The National Education Association, the country’s largest teachers union, reports educators’ widespread frustration with cellphone use and encourages its members to negotiate local policies “restricting access to personal devices during the school day.”

That approach worked in Cleveland, where the teachers union successfully pushed for a student cellphone ban in negotiating its recently approved contract.

The newly approved language requires administrators at every school to collect student cellphones before students go to their classrooms. It takes effect this school year.

The previous policy required that students keep their phones off, but that meant constant monitoring by teachers, said Shari Obrenski, president of the Cleveland Teachers Union.

Teachers were also concerned about fights. Obrenski said high school students used cellphones to schedule fights, record them and post the videos to social media. “They were using the phones to create chaos and perpetuate violence in our schools,” she said.

There’s often pushback from students and sometimes from parents when cellphone restrictions are adopted, administrators say.

Some parents worry about reaching their children during an emergency — such as a school shooting. Advocates respond that students can use phones in the school office if there’s a need to communicate with a parent or caregiver, and that school shootings are rare.

On Change.org, more than 170 petitions about cellphone bans, most of them calling for fewer restrictions, have been created over the past six months, together garnering more than 120,000 signatures, a spokeswoman for the platform said.

One targeting a new law in Louisiana banning cellphone use, created by students, has garnered more than 43,000 signatures. “As high school students, we are currently being treated little better than kindergartners,” the petition says.

Two approaches in Florida

Last year, Florida became the first state to enact a law that requires all public schools to ban student cellphone use during class time and block access to social media on district WiFi networks. Districts may decide whether students can access phones during lunch and between classes.

In July, Florida’s Hillsborough County adopted a policy that requires phones to be placed on silent and put away in middle and elementary school. In high schools, phones can be used only during lunch, with exceptions for teachers who want to utilize phones for instruction.

Steinbrenner High School English teacher Calvin Dillon said in an interview that blanket bans won’t work.

“Thinking that you can actually get rid of the phones, it’s not realistic. It’s naive,” Dillon said. “But if you create a situation or an experience that’s more interesting than what they could find in the phone for 20 seconds, you know, then you’re doing your job.”

Nate Casibang, a senior at Sickles High School in Hillsborough County, said he understands why lawmakers were eager to ban phones from the classroom. But he likes using the device for educational purposes, like in one of his favorite classes last year, French, where the teacher relied on the educational platform Canvas to post assignments and grades. Most days, students were expected to use their phones to access Canvas, he said.

Nate, 17, knows that phones can be harmful — he doesn't like how he feels after scrolling on TikTok for two hours. But he doesn't want people to forget that good comes from phones, too.

“It's easy to paint a bad narrative,” he said. “But also, more people than you could ever imagine are using it to be smarter, and smarter than any previous generation.”

Elsewhere in Florida, Orange County Public Schools adopted a full ban, requiring students in all grades to leave their cellphones silenced and in backpacks all day long.

Marc Wasko, principal of the 3,500-student Timber Creek High School in Orange County, said he was surprised by how quickly students adapted. At first, he said, administrators were confiscating about 100 phones a day. That quickly dropped to about 10 to 30.

The school added lunchtime programming to help students with the transition. On Tuesdays and Fridays, there's pickleball. Sometimes there's a DJ. Students read and use the library more.

Wasko recalled joyful moments that might never have happened if students were glued to their phone screens: Kids brought Polaroid and digital cameras to school to capture homecoming week last school year. They seem to be talking more, he said. Students now greet him in the hallway.

“It was nice,” Wasko said, “to see kids being kids.”

Mother, daughters exchange frantic texts during Georgia school shooting

The 14-year-old girl's message: "Mommy im scared."

🕒 3 min ↻ 📌



By [Laura Meckler](#)

September 4, 2024 at 6:08 p.m. EDT

At 10:23 a.m. Wednesday, sophomore Abby Turner texted her mother from her second-period biology class at Apalachee High School. There was a lockdown at the school. It wasn't a drill.

Her mom asked where she was in the classroom.

"i can't explain it i'm shaking to much," Abby replied, according to text messages shared with The Washington Post.

Abby and her friends had heard banging outside. They opened the classroom door and saw police in the hallway, then ran to the back of the room and hid behind a long lab table.

"That's when I thought I heard shots," Abby, who is 15, said in an interview. "It was like quick."

Like an automatic weapon.

Her teacher gave everyone instructions in a voice that was soft but very direct: "Get down, be quiet, don't move, don't talk."

"I was nervous and couldn't breathe," Abby said. "I was just sitting with my friend, hugging her."

That's when she texted her mother. "I wanted to do it in case I couldn't do it later," she said. "It was my first instinct."

Reading these messages at home, Sonya Turner first called her husband to tell him something was up but that maybe, despite their older daughter's text, it was just a drill. Then she called back: "It's real, it's real, please go to the school," she told him. Derrick Turner took off, soon waiting near the perimeter while emergency vehicles sped onto the campus.

Turner heard from their younger daughter, who is a ninth-grader. Both she and her sister were safe but terrified. The three connected via a group text, one girl saying she didn't know what to do. Turner typed: "Pray...."

"I did. Like 8 times," answered Isabella Faith Turner, 14. Mom then texted the words of the Lord's Prayer and told the girls to keep praying. "I love you!" she added.

"I love you," Isabella responded. And then, "Mommy im scared."

"Dad is coming," Turner replied. "We are coming."

School shootings: Tracking gun violence in the U.S.

The Post has spent years tracking the number of students affected by school shootings. More than 382,000 students have experienced gun violence at school since the Columbine High massacre in 1999.

(The Washington Post)

Turner spent part of the day waiting for news with another mother, a friend whose husband is in law enforcement and who was heading to the scene. That mom could not reach her son. "I'm watching her life fall apart," Turner said. Both were imagining the worst.

Finally, the other mom got through to him. "He was in the classroom where the first teacher was shot and killed," Turner said.

Turner had been resting at home Wednesday morning because of abdominal surgery she underwent about a week ago. While she knew her husband was already at the campus and would get to the girls as soon as he could, waiting was still torturous. She finally decided she had to go — though she had to walk most of the mile and a half, because cars of arriving parents were parked the entire route from her house to the school and beyond.

The students had been moved into the football stadium to wait. There, Abby met up with a friend with a terrifying story.

“When I found her we were both crying,” Abby said. Then her friend showed her the blood on her shoes. She told Abby she had tried to help after her teacher was shot.

“She said that nobody wanted to get up,” Abby said.

Eventually, the two parents were reunited with their two daughters. The family all came home shaken.

“They’re okay right now,” Turner said. “But it hasn’t hit them.”

Why Teachers Are Finding Meaningful Careers In Microschools

Kerry McDonald Contributor 

Kerry McDonald writes about innovative K-12 learning models.

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A teacher works with a student at The Urban Cottage in Tampa, Florida. **MARISSA HESS**

For more than two decades, Marianne O’Loan ushered in the new school year as a New Hampshire public school teacher, but as she begins her second year working as a part-time science teacher at [The Harkness House](#)

microschool in Nashua, New Hampshire, the retiree finds renewed professional fulfillment.

“It is so nice to be able to have relationships with the kids and have freedom with what to teach,” O’Loan told me during a recent interview. “I ask the students what they want to learn, and we go from there to figure out different curriculum and programs. It’s such a refreshing environment to work in. It makes me want to teach more.”

O’Loan is among a growing number of teachers across the U.S. who are finding greater meaning as educators outside conventional classrooms. While many of these teachers are leaving traditional schools to become founders of new microschools and similarly small, individualized learning communities, others are eager to teach in these innovative schools and spaces.

In June 2023, O’Loan retired from teaching in the Bedford, New Hampshire public schools and began doing occasional tutoring work when she heard from her former colleague, Nathan Fellman, that he was looking for a part-time science teacher for his new microschool. Fellman left the public school system a year earlier to launch The Harkness House, a state-recognized independent middle school that will be expanding into high school offerings in the coming months. The microschool currently serves 15 full-time private school students, and an additional 15 part-time homeschoolers.

“The most rewarding thing I find as an independent school founder who spent 20 years in public schools is the flexibility,” said Fellman. “Flexibility means freedom, it means autonomy. It means responsiveness and the ability to truly meet all students where they are.”

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Freer, more flexible education is also what is attracting teachers like O’Loan, who desired more scheduling flexibility as well as greater curriculum flexibility. She says she retired earlier from the district than she otherwise might have because of the increased pressures put on teachers, especially in the wake of the pandemic. “There is a lot of stress on the teachers to try and figure out a way to make up for what the students had lost during the Covid time,” said O’Loan, adding that the stress was taking a toll on her health and well-being.

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She’s not alone. According to the RAND Corporation’s [2024 State of the American Teacher Survey](#), teachers report levels of job-related stress and burnout that are twice that of adults working in other professions. More than 20 percent of teachers said they intended to leave their jobs by the end of the 2023/2024 academic year.





Students conduct a science experiment at The Harkness House in Nashua, New Hampshire. NATHAN FELLMAN

It's not just public school teachers who are leaving conventional classrooms for alternatives. In Tampa, Florida, Gabrielle Leffew left her job as an elementary school teacher at a traditional private school to become an English Language Arts and homesteading teacher at [The Urban Cottage Educational Collaborative](#), a Montessori-inspired schooling alternative. Launched in 2015 by former public school teacher Marissa Hess, The Urban Cottage provides part-time drop-off academic and enrichment programs for more than 100 homeschooled students who learn from 14 teachers—including Leffew.

“I find it freeing, but I've also found it very stretching because you really have to think outside of the box for some of these kiddos,” said Leffew, who enrolled her own child at The Urban Cottage. “Typically, you're used to being handed a curriculum and told how to do it and what is expected. Now, it's about finding what is going to work best for each child.”

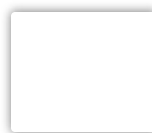


That personalization is by design. Hess, who was homeschooled as a child, set out to create an educational environment that would offer the type of tailored learning she enjoyed while growing up, and that she found to be absent as a teacher in conventional schools. She wanted her teachers at The Urban Cottage to experience the creativity and autonomy that led many of them to become educators in the first place. “Our teachers only teach the content areas that they are most passionate about and experts in, and are compensated with a living wage and the benefit of not being overworked,” said Hess. “This creates an environment where the teachers are happy and not stressed out by administration. When teachers are not micromanaged and forced to jump through the next top-down, district-handed mandate, but are instead allowed to do the art of teaching children their most cherished content areas, the students flourish.”

Leffew agrees. She had never considered homeschooling as an option—either personally or professionally—but she explained that microschoools and similar homeschooling programs such as The Urban Cottage create the ideal conditions for both students and teachers to thrive. They also enable working parents like her, and others who may not have thought that homeschooling was a possibility, to enjoy the freedom and flexibility of homeschooling along with structured academic support and a consistent community.

Leffew hopes that more parents consider innovative education options for their children, but she also hopes that more teachers consider working in these schools and spaces as well. “I think you're going to walk away every day feeling satisfied with yourself and your work,” said Leffew. “You're going to feel excited and you're going to feel passionate about teaching your students. That's something that I really enjoy, and I think a lot of teachers would love that feeling.”

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Kerry McDonald works at the intersection of education and enterprise, spotlighting the entrepreneurs who are building innovative learning models across the U.S. She is a senior fellow at the Foundation for Economic Education where she leads the Education Entrepreneurship Lab and hosts the *LiberatED* podcast. She is also the Velinda Jonson Family Education Fellow at State Policy Network, an adjunct scholar at the Cato Institute, and a regular contributor at Forbes.com and The 74. The bestselling author of *Unschooling: Raising Curious, Well-Educated Children Outside the Conventional Classroom*, Kerry has a B.A. in economics from Bowdoin College and a Master's degree in education policy from Harvard University. She lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts with her husband and four children. Follow her for ideas and inspiration on seeking or starting a creative schooling option. **Read Less**

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