

AmeriSchools Perspectives

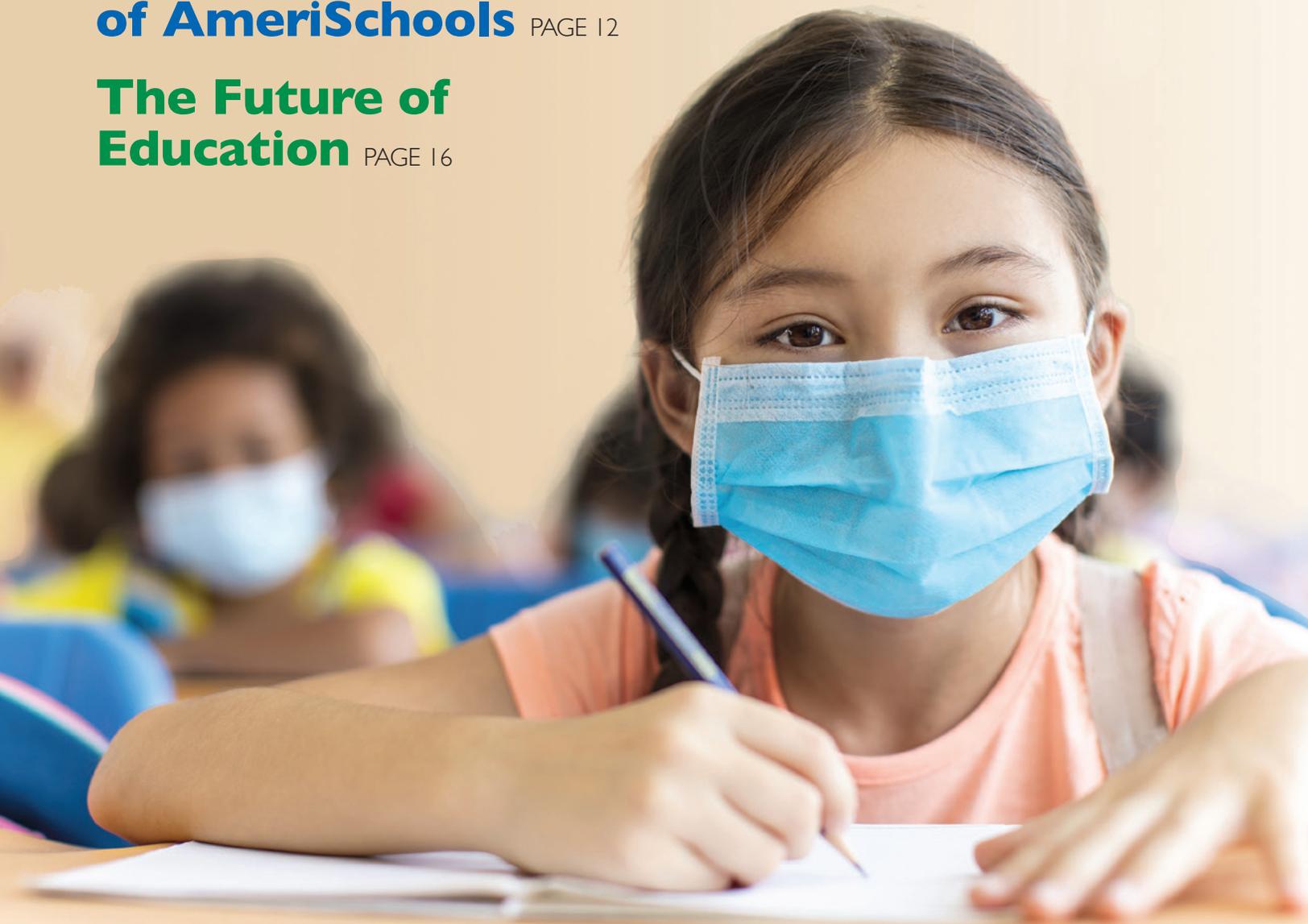
VOLUME TWO NUMBER ONE
FALL QUARTER 2020 ISSUE
AMERISCHOOLS ACADEMY

Learning (and Caring) Through a Pandemic:

It's All About "Our Kids" PAGE 6

**The 25-Year History
of AmeriSchools** PAGE 12

**The Future of
Education** PAGE 16





Dr. Reginald Barr

former president of The Arizona State Board of Education and Associate Superintendent of the State Department of Education, is the founder of Charter Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization dedicated to developing charter schools throughout the State of Arizona, including AmeriSchools Academy, and University High School, Tucson Unified School District.

AMERISCHOOLS PERSPECTIVES is a publication of The Charter Foundation, Inc., a non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation, doing business as The AmeriSchools Academy, or AmeriSchools. Visit: AmeriSchools.org



The question about charter schools is extremely simple. Are the schools accountable for academic standards, the attainment of students and the efficient use of resources? Clearly articulated facts can help answer the question as parents and students continue to elect schools of choice.

Strengths: Alive and Flourishing!

First things first—What facts set independent public charter schools apart from district public schools?

Today the state of Arizona enrolls at most 1.2 million students. Approximately 500 charter schools serve about 18% of this student population. These figures are staggering considering one critical issue. Presently, Arizona cannot fund nor build sufficient classrooms necessary to enroll the total student population. District school systems have found that students continue to choose from the charter system of schools. This situation magnifies the importance of private investments in charter school facilities.

For each participant in the AmeriSchools system of schooling, whether Phoenix, Tucson or Yuma, student after student has found rewarding successes through the multi-age/skill-based curriculum. AmeriSchools faculty has received two grades of A, and two grades of B, awarded by the State

Board of Education. Each school should be commended. The staff has provided a birthright of choice, academic success, and freedom to succeed.

The growth of the student population in Arizona is a sustaining element for the continued support of charter schools. The *Arizona Republic* concluded in one editorial that a charter education has left choice to the best decision maker, both parent and child. Accordingly, students’ academic records indicate increased achievement levels and gratifying statistical results. With this in mind, chartering has become the economic bargain of the past 25 years.

As noted by the Goldwater Institute, every taxpayer in Arizona must be familiar with the use of public resources for education. On average, charter schools receive less than district schools in per pupil funding.

The Joint Legislative Budget Committee (JLBC) confirms these significant funding differences. Including federal and state sources, this funding shortfall for charter schools of almost \$1,700 per student is significant when compared with district schools.

Opportunities: Understanding and Managing Challenges

Due to the impact of the coronavirus and other impending challenges, there



are unanswered questions to explore to fully support virtual systems of personalized learning. The future of schooling as an increasingly independent activity is a challenge that must be met.

The growth of an ever increasing student population that is distinguished by independent learning options is now an untapped source of schooling opportunities.

This year's fires in the Pacific Northwest have forced students to vacate college dormitories and find locations that are free of burning embers. Relocating to safety did not hamper their educational opportunities. They were able to utilize readily available virtual education platforms. A *New York Times* recent (September 13, 2020) reminder that "a picture is still worth a thousand words," exhibited young teenage students in Indonesia using their Internet-enabled devices to join other students in an

intercontinental classroom. Another personalized example: an Arizona State University student was able to complete college level courses totaling 83 units by the end of their first year, an outstanding record for a challenging opportunity. The marketplace for knowledge finds that the Internet has become each student's personalized resource.

Threats: Enemies, but Also Allies

The learning enemies of independent charter schools have been fully documented by Thomas Sowell, a resident of the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. *Charter Schools and Their Enemies* presents a systematic study, including a sizeable number of charts that compare charter and district student outcomes. This publication sets a research standard that places most opposing "enemy" efforts to diminish charter student competencies in the trash bin.

To multiply student schooling successes requires the forceful protection of personalized instructional opportunities. The protection of each student's birthright is one of choice and learning freedom.

Sincerely,



Dr. Reginald E. Barr, CEO
AmeriSchools Academy



"If you're going through hell, keep going."

– **Sir Winston Churchill**
was a British statesman, army officer, and writer. He was Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1940 to 1945, when he led the country to victory in the Second World War, and again from 1951 to 1955.



Dr. Thomas Sowell
has written about education throughout his career. He has argued for the need for reform of the school system in the United States. In his latest book, Charter Schools and Their Enemies, Sowell compares the educational outcomes of school children educated at charter schools with those at conventional public schools. He presents the case that charter schools, on the whole, do significantly better in terms of educational outcomes than conventional schools.



"The Internet has become each student's personalized resource."

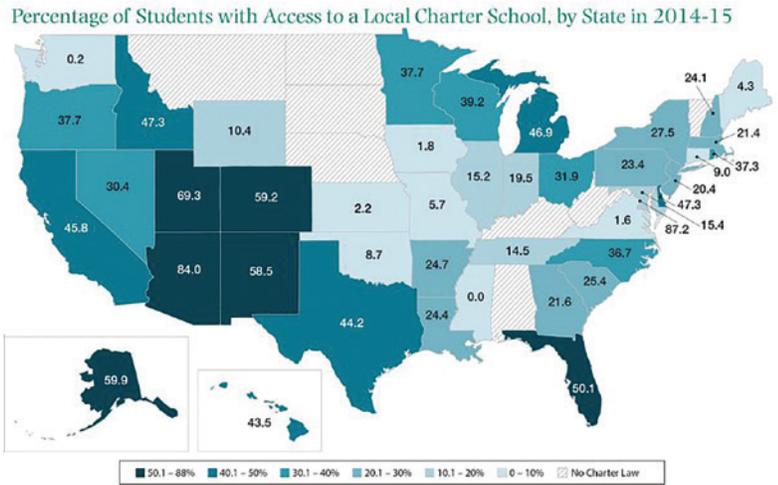
“California- Arizona Here I Come!”

Could Striking Contrast in Educational Results Be the Reason?

A recent report from Dr. Matthew Ladner* illustrates a striking contrast between Los Angeles County and Maricopa County (Phoenix Metro) educational results data. Before getting into the educational data Ladner presents a simple economics lesson. U-Haul rates for a 20-foot truck can vary a bit: (1) Phoenix to Los Angeles for \$157, (2) Los Angeles to Phoenix for \$1,483 (845% higher). Do you think supply and demand have something to do with it?

Los Angeles U-Haul dealers desperately need the vans, so anyone relocating a van to Los Angeles is rewarded with a low rate. But once the Los Angeles U-Haul dealers have the vans, they can charge a premium rate for them to leave the L.A. area, because everyone wants to leave. Is this just about moving vans, or could another factor be involved?

A possible answer, according to Ladner, lies in comparing educational results between the two areas. Stanford University research provides a data visualization tool to compare academic growth (student progress) over time. Comparing these two giants in their respective states in this research makes “you wonder when the rest of Los Angeles might arrive in Arizona.”



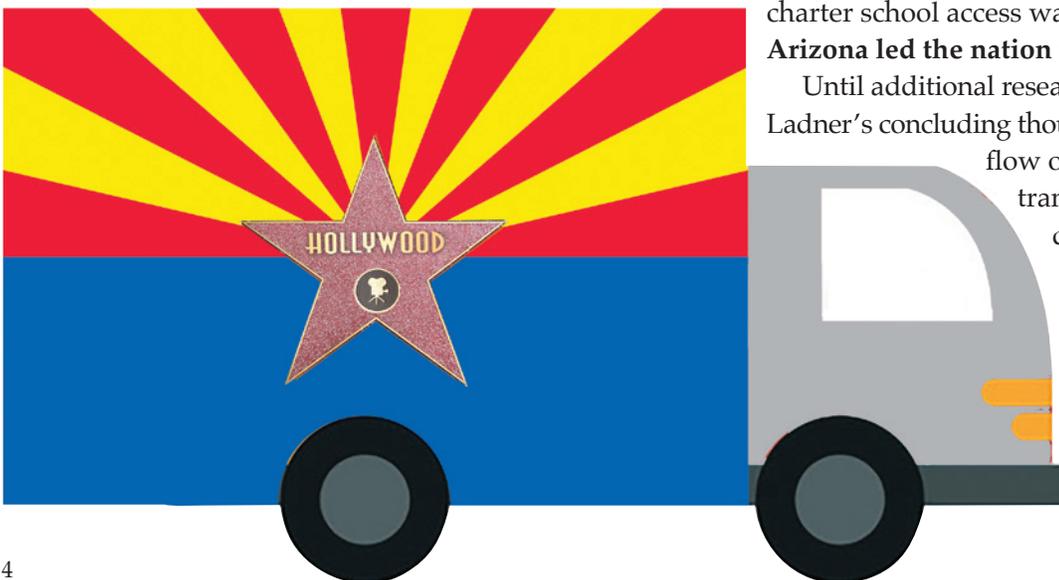
In Ladner’s report he compares Los Angeles County student progress data with that of Maricopa County for both low-income students and non-low-income students. His findings:

- **Low-Income Students:** Low-income students in Maricopa County learned at a rate 12% higher than the national average. Similar students in Los Angeles County learned at a rate 5% below the national average. A similar gap appears among non-poor students.
- **Non-Low-Income Students:** Middle-to-high-income Los Angeles students fell one percent below the national average in academic progress. Similar students in Maricopa County made academic gains 16% above the national average during this period. Interestingly, both groups of students (low-income and middle-to-high-income, respectively) saw a gap of the same size, a 17% advantage for Maricopa County students.

The Stanford data “cannot definitively say why students learn faster in the Phoenix area than in L.A.” But Arizona’s access to charter schools could be a factor. Brookings Institution research shows, for the 2014-15 school year, that the percentage of students having charter school access was 45.8% in California, but **Arizona led the nation with 84%!**

Until additional research is done, we are left with Ladner’s concluding thought: “it looks like a continuing flow of Angelenos will continue to transport themselves to Arizona despite the steep price for moving trucks.”

**Dr. Matthew Ladner is the executive director of the Center for Student Opportunity*



Charter Schools and Their Enemies

Thomas Sowell



Charter Schools and Their Enemies by Thomas Sowell

The #1 Best Seller in Educational Law on Amazon

The black-white educational achievement gap — so much discussed for so many years — has already been closed by black students attending New York City's charter schools. This might be expected to be welcome news. But it has been very unwelcome news in traditional public schools whose students are transferring to charter schools. A backlash against charter schools has been led by teachers unions, politicians and others — not only in New York, but across the country. If those attacks succeed, the biggest losers will be minority youngsters for whom a quality education is their biggest chance for a better life.

Five-Star Comments from Readers:

"The author has taken the time and effort to overcome seemingly every objection (valid and frivolous) to charter schools by providing the data to support his assertions, primarily from New York State. He is honest where charter schools aren't the best, but the overwhelming supply of empirical data suggests that charter schools are much needed and in greater numbers in most big cities."

"This is a very important book. The commanding point that is made is apparent on its face: charter schools offer conscientious parents and students in minority communities an opportunity to achieve a better education than the one provided by nearby public institutions. This is not true in 100% of the cases, but it is largely true and sufficiently true to make the claim that the denial of such a choice should be seen as the principal civil rights issue of our times."

"After reading Dr. Sowell's comparison of public vs. charter schools, every parent should do everything in their power to get their kids into a charter school. They should also apply all the pressure they can exert on politicians to get more charter schools approved."

ENGLISH:

14% of traditional public school classes had proficient students

65% of charter school classes had proficient students

MATHEMATICS:

10% of traditional public school classes had proficient students

68% of charter school classes had proficient students

2019 Results of Grade-Level Proficiency Tests,
New York State Education Department

This Book Features Hard Facts:

- In dozens of places in New York City where a charter school and a traditional public school hold classes in the same building, charter school students in those buildings have achieved "proficiency" on statewide tests several times more often than traditional public school students taking the same tests.
- In 2013, a fifth-grade class in a Harlem charter school scored higher on a mathematics test than any other fifth-grade class in the entire state of New York. That included, as the *New York Times* put it, "even their counterparts in the whitest and richest suburbs, Scarsdale and Briarcliff Manor."
- Nationwide, charter schools have only a fraction of the number of students who attend traditional public schools. But charter school enrollment is growing faster, especially in low-income minority communities. From 2001 to 2016, enrollment in traditional public schools rose 1 percent, while charter school enrollment rose 571 percent.
- In cities across the country, with many students on waiting lists to transfer into charter schools, public school officials are blocking charter schools from using school buildings that have been vacant for years, in order to prevent those transfers from taking place. Even in states where blocking charter schools from using vacant school buildings is illegal, the laws have been evaded. In some places, vacant school buildings have been demolished, making sure no charter schools can use them.

About Thomas Sowell

He was born in North Carolina in 1930. At age nine, his family moved to Harlem. He was drafted into the military in 1951, during the Korean War. After his discharge, he worked a civil service job, and attended night classes at Howard University, a historically black college. His high scores and recommendations by professors helped him gain admission to Harvard University, where he graduated magna cum laude in 1958 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in economics. He earned a Master's degree from Columbia University the following year, and received a Doctor of Philosophy degree in economics from the University of Chicago in 1968.

Learning (and Caring) Through a Pandemic: *It's All About "Our Kids"*

“The very first need of any person, any child, is a relationship. And one of the most important is the relationship between families and the school community. They’re not just students to us, they’re our kids. We care about them in a way that’s uniquely AmeriSchools, and that guided us in how we responded, and how we continue to respond.”

A Conversation with
Courtney Braren,
Superintendent for
Instruction,
AmeriSchools
Academy



When future historians study the year of the coronavirus (2020), and the governmental and public response, they will perhaps discover that none of society's institutions, other than health-care, was as significantly impacted as education.

According to many, the pandemic response within the American educational system was/is lacking. Education at all levels attempted to completely replace traditional classroom instruction with online, home-bound instruction. With no advance notice, and a desperately short turnaround time, a crisis developed within much of the educational system.



Start with C.A.R.E. Crisis, Action, Research, Examples

This crisis caused many institutions of learning to confuse the relative importance of means and ends. For many schools, the new means of instruction (technology) became more important than the end goal of education: the moral and intellectual development of the student toward the goal of a more enriching and fulfilling life.

In several ancient languages the word for crisis is composed of two ideas: one representing danger and the other *opportunity*. But how do you find the opportunity in the current pandemic crisis, or any crisis? In times of uncertainty, insecurity, and fear, *action*—wisely and appropriately taken—is the path forward and through the crisis.

Some would say that charter schools, with large populations of traditionally disadvantaged minority students and lower funding levels than district public schools, would be at a particular disadvantage in dealing effectively with the educational crisis brought on by the pandemic response. And they would be correct in some cases, *but not in all*. There are other compensating advantages possessed by charter schools that some charters have been able to take advantage of, and this is especially evident during the 2020 pandemic. So, how have some charter schools, and one charter school system in particular, not just coped, but excelled in this extremely challenging environment? One part of the answer is action, which we discuss next. As for the other part, more on that later.

Research for this article related to charter school systems taking effective action during the 2020 pandemic comes from two main sources:

1. National Charter Response Benchmark

A big-picture view is presented in a recent study conducted by the prestigious Fordham Institute.*

For their report, the Fordham Institute surveyed eight charter school networks across the country that had marked success in responding to the pandemic in the spring of 2020. Researchers gathered information from dozens of individuals in these organizations that collectively educate more than 140,000 students. The results presented within Fordham's report are organized around *actions* taken by these large charter organizations that form the foundation of their recent pandemic response success.

2. AmeriSchools' Pandemic Response

The Fordham Report was used as a framework with which to analyze AmeriSchools' pandemic response, during the spring as well as in the fall of 2020. AmeriSchools input was provided through an exclusive interview with **Courtney Braren**, AmeriSchools Superintendent for Instruction.

The Fordham Report points to a factor in the recent success of the large charters studied being their minimal bureaucracy as compared with district public schools. This allowed them to make decisions and take positive action more easily. The same comparison holds between the large charters in the Fordham Institute study and a smaller, high-performing charter organization like AmeriSchools.

As evidenced by recent evaluations and parent feedback, AmeriSchools' smaller size can be an even greater advantage in quickly and nimbly making decisions and taking action to facilitate student learning, even during a pandemic. Superintendent Braren commented that if Fordham did a broader, follow-up study, they should consider investigating the success of smaller charter systems such as AmeriSchools.

We shall now consider four examples of game-changing action areas pursued by AmeriSchools, three of which were also present in the large charter organizations of the Fordham report.

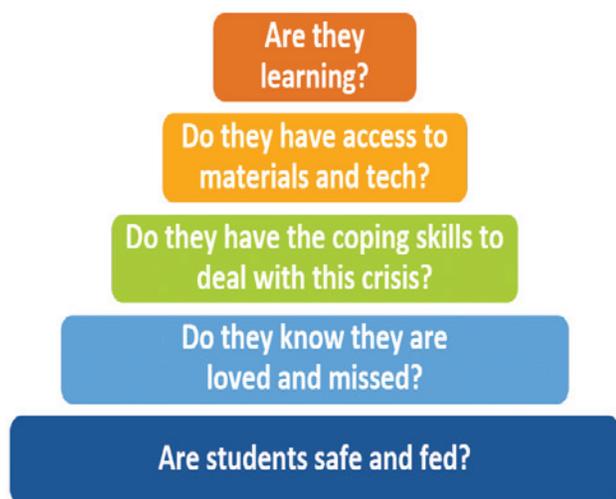
*Vanourek, Gregg. Schooling Covid-19: Lessons from leading charter networks from their transition to remote learning. Washington DC: Thomas B. Fordham Institute (August 2020). <https://fordhaminstitute.org/national/research/schooling-covid-19-lessons-leading-charter-networks-their-transition-remote>.

1 Meeting Non-Academic Needs

Social and Emotional

AmeriSchools Grade: A-/B+

“The schools understood that this was something unique... and we purposely sent out a form to parents immediately asking about their needs,” relates Superintendent Braren. AmeriSchools’ initial action, upon first hearing the escalating pandemic news in March 2020 — *during the middle of their spring break*— resonates with Stephen Covey’s *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, which reminds us to *Put First Things First* (Non-Academic Needs before Academic Needs). Similar to Maslow’s famous hierarchy of needs for human self-actualization, there exists a similar hierarchy of needs that are prerequisites for learning (see figure below). Among the needs AmeriSchools asked parents about were being certain that their children were safe, fed, cared for, and emotionally stable.



Source: KIPP DC.

“Personal relationships have *always* been foundational at AmeriSchools,” explains Ms. Braren. “We want to make sure that they’re healthy, make sure that they’re happy and that they have what they need.” And, as previously mentioned, this does not begin with, or even include, purely academic needs (books, lessons, technology, etc.).

The personal relationships between AmeriSchools and parents/students were already well established before the pandemic struck, but became even more critical during the initial days of school closure in March 2020, when, according to news reports, many schools were having trouble locating and communicating with their students, thereby allowing those “missing students” to suffer needlessly. Ameri-

Schools’ standard operating procedure of relationship building was in place for the benefit of their families when it was needed most.

AmeriSchools’ “whole person” approach with their students is one of the factors that sets them apart from other schools, of any type. The Fordham Report uses an analogy of “stabilizing the patient” first, before doing anything that depends upon that stability being present (like learning). This comparison seems especially appropriate, even in education, during this time of pandemic and its accompanying response.

2 Meeting Technology Needs

Timely Connections to Remote/Online Learning

AmeriSchools Grade: B+

Secondary to non-academic needs, the current state of families’ technology was also surveyed. Several misconceptions were quickly resolved by the AmeriSchools team. Some families thought that if they owned a smart phone, that was all they needed for their children’s online learning. These parents quickly discovered that smart phones alone were insufficient to enable their child to successfully navigate the new online system of learning.

Also, several families made a somewhat natural assumption that if they had access to a tablet or full-size personal computer, they were in good shape technology-wise. What many failed to appreciate was that the Internet bandwidth requirements for online learning were in excess of what they had available to them. So, AmeriSchools’ technical mission for students was two-fold: get capable devices *into the hands of students* who needed them *and* ensure that high bandwidth Internet connectivity was also available for all device-enabled families.

“We immediately started to clean up the performance of our computers...and then sent them out to families who needed a device,” explained Ms. Braren. AmeriSchools started with small goals initially, “making sure that every child had access to some online programs that we supported” and “we created videos...because we didn’t have an LMS (Learning Management System) at that point.”

When AmeriSchools campuses started using the online meeting platform Zoom, it was initially so they could meet with students in small groups. It was soon discovered that to properly implement this technol-

ogy, professional development training for teachers, who were also embracing this new mode of instruction, was needed.

According to Superintendent Braren, “we had professional development on those programs that we thought would support the learning *and the social emotional* needs of the students. We felt... that with everything going around for children, especially small steps can be very confusing and overwhelming. The more it mimicked what they were familiar with, the better off everybody would be. And so, we tried to immediately respond with, yes, we are going to do school from home, and this is how we’re going to do it.”

To conclude on technology, Ms. Braren explained that AmeriSchools upgraded the loaned computers during the summer before reissuing them to students in the fall. This refurbished technology works well, but Braren and AmeriSchools are not satisfied with just “good tech” for their students. “We also realized that we need to invest more into technology,” so budget funds are being re-prioritized for new technology purchases in the near term toward the goal of a one-to-one (student-to-computer) model where “every child in school would have a device.”

3 Maintaining Consistency (and Flexibility) in Scheduling & Structure

Recovering Predictability and Disciplined Routine

AmeriSchools Grade: A

Remote (synchronous) learning, including virtual teacher-student interaction, and *online (asynchronous) learning*, often chosen by busy parents, comprise the dual optional modes of instruction currently offered at AmeriSchools as reported by Superintendent Braren. This allows for school scheduling to be either (1) closely resembling pre-pandemic daily timings (remote learning) or (2) flexible, as an individualized approach for those parents who need it (online learning).

In either case, what AmeriSchools is addressing by not imposing a “one size fits all” approach is *predictability with flexibility*. The critical importance of the psychological need of a sense of predictability and routine, especially during periods of relative social isolation or quarantine, has a long documented history from fourteenth century plague survivors in Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, to prisoner-of-war (POW) tales (especially during World War II), to twenty-first

century psychological research papers.

Those areas of our society where this psychological need is not being effectively supported, including in some educational circles, may unfortunately be witness to psychologically-injured individuals in need of future help. Indeed, this has already been documented over the past several months of pandemic response.

AmeriSchools’ most proactive approach in this area is, according to Ms. Braren, “number one...let’s plan on reopening.” She continues, “the goal is not looming remote instruction. The goal is to have students back in the brick and mortar classroom,” but returning to the classroom “has to be safe for everybody.” AmeriSchools principals, teachers, staff, and facilities are prepared for students to return to the classroom at *the appropriate time*. (For more information on school reopening, please see infographic on page 11.)

4 Filling In “The Gaps”

Taking Students (Individually) Where They Can’t Take Themselves

AmeriSchools Grade: A

For the fourth and final action area we will consider, AmeriSchools seems to have come up with something that the Fordham Report missed in the large charter organizations. *Perhaps Fordham really should be talking to AmeriSchools*. This multi-faceted action area is what is known by AmeriSchoolers as “filling in the gaps.” Let us explore this in three different, yet related areas: filling in transfer student gaps, filling in current student gaps, filling in post-pandemic gaps.

Many AmeriSchools students are transfer students, and, as Superintendent Braren explains, “when they’re behind, we usually allow ourselves two years to catch them up, and it usually takes us about that amount of time.” In a typical school if a student falls behind, they often stay behind. Closing this learning level gap is not only a target of AmeriSchools, but a target that they regularly hit.

For current students, rather than having a standardized curriculum for the entire organization (as some of the larger charter organizations surveyed by Fordham have), AmeriSchools uses the principle of subsidiarity (making decisions at the level closest to those affected). They empower the classroom teacher—the person closest and most knowledgeable about the individual students—to develop appropriate, standards-based curriculum to fill (and bridge) gaps in the student learning process, classroom by classroom.

Pay attention to this next area if you really want to get a deeper insight into the comprehensive thinking and planning that is AmeriSchools. While many schools have been primarily focused on (1) the means necessary to deliver online learning (technology, scheduling, change management), or (2) possibly returning (in some limited way) to classroom instruction, AmeriSchools is not only identifying the “gap” between those two frames of reference, but actively planning to fill that gap with *post-pandemic planning*. According to Ms. Braren, it works like this:

1. Challenge the effectiveness of online learning compared with classroom learning:
“I think that the bigger challenge is how effective can remote learning be?...according to the Fordham study, they (the charter networks studied) had some great results in some areas and not in others.”
2. Realize that just bringing the students back to the classroom is doing them a disservice, unless you address the deficiencies (gaps) in their pandemic-necessitated online learning experience:
“to address the gap...I think that understanding that it’s not just having kids back in the

building, but that there is something missing... whether it was technology, whether it was time, whether it was a lack of motivation, a loss of interest, whatever it might’ve been, there’s going to be a gap per season due to the fact that they haven’t been in the same education setting for an extended period of time, and the level of support that needed to be there might not have been there...either for new students coming to us or students who might have attended their Zoom meetings, but maybe didn’t do the assignments.”

3. You must have a system to use, *post pandemic*, to address those gaps:
“We need to make sure that through a system... a school system, we address the fact that for six months kids have had different types of learning environments. And that might mean that there are gaps in what they understand and what they can do. And so we have to make sure that we’re doing everything we can to fill those gaps, whether it’s through intervention, whether it’s through a program that specifically targets those areas...You have to build that into part of their structure, even when it comes back to the brick and mortar...it’s key to helping students.”

These gaps are sought out and “filled in” on an individual student basis. AmeriSchools is “always looking for what the child understands and what misconceptions they have so that we can fill this gap. Our vision and mission have always been to address individuals, not to disseminate information.”

When “someone” says, “we care,” our first thought should be, “why?”. If the reason is based upon a deep-seated belief, especially a belief that you share, the “someone” should be taken seriously.

In our discussion today, the “someone” is AmeriSchools. They are saying, and demonstrating, “we care.” And the reason, their reason, may just be something we as parents can relate to: *it’s all about “our kids.”*



School Reopenings

A National Perspective



CONSTANT CHANGE:

All the various school reopening plans have been, and continue to be, subject to *constant change*

FALL SEMESTER 2020 STATUS

477
SCHOOL
DISTRICTS



477 sample school districts were weighted to provide a nationally representative sample.

49% 49% of schools are fully reopening

26% 26% of schools are fully remote

12% 12% of schools are using a hybrid model

85% 85% of schools are offering a fully remote option *in addition to* in-person instruction

Information from Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) and additional sources.

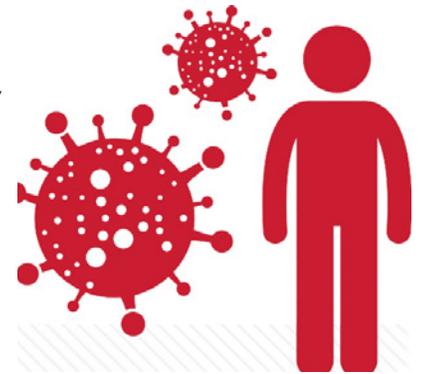
LOW-INCOME students

are more likely to only have fully remote instruction



INFECTION Rates

are Very Low for Open Schools:



Students

0.071%



Teachers

0.19%



The 25-Year History of A

Once upon a time in Arizona, long before AmeriSchools, and before the days of charter schools, yes, even before the personal computer and the Internet became commonplace, there was an educator working for the good of students through the public school system. This was Dr. Reginald Barr. During his nearly six-decade-long career he has served thousands of children as an innovative and conscientious teacher and administrator.

He has served other educators through local, state, and national associations, while also serving children, their parents, and school professionals, during his two terms on the Arizona State Board of Education.

Dr. Barr directed federal programs and wrote grants, always looking for new and successful methods that demonstrated a positive effect upon the lives of the children of our state. All of this considerable experience in the field of education set the stage for him to emerge from retirement in 1995

to take on the complex task of writing a proposal for a charter school through Charter Foundation, Inc.

The State Board of Education applauded his efforts by granting him an official school charter, and in 1996, the first K-6 school opened at 1346 North Stone Avenue in Tucson, followed in 1997 by a second K-6 school in Phoenix, at 1837 North Central Avenue. Hardly one to slow down, Dr. Barr wrote yet another proposal to the Charter School Board for IdeaBanc, Inc. and another charter was granted in 1998 that accommodates up to 6800 students in Arizona. Thus, the AmeriSchools system of schools was born.

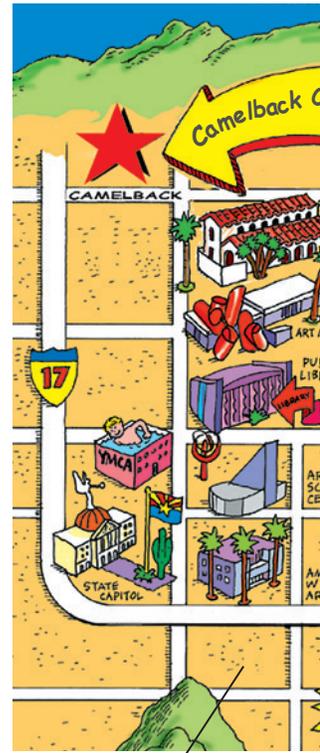
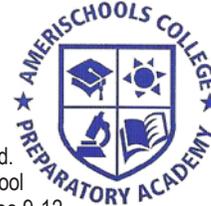
Today, the AmeriSchools system of charter schools includes four schools at two sites in Yuma, and one each in Tucson and Phoenix.

There are other major events in the 25-year saga of AmeriSchools featured here, as we acknowledge the considerable contributions of Dr. Reginald Barr, Educator.



1998-2012

AmeriSchools College Preparatory Academy opens in Tucson on Broadway Blvd. to serve high school students in grades 9-12.



THE AMERISCHOOLS YEARS — FROM 1995 TO 1999



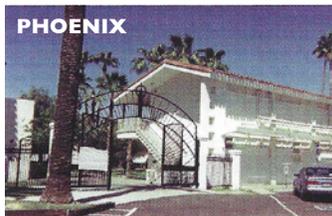
1995

Arizona Governor Fife Symington established charter schools in Arizona by signing sweeping education reform legislation, with the first charter schools opening in the state in 1995.



1995-1996

Dr. Reginald Barr, former President of the Arizona State Board of Education, submits a proposal in 1995 for The Charter Foundation. The charter is approved in 1996, and AmeriSchools Academy opens at Stone & Drachman in Tucson, Arizona.



PHOENIX

1997

AmeriSchools Academy opens in Phoenix on Central Avenue to serve students in grades K-6, and transitions to Camelback Road in 2001. **Academy Adventures After School and Summer Adventure Programs** open in Phoenix and Tucson.



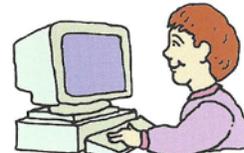
1998

AmeriSchools Academy opens the Yuma South campus on South 3rd Avenue to serve students in grades K-6.



1999

AmeriSchools joins the Internet age. Technology was introduced to all the schools to provide Internet access to the World Wide Web, as well as Electronic Mail, and other computer-accessible sources of information.

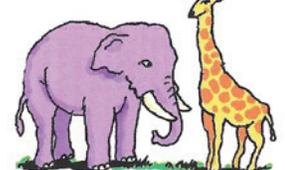


1999

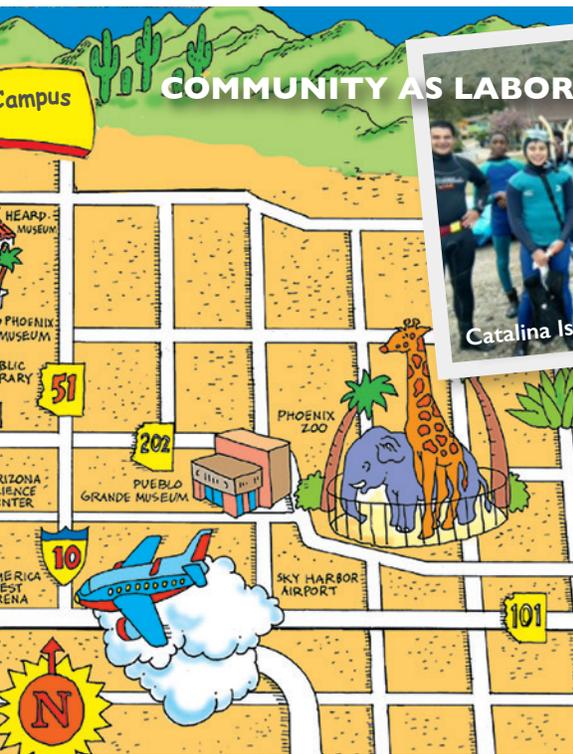
Community as Laboratory was an innovation that creates a bridge between community and classroom in a way that connects the absolute necessity of staying in school with compelling visions of good and prosperous futures.



Students learn to become good citizens by volunteering, as well as to have fun exploring, and learning in far-away places, such as the Grand Canyon, Catalina Island, Biosphere 2, and the Phoenix Zoo.



AmeriSchools Academy



2001
AmeriSchools Academy opens in Phoenix on Camelback Road and Thirteenth Street to serve students in grades Kindergarten through 8th.

2019
Education Savings Accounts were announced to be opened in the fall of 2020 for every child in grades 3 thru 8. Unfortunately, the pandemic caused an indefinite delay in the program.



2014
Capstone Quest Academy, a private corporation, introduces Pre-Kindergarten for children ages three to five. Also, Before and After School Programs are added in all schools in Yuma, Phoenix and Tucson.

2019
The Premier Issue of *AmeriSchools Perspectives* quarterly magazine was mailed to all parents and staff informing them of the latest news and activities at AmeriSchools campuses.



THE AMERISCHOOLS YEARS — FROM 2000 TO 2020



2000
 Prior to the 2000 dot-com bubble, an online learning concept, called **www.GoLearnIt.com**, was presented to major West Coast investors to totally challenge all current educational assumptions. The opportunity would have changed history. It may still be a future happening as the current technology makes it much more feasible, especially with the remote learning requirements brought on by the pandemic.

2000
Charter School concept wins Innovations in American Government Award from the JFK School of Government at Harvard University.



2000
AmeriSchools Academy opens Country Club campus in Tucson at 1150 N. Country Club, to serve students in grades Pre-K through 8th.



2008
Dr. Reginald Barr chosen **Professional of The Year in Education** by Strathmore's Who's Who.

2012
 Renewal application for a new 20-year charter was approved January 23, 2012, and effective July 1, 2012.



2020
 The coronavirus struck early in the year, and all our campuses closed in mid-March, just before our students began their Spring Break. Our entire staff responded quickly and transitioned to remote learning. Our parents pitched in, and made the unprecedented event easier to handle.



2010
AmeriSchools Academy opens the Yuma North campus on South 4th Avenue to serve students in grades K through 6.



Why I To Teach

by Mr. Chip Wafer, Math Teacher, Country Club Campus



Courtney Braren recommended my being hired at AmeriSchools Country Club seven years ago and I will be forever grateful! Little did I know or anticipate at that time just how special it would be to become a part of the AmeriSchools family!

Good People Making a Difference

AmeriSchools reminds me of my small town country upbringing. People are friendly and supportive. They are kind and generous! It is refreshing to work in such an uplifting environment.

It feels good to be with AmeriSchools. We take curriculum, core content, and assessment seriously. In addition to the traditional three R's (reading, writing, arithmetic), we include a fourth R: real life skills. These include relational skills, problem solving, and coping skills. We also equip our students with the ability to fit well within a team, to thrive, to find and pursue passion, and to adapt and adjust to change.



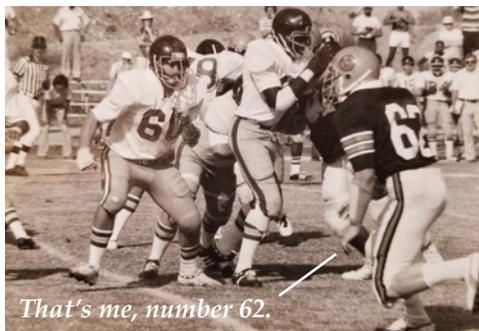
Dressing up as Batman for our school Halloween party.

These enduring skillsets are needed now more than ever, with the rapidly changing delivery of education during this time of pandemic.

The Good Life: Now and in the Future

AmeriSchools is good for our students. It is a safe and supportive environment where we help shape our students for a better and brighter future.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused great loss at many levels. It has been a heartfelt loss to not see my students in the classroom and to not see my fellow teachers who I count as friends. Despite this, it is important to remember that a good life is about good health, joyful relationships, and true happiness. ❤️



That's me, number 62.



I couldn't be more proud of my 6th-8th grade blended after-school club.

My Third-Grade Photo



My Story:

My name is Chip Wafer.

I am the Middle School Mathematics teacher at AmeriSchools Country Club. This is my seventh year of teaching for AmeriSchools.

I graduated from Azusa Pacific University with a B.A. in Mathematics. While there, I competed on scholarship in both football and track.

I graduated from the University of Oregon with an M.S. in Mathematics.

I am a very proud father of my three children who have become successful adults.

My Favorite Quote:

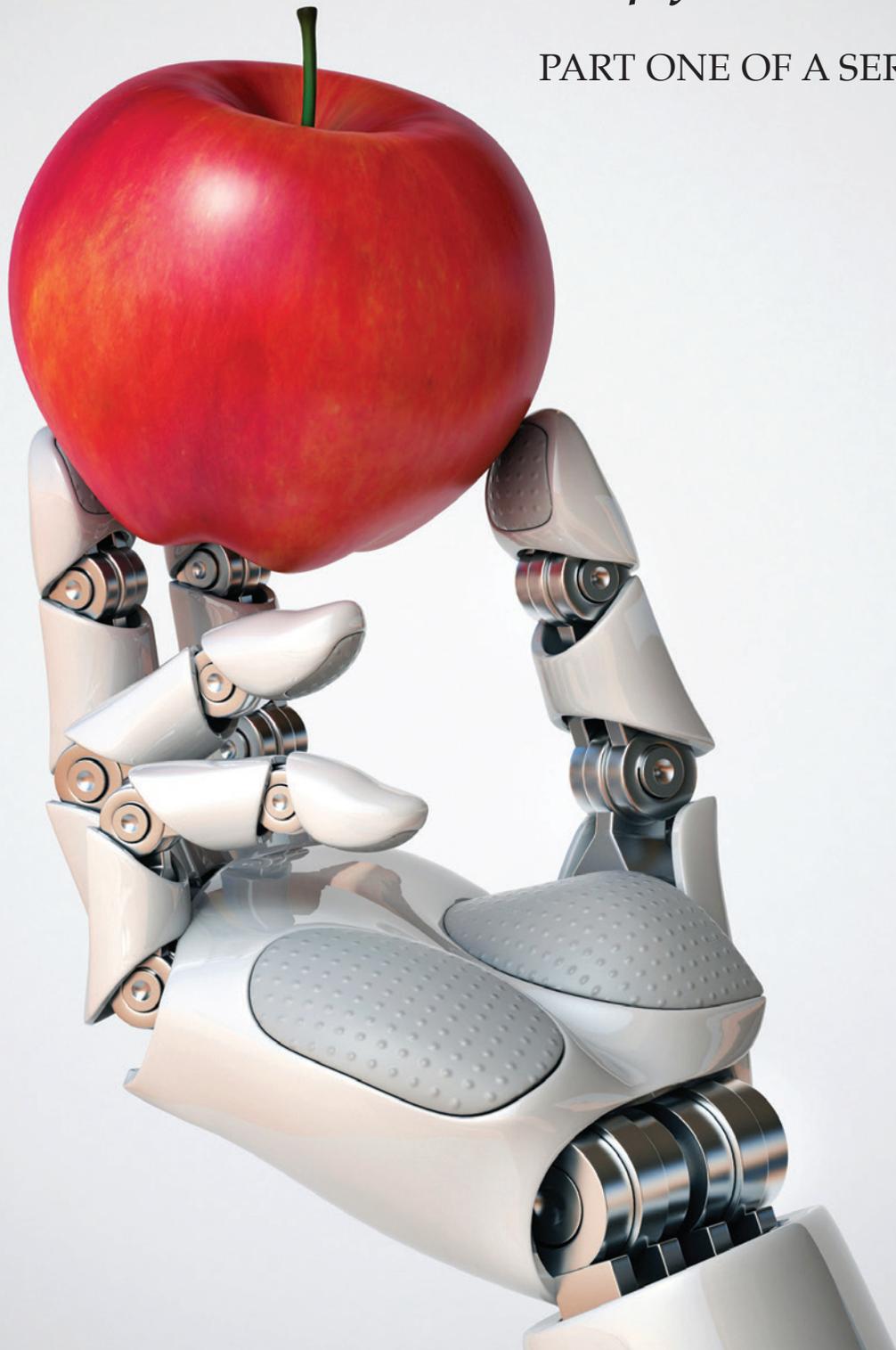
"Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all."

— ARISTOTLE

The Future of Education

Will Artificial Intelligence, Virtual Reality and Robotics be the next leap forward?

PART ONE OF A SERIES



It doesn't take a Ph.D. in education to understand that schooling may never again be quite what it was. There's no doubt that the future of education will be transformed—but how exactly?



While living in the new reality of COVID-19 challenges, we tend to focus on what's going to happen in our immediate and near future. However, it's likely that schooling will change significantly in the long-term.

A new "R" has joined the traditional "Three R's" of education. Reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic now include "reimagining."

New technologies can play an important role engaging students in innovative and immersive learning, and existing technologies can be utilized as teaching tools and methods in ways not previously "imagined." After all, students these days, are learning through digital devices, while remaining safe at home.

This is not to suggest that the human teacher doesn't and won't continue to be an essential part of the learning equation. However, it's possible that, even as we settle into whatever our new normal becomes, school lessons may no longer begin and end with the sound of a bell.

An article authored by Jake Bryant, Emma Dorn, Stephen Hall and Frédéric Panier states, "Responding to the changes that the COVID-19 crisis has wrought on education systems around the world requires building on what we know works, as well as looking ahead to what we know students will need.

The COVID-19 pandemic has upended school systems around the world. The pace has been frenetic as systems have had to stand up remote learning overnight, plan whether and how to reopen schools amid changing epidemiological circumstances, and support students academically and emotionally. The scope of the challenge has thus far left little time for deeper reflection.

Yet crises often create an opportunity for broader change, and as education systems

begin to make decisions about investments for the new school year, it's important to step back and consider the longer-term imperative to create a better system for every child beyond the pandemic.

The process starts with a key question: What are we trying to achieve, for whom, by when, and to what standards? Our research shows that top-performing school systems can vary significantly in curricula, assessments, teacher behaviors, and even desired outcomes. What unites them is a focus on excellence for every child, regardless of race, gender, income level, or location. That core value should inform the areas to keep in our current systems and where to innovate to create more effective and equitable education for all.

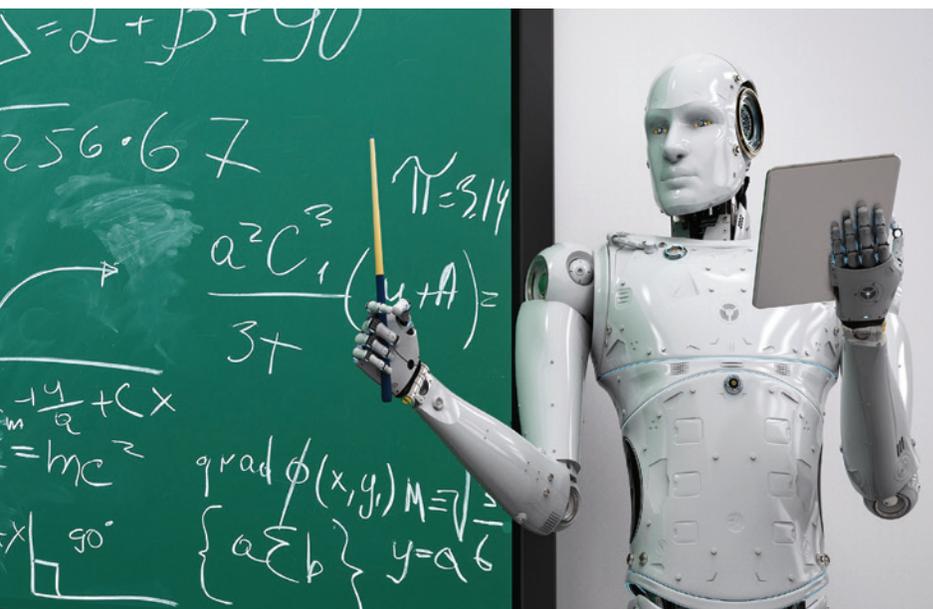
While we mustn't lose sight of what we have learned through decades of research and education reform, the COVID-19 pandemic is driving educators to accelerate new models of learning and innovate beyond the classroom. Lock-downs forced students around the world to learn from home, resulting in a dramatic increase in the use of online tools, such as videoconferencing, learning-management platforms, and assessment tools."

Artificial Intelligence (AI) *There's nothing "artificial" about the real-world benefits of AI*

AI is intelligence demonstrated by machines, unlike the natural intelligence displayed by humans and animals. Leading AI textbooks define the field as the study of "intelligent agents" — any device that perceives its environment and takes actions



"Students these days are learning through digital devices, while remaining safe at home."



“Artificial Intelligence in education is being felt, and the traditional methods are changing drastically.”



that maximize its chance of successfully achieving its goals. Colloquially, the term “artificial intelligence” is often used to describe machines (or computers) that mimic “cognitive” functions that humans associate with the human mind, such as learning and problem solving.

Alyssa Johnson of eLearning Industry, states, “Artificial Intelligence is now a part of our normal lives. We are surrounded by this technology from automatic parking systems, smart sensors for taking spectacular photos, and personal assistance. Similarly, Artificial Intelligence in education is being felt, and the traditional methods are changing drastically.

The academic world is becoming more convenient and personalized thanks to the numerous applications of AI for education. This has changed the way people learn since educational materials are becoming accessible to all through smart devices and computers. AI is also allowing the automation of administrative tasks, allowing institutions to minimize the time required to complete difficult tasks so that the educators can spend more time with students. Now is the time to discuss the transformations brought by AI in education.”

Lisa Plitnichenko of eLearning Industry, shares, “Artificial Intelligence helps find out what a student does and does not know, building a personalized study schedule for each learner considering the

knowledge gaps. In such a way, AI tailors studies according to student’s specific needs, increasing their efficiency.”

Geoff Spencer of Microsoft, shares, “Real-time data, innovations like artificial intelligence (AI), and a range of new devices and tools, will help transform the roles and relationships of students, teachers, and parents.

- **STUDENTS will be empowered to learn for themselves in flexible, often collaborative ways, both inside and outside classrooms at their own pace. They will be able to follow their own interests and be challenged where appropriate.**
- **TEACHERS will have access to individualized real-time data on how well each of their students is progressing scholastically and emotionally so they can devise new challenges and offer appropriate support for each child to move ahead.**
- **PARENTS will be better connected to, and involved with, their child’s education with certainty, detail, and confidence.”**

“The response to the coronavirus has demonstrated how technology can help transform how we teach and learn. But the push for change started long before the pandemic struck, and it will go on long after the threat subsides. For years, policymakers have been exploring new transformative approaches to K-12 education that go far beyond just online lessons at home.”

“Children who start school from now on will grow up to be workers and leaders in a digital-first world that will demand new skills and new ways of thinking. To succeed in life and at work, they will need all the social, emotional, and academic support they can get via rich and flexible learning experiences that will differ vastly from the school-days of their parents.”

Robotics

The reality of robots helping educate comes alive

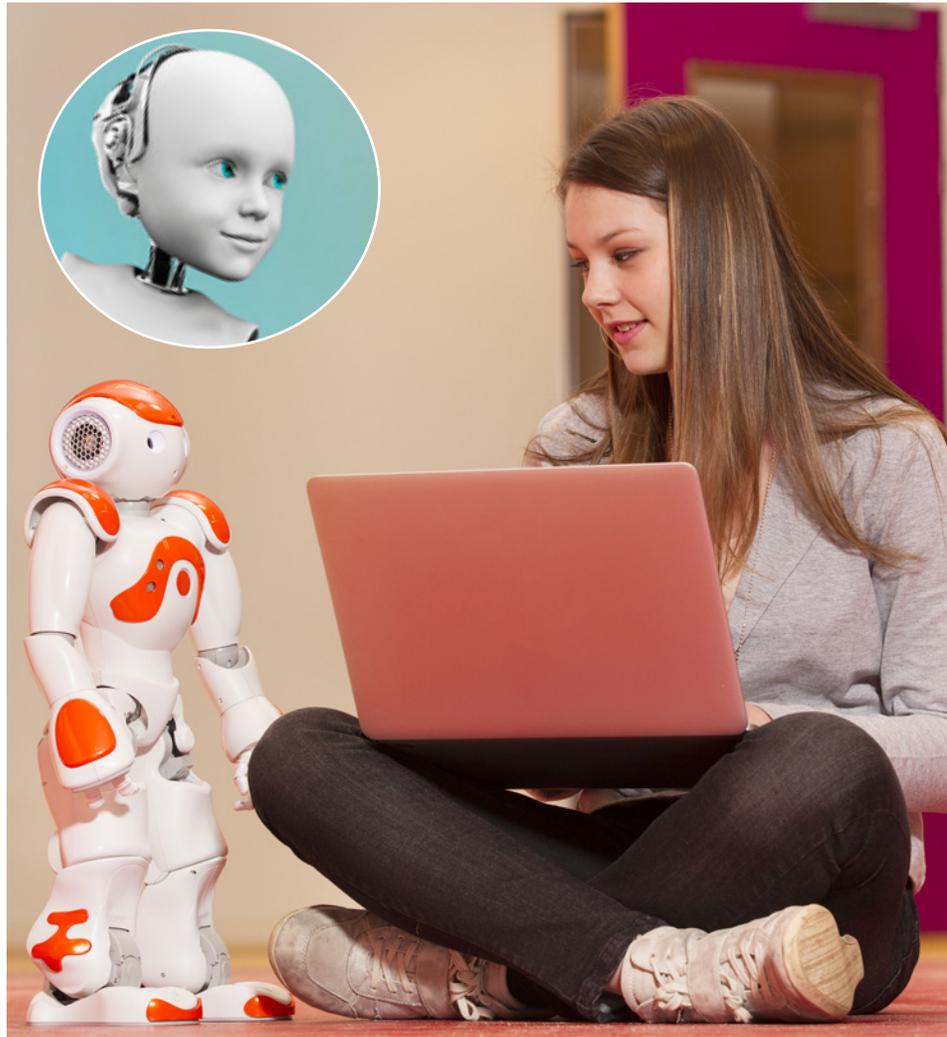
As far-fetched as it may seem, robots can play their own unique role in education. Douglas P. Newton and Lynn D. Newton of the School of Education, Durham University, United Kingdom, state, “Engineers have made robots which can move around classrooms, often but not exclusively those of younger children, asking questions, providing information, noting and commenting on answers, and responding to requests. They are able to recognize individual students and maintain a record of those interactions. Frequently working as classroom assistants, they may make useful contributions to learning.

Some robots have been programmed to teach a second language. As well as playing games and engaging students in conversation, they can respond to students’ commands in the second language.”

“In the context of health education in the Netherlands, children (8–12 years old) have been successfully taught about chronic conditions, like Type 1 Diabetes, using a ‘personal’ robot (one which “develops a user model and adapts the child-robot interaction accordingly”) using games and quizzes engaged in by robot and child.

In the same way, there is evidence that robots can support language development, writing skills, teach sign language, enhance reasoning, and some kinds of problem solving, support self-regulated learning (SLR), and foster SLR skills using prompts, help with small group work by answering questions while, at the same time, free the teacher to give more time to other groups and to individuals.”

“Aids to teaching and learning are not, of course, new. Textbooks, for instance, are long-standing surrogate teachers which have found wide application around the world, but no-one has concerns that children will behave like a book. Humanoid robots, however, are more active, even proactive. Unlike the



passive textbook, they can respond and adapt to each student, tailoring teaching to particular needs. There is clear evidence that they have the potential to support learning, as in teaching children about their medical conditions, developing and rehearsing learning, and testing it. They can also take on teaching roles which human teachers may find time-consuming, uncomfortable, inhibiting, or unfeasible. For example, they can patiently help a student practice a skill or procedure, practice conversation in a foreign language, or act dumb and be ‘taught’ by the student. They can even do what a teacher would find difficult by his or her presence, as in teaching an ASD student while slowly accustoming that student to social interaction.”

According to educational expert Sir Anthony Seldon on RobotLab.com, within the next ten years teaching robots will be able to read children’s facial expres-

“In the future, AI tutors and robots will be with students during all the years that they are in school. This will allow the robots to get to know the students very well, better enabling them to provide inspiration, motivation, and personalized learning.”



“These technologies used in the education environment have shown their value in everyday learning and in the specialized education of students with disabilities.”

sions, and maybe even their brains, to analyze and adapt to how their learning is proceeding. In the future, AI tutors and robots will be with students during all the years that they are in school. This will allow the robots to get to know the students very well, better enabling them to provide inspiration, motivation, and personalized learning.”

RobotLab continues, “As technology will make almost anything possible within the next ten years, it’s important that we continue trying to analyze the long-term effects of its use. We also need to use each new technology responsibly, always following ethical guidelines and standards.”

According to Purdue University, “The use of robotic technologies have proven themselves to be worthy components of available educational resources. These technologies used in the education environment have shown their value in everyday learning and in the specialized education of students with disabilities”

“Robots can be used to bring students into the classroom that otherwise might not be able to attend. In New York, a second grader with severe, life-threatening allergies was unable to attend school due to his condition. A four-foot-tall robot provided a ‘real school’ experience for the boy, ‘attending’ school and bringing the boy with him via an internal video conferencing system. Robots such as the one mentioned are able to ‘bring school’ to students who cannot be present physically.”

“The use of robots is rapidly becoming more commonplace all around us — in our workplaces, our homes, and soon even in our schools.

Although the use of robots is quite new in the field of education, some experts predict that within the next ten years they will be regularly used in classrooms around the world.”



Don’t miss PART TWO of this exciting series: **“The Future of Education — Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality”**
Coming in the Winter 2021 Issue of *AmeriSchools Perspectives*

Now what?

Artificial intelligence and robotics are just some examples of technologies that could forever be part of the reimagining of what education will be like in the future, and represent just a glimpse of the possibilities. Future installments in this series will explore additional technologies that are predicted to play an exciting role in the future of education.

Innovative technologies in education are growing, and the capabilities they can ultimately provide to students are endless. As they continue to move forward, schooling could potentially benefit from the opportunities provided by these advancements.

It’s important to keep in mind, however, that no matter how the future of education evolves, new technologies won’t replace outstanding educators. As many will attest, a single teacher can change a student’s path in life. ❤️



Let's Celebrate National School Choice Week!

JANUARY 22-30, 2021



CELEBRATES
NATIONAL SCHOOL
CHOICE WEEK

What is National School Choice Week?

National School Choice Week shines a spotlight on effective education options for children and is the world's largest celebration of opportunity in K-12 education.

NSCW features tens of thousands of events and activities each January, which are independently planned by schools, homeschool groups, organizations, and individuals. In addition, NSCW develops and provides helpful, practical school search resources to families on a year-round basis.

In 2021, National School Choice Week's January celebrations will solely focus on projects and activities, not in-person events, as the U.S. fights the spread of COVID-19.

What types of school choice does National School Choice Week celebrate?

We celebrate all types of K-12 options, including traditional public schools, public charter schools, public magnet schools, private schools, online academies, and homeschooling. NSCW does not preference one type of education option over another. We trust parents to make the best choices for their individual children.

Who plans National School Choice Week activities?

NSCW activities are independently planned by thousands of schools, homeschool groups,

organizations, and individuals across the country. These schools, groups, and individuals decide how they want to celebrate NSCW and plan the types of activities that best meet their objectives. For 2021, National School Choice Week requests that all participants refrain from planning in-person events. We must all do our part to curb the spread of COVID-19.

How is National School Choice Week responding to COVID-19?

To help curb the spread of COVID-19, we are asking schools, homeschool groups, organizations, and individuals to refrain from holding in-person events for National School Choice Week 2021. Instead, we invite participants to celebrate using our non-event projects and activities that help raise awareness of effective education options, express gratitude for learning environments that are making a positive difference for children, or provide service and support to local schools or communities.

AmeriSchools Academy in Yuma, Tucson, and Phoenix will be celebrating National School Choice Week with appropriate activities to thank our students, parents, teachers and staff. We recognize that without parents choosing us and supporting our students we would not be able to provide the very best for our students.

(Please check the next issue of our magazine for a list of activities.)

KINDERGARTEN TEACHER SEEKS SUPPORT TO BUY LETTER CUBES

You can help a teacher at AmeriSchools Academy Phoenix Camelback provide kindergarten students with tangible tools for learning words at home.

Olivia Ortega is asking for financial contributions through DonorsChoose.org to fund letter cubes and building words, to help her students learn to recognize and identify letters and to create words.

If she can provide them with letter cubes while they are learning at home, the students will be able to follow along with her instruction and have concrete work to show her.

With these new tools, Ortega said she would be able to offer quick assessments in breakout rooms utilizing the cubes and parents can make fun learning games with their children.

Ortega is hoping to raise about \$400 to purchase the letter cubes. To make a donation, visit: www.donorschoose.org.



Parents, Has Your Child Fallen Behind Academically During the Pandemic?

*Are they suffering from Learning Loss,
Depression, or Isolation?*



AmeriSchools has the answer

It's All About "Our Kids"!

(And Our Parents and Students Say It Shows)

5. Learning!

4. Access to learning materials and technology

3. Emotional skills & support to deal with uncertainty

2. Strong, supportive family and school relationships

1. Basic needs met (safety, nutrition, rest, warmth)



The WHY of AmeriSchools

First Things First

Learning Depends on Social and Emotional Factors

1. **Personal Relationships** have *always* been foundational at AmeriSchools

2. Meeting Social and Emotional Needs

- Nurturing of Student Character Development and Behavior
- Positive Social Development
- Anti-Bullying Policies
- The best education possible in a comfortable, consistent environment

"We want to make sure that 'our kids' are healthy, happy, and that they have what they need."

3. Individual, Whole Person Approach

"Our vision and mission have always been to address individuals, not to disseminate information."

4. Some of Our Favorite Words:

"We" "Our" "Us" "Together" "Succeed"

The HOW of AmeriSchools

1. **Non-Graded, Integrated Curriculum** allows students to express themselves through their creative abilities and promotes a positive self-image

2. Multi-Age, Skill-Based, Individualized Instruction

- Provides a challenging environment where students promote their own advancement *in the time they need* to achieve academic requirements
- Low Student-Teacher Ratio and minimal staff turnover enable more direct student instruction for the acceleration of student learning
- Reduces discipline issues with students who become frustrated when they are not grasping academic concepts

3. **Technology-Enabled Classroom Instruction** utilizing 21st century technology and Internet resources for all students

YUMA NORTH (K-6)

1220 South 4th Avenue
Yuma, AZ 85364
(928) 919-7203

YUMA SOUTH (K-6)

2098 South 3rd Avenue
Yuma, AZ 85364
(928) 329-1100

COUNTRY CLUB (K-8)

1150 N. Country Club Road
Tucson, AZ 85716
(520) 620-1100

CAMELBACK (K-8)

1333 W. Camelback Rd.
Phoenix, AZ 85013
(602) 532-0100

AmeriSchools Academy

Executive Offices
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AmeriSchools Perspectives

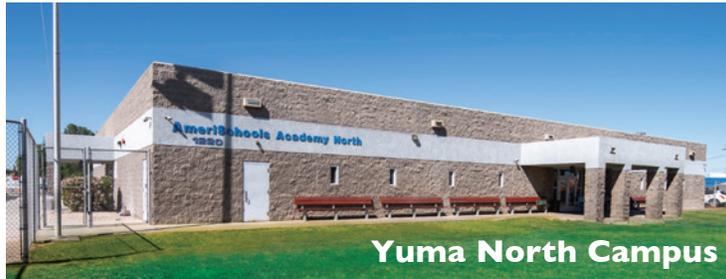
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Message from CEO / 2
- Charter School News / 4
- Learning Through a Pandemic / 6
- School Reopenings / 11
- The 25-Year History of AmeriSchools / 12
- Why I Love to Teach / 14
- Future of Education / 16
- School Choice Week / 21
- Our Core Values / 22
- Contact Information / 24

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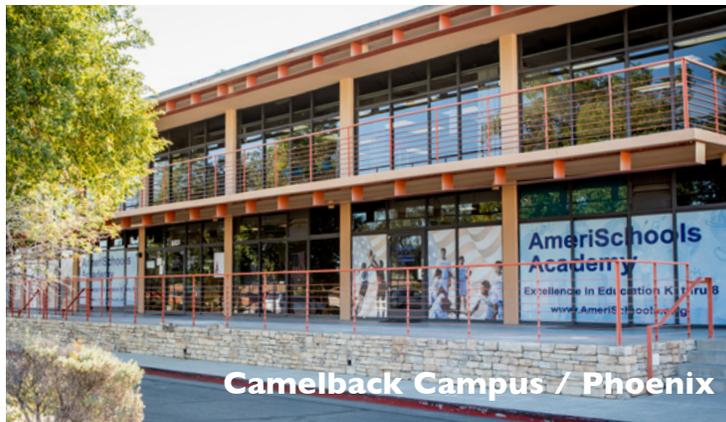
Yuma North Campus



Yuma South Campus



Country Club Campus / Tucson



Camelback Campus / Phoenix

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AMERISCHOOLS ACADEMY

A system of charter schools for children K-8

To learn more visit:
www.AmeriSchools.org

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