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NEWS   MAY 7, 2021

How K-12 Schools Can Make the Most of American Rescue Plan Funding

GoGuardian Team

American Rescue Plan (ARP) funding is on its way to schools across the United States. With $122 billion in its educational wallet, the ARP is the largest funding for public education in a generation — and offers a potentially game-changing opportunity for K-12 schools. As superintendents and administrators consider the challenges magnified by the ongoing

pandemic, this funding gives them a chance to reimagine their schools and rebuild for greater equity and stronger learning outcomes.

On April 21, 2021, GoGuardian and Pear Deck hosted a **panel discussion** with four experts who shared thoughts and ideas on how schools can utilize the incoming funds. Panelists included:

- **Doug Mesecar,** former edtech senior executive and U.S. Department of Education Deputy Chief of Staff
- **Thomas C. Murray,** Director of Innovation, Future Ready Schools
- **Phillip Lovell,** VP of Policy Development and Government Relations, Alliance for Excellent Education
- **Steven Yanni, Ed.D.,** Superintendent, Upper Dublin School District (PA)

Here are a few key takeaways from the conversation.

Flexible spending, focused goals

ARP funding is set up to give recipient schools ample discretion in terms of how they use the funds. However, the funding isn't going to every public school. Ten percent will be distributed to state departments of education, while 90% will go directly to districts based on their Title 1 status.

"Some districts may not be receiving these dollars depending on their concentration of poverty; some districts may be receiving more than others," said Doug Mesecar. Districts with higher poverty will receive more funding.

The bill underscores a few areas for schools to prioritize in their spending: social and emotional learning, student mental health, equity and engagement, and unfinished learning. At the district level, 20% of ARP funds must be spent to address unfinished learning; at the state level, 5% must be spent on unfinished learning, 1% is designated for after-school programs, and another 1% is for summer school.

To stay updated on development regarding ARP and other federal funding, keep tabs on the Department of Education's website.

Addressing unfinished learning

The last year brought challenges for educators and students alike. With shifting educational modes and little (if any) in-person class time, many schools adjusted their curriculum for the year — but learning standards weren't always achieved. This unfinished learning has implications for students as they move into higher grades, which is part of why addressing it is a core goal of ARP funding.

A wide variety of programs fall under the "unfinished learning" umbrella, but evidence-based approaches are crucial. Summer school, after-school tutoring, and other forms of intervention and support all qualify, but the *how* of those programs matters as much as the *what*, said Phillip Lovell.

Mesecar recommends reading research carefully to ensure any evidence-based approach works in your particular use case. Lovell recommends thinking of creative ways to implement programs. For example, your summer school could partner with a camp "to have an enriching experience for young people where they are having a camp experience that maybe they wouldn't afford otherwise," he said.

Prioritizing equity

The ARP targets education funding toward districts with high levels of poverty, but recipient schools are responsible for using those funds to promote equity. The digital divide — between students who have access to the internet and electronic devices and those who don't — came front and center over the last year, but previous pandemic funds to schools didn't address those gaps.

The ARP is different: it includes $7.2 billion for schools and libraries to offset the cost of high-speed home internet and devices. Separate from the Department of Education funds, these dollars will be distributed by the Federal Communication Commission through its E-Rate program.

Equity issues in schools are nothing new. "COVID...amplified equity issues that have already existed," said Thomas C. Murray. This moment and the ARP funds provide an opportunity to rethink how schools are set up once students return to the classroom.

"If we just get back to the status quo, then we're probably going to recreate or at least perpetuate these equity gaps," Mesecar said. "This is an opportunity to really think about things differently and provide new pathways forward."

Identifying the silver linings of the last year

It's important for educators and administrators to process the lessons learned since last spring.

"Despite this horrible time and the horrible pandemic we're fighting right now, there have been tons of silver linings," said Steven Yanni.

Experimentation with education approaches, mixing synchronous and asynchronous learning, using new digital tools — "There are so many things that have happened this year that have been new, that have been different, where people have gone out of their way. They've tried new things that, moving forward, may just be better ways to do it," Murray said.

Identify those lessons and consider how to carry them into the future. Ask students and parents what worked, what was ideal, what should be continued or changed. Ask teachers, too. Then use that feedback to make practical changes.

Questions to ask before spending federal funds

ARP funds should be spent thoughtfully and intentionally. To ensure you get the best, longest-lasting value out of every dollar, our expert panel recommended asking these questions:

- Yanni: "What are the true needs in your organization? What are the true student and staff needs?"
- Lovell: "How does this expenditure help more students get ready for post-secondary education?"
- Mesecar: "How does this expenditure help you get to the future state you need to get to not three years, not five years, but thinking 10 years down the line? Don't make quick term investments if they don't get you on the path to where you really want to go."
- Murray: "For the dollars spent, which students do they impact? What are the demographics? What are the socioeconomics? What are the special education needs? How do we ensure equity for every purchase that we make?"

Want to hear everything these experts had to say? Be sure to watch **the recording of our panel discussion**.

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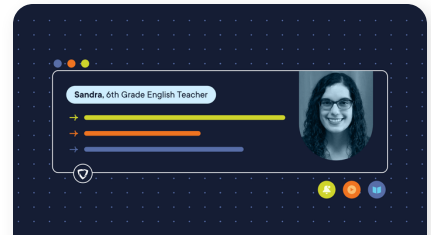
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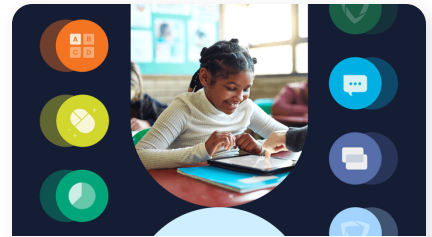## Benefits and Challenges of Technology in the Classroom

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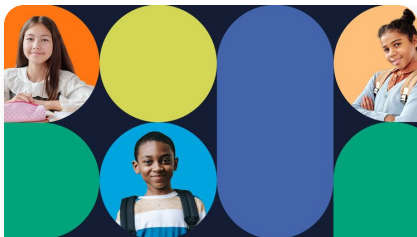## How GoGuardian's Latest Update Addresses Proxy Challenges in Education

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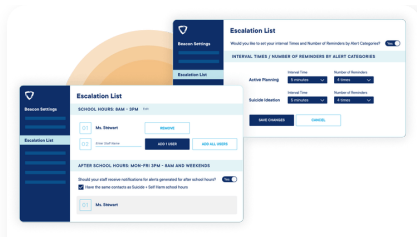## Designing Effective Edtech for K-5 Learners

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