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# ON BOARD

The Voice of Public School Leadership

June 12, 2017

NEW YORK STATE SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION • [www.nyssba.org](http://www.nyssba.org)

Vol. 18, No. 9

## Profs: Schools need to understand potential of 'digital rich teaching'

By **Eric D. Randall**  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

*First of a two-part series*

Buying students devices that connect to the internet was made easier by the Smart Schools Bond Act. But figuring out how to use such devices most effectively in the classroom is a challenge now facing every school district with a 1:1 computing program.

Schools are entering a new world of teaching and learning in which the strength of a school's Wi-Fi signal becomes as important as having heat, light and plumbing, according to professors at the Warner School of Education at the University of Rochester.

The idea is that buying devices is not enough; teaching has to transform and evolve to take full advantage of what's possible with the new technology.

The Warner School has invented a term for this new vanguard in education: "digitally rich teaching."



David Miller of the University of Rochester presents at a Digital Conversion Symposium at the East Irondequoit school district in February 2016. The conference was attended by 179 educators from 47 districts. ◀ Photo courtesy of the East Irondequoit Central School District

"As a school of education, we want to be where people want to go to learn to use these technologies," said Raffaella Borasi,

dean of education. "We need to ask people to teach in a different way than they were taught. You need to give people an image

of what's possible with the device."

With internet-connected devices in the hands of every student, teachers have new ways to inspire "deep learning," according to Borasi. While definitions of that term vary, what Borasi hopes to see in more classrooms is a personalized form of education in which instruction is paced to the needs, learning style, and specific interests of individual students, with ample opportunities for creative expression, independent research and feedback from both peers and the instructor.

At the same time, teachers and administrators will have better, homeworkn ways to assess student mastery of standards and other educational objectives.

Schools will need to abandon or reduce some traditional methods of teaching (e.g., printed worksheets) and adapt other teaching methods to a new digital environment, according to Dave Miller, an assistant professor at the

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### Quoted

**"Please join us in telling President Trump his budget is dead on arrival."**

— Regents Chancellor Betty Rosa and Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia in a letter to U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer (page 17)

## Students respond to Netflix series with '13 Reasons Why Not'

By **Eric D. Randall**  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Lately, high school announcements at the Delaware Academy in Delhi are anything but routine and boring.

In response to the Netflix series "13 Reasons Why," students and staff in the 700-student district in the southern Catskills are reading self-revelatory statements over the public address system. They call it, "13 Reasons Why Not."

Superintendent Jason Thomson describes it as "a collaborative student- and staff-led program to combat anxiety, depression, self-harm and suicide."

In the Netflix series, a fictional girl who committed suicide leaves behind tapes in which she explains how 13 people let her down. In the Delaware project, the message is quite different. Students and faculty explain how they have experienced and survived dark times, and they single

out someone who deserves credit for helping them get through it.

Typically, the student speeches conclude with: "Thank you for being one of my 13 reasons why not."

The idea started with four students including junior Kaitlynn Finch, who heard about a similar effort organized by a student at Oxford High School near Detroit, Mich.

"I messaged her and I was like, 'Hey, can we use this project proposal?'" Finch told WBNG-TV. "We're having really big issues with suicide and depression and anxiety at our school, and we really need to get something going."

What's different in Delaware Academy is that staff are also getting on the P.A. and telling personal stories. "The message is: I was a kid, too," Thomson said. "I felt like you do. There is hope."

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High school junior Kaitlynn Finch was among students who told personal stories during morning announcements at the Delaware Academy in response to "13 Reasons Why." With her is Superintendent Jason Thomson. ◀ Photo courtesy of the Delaware Academy at Delhi

**DIGITAL**, from page 1

Warner School who teaches classes on “Digitally-Rich Teaching and Learning in K-12 Schools.”

Among the key decisions in “digital conversion”: choosing an umbrella software platform that will enable teachers and students to do work online, 24/7. Called a learning management system (LMS), it might be described as a daily collaboration tool for teachers, students and others.

An LMS provides an online space that students can use to submit work, access educational apps, monitor their own progress and interact with classmates or the teacher, among myriad other functions. Administrators and parents can use it to monitor progress. Popular ones include Blackboard, Canvas, Google Classroom, Moodle and Schoology.

Borasi said she is particularly intrigued by ways that digitally rich teaching may be able to enhance social equity in schools. “We have groups of students that are underperforming, and we have to do something to level the playing field,” she said. It can be harder to be invisible with digitally rich teaching, she said, because peer interaction and teacher feedback are routine, and students seem engaged in new ways when you put a device in their hands.

While students do seem to love to use devices, that is not the point of

digital conversion, said Miller. Rather, he said, 1:1 computing environments (in which every student has an internet-ready device) give teachers a large new set of ways to get students engaged with material.

Students aren’t passive learners in digitally rich classrooms, he added. When students can use the internet to do research and have multiple ways of presenting information, including making videos or creating a game, educators must transition from being providers of information to facilitators of learning.

Whether a 1:1 device is involved or not, “good teaching is good teaching,” Miller added.

The university has been working with a consortium of two dozen school districts to help them navigate through all the changes and decisions associated with digital conversion. The university’s main partner has been the East Irondequoit school district, whose achievements in digital conversion have earned it a site visit by the National School Boards Association’s Technology Leadership Network, coming up in November.

*Look for the second part of this series, on East Irondequoit’s digital conversion, in the July 3 issue of On Board.*

## Now Accepting Nominations for the NYSSBA Board of Directors

Deadline: July 31, 2017

The following areas are up for election this year: 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11.

Nominations for candidacy for the NYSSBA Board of Directors must reach NYSSBA headquarters by 5 p.m. July 31.

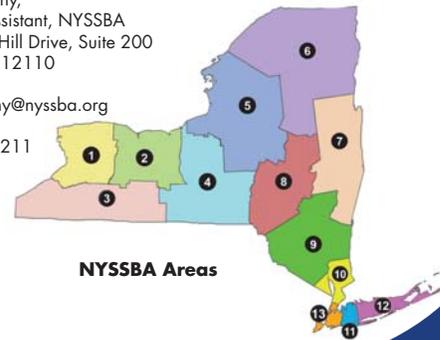
All nominations need to be on district letterhead and signed by the board president, superintendent or district clerk. Individuals must receive nominations from at least five member school boards from their respective areas to be an eligible candidate.

**Nominations can be submitted three ways:**

**Mail:** Mary Metheny,  
Executive Assistant, NYSSBA  
24 Century Hill Drive, Suite 200  
Latham, NY 12110

**Email:** mary.metheny@nyssba.org

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