

Leadership ISD TCBSBM MASBAhablemos COVID-19 Conversation

April 20, 2020

MASBA Vice President Holly María Flynn Vilaseca, Moderator

Leadership ISD, the Mexican American School Boards Association (MASBA), and the Texas Caucus of Black School Board Members (TCBSBM) co-hosted a statewide conversation regarding the COVID-19 pandemic on Monday, April 20, 2020, beginning at 12:00 p.m. CDT.

The 86 attendees, in order by school district, then by company, included:

- Alief ISD Trustee Natasha Butler
- Amarillo ISD Trustee David Nance
- Austin ISD Trustee Cindy Anderson
- Austin ISD Trustee Jayme Mathias
- Austin ISD Trustee Geronimo Rodriguez
- Benavides ISD Superintendent Marisa Chapa
- Ben Bolt-Palito Blanco Trustee Zeldá Saenz
- Brazosport ISD Trustee Jerry Adkins
- Buena Vista ISD Superintendent Marisa Chapa
- Buena Vista ISD Superintendent Mark Dominguez
- Canutillo ISD Trustee Armando Rodriguez
- Clear Creek ISD Trustee Laura DuPont
- Clear Creek ISD Trustee Page Rander
- Crowley ISD Trustee Nedra Robinson
- DeSoto ISD Trustee Tiffany Clark
- DeSoto ISD Trustee Karen Daniel
- DeSoto ISD Trustee DeAndrea Fleming
- Dilley ISD Trustee J.D. Rodriguez, III
- Ector County ISD Trustee Tammy Hawkins
- El Paso ISD Superintendent Juan Cabrera
- Fort Worth ISD Trustee Daphne Brookins
- Fort Worth ISD Trustee Anne Darr
- Fort Worth ISD Chief of Staff Karen Molinar
- Fort Worth ISD Superintendent Kent Paredes Scribner
- Fort Worth ISD Trustee Jacinto Ramos, Jr.
- Fort Worth ISD Trustee Norman Robbins
- Frisco ISD Trustee René Archambault
- Frisco ISD Trustee Debbie Gillespie
- Garland ISD Trustee Linda Griffin
- Grapevine-Colleyville ISD Trustee Jesse Rodriguez
- Greenville ISD Trustee John Kelso
- Hays CISD Trustee Willie Tenorio, Jr.
- Houston ISD Trustee Judith Cruz
- Houston ISD Trustee Sue Deigaard
- Houston ISD Program Specialist Noé Denova
- Houston ISD Trustee Holly Maria Flynn Vilaseca
- Houston ISD Trustee Dani Hernández
- Houston ISD Trustee Elizabeth Alba Santos
- Houston ISD Trustee Anne Sung
- Kenedy ISD Trustee Demetrio Garcia
- Lancaster ISD Trustee Ty G. Jones
- Leander ISD Trustee Trish Bode
- Lockhart ISD Superintendent Mark Estrada
- Manor ISD Trustee Ana Cortez
- Marathon ISD Superintendent Guadalupe Singh
- Midland ISD Trustee James Fuller
- Northside ISD Trustee Karen Freeman
- Palacios ISD Trustee Fabian Marroquin
- Pflugerville ISD Trustee Tony Hanson
- Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD Chief Academic Officer Rudy Treviño
- Richardson ISD Trustee Karen Clardy
- Sequim School District Trustee Larry Jeffryes
- Tomball ISD Superintendent Martha Salazar Zamora
- Waco ISD Assistant Superintendent Israel Carrera
- West ISD Trustee Leigh Crawshaw
- ABM – Stephen Ferrar
- ABM – Katie Powell
- Aetna – Heidi Shafer
- Amplify – Paul Griffin
- BuyBoard – Angel Magallanes
- Claycomb Architects – Richard Crump
- Claycomb Architects – Francis Zordilla
- E3 Entegral Solutions – Vince Zubicek
- Equal Opportunity Schools – John Gatica
- ERO Architects – Brian Godinez
- FBS Benefits – Gilberto Gonzalez

- IDRA – Chloe Sikes
- J.L. Powers & Associates – Jeffrey Richard
- Johnson Controls – Cheryl Aquadro
- MASBA – Vincent Tovar
- MIND Research – J. Iván Alfaro
- Mpowerment Works – Marisa Rivera
- O’Connell Robertson – Danny Cornejo
- O’Connell Robertson – Misela Gonzales-Vandewalle
- O’Connell Robertson – Cindy Villarreal
- O’Hanlon Demerath & Castillo – Ricco Garcia
- Page Southerland Page Architects – Jim Brady
- Progressive Roofing – JJ Eusay
- Schneider Electric – Aaron Garcia
- TASB – Kay Douglas
- TASB – Phil Gore
- TASB – Amanda Quraishi
- TALAS – Stan Paz
- Texas Ed Tech Solutions – Jeff Dominguez
- UT Austin – Angela Valenzuela
- Alice Hawkins
- Zac Thompson

Welcome

MASBA Executive Director Dr. Jayme Mathias welcomed all, introduced them to the features of GoToWebinar, and introduced MASBA Board Vice President Holly María Flynn Vilaseca, the moderator of this conversation.

Panelists

Trustee Flynn Vilaseca invited panelists to speak about their districts’ responses to the present COVID-19 pandemic. Summaries of their remarks follow.

Tomball ISD Superintendent Dr. Martha Salazar Zamora

We are discovering the “new normal” during unprecedented times, as we transition for an indefinite period of time from brick-and-mortar, to a remote-learning platform accessible to all students. We have focused on ensuring equity and access for all students, reaching 98% of student so far. We are reaching out to all students who haven’t regularly logged in for e-learning, and we’re thinking through a grading system that puts “grace before grades.” By the second week of the pandemic, we had deployed Chromebooks, hotspots & park-and-learns (offering free internet access at parking lots). We have focused on accessible & inclusive learning for SPED students, with a weekly communication, a help desk, a website, and a YouTube channel. We provide breakfast and lunch five days per week. We are focusing on meeting the social-emotional needs of students (who are missing their teachers and friends) and parents (who have the added responsibility of teaching), by remote means (e.g., through teletherapy).

Fort Worth ISD Superintendent Dr. Kent Paredes Scribner

We are focused on three priorities: (1) virtual learning & setting up virtual classrooms, (2) meeting student needs (e.g., food security), and (3) providing social-emotional support. We’re reaching out and contacting students on a regular basis. We have learned much about student needs. Disparities in healthcare, hardware and infrastructure have been revealed. We are messaging that laptops and hotspots are short-term solutions, that will get students through the next two weeks to two months, but that we need to be working on WiFi towers in areas of economic disadvantage. Our message: We don’t want laptops; we want appropriately-funded schools. We shouldn’t let this crisis go to waste; it’s an opportunity to begin conversations on equity, basic needs, and the need to invest in our students and our future.

Lockhart ISD Superintendent Mark Estrada

We are ensuring our kids are fed, taken care of, and getting the social-emotional support they need. We offer breakfast, lunch and dinner Monday through Friday, with 250 stops for buses delivering food. The need is great: In a district with 6,200 students, we’re serving well over 10,000 meals every day. We have hotspots, but 30% of our rural county doesn’t have access to an internet provider. For over two years, we

had been looking at purchasing WiFi towers, to make our community more resilient. Our Board approved this last week; construction has already begun on seven towers that will cover 300 square miles. We spoke with many vendors and found someone who believed in building infrastructure in our county. The towers will provide our network and bandwidth, with free access for all students and staff. It's a huge gamechanger. This crisis lit a fire for us to make bold decisions for the benefit of students and families—while also addressing our longterm strategy of addressing equity.

Austin ISD Trustee Cindy Anderson

We're excited to hear what's happening in Lockhart, since we're looking for an alternate solution to hotspots. We've placed 110 buses with mobile hotspots in the community. We're also placing hotspots in apartment & housing complexes. All students in grades 3 to 12 have access to 1:1 technology with Chromebooks. We've also delivered 60,000 learning packets for grades K through 8 at 37 schools; the participation rate is about 60%. We use a Let's Talk platform to field questions from families. We have a bilingual help desk and a curbside program for students to switch out technology. We're getting ready to open a touchless repair center tomorrow. We've had incredible community partnerships, and our local PBS station is providing educational resources, segmented by hour: with programs for Pre-K through 3rd grade at 6:00 to 8:00 a.m., programs for 4th & 5th grade from 8:00 to 11:00 a.m., and grades 6 to 12 from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. We are concerned with food and housing insecurity, addiction, and domestic violence. Partners, like the local food bank, are assisting with wraparound services. We have been providing student meals and are resuming weekend meals this week.

Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD Chief Academic Officer Dr. Rudy Treviño

It's awesome to hear of this statewide, concerted effort on social-emotional learning. In Houston, we learned some tough lessons from Hurricane Harvey. COVID-19 is now an "equal opportunity" event, affecting families of all socioeconomic levels throughout the entire state. We ask how we're supporting our teachers and staff members as they focus on students. We're creating a holistic approach to wraparound services and SEL support systems. This is National Librarians Week, and all our librarians are Google Classroom certified and serve as resources for addressing the virtual challenges we're having.

El Paso ISD Superintendent Juan Cabrera

We're aware of the hierarchy of needs, beginning with food insecurity, health, safety and student well-being. We dialed every student, and quickly contacted 45,000 of 60,000 students. We're still whittling down that list and are down to about 8,000 students. Our EcoDis families move so much that it's often difficult to have the last current address for every student; many will move two or three times before updating their address with us. United Way and AmeriCorps are assisting. A lot of our kids go back and forth to Mexico. As we contact families, we make sure they're okay, then make sure they have the ability to be online. If they don't, we get them access to offline resources. We had some pushback at first by those saying we were going outside the scope of academics; I told them we have to wear two "hats" now. We're trying to shift the culture from a sole focus on academics, to a joint focus on academics as well as the health, safety and wellbeing of students and staff. We have 50 meal locations serving three days a week. Our students' ability to learn is more important now than in the brick-and-mortar days. I've made it clear to my cabinet that nobody is allowed to give projects to anyone touching students; we don't want to distract them from working with kids, and we can have non-student-facing staff take care of projects like setting up our virtual summer school. We're working to develop a playbook, so that in the future we'll be able to close a school in 24 hours and be up teaching. As we dig deeper and peel the onion, we find issues we hadn't thought of. We spent two weeks setting up a full-time virtual school, in addition to paper support. After two weeks, we felt we had "climbed the mountain." I told my team it was equivalent to opening a school building, and now we have to focus on quality, continuity, and increased rigor. We need to get our best and most creative teachers

teaching others. It feels like we're getting to work at the end of the year, with five weeks now left. I tell my team we can't just crawl across the finish line. Let's finish better and better, with better virtual schools, better outreach, better connection, better engagement. And let's be ready to start summer school the next week. If, God forbid, we find ourselves in the same situation of closed schools in the fall, let's open our virtual schools with continually-increasing rigor and quality, rather than simply hope that we'll soon get back to brick-and-mortar.

Remarks & Questions

Stan Paz: Dr. Salazar Zamora addressed the question I had on addressing the needs of special needs students. On what dates will many school districts be concluding this school year?

Paredes Scribner: The latest information from the Commissioner on Friday is that schools will remain closed through the end of the school year. The conversation pivoted to summer school. We likely won't have person-to-person instruction in urban centers in June, so summer school might be a jumpstart program. Each week, we're getting better at supporting our students through virtual means. There's a possibility that school might open in August or September, but then need to close again. The closing of schools is something we'll have to build into our "new normal." In the meantime, we're turning to other virtual means of helping students, like teletherapy.

Salazar Zamora: When the state made the decision to close schools through the end of the year, many superintendents were already thinking of this, but were weighing the financial implications and consulting with neighboring districts. We're looking at virtual summer school. We need to learn from this; history may repeat itself. We need to find the "nuggets of gold" with respect to traditional brick-and-mortar and future online, remote learning—for SPED and general ed students. There are several challenges with the accessible and inclusive online education of special needs students. We've increased parent webinars, and more parents are participating in our virtual ARD meetings. We're turning to teletherapy and telecounseling as well.

John Gatica: What are some of the things that need to be in place before we open our school doors? And what are some of the specific challenges you foresee for the 20/21 school year? Lastly, what are we doing about the conflicting messages we hear in the media about the COVID-19?

Treviño: We'll need to prepare a plan for the reopening of schools. The Commissioner has suggested that students may need to show up with masks and gloves. And trauma can be delayed, so we need to be ready to address psychological and sociological needs when students return to our schools. Interactions may change. The way we greet one another may change. We need to anticipate this and know they won't be the same.

Paredes Scribner: We're going to see a summer slide of unprecedented level. The last day our Fort Worth ISD students entered a school building was March 6. If we don't open until August, that'll be over five months without school. This will disproportionately impact our most fragile students. We need to focus on EcoDis students first, with an equity lens.

Estrada: We'll open schools when it's safe to. As educational leaders, we need to maintain a balance between supporting students, families and teachers, and understanding that our kids are developing gaps. As leaders, how will we balance high expectations with an acknowledgement of social-emotional needs, without making excuses? It'll be a difficult change for us to manage.

Anderson: So many things have changed in the delivery of education and support for our students, staff and their families during this. Practices are shifting, and some of them will be part of the "new normal." The job duties and responsibilities of our employees may change. We've seen an increased participation from our families and community—watching online board meetings and participating in principal selection processes. These meetings are now more accessible. We're concerned our achievement gap is going to be absolutely huge and that many students will be unable to focus because of the trauma they and their families have experienced.

Many students have moved, and the unemployment rate in Austin—which is already unaffordable to many—is expected to be over 25%. We're having difficulty tracking everyone down and making sure they're okay. I anticipate lower enrollment and less gains during the next school year. I think there will be a fear of going back to our physical environments—which will affect enrollment. There will be massive changes, many of which we can't anticipate.

Chloe Sikes: Dr. Paredes Scribner suggests hotspots are a Band-Aid. How might we at IDRA assist in advancing a statewide strategy around increasing Wi-Fi connectivity?

Paredes Scribner: When HB3 passed, the narrative was that the state was taking responsibility for public education. The question at that time was whether the state would live up to that responsibility. No one anticipated turning off the sales tax spigot for three months or longer. Gas and oil prices are going through the floor. We're looking at a very difficult next session. We're all going to have to pull together and have a united voice on the importance of investing in policies.

Cabrera: Dr. Scribner hit the nail on the head. We don't want to waste a good crisis. The digital divide has grown deeper, and we're hearing from the state that all other issues that take financial resources will not affect the budget of the second half of this biennium. The next legislative session will be a big fight, to make sure education doesn't take the brunt of the budget challenge. I'm already planning to spend a couple of weeks each month in Austin next spring. It'll be the most important session we've had in 30 years.

Estrada: From a policy perspective, pushing for e-rate changes is an important conversation to have at the national level.

Elizabeth Alba Santos: Tell us about the quality of the data you're collecting, especially about the social-emotional needs of students. What types of questions are you asking, and what is your data telling you? The Houston ISD, for instance, has a 91% contact rate, but that doesn't tell me anything. Also, what will social distancing look like when we reopen schools? What measures will we take to keep kids safe?

Cabrera: If we're not capturing the data, we won't solve the problem. We've had 20 social workers on staff in our district for five years, focusing on the non-academic issues that keep students from showing up. We're continually digging into that data. Now we're gathering data on our non-responsive students. We'll likely see a bell curve of engagement in virtual learning, with the majority of students being engaged, but with several who are not engaged due to their personal situations. We'll have to dig into the situation of each student. Some kids will receive from us 80% educational services and 20% social services; other kids might receive 80% social services and 20% educational services from us. Social services are not part of our charge, but we take them on in the El Paso ISD. So we're chasing kids, collecting data, and hopefully the idea and solutions we create will be utilized by others.

Treviño: Going forward, we need to do a better job of analyzing data. Before this crisis, we analyzed data on student outcomes and content mastery. We need to do the same for non-academic needs. The mind shift now required utilizes the same skills—grouping kids, analyzing data, and identifying needs—but with respect to domestic violence, sexual abuse, trauma and grief.

Page Rander: What are your districts doing with grading and GPA, and how are your communities responding to the changes?

Paredes Scribner: We did pass/fail, with GPA at the end of the third nine weeks.

Anderson: We truncated the ranking of GPA at the end of the first semester. The second semester is pass/complete.

Estrada: We're doing the same in Lockhart.

Linda Griffin: Going forward, what changes would you like to see in how our Teams of Eight work?

Salazar Zamora: In my district, I wouldn't want to see change so much as continual support. We've now had three virtual board meetings. I'm grateful that they continue to support the district and the decisions of leadership—whether it's on grading policy or what we're doing for graduation. We have important decisions to make moving forward, so maintaining a cohesive team will be important.

Estrada: The speed at which everything is moving necessitates trust. We typically go through a two-month cycle to communicate items to the board; that's not possible now. Communication and trust are essential.

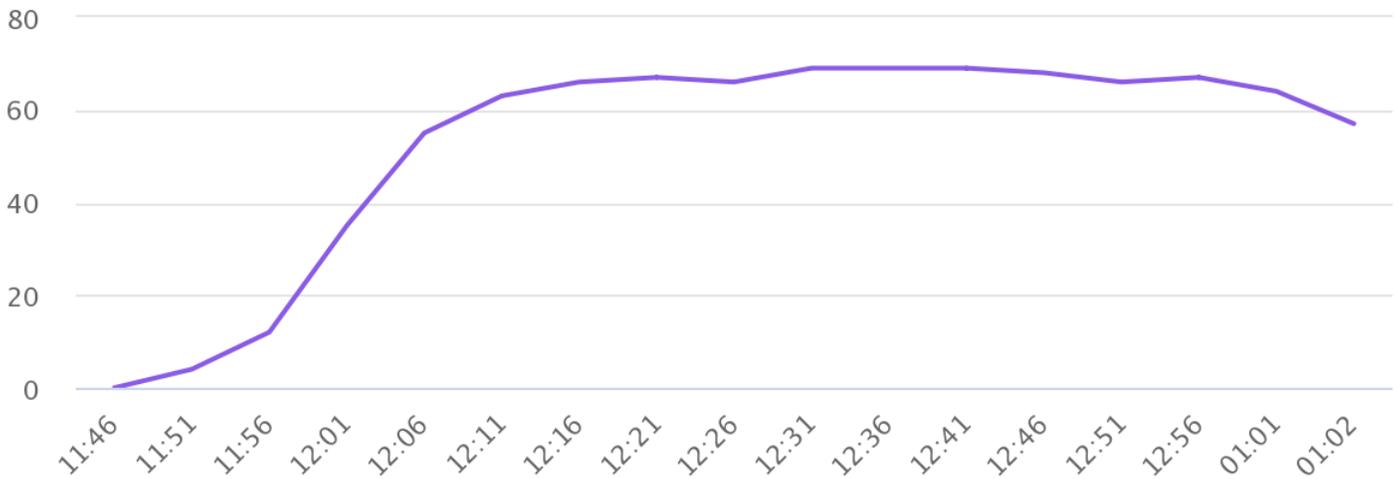
Paredes Scribner: In addition to our biweekly board meetings, our chief of staff is convening weekly meetings with small groups of trustees to review current events and important issues. It's been a great avenue for a two-way flow of information.

Adjournment

The conversation concluded at 12:59 p.m.

Meeting Data

This conversation was advertised in MASBA eblasts to over 6,400 recipients each. We also spread word of this conversation through social media (Twitter & Facebook). 148 people registered. 77 attended, not including organizers and panelists. The meeting attendance, as tracked every five minutes, follows. Dr. Mathias logged into GoToWebinar at 11:46 a.m. and concluded the meeting at 1:02 p.m. More than 60 attendees were present for the conversation from 12:11 to 1:00 p.m.



72% of attendees had GoToWebinar on top of other applications, compared with 70% the previous week. This was likely due to the fact that we shared video of speakers for this conversation.

Post-meeting Survey Results

33 attendees (43%) responded to the post-conversation survey. They included:

- 24 school board members
- 2 superintendents
- 2 other district administrators/staff
- 5 others

They provided the following feedback on the size of their districts:

- 9 are from districts with 50,000 or more students
- 8 are from districts with 25,000 to 50,000 students
- 4 are from districts with 10,000 to 25,000 students
- 3 are from districts with 5,000 to 10,000 students
- 3 are from districts with 1,000 to 5,000 students
- 4 are from districts with less than 1,000 students

When asked how many days each week their district are feeding students, they responded:

- 6 – every day of the week
- 15 – five or more days each week
- 3 – four days a week
- 4 – three days a week
- 1 – two days a week
- 1 – one day a week
- 1 – I don't know

When asked at which levels they are sharing 1:1 devices with students, they responded:

- 26 – for high school students
- 23 – for middle school students
- 19 – for elementary students
- 3 – I don't know

When asked what percent of their district students they estimate as having WiFi access, they responded:

- 1 – 100%
- 9 – 80-99%
- 11 – 60-79%
- 6 – 40-59%
- 4 – 20-39%
- 0 – less than 20%

20 attendees shared **what was most helpful** about this conversation:

- The **superintendent/trustee panel**.
- I enjoyed hearing from the various **superintendents** regarding meeting the needs of their students.
- Hearing from **superintendents**.
- Hearing from all the **superintendents**. Much is the same, but a few had different ideas.
- While some challenges differed among the panelists, the majority of **concerns were consistent**.
- Thoughts from **superintendents** concerning ideas on **Team of 8 relationships**.
- Learning **what others districts are doing**, keeping current with changes and conversations occurring throughout the state, support.
- Learning about **different approaches** to the crisis.
- The **collaboration**.
- Hearing others **ideas and solutions** to problems.
- Listening to the **challenges and solutions** that have districts have been working through.
- Learning how superintendents and school board members view upcoming **budget challenges & needs**.
- Discussions about **future state financing**. discussions about **what learning will look like in future years**, what will be changing?
- **Grading, GPA & Top 10** students, and El Paso using **social** workers to help find & identify student needs.
- Ways to provide **Wifi**, using buses, providing students **devices**.
- Knowing school district are aware of students and families' **needs** and are **concerned** for their safety and sanity.
- **All of it!** Nuts and bolts, legislative concerns, SEL and what trustees can do.
- **No-nonsense answers**.
- All input was good.
- I didn't hear new information - mostly **affirmation**.

13 attendees share what might be improved:

- I enjoyed the conversation. You may **reduce the number of panelists** to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to speak with no one person dominating the discussion.
- Perhaps **fewer participants** to allow a little more depth in conversations.
- Maybe **make the panel smaller** by one or 2, although this was a strong group
- It is paramount that every participant that is speaking and showing on the screen STOP moving & multitasking unless he/she continues to mute when not speaking. Please put the dogs in another location. This is a wonderful opportunity to learn more, brainstorm, and share information, but all the background noises are diminishing those benefits, if allowed to continue. I know this is new technology and a new means of sharing information, but we really need to close the gap on **distractions** in the board.
- Information on **graduation & summer school**.
- How are other school districts **adjusting to students leaving district** due to economic conditions.
- Would love to see **new details or information** provided in way that helps spur ideas moving forward
- Parents concerned about campuses and teachers using **too many digital platforms to deliver instruction** to students.
- The **video would freeze up**. However, the audio still worked.
- I appreciate the diverse perspectives.
- It was great and great panelists.
- Great format.
- N/A

8 attendees shared the following concerning unanswered questions:

- What are **differences/similarities among school districts' responses** (academic, nutritional, employee, etc.) to the crisis?
- What is the scale of **individual access and use to technology** in State of Texas via data per each district? Access and use to **internet**, access and use of an appropriate **device**, access and use of appropriate **curriculum**, by profile of individuals students, by location, grade, ethnic and economics.
- Is anybody **cataloging innovations or emerging best practices** for sharing later?
- I'd like to hear more on how **much, how often, a Superintendent should be making contact, keeping boards informed**. I feel like I'm in the shadows much of the time. Dr. Gore touched on it, but an expanded discussion would be helpful.
- The only question I continue to have is **how to deal with a board member that is off the deep end**, not understanding the role of governance at all - in fact believing his way of doing governance is the right way. That in the midst of everything else happening. And trying to ensure the rest of the team all stays together in solid governance. I need to call Kay :)
- This is going so fast that it's hard to form questions right now.
- None at this time. *Mil gracias!!*
- None.

Ideas for **future speakers**:

- **Commissioner Morath**
- **Mike Morath**
- **Dr. Michael McFarland** from Crowley ISD (michael.mcfarland@crowley.k12.tx.us)
- Could you policy have a panel with **Teach Plus Texas, Texas Education Policy Institute, Commit, IDRA?**
- **Districts in West Texas & Amarillo, Lubbock**
- **Rural superintendents and trustees** to discuss wifi connectivity issues, extended school year/additional school days considerations for next year, community partnerships
- **Parents, students**

Ideas for **future topics**:

- **Special Education**
- How to select the best common **online digital program** to facilitate learning for a campus.
- **Financing for technology** and budget
- I would like to hear more regarding **legislative policies**.