

Future Schools

The Power of Connection

eSchool News recently connected with three Verizon education and technology experts to tackle some of the most pressing issues for district leaders today—from fortifying network cyber security defenses, to enhancing equity opportunities, to integrating next-generation technologies like AI.

To watch the conversation in full, click [here](#).



The Panelists:



Kim Mirabella, Vice President, Business Development, Verizon

Kim Mirabella serves as the Vice President, Business Development and Strategic Sales for Verizon Public Sector (Federal and SLED) and oversees the development, design and capture of strategic opportunities as well as a new team focusing on Fixed Wireless Access.



Scott Andersen, Distinguished Architect, Verizon

Scott Andersen is a long-time distinguished architect with more than 30 years of experience. He has designed solutions that span the world in a number of different industries including Financial Services, US Government, State Government, Aviation, Oil and Gas and many others.



Wes Withrow, Senior Client Partner, Verizon

Wes Withrow is a senior emerging services strategy leader, technical direction agent to governments, Fortune 500 account strategist, team director, and hands-on technology expert recognized for eliciting top performance in technical teams.



The Topics:

Concerns on Cybersecurity

All three panelists place a significant emphasis on cybersecurity threats, particularly social engineering attacks like phishing, which exploit human vulnerabilities to gain unauthorized access. They encourage districts to prioritize social engineering defense as part of their cybersecurity strategy.

The shift towards online learning during the pandemic only highlighted vulnerabilities, raising concerns about protecting students from online risks such as accessing inappropriate content or falling victim to cyber threats. Also, while exciting prospects like Artificial Intelligence (AI), Augmented Reality (AR), and Virtual Reality (VR) in education promise to enhance learning outcomes, they also introduce new security considerations. Safely integrating these technologies into classrooms requires robust cybersecurity measures to protect against potential threats.

Looking forward, the integration of AI into network security is also seen as a future strategy for enhancing cybersecurity. AI-powered systems can detect and respond to cyber threats more efficiently than traditional methods, offering continuous monitoring and adaptive defense mechanisms. The panel emphasizes collaboration between educational institutions and technology providers like Verizon to strengthen cybersecurity defenses. Sharing insights and best practices can help develop comprehensive security strategies tailored to the unique challenges faced by schools.

It takes less than 60 seconds for someone to click on a phishing email. So imagine everyone within the educational system—teachers, students and parents—being vulnerable just to one kind of social engineering attack through phishing. One of the areas where we help organizations get started is helping them understand what an overall social engineering defense plan is and then helping build capabilities around that. Start with the specific use case and then build off of that use case to help develop a strategy for the future. —Wes

Digital Equity to the Forefront

The discussion shifts to the need for digital equity, especially in education, which became exacerbated during the pandemic. Since then, Verizon has supported more than 1.5 million students with connectivity solutions like hotspots and digital inclusion programs, ensuring access regardless of economic status. They also support schools through initiatives like the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools program, which targets socioeconomically challenged schools, providing iPads and 24/7 connectivity to students. It aims to bridge the digital divide by offering hands-on learning experiences and access to advanced technologies like 5G labs.

All the panelists underscore the critical role of connectivity, digital literacy, and inclusive access initiatives in ensuring equitable educational opportunities for all students, especially during times of crisis.

When you think about distance learning and learning from home, even from a homework perspective, kids are going to need access to the Internet. Do they have network coverage? We've spent the last couple of years really shoring up the network and making sure that we're properly forecasting those needs moving forward...We have actually launched some plans which we call digital inclusion and these are plans we make available to government agencies. So any school can take advantage. —Kim





The Potential of AI

Panelists also touch on the role of today’s most talked about technology. While AI presents opportunities for innovation and efficiency, there’s cautious optimism about its integration into educational settings, ensuring it complements rather than replaces human educators. It can break down language barriers through real-time translation, making education more accessible for students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. It also can enable personalized learning experiences by providing virtual tutors and supporting individualized enrichment activities, catering to diverse learning needs within classrooms.

Platforms like Khan Academy and initiatives like Microsoft’s AI assistant for teachers illustrate the evolving role of AI in education, offering free resources and tools that support educators in lesson planning and content delivery. The future of AI in education promises further advancements in curriculum development, real-time teaching assistance, and interactive learning experiences, suggesting a transformative shift towards more efficient and inclusive educational practices.

It took me 11 weeks in the summer in years past to create, digitize and build a hyper card stack with the kids. At least two hours every single day. ‘Using an AI tool to perform a similar task’ it took about 11 minutes and the only reason it took me 11 minutes, I didn’t copy it the first time. It’s an amazing new world. The capabilities are there. I’m jealous. The opportunity is there. The power is there. Take advantage. —Scott

Verizon Communications Inc., (NYSE, Nasdaq: VZ) was formed on June 30, 2000 and is one of the world's leading providers of technology and communications services. Headquartered in New York City and with a presence around the world, Verizon generated revenues of \$136.8 billion in 2022. The company offers data, video and voice services and solutions on its award-winning networks and platforms, delivering on customers' demand for mobility, reliable network connectivity, security and control. **To learn more about how Verizon can help transform K-12 learning experiences, go to www.verizon.com/k12.**

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