

Fall Into Action

Leadership Perspective

The School Year Has Started. Now What?

By September, the planning season is behind us. Strategic plans have been approved, professional learning scheduled, technology purchased, and teachers and students are back in the building. But September is also when the real work begins and when good plans can quietly stall. A plan on paper is not the same as a plan in practice. The gap between what was approved in the spring and what is happening in classrooms now is where transformation either takes hold or loses momentum. That is why ETA sees September as a time to **listen**, **investigate**, and **engage**. We are paying attention to what educators and leaders are experiencing as plans move into practice, and to the questions and challenges that emerge along the way. This month, ETA is focused on helping leaders move from planning to implementation, and from implementation to results.

The school year has begun. Now, the real work begins.

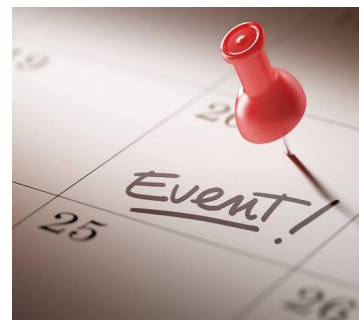
~Dr. Todd Ullah
Executive Director

What's New at ETA?

K-12 education is not short on ideas. Districts are working to improve academic outcomes, address attendance, retain educators, integrate AI, modernize technology, and respond to changing resources all while being asked to demonstrate results. The challenge is increasingly implementation. A new curriculum, technology platform, professional learning experience, or strategic initiative only creates impact when the people and systems responsible for implementation have the clarity, capacity, and support to make it work. So we ask:

Are we adding another solution, or building the capacity to make the solutions we already have work?

This question is at the heart of ETA's evolution. We help education organizations understand their current conditions, align people and systems, strengthen implementation, and use evidence to improve. The future of K-12 transformation will depend not on how many initiatives we launch, but on how effectively we turn good ideas into sustained practice and results.



Save the Date

- **Sept. 8:** International Literacy Day
- **Sept. 7:** Labor Day
- **Sept. 13:** Nat'l Grandparents Day
- **Sept. 13-19:** National Arts in Education Week
- **Sept. 14-18:** National Coding Week
- **Sept. 15:** Hispanic Heritage Month Begins
- **Sept. 22:** First Day of Fall
- **Sept. 24:** National Punctuation Day

Education Focus

September brings two important opportunities for educators: Hispanic Heritage Month and Attendance Awareness Month.

Hispanic Heritage Month, observed September 15-October 15, invites schools to recognize Hispanic and Latino histories, cultures, and contributions while asking, Whose stories are represented in what students learn?

Attendance Awareness Month reminds us that students must be present and engaged to benefit from those learning opportunities. Early attendance patterns can help educators identify barriers before absences become chronic. Together, these observances reinforce an important principle: students are more likely to engage when they see themselves, their experiences, and their communities reflected in the learning environment and when schools create the conditions that help them be there. Representation builds connection. Attendance creates opportunity. Together, they support student success.



IMPACT in Practice: Investigate

Every school leader has a sense of how their strategic plan is progressing. **But how do we know?** ETA's IMPACT Model guides organizations through six phases: **Investigate, Map, Prepare, Activate, Cultivate, and Transform**. Each issue of the ETA Insight Bulletin explores one phase in practice. We begin with **Investigate**. Before schools can determine where they need to go, they need a clear picture of where they are. Investigate looks beyond the surface to understand what is happening across data, people, practices, and systems. Schools are looking for evidence of what is working, where gaps exist, what barriers are getting in the way, and whether strategies are being implemented as intended. The goal isn't simply to collect more data; it is to turn information into understanding that can inform priorities and guide what comes next. **Put It to the Test;** Ask your team:

- What does the evidence tell us about where we are?
- What shows us that implementation is working?
- Where are staff experiencing friction or barriers?
- What can we learn from previous initiatives?

If you can't answer these questions with confidence, that's where investigation begins. The [IMPACT Implementation Readiness Assessment](#) can help establish your starting point by identifying strengths, gaps, and areas that may require attention. **Investigate replaces assumption with evidence.**



Research Spotlight: Rethinking Screen Time

Technology is now part of everyday learning, but schools are asking an increasingly important question: **How much screen time actually supports learning?** The concern is not simply how much time students spend on screens, but what they are doing, why they are doing it, and what that screen time may be replacing. The American Academy of Pediatrics has shifted its guidance toward considering the quality, context, and purpose of media use, noting that digital media can affect sleep, attention, physical activity, relationships, and learning when it crowds out other important experiences. The numbers make the conversation more urgent. The [2025 Common Sense Census](#) found that children ages 5-8 averaged 3 hours and 28 minutes of screen media per day in 2024. For schools, the question is not whether technology belongs in education. It is about whether every minute of screen time earns its place.

A Question for School Leaders

Is our use of technology intentional, instructional, and improving the learning experience, or simply adding more screen time?

That is an ETA question: **Investigate the current practice. Examine the evidence. Then make informed decisions about technology, instruction, and student engagement.**



EDforTech Alliance

ETA in Action

Is Your Strategy Translating Into Action?

The conversation around student screen time is raising an important question for school leaders: What happens when a well-intentioned strategy meets the realities of the classroom? Schools are reconsidering how technology is used not because technology has no place in learning, but because more technology does not automatically mean better learning. Research and emerging practice are prompting leaders to examine whether screen use is intentional, instructional, and supporting the learning experience. But changing the expectation is only the beginning. A policy can limit screen time. A strategic plan can establish technology priorities. Professional learning can introduce a new approach. None of these, by themselves, guarantee a change in practice. Implementation is where strategy is tested. What are teachers actually doing? What are students experiencing? Where are expectations clear, and where are they creating friction? What evidence tells us the strategy is working and what might need to change?

These questions move schools beyond simply having a strategy to understanding how that strategy is showing up in practice. That is the work at the heart of ETA's IMPACT Model: helping education organizations move from strategy to sustained practice by Investigating current conditions, Mapping priorities, Preparing people and systems, Activating implementation, Cultivating continuous improvement, and Transforming outcomes. Because the question isn't simply: **"Do we have a strategy?"** It's: **"Is our strategy showing up in practice?" Start the conversation with ETA.**

If your organization is asking whether a new initiative, policy, technology strategy, or improvement plan is translating into meaningful practice, **let's talk**. ETA can help you examine where you are, identify what may be getting in the way, and determine what it will take to move from strategy to sustained action.

