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Episode 14 | ISTE Innovators in the Pandemic: Reflections and Actions from East to West Coast

by Curtis Bonk | Jun 14, 2020

{ Silver Lining for Learning }
Conversations about the future of education



Innovators in the pandemic: Reflections & actions from coast to coast

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Episode #14 | June 20

5:30pm eastern



Rich Culatta, ISTE



Sophia Mendoza, Los Angeles Unified School District



Nikole Blanchard, ISTE & The Dunham School Baton Rouge

Designed by Punya Mishra

We are most fortunate to have not just one national leader in the K-12 educational technology space this week, but three highly accomplished pioneers. Importantly, they all are affiliated with the International Society of Technology in Education (ISTE), thereby providing us with a common theme for this episode of Silver Lining for Learning. ISTE attempts to inspire “the creation of solutions and connections that improve opportunities for all learners by delivering: practical guidance, evidence-based professional learning, virtual networks, thought-provoking events and the **ISTE Standards**.”

On the east coast in the DC area is Richard Culatta, the CEO of ISTE as well as CEO of EdSurge. Richard has an extensive background in educational technology, including working in the Obama Whitehouse as the top educational technology leader in the U.S. Department of Education. He has also been Chief Technology Officer at the CIA University. Given this background, Richard likely has many exciting stories he could to tell; hopefully, some of them will no longer be top secret.

Joining Richard will his colleagues on the west coast and in the south; namely, Sophia Mendoza from Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) and Nikole Banchard the Director of Innovation and Technology at the Dunham School and founder of a technology network in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Nikole is also the ISTE Treasurer. During the past few years, Sophia and Nikole have been extensively recognized for their efforts (see their bios below).

Join us for this thought-provoking session where we learn about recent activities and initiatives of ISTE that are impacting students and teachers from across the United States. It is sure to be an exciting conversation and a fast-paced hour!



Richard Culatta is a leader in the field of innovation and education. He currently serves as the **CEO of ISTE/EdSurge**. In 2012 he was appointed by President Obama as the Director of the Office of Educational Technology for the US Department of Education. In that capacity he focused on expanding connectivity to schools across the country, promoting personalized learning, and developing a National Educational Technology Plan. He also pioneered new ways to engage with citizens and policy makers to accelerate innovation in government. Culatta has also served as the first Chief Innovation Officer for the State of Rhode Island and education policy advisor to US Senator Patty Murray. Previous to that, he was Chief Technology Officer at the CIA University where he developed a collaborative online learning platform to extend training opportunities to CIA officers worldwide. Richard Culatta is a renowned public speaker known for his high-energy and thought provoking talks. He has spoken across the globe about innovation, technology, and the future of learning to k-12, higher ed, adult learning organizations, and governmental agencies.

Culatta began his career as a Spanish teacher and is active in promoting bilingual and arts education in public schools. He is married to the violinist, **Shaundra** and lives with his family in Washington, DC. Recent Talks on Digital Citizenship and Personalized Learning can be found on **Culatta's YouTube Channel**. <https://www.youtube.com/user/rculatta/>



Sophia Mendoza (bio), who began her career at Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) as a kindergarten student, is now director of the Instructional Technology Initiative where she oversees the implementation of instructional technology across the nation's second-largest school district. Mendoza says it's important to her to give back to the district that opened so many doors for her. She is an innovative, systems-level collaborator with over 20 years of experience as an education leader in L.A. Unified (which serves 589,000 students). Mendoza leads the implementation of computer science education and digital

citizenship programs across 1,300 schools. She is committed to cultivating leaders and learners ready for a growing digital world. As evidence, Mendoza was named a NextGeneration Leader by EdScoop and CoSN as well as 2018 Most Influential People in EdTech by Tech & Learning. In addition, she received an ISTE Impact Award honoree for 2019, an honor that recognizes her work in establishing strategic partnerships and programs that expand instructional technology opportunities for all students, such as collaborations with Common Sense Media and Code.org.



Nikole Blanchard is Director of Innovation and Technology at The Dunham School and founder of a technology network in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Nikole is a Nationally Board Certified Teacher, a Google Certified Trainer, Google Innovator, and Apple Distinguished Educator. Under her leadership, Dunham has become a seven-time Apple Distinguished School, with 93 teachers recently completing the Apple Teacher Program. Add to that list PBS Learning Media Innovator and Microsoft Innovating Educator and, clearly, she is a national leader in K-12 educational technology. As a board member of ISTE and a leader in ISTE's Early Learning Network, Blanchard travels nationally to train teachers on best practices of technology in education. A career highlight for Nikole was sharing the stage with Apple's CEO, Tim Cook in 2018. She told her technology story making history – the first-time non-Apple employees spoke during an Apple Keynote.



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