

Supporting Education Business Leaders

K-12

EnvisionED

VOL 6 • ISSUE 3

THE COST OF INNOVATION



**BUDGET
CHALLENGES
IN K-12
OPERATIONS**

SPONSORED BY CANON U.S.A., INC.

CHANGE DOESN'T NEED TO BE DIFFICULT

HOW CANON CAN MAKE CHANGE SIMPLE— THE CHANGE-IT APPROACH

Nothing truly changes until behavior changes. People need to know what is coming and how it will impact them. At Canon, our approach to change is leader-led and fit-for-purpose. We work with you to scale the effort to match the scope of the change involved.



1 CLARIFY/IT

GOAL: Align leadership and make the case for change.



LEADERSHIP ALIGNMENT

Ensures that the leadership team is unified in vision and commitment.



CASE FOR CHANGE

Clearly articulates the “why” behind the change, creating urgency and setting the tone for stakeholders.

3 REALIZE/IT

GOAL: Execute the plan while supporting teams through change.



FAQS & SUPPORT MATERIALS

Address concerns and clarify confusion.



DASHBOARD

Provides real-time progress tracking.



LEADERSHIP TIPS & COACHING

Equips leaders to support their teams through transition.

2 PLAN/IT

GOAL: Develop the roadmap and communication strategy.



ROADMAP & PLANNING

Identifies goals, milestones, and tactical steps.



COMMUNICATION PLAN

Outlines how and when stakeholders will be informed.



TRAINING STRATEGY

Prepares staff with the skills and understanding needed for success.

4 SUSTAIN/IT

GOAL: Ensure long-term adoption and improvement.



FEEDBACK & ENGAGEMENT

Ongoing dialogue to address issues and gather input.



REINFORCEMENT TOOLS

Embed change into daily operations through policy, tools, and training.



PERFORMANCE MONITORING

Tracks effectiveness and identifies improvement opportunities.



Canon

LET IT BURN BRIGHT

There's a quiet danger creeping into education today—one that doesn't come from budget cuts or policy shifts, but from something far more subtle: the slow slide into mediocrity.

Shortcuts are everywhere. AI-generated answers, templated thinking, and digital conveniences are flooding our classrooms and offices. At a glance, they offer efficiency. But if we're not careful, they dull our edge—and worse, they dull the spark in our students.

The impact to society is even greater. The beauty of your role as educational institutions is that your impact extends beyond a moment in time. The mental and intellectual makeup of the kids we launch into this world echoes for decades.

Now is the time for bold leadership. Not louder, but deeper. Not trendier, but truer. As educators and operators, we

must reject the safe route of sameness and instead choose the road that challenges, uplifts, and grows. Our children are watching. They're waiting. And what they need most is not more noise—but more passion. More vision. More adults unafraid to pursue purpose with fire in their hearts.

This issue is for those who refuse to coast. Who see their work not as a job, but as a calling. Who believe that innovation and positivity are not luxuries, but necessities. Who know that enabling a child's mind is the most powerful work on earth.

The time to challenge the status quo isn't coming—it's now.

Warmest regards,
Peter Kowalczyk
EVP/Client Services Group President
Canon U.S.A., Inc.

"The beauty of your role as educational institutions is that your impact extends beyond a moment in time."

ENVISIONED K-12 EDITORIAL BOARD

Dianna Drew
Executive Director of
Technical & Document
Services, Grand Prairie ISD

Dr. Vincent Janney
Assistant Head of School for
Academic Affairs/Head of
Middle School,
Houston Academy

Gary Kerbow
Director of Purchasing Hurst
Euless Bedford ISD

Greg Long
Director of Purchasing and
Distribution - Seminole
County Public Schools

Dewayne Hancock
Great Crossing High School,
Information Technology
Instructor

Marissa Hancock
Great Crossing High School,
CTE Department Co-Chair

02 THE COST OF INNOVATION

Budget challenges
in K-12 operations

06 AI REVOLUTION

How Artificial Intelligence is
impacting K-12 education

10 KYOSEI CORNER

New Trends, Perspectives
and Insight into Education

12 WHY GREAT TEACHING STILL MATTERS MOST

Insights on leadership,
AI, and what really
matters in education

Publisher
Canon U.S.A., Inc.

Managing Editor
Diana Curci

**Editorial &
Creative Direction**
Conduit, Inc.

Get the latest insights on
envisionEDK12magazine.com



THE COST OF BUDGET CHALLENGES IN K-12 OPERATIONS INNOVATION

Walk into any school in the Glassboro Public School District in New Jersey and you'll find Superintendent Al Lewis, Ed.D., making the rounds. Asking questions. Sitting with students. Making sure teachers feel supported. Dr. Lewis' people-first strategy runs parallel with his mission to build a future-ready district—one that at times must be structured on a finite budget.

Like many K-12 districts across the country, Glassboro faces the constant challenge of balancing rising costs across all areas—salaries, transportation, special education, facility maintenance—against relatively static and limited funding streams. Adopting new technologies or upgrading infrastructure cannot happen in isolation.

Dr. Lewis believes today's educators must think about sustainability, training, long-term value and, above all else, people. "As we work to create people-centered learning environments that are safe, welcoming and future-ready, every investment must support not only the systems, but the people who rely on them. Building the kinds of partnerships that can ease the financial burden takes time and trust, which adds yet another layer to an already complex equation."

"As we work to create people-centered learning environments that are safe, welcoming and future-ready, every investment must support not only the systems, but the people who rely on them."

— Al Lewis, Ed.D., Superintendent,
Glassboro Public School District

That people-centered mindset is at the core of how Glassboro makes its financial decisions. Every investment—whether it’s a digital tool or a new HVAC system—is filtered through the lens of does this improve safety, equity, and access for our students and staff? “If a purchase can’t be maintained or scaled in the future, we reconsider it,” Dr. Lewis says. “Our job isn’t just to bring in new systems. It’s to build environments that are functional, empowering and built to last.”

One of the advantages Dr. Lewis has at the ready is the partnerships he has built within the community—a strategy that remains a key part of the district’s ability to innovate responsibly. Take Glassboro’s close collaboration with Rowan University, Dr. Lewis’s alma mater. What began as a local connection has become a powerful cost-saving and opportunity-expanding force.

“By collaborating closely with the university, we have been able to share services, reduce costs and expand opportunities for students,” Dr. Lewis says. “We benefit from sharing resources and expertise in areas like technology and professional development, which supports both our people and our programs. This partnership does more than stretch dollars; it amplifies our collective impact.”

Glassboro also works closely with the borough’s mayor and his administration to secure funding for capital improvements such as security doors and fencing. “We are fortunate to have a highly supportive borough team that is genuinely invested in helping us create safe, nurturing and people-centered spaces for students, staff and families,” Dr. Lewis says.

In addition, grants and external funding also play a role in Glassboro’s innovation strategy. From instructional technology to wellness programs, the district actively pursues opportunities that align with its broader goals. But Dr. Lewis emphasizes that success is not about chasing every dollar—it’s about building internal systems that make applying for and managing grants a seamless part of district operations. “We’ve built strong relationships with state agencies, our education foundation, and institutional partners. That allows us to identify opportunities early, write strong proposals, and follow through with impact.”

5 WAYS TO FUND INNOVATION WITHOUT BREAKING THE BUDGET

- 1 LEAN ON LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS**
Collaborate with nearby universities, city governments, or nonprofit groups to share services and reduce costs. In Glassboro, Rowan University’s support has helped the district save money and strengthen staff development.
- 2 MODERNIZE PROCUREMENT**
Like FBISD, districts can unlock major cost savings and rebate revenues by adopting eProcurement systems. Look for platforms that offer vendor compliance tools and real-time spending data.
- 3 PRIORITIZE LONG-TERM VALUE**
Don’t just chase new tech—evaluate sustainability, scalability and total cost of ownership. Focus on solutions that serve both short-term needs and long-term district goals.

Sources: Al Lewis, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools, Glassboro Public School District; Rick Gay, Executive Director of Business Services, Fort Bend ISD

For other superintendents facing similar constraints, Dr. Lewis offers simple advice: Start with your story. Be bold. Be creative. And don’t wait for perfect conditions. “Some of our biggest wins came from investing in relationships first. Lead with your values, center your people, and stay relentlessly focused on what your students need.”

AUTOMATE. CENTRALIZE. CREATE.

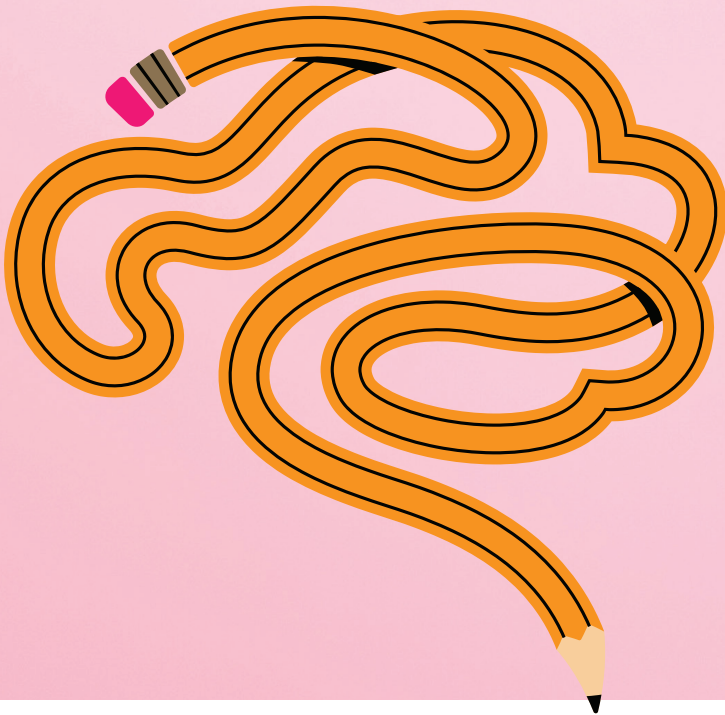
More than 1,500 miles away in Sugar Land, Texas, Rick Gay, CPPO, RSBO, RTSBA, has been applying those same principles—only with a different toolset. As Executive Director of Business Services for Fort Bend Independent

4 USE GRANTS STRATEGICALLY

Identify grants that align with your vision. Build internal systems to monitor, apply for and manage grants efficiently. Avoid using one-time funding for recurring expenses.

5 TELL YOUR STORY WELL AND OFTEN

Whether through community events or social media, transparency builds trust. When your community understands the why behind each investment, they're more likely to advocate and support.



School District (FBISD), Gay was on a mission to modernize how the district approached procurement. “We aren’t just trying to cut costs. We want to automate, centralize and create real visibility in how we spend every dollar.”

The result: a district-wide implementation of the Equalevel eProcurement Platform. Launched in January 2024, the system transformed FBISD’s purchasing operations—connecting to vendors like Amazon Business, Office Depot, Lowe’s and School Specialty and creating a more efficient, data-informed process for ordering supplies.

The numbers speak for themselves. In just 18 months, the platform processed more than 9,200 purchase orders totaling \$3.82 million—a 113% increase over the previous year. And it didn’t just speed things up. It saved money. “Our cost savings and rebate revenues from the platform added up to \$241,902,” Gay says. “When you subtract our \$90,600 in startup and subscription costs, we ended up with more than \$150,000 in net positive revenue.”

That surplus went straight back into the district’s general operating fund—proving that strategic investments, even in backend systems, can generate significant returns. “This platform has made procurement budget-neutral, which is no small feat,” Gay says. “And it’s helping us improve compliance, reduce manual errors, and streamline our internal workflows.”

“We aren’t just trying to cut costs. We want to automate, centralize and create real visibility in how we spend every dollar.”

— Rick Gay, Executive Director of Business Services, Fort Bend Independent School District

For the Sugar Land K-12 district, it’s not just about technology, but about enabling better financial planning across the district. The platform’s data tools provide real-time insights into spending trends and vendor usage, allowing FBISD to make smarter, faster decisions. “One way Strategic Procurement can drive ROI is by being proactive,” Gay says. “It’s not just a department—it’s a lever for innovation.”

Gay’s story is a reminder that operational improvements can fuel educational gains. When systems run better, resources go further. In turn, that allows school districts to reinvest in their people and programs.

Whether it’s building community partnerships in New Jersey or driving procurement efficiency in Texas, today’s school leaders are proving that progress through innovation is possible—even when every dollar counts. ■



A(i) Revolution

HOW ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IS IMPACTING K-12 EDUCATION

When Brian Graham, Ed.D., talks about artificial intelligence (AI), he doesn't see a trend or tech experiment—he sees a strategic partner. That's because the Superintendent of Grand Island Central Schools in New York has embraced AI not as a gimmick, but as a genuine strategic partner—one that has become an integral part of how the district supports students, educators and operations across the district.

At Grand Island, that vision already is playing out in meaningful ways, from AI tutors that personalize instruction to voice-powered platforms that help administrators stay focused on big-picture thinking. But the district isn't alone. Across the country, school leaders are taking a measured but optimistic approach to integrating AI, weighing its ability to individualize learning and increase efficiency against ethical concerns like data privacy, equity, and the evolving role of the educator.

The result is a snapshot of a system in transformation—one where AI's greatest impact may not be in replacing teachers, but in amplifying what they do best. For example, under Dr. Graham's leadership, Grand Island Central School District has adopted several AI-powered tools that support both classroom learning and school operations. Among the most impactful is Khanmigo, an AI tutor from Khan Academy deployed to all students in grades 6–12.

"Khanmigo provides just-in-time support in math and ELA," Dr. Graham says. "It also includes a series of teacher tools that almost act as a teaching assistant."

"AI won't replace teachers— it will amplify them. The teacher of the future is part educator, part designer, part AI coach."

— Brian Graham, Ed.D., Grand Island Central Schools

On the operations side, Grand Island uses tools like Google's NotebookLM to help educators and administrators synthesize content, and ZeroEyes, an AI-powered security platform, for gun detection and school safety. Dr. Graham even uses ChatGPT's Advanced Voice Mode as part of his own workflow—an example of how AI can assist with everything from strategy to scheduling.

Perhaps most significantly, AI is helping personalize student learning at scale. “Khanmigo adapts to each student’s pace and helps build confidence through tailored explanations,” Dr. Graham says. “Teachers are also using AI to adjust reading levels and differentiate content, giving struggling readers a fair shot at mastering the same standards as their peers.”

Early feedback shows stronger engagement, especially in subjects like algebra and geometry. Still, Grand Island’s implementation has been grounded in ethics and inclusion. “Districts need to establish an AI ethics framework built on three pillars: transparency, privacy and equity. This means working with legal counsel to ensure FERPA compliance, creating opt-in/opt-out structures for families and ensuring that AI tools don’t inadvertently reinforce bias. We’ve also formed advisory groups that include teachers, students and parents to vet AI tools and discuss potential equity gaps—because if AI isn’t equitable, it isn’t ethical.”

And while Grand Island welcomes what lies ahead, Dr. Graham remains clear about what AI is—and isn’t. “AI won’t replace teachers—it will amplify them. The teacher of the future is part educator, part designer, part AI coach. With AI handling some of the heavy lifting like generating leveled texts, running formative assessments or offering immediate feedback, teachers can focus on building relationships, fostering creativity and responding to students’ social-emotional needs. Professional development must evolve in tandem, equipping educators to ask better prompts, evaluate AI outputs and integrate technology meaningfully.”

For school leaders ready to explore AI but unsure where to start, Dr. Graham says they must start small, think big and move fast. The key is to pilot a few tools with high-need students or enthusiastic teachers. “Leverage free or low-cost options like ChatGPT or Perplexity AI before jumping into enterprise-level platforms. Most importantly, focus on professional learning—because even the most impressive AI tool will flop without teacher buy-in and understanding.”

Graham sees three innovations that could reshape K-12 education in the next five years:

- AI-generated personalized learning pathways, where students co-design learning experiences with AI tutors
- Speech-recognition literacy tools, like SoapBox Labs, which conduct running records in real time

- Multimodal AI, including natural conversation tools like OpenAI’s Voice Mode and Google’s Project Astra

“We’re about 18 months away from a world where every educator can prompt an AI to build a personalized learning experience,” Dr. Graham says. “Imagine asking an AI to create a video game to teach multiplying fractions with a progression of levels, scaffolding, and standards-aligned mastery built in.”

Empowering teachers first

In Oakwood, Ohio, Superintendent Neil Gupta, Ed.D., also is exploring the potential of AI in schools—but with a different starting point. The district began with the idea that AI should support teachers, not replace them. This initial focus continues to help build comfort and ensures a safer, more effective rollout for Dr. Gupta and his team.

Oakwood’s approach has centered on streamlining teacher workloads and increasing instructional flexibility. Tools like Google’s Gemini and NotebookLM, MagicSchoolAI and Gamma are being used to help teachers plan lessons, create diverse assignments and tailor instruction to individual students. “It’s about giving educators the capacity to do what they do best—connect with students,” Dr. Gupta says.

Dr. Gupta believes that with the right instruction and mindset, students can also use AI as a learning ally. “When students are taught to view AI as a partner—like a classmate or parent—it becomes a powerful resource. AI can help outline learning paths, create study guides, offer instant feedback, and shape strategies for learning more effectively.”

“AI will create real-time, individualized learning paths for every student. Students will move at their own pace, reinforce concepts as needed, and explore areas of interest.”

— Dr. Neil Gupta, Superintendent, Oakwood City Schools

For its part, the Oakwood City Schools District is equally focused on ethical responsibility. District leaders must prioritize proactive dialogue and rigorous vetting over outright prohibition. That includes reviewing privacy policies to ensure student data is protected and building a vetted list of approved AI tools. “Teachers will become designers of



learning experiences and mentors,” Dr. Gupta says. “As teachers become more confident with AI, they’ll help students engage with it in thoughtful and productive ways.”

For school leaders concerned about implementation costs or staff hesitation, Dr. Gupta offers a grounded approach: Start with pilot programs and bring in an expert early to demystify AI. “Focus on professional learning and teacher comfort. Use free tools. Build evidence internally before scaling. That’s how you build confidence and success.”

As the K-12 landscape moves forward, Dr. Gupta remains eager to see the potential for hyper-personalized adaptive learning. “AI will create real-time, individualized learning paths for every student. Students will move at their own pace, reinforce concepts as needed, and explore areas of interest. That’s how we unlock deeper understanding and accelerated growth.”

An AI quick-start guide for school leaders

Start with strategy

Focus on instructional goals before choosing AI tools that align with your mission.

Empower teachers

Provide training on prompt writing, tool evaluation and integration. Start with teacher-friendly platforms like MagicSchoolAI or Google Gemini.

Prioritize privacy

Choose tools that comply with FERPA and don’t store student data without safeguards.

Embed equity

Include students, parents and teachers in decisions. Make accessibility and fairness a priority.

Pilot, refine, scale

Begin with a small group. Use results to improve and expand.

Promote ethical use

Set clear AI guidelines. Emphasize critical thinking and human connection.

Sources: Brian Graham, Ed.D., Superintendent, Grand Island Central Schools, Grand Island, Neil Gupta, Ed.D., Superintendent, Oakwood City Schools

AI continues to evolve and its greatest potential lies not in replacing the educator, but in enriching every learner’s journey. With thoughtful planning and ethical integration, schools can harness this powerful technology to create more personalized, equitable, and impactful education experiences. ■

ImaginAction Time

Key insights to drive bold moves

**STUDENT
ENGAGEMENT
IS DECLINING**

46%
OF TEACHERS

report that student engagement has declined compared to 2019—a clear wake-up call that complacency isn't an option. ¹

**SMALLER CLASS SIZES
DRIVE EQUITY & GAINS**

Rigorous studies show smaller classes (≤ 20 students) can reduce the Black-White achievement gap by

38%

in early grades, improve graduation odds, and enhance socio-emotional outcomes.⁷

**AI IS ALREADY
TRANSFORMING
CLASSROOMS**

AROUND

60%
OF K-12 TEACHERS

are now using AI tools regularly in class.²



**AI USE SPARKS BOTH
EXCITEMENT & CAUTION**

55%
OF TEACHERS

believe AI has improved educational outcomes, but 65% are concerned about plagiarism and 62% worry it reduces human interaction.²

86%
OF STUDENTS

globally report using AI in their studies.³

IN THE U.S.,

93%
OF STUDENTS

have used AI for schoolwork, with “often use” increasing 26% year-over-year.⁴

**HANDS-ON, ACTIVE
LEARNING BOOSTS RESULTS**

84% **87%**
OF TEACHERS OF ADMINISTRATORS

believe hands-on experiences benefit all learners—underlining that innovation must be experiential.⁶

47%

A notable MIT study showed a 47% drop in neural activity for students overly reliant on AI-generated work.⁵

Source:
1 - <https://tinyurl.com/v67upnxc>
2 - <https://aistatistics.ai/education/>
3 - <https://tinyurl.com/3cmj5rvj>
4 - <https://tinyurl.com/murz4edm>
5 - [Heraldsun.com.au](https://www.heraldsun.com.au)
6 - <https://tinyurl.com/5n76fhs7>
7 - [wikipedia.com](https://www.wikipedia.com)

Calling All Leaders

Declining enrollment rates are no longer hypothetical—they're here, and hitting hard. Without proactive leadership, districts risk eroding educational quality, dismantling community trust, and falling victim to financial instability.



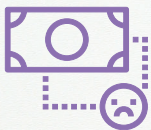
~7.6% projected national decline through 2031



Per-pupil funding drops; hard decisions around staffing and facilities must begin now



Long-term vs. temporary funding (ESSER ended Sept 2024)



Relief money has masked deficits—financial reality now sets in



Large-scale closures becoming common



Needs-driven consolidation saves costs but disrupts communities

K-12 leaders must face these headwinds head-on—reassessing facility use, protecting instructional quality, stabilizing budgets, and ultimately reimagining how to serve fewer students with more impact.

Sources: <https://tinyurl.com/bjy5bdf4>, <https://tinyurl.com/fmktf6fs>, <https://tinyurl.com/3k9f3pj8>





Why great teaching still matters most

Insights on leadership, AI, and what really matters in education

In a time when public education faces growing scrutiny, policy shifts, and the disruptive rise of AI, few voices cut through the noise like Dr. Todd Whitaker. A former teacher, principal, coach, and now one of the most sought-after education

thought leaders in the country, Whitaker has written over 65 books, including the widely acclaimed “What Great Teachers Do Differently” and his latest, “How to Get All Teachers to Become Like the Best Teachers.”

We sat down with Todd for a candid conversation about the real state of education, what makes a great teacher, and why effective leadership—not politics or technology—is still the key to thriving schools. As always, he brings clarity, humor, and the kind of perspective that reminds us why this work matters.

What’s your take on the current K-12 landscape, given all the noise around politics, policy, and performance?

A lot of what you hear today—especially in politics and on social media—is made up. Schools are actually better than they’ve ever been. Educators are more skilled, more thoughtful. But people like to latch onto one bad story and

pretend it’s normal. It’s not. You walk down the street, people hold doors, say thank you. That’s real life. But there’s power in making up problems that can’t be solved—it gives people something to yell about, even if it’s not true.

What’s the biggest challenge for educators today?

Defending against things that aren’t real. Rumors like “there’s kitty litter in classrooms” are distractions. And teachers are stuck spending time and energy pushing back on nonsense instead of teaching. Meanwhile, effective people are doing the work—teaching, influencing, improving. Ineffective people love to gather in circles and complain. But the best teachers? They’re not talking

about participation trophies or cell phones. They’re figuring out how to reach kids today with what they have.

“Effective educators lean into change. They don’t deny it or fear it—they figure out how to use it to improve learning.”

What’s your view on AI in the classroom—and how should leaders approach it?

AI is a tool, just like calculators were. Back in the day, people said calculators would make us dumb. But if your architect gave you a



square-foot estimate in their head, you'd ask them to use a calculator. Same thing here. AI can help if it's used well. Will some students misuse it? Sure. But our job is to teach them how to use it right. Effective educators lean into change. They don't deny it or fear it—they figure out how to use it to improve learning.

What's the most important thing a school leader can do today?

Focus on what you can influence. Budgets may shrink, politics may get loud, but great teachers keep showing up. And if you're a leader, your culture is shaped by the worst behavior you're willing to tolerate. Take care of your best people—because if you don't,

someone else will. You can always attract exceptional people, but only if they see your school as a place where they're valued and can thrive. That's how you build momentum.

“We're one of the few professions that doesn't just reflect society—we help shape it.”

Where do you see opportunity right now in K-12 education?

The opportunity is what it's always been: to change lives. We're one of the few professions that doesn't just reflect society—we help shape it. Everyone remembers a great teacher, bus driver, or custodian. That tells you how powerful the role is. My latest book is “How to Get All Teachers to Become Like the Best Teachers.” Because that's the key. In every school, someone's figured it out. So don't reinvent the wheel. Replicate what's already working—and help others do the same. ■



GET THE LATEST INSIGHTS
Visit and subscribe to EnvisionED Magazine

