Preparing for the Great American Eclipse of 2024
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The Great American Eclipse of 2017 path of totality passed across the United States on Monday August 21, 2017, from Madras, Oregon to Columbia, South Carolina (NASA 2017). The Great American Eclipse of 2024 will likewise pass across the United States on Monday April 8, 2024, from Eagle Pass, Texas to Presque Isle, Maine (Zeiler 2022). It is important to consider “lessons learned” from the first eclipse to prepare for the upcoming one.

Background
During the Great American Solar Eclipse of 2017, news reports stated K–12 school personnel either barred students from watching the eclipse at school (Fox8webcentral 2017), cancelled school (Toppo 2017), scrapped outdoor recess (The Associated Press 2017), or released students early (Donovan 2017). The biggest concern school personnel expressed was the issue of student safety. District administrators worried whether students, even with the correct procedures, would properly view the eclipse (The Associated Press 2017).

This was not an issue in every school district—some districts proactively planned by purchasing solar glasses in advance, required parents to sign consent forms, and/or organized proper supervision. Other school districts reactively planned, so solar glasses may have been sold out or unavailable. In the following paragraphs, I make three recommendations to prevent a repeat of what happened back in 2017.

Recommendation #1—Plan
Start planning right now. Think about who should view the eclipse, how students will make observations (e.g., eclipse glasses, pinhole cameras, solar telescopes, etc.), and identify the proper funding sources to purchase materials. Community foundations, crowdfunding, district supply budget lines, and/or education association foundations may serve as reliable sources (Miller 2018b; Reese and Miller 2017). Have the money ready months before the public begins purchasing eclipse glasses to prevent them from being sold out. Align the purchases to the state and national standards to demonstrate curricular and instructional relevancy.

Recommendation #2—Discuss
Meet with teacher-based team (TBTs), building-leadership teams (BLTs), professional learning community (PLCs), and/or Teacher Teams (TTs) to discuss an implementation plan to allow as many students as possible to view the eclipse (DuFour 2004; Miller 2018a). Once a plan is discussed and ratified, formally present the ideas to the building and district administration to allow enough time for approval. Expect the building and district administration to push back with logistical and safety con-
Concerns. Respond with modifications to the initial proposal to satisfy the concerns of the building and district leadership. Seek out the needed volunteers to make the plan work with total success. Amateur astronomy clubs or Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) Solar System Ambassadors may be good places to solicit volunteers.

Recommendation #3—Contingency plans
Expect there may be building and/or district administrators who still insist it is not safe to view the eclipse. Political and/or legal pressures may cause school administration to cave in to supporting authentic learning experiences during the eclipse. Some building and/or district administrators may refuse full support for viewing the eclipse because the event is not in the state or national learning standards at each grade. Approval may be given for one or two grades to view the eclipse, but other students are barred from participating in outside learning activities. In the previously mentioned cases, it is important to have contingency plans in place to ensure as many students as possible can view the eclipse. Contingency plans may include preapproved, integrated, project-based units of instruction; off-site viewing; viewing the eclipse through live streams in classrooms; and/or organizing outreach activities where students participate in volunteer work.

Conclusion
The Great American Solar Eclipse of 2024 is quickly approaching. High school science teachers, space enthusiasts, and astronomy outreach educators are unable to adjust the timing of the eclipse to maximize the number of people who view it. However, it’s possible to proactively plan right now how to make the eclipse a learning experience all students can enjoy.

REFERENCES

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