



About Discovery Educator Network (DEN)

The Discovery Education Community is focused on connecting educators to their most valuable resource: each other. Whatever your role in education, you deserve a supportive learning environment that helps you improve your practice, provides valuable networking opportunities, fosters the sharing of great ideas, and focuses on the joy of teaching and learning.

Q&A with The Discovery Educator Network Community: Connecting and Empowering Educators Across the Globe

Where can educators around the globe find resources, advice, networking, and support when they need it? There was never one dedicated space that offered a sense of community beyond the walls of a school building or district. Connecting was difficult - until the Discovery Educator Network (DEN).

The DEN evolved from disparate groups connecting across social platforms to an engaged, active online community hub. It's a testament to a powerful combination of engaged users and great community management.

Higher Logic's own community expert Jenny Taylor works in tandem with Dave Tchozewski, Manager of the DEN Online Community. She sat down with Dave to chat more about the evolution of the DEN, why community members and educators are always there for each other, and how the community hopes to grow in the future.

KEY STATS

CRM: 

Discussion metrics hover **5-6 times higher** than industry benchmarks

Email **open rates doubled** with integrated campaigns

700 events impacting **21,000 educators** through DEN STAR Educator program



About Dave Tchozewski

Dave is the DEN's community manager and point person with a background in public education. He was previously a district technology director and high school math teacher before joining Discovery Education's community team. He originally joined the DEN community in 2009, and as he describes, "bought it hook, line, and sinker."



About Jenny Taylor

Jenny leads the team of Community Managers at Higher Logic. She works with clients to implement strategies and best practices to ensure their community produces the most engaged members possible. Prior to Higher Logic, Jenny was ingrained in the nonprofit sector as a grant writer, marketing specialist and—you guessed it—a community manager.

Jenny Taylor: Can you give us a quick history lesson on the DEN?

Dave Tchozewski: The Discovery Educator Network, or DEN, was launched in 2005 to connect educators who were using Discovery Education with others around the world. Initially, we used a blog (blog.discoveryeducation.com) as our primary communication tool to share about events and resources with our community members. However, over time, we found our members wanted more ways to stay connected and to share with each other. For example, a couple of DEN members took it upon themselves to form a private Facebook group where members could connect. We saw the need and created the DEN Online Community to provide our members with a place to learn, share, and connect.

Jenny: And you haven't always been a community manager, but you've always been in education, is that right?

Dave: Yes. I've been the DEN Online Community Manager for about two years, but I've spent 30+ years in public education. I was a high school math teacher for 22 years and spent the following eight years as a district technology director.

I joined the DEN community in 2009, the same year I took over as tech director. Our district was subscribed to Discovery Education resources, and as I learned more, I bought into it hook, line, and sinker. It was exciting to join the DEN team and become a community manager and point-person for all things DEN.

Jenny: Personally, I've never encountered a community that exudes positivity like this group - it's truly a tribe. Can you tell us more about that?

Dave: Well, when you find people who are passionate about similar things, in this case, teaching, you tend to bond quickly.

It's remarkable to see how educators come to the DEN to support their professional learning goals, and over time, their connections with others in the community become personal. **Members started showing up for the resources, but they stayed for the people.** People who join often will tell you it has improved both sides of their lives. It's kind of a unique mentality - they've never met in person, but develop strong professional relationships online, and end up eventually connecting in person. We have many members who have become close personal friends and choose to schedule vacations based on those relationships.

“ We never had a place online to call 'home,' where all our members could go and interact and do so in a safe space. Providing that for educators who use our products and services - it's powerful. ”

Honestly, a lot of teachers have felt totally alone in their educational careers. Let's say you're a third-grade teacher who doesn't have other third-grade teachers to bounce ideas off of. Now you have access to a group of teachers from all over the planet!

On the lighter side, we find community members do amazing things to be part of the community and its activities. For example, we conduct face-to-face events across the U.S. and Canada, and we have a member who has traveled to six of them from his home base in North Carolina, all on his own dime. He does it to be part of this community.



“DEN community members often call themselves a tribe. It’s remarkable to see how the **relationships have grown so personally, starting off as just professional. Members started showing up for the resources, but they stayed for the people.**”

Jenny: What do you think makes DEN members so loyal?

Dave: We take pride in listening to our community members and then supporting what they need. We have several members who, at different times, have stated, “I’ve found my people.”

A lot of community members will tackle ongoing volunteer projects, and we provide support and encouragement. Internally, we call them passion projects. Here’s a good example:

The #DENChat occurs on Twitter every Thursday at 8 PM, where members post themed questions and have a discussion. A DEN community member has been running this for years, as well as her daily “#DENspiration” posts. She hasn’t missed a day for #DENspiration dating back to July 29, 2014. Recently on a cruise vacation, she asked her spouse to post on her behalf while gone! And you can be assured, he posted it. The streak continues.

When we launched this community, we knew we needed member support to help kickstart the conversations. We announced to members that we were looking for people to take on the role of a DEN Online Facilitator. Our initial group of seven went through a dedicated, in-person training with us to learn how to best facilitate conversations and engage the community. We have a new group of facilitators this year who were already highly engaged. By recognizing them and providing them with training, they have taken on leadership roles within the online community. If I need assistance of any kind in the community, the facilitators are there to help.

Jenny: Tell us more about DEN STAR Educators – this program is now integrated into the DEN community.

Dave: DEN STAR Educators are DEN members who choose to take the lead in sharing what they know and love about Discovery Education with their colleagues. They apply by taking one of our interactive courses and commit to sharing at least one time per year with three or more educators. We know our STARs share far more than one time. Since February, we’ve had over 700 events reported impacting 21,000 educators. Our STARs drive our community growth. Using the Higher Logic platform, we created a DEN STAR Educator microsite to meet their specific needs and provide them with a special experience.

Jenny: Can you share some DEN community success stats?

Dave: Our growth has been almost entirely organic. As a result, our discussion metrics really shine. The discussion posts and replies (per day or per post) hover 5-6 times higher than industry benchmarks.

Higher Logic was really a partner with us in this approach. They were open-minded and willing to try, tweak, and test the waters to make sure things worked well for us. We wanted to attract community members who came by choice, who joined with a purpose, and weren’t just there because we gave it to them. We believe this effort has built a strong, engaged educator community for the long-run.



“When DEN members get together, **magic happens**. People who have never met face-to-face are instantly bonded. Lives are changed, both professionally and personally.”

Jenny: How did this year’s DEN Summer Institute go? I loved meeting all the DEN members in person last year!

Dave: The DEN Summer Institute (DENSI) is our week-long flagship community event. Over 150 educators from around the world gathered in Wilmington, NC, for this event. It is really hard to put into words the impact of the DENSI experience. When DEN members get together, magic happens. People who have never met face-to-face are instantly bonded. Lives are changed, both professionally and personally. A member recently shared this about DENSI:

“DENSI is different from other professional development because of the relationships that are created between attendees. Everyone is friendly and loves to share resources. These relationships continue long after everyone has returned home. I always know I have someone to go to for support and help with any task I want to attempt at my school. Discovery Education has done an amazing job of giving passionate educators a space to learn, share, and connect with each other.”

Jenny: We’ve seen a lot of success in incorporating this classroom activity called Mystery Skype with the community. Can you explain how it works and why the DEN got involved?

Dave: This is how it works: imagine you’re a second-grade teacher in Oklahoma, and you want to conduct a video chat with another classroom in Oregon. You connect the two classrooms without giving either classroom information on each other’s whereabouts. The students play 20 Questions to figure out where the other classroom is located.

It’s already a fun program that works to connect classrooms across time zones and foster learning about new communities and cultures – the DEN just helps to facilitate.

“Our discussion metrics really shine. The discussion posts and replies (per day or per post) **hover 5-6 times higher than industry benchmarks.**”

Jenny: What’s next for the DEN?

Dave: We’re really excited about the new integrated community and marketing automation campaigns we’re working on in partnership with Higher Logic. We’re customizing our DEN email outreach to be more visually engaging. It will incorporate better calls-to-action, personalized content, and a schedule based on member behavior we observe in the community.

Different community groups engage in different ways – that’s why tracking behavior is very powerful. We wanted our email outreach to be consistent, effective, and most importantly, useful.

We used both targeted and random community member lists (depending on how they interact with us and the content we want to share), and our findings are encouraging so far:

- › Open rates have doubled
- › Traditionally slow season has seen improved traffic
- › Targeted emails do significantly better, but both lists saw an increase in interactions
- › Received great feedback



Heatmap of Discussion Activity 

Observed member behavior in the community helped the DEN successfully adjust its member lists and email send times.

Jenny: How has the DEN been a game-changer for educators worldwide?

Dave: We welcome everybody – whoever you are, we will embrace that. We’re a strong, engaged community because members join on their terms. The bulk of members are lurkers, there to be a sponge, to read and learn. Then, when they get comfortable, they shift into contributor mode.

Now the DEN provides a sounding board for any educator. People will vent frustrating moments in their career, and when it happens there is always a flood of positivity and support – it’s less about jumping on a bandwagon and more about encouraging the individual to reach out and work through it. We rarely need to moderate discussions, which we recognize is unusual.

And we’ve found community member recognition is huge for us – in the next year, I’m looking forward to more efforts on our part to elevate and celebrate the members of our community.