

# pioneering

ISSUE 14 • JUNE 9, 2016 • EDUCATION REIMAGINED

## A NOTE FROM EDUCATION REIMAGINED

Kelly Young, Director

## FANNIE LOU HAMER FREEDOM HIGH SCHOOL

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education   
reimagined



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Dear Friends,

At Education Reimagined, we have been asking ourselves whether it matters which element you start with. In listening to the pioneers, can we see whether it matters which of the five elements you start with? Will starting with one entry point lead to all the other elements more quickly or are they all equal?

This week, it became clear to me that the place that most quickly leads to all five of the elements is likely in the being of learner-centered itself: starting by listening to the learners. Listening to a learner and having them be known and know themselves—really known—for their gifts, talents, interests, and aspirations.

This seems so obvious. It almost feels ludicrous to have to say that the place to start in creating learner-centered learning environments is to start by listening and knowing the learner. Yet, it isn't where most innovation begins. In listening to pioneers, it seems to be a pattern. Here are three of many stories I heard recently:

**Kim Carter**, Executive Director of the [QED Foundation](#) and Founder of [MC<sup>2</sup>](#): When a child comes into our school for the first time, we start by getting to know them. We want to know their interests and strengths and have the child know their interests and strengths so we can start with those and develop them into confident learners who know how they learn and are engaged in things they want to learn.

**Joanne McEachen**, President and Chief Destiny Changer from [The Learner First](#): When we work with a new learning environment, we ask teachers to pick three or four students to really get to know and begin to work with to create learning pathways that empower the learner. That always revitalizes the teacher and gives her permission to use her professional judgment.

**Bena Kallick**, co-founder of the [Institute for Habits of Mind](#): I train teachers to listen. And then I ask them to sit with a learner and listen to them. The results transform the learners and the teachers. Some learners say it is the first time in their whole life that anyone has ever listened to them.

I suspect that in starting a learner-centered learning environment, the most valuable place to start is by authentically listening to learners. It seems obvious now that you can't be learner-centered without knowing the learner for ALL of who they are—their interests, strengths, struggles, and aspirations. But, sometimes, the obvious takes time to make itself known.

Warm wishes,  
**Kelly Young**



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### Connect. Share. Discover. Lead.

We seek to accelerate the growth of the movement dedicated to transforming education in America. We invite those excited and interested by the possibility of learner-centered education to discover more, join a growing movement, and begin a journey to make this a reality in diverse communities across the country.





# Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School

South Bronx, New York City, NY

I am engaged and empowered like I never was before.  
Here, we can speak about what matters to us.

—Fannie Lou Hamer Learner

**UP AGAINST A SIX LANE FREEWAY IN THE SOUTH BRONX** is a small school that operates like a big family. Every kid is known by every adult—from the principal to the security guard—and not just by name. At Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School, the ties forged between learners, educators, and the support staff (almost equal in number to the faculty) are made to last and to make a big difference.

Located in the poorest congressional district in the nation, learners arrive at Fannie Lou with large gaps in their education. The challenges are profound. But, the possibilities are also powerful.

Fannie Lou has found a way to propel their learners on to college, career, and active civic lives. Through one-on-one advisories, small groups, and community partnerships, they build on learners' strengths and help them develop habits of mind. What makes that work?

To build on a learner's strengths, you first have to know them. That takes time and space. In advisory, educators, learners, and their families really get to know one another. Together, they review the learner's work, set goals for the future, and delve into areas for growth and development. This **socially embedded** practice not only helps learners with decision-making, academic planning, and college exploration but also creates a bond of familial strength between the educator and learner.

In small groups, the focus is on real-world learning. Educators act as coaches and guides, and kids are encouraged to examine and contribute directly to their own communities. And, in their eleventh- and twelfth-grade years, learners design and lead inquiries that are captured in mastery portfolios. When combined with meaningful, **relevant** assessment of their work, these portfolios create kids' pathway to graduation—and help in developing learners' own sense of agency, in growing their communication skills, and in instilling them with a real understanding of how they learn best.

Community partnerships extend learning **beyond the walls of school** to embrace both the opportunities and realities of the world. Fannie Lou has developed a bevy of partnership opportunities with organizations like the Children's Aid Society, Big Picture Learning, Rocking The Boat, GE Skills Lab, Code Interactive, Beam Center, and SoulCycle. All of these keep the kids' passions and interests front and center—allowing them to build on their own strengths and uncover new interests and passions.

By attending to the health of their learners' minds, connecting with their families, and trusting learners to follow their own paths, Fannie Lou has created a place where small is very big indeed.

## LEARN MORE

[A Long Hardwood Journey](#)

[A rare 'defy the odds' school where learning isn't driven by high-stakes tests](#)

[Peace Block Party](#)

[TOOL Working with High School Readers: A Digital Exploration](#)

## FACTS & FIGURES

Public, 9-12 grades

487 learners

1 school

ELL or Primary language other than English: 10%

Learners with disabilities: 25%

Free or reduced lunch: 100%

Graduation rate: 68%

College enrollment: 47%

## CONNECT

Website

[Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom HS](#)

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# Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School: A Conversation with Principal Jeff Palladino

The Education Reimagined team sat down with Jeff Palladino, Principal of Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School in Bronx, NY. Located in the poorest Congressional district in the country, Fannie Lou is a learning environment with stories to tell—full of both inspiration and struggle. Read on to hear Jeff’s story and to discover the passion and persistence of these Fannie Lou learners.

**Q. Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School has been around for quite some time. What were its origins?**

**A. JEFF:** About 20 years ago, Fannie Lou got its start during the first wave of the “small schools movement.” They were breaking up big high schools—which were not serving learners—to create smaller campuses. Some of these large high schools had dropout rates in the teens and attendance rates below 30%. So, the idea was that these smaller environments would be better able to keep kids going and support them to succeed.

With this, a small group of educators, who came from Central Park East School in Harlem, NY, launched Fannie Lou. For those who don’t know, Central Park East was founded and directed by Deborah Meier—a visionary leader in the field—and supported by Ted Sizer—the founder of the Coalition for Essential Schools. Both leaders and their visions for education are at the core of Fannie Lou’s work, even today. So, in essence, Fannie Lou stands on the shoulders of giants.

**Q. You weren’t part of this founding moment at Fannie Lou. How did you join in the fray?**

**A. JEFF:** Well, my story is a bit different from the previous leaders at Fannie Lou. My predecessor, Nancy Mann, was a founding teacher here. She saw the entire evolution—living and breathing the vision of an environment that develops learners’ Habits of Mind through portfolio-based work.

I, on the other hand, came from outside of Fannie Lou’s history—but not from outside of the NYC education landscape. I was a founding staff member and eventually co-director of Bronx Guild. Not your traditional environment, Bronx Guild was NYC’s first Outward Bound School. The school was originally devoted to expeditionary learning. After a few years, we transitioned to align with Big Picture Learning’s model and pedagogy, which meant a focus on portfolio-based work and providing an avenue for learners to bring their own passions to the table. My work with Big Picture’s methodology was a major influencer in my decision to transition to Fannie Lou.

“Fannie Lou stands on the shoulders of giants.”

**Jeff Palladino**

**Q. What impressive history from all sides! We know that all of these factors have come together to form and mold Fannie Lou as it stands today. Can you expand on what the model looks like in action?**

**A. JEFF:** Our entire model centers on five habits of mind that we develop in our kids:

- 1. VIEWPOINT:** Identifying and understanding various perspectives on an issue.
- 2. EVIDENCE:** Being able to support a particular point of view and critically examine different forms of evidence.
- 3. CONNECTIONS:** Seeing larger patterns and connections between ideas, the individual, and the larger society.
- 4. CONJECTURE:** Being able to envision alternatives and ask, “What if?”
- 5. RELEVANCE:** Understanding the importance of an issue and asking, “What difference does it make?”

These form the bedrock to Fannie Lou’s culture and drive our curriculum. In practice, our kids do a tremendous amount of writing—crossing traditional subject lines and developing the communication skills that they need to succeed in the professional world. We are also big tech users, as we see it as a means of both delivering content and of creating the cross-connections for learning between our kids and the outside world. In fact, we were recently designated an Apple Distinguished School—one of only six in the New York City area.

We also utilize a performance-based assessment model throughout our kids’ time with us. To graduate, for example, all of our learners must present their own learning at a series of panels (composed of reviewers from the community), demonstrating their achievement of mastery in a variety of competencies. We are a member school of the New York Performance Standards Consortium—a coalition of schools that employ a series of commencement-level performance-based assessments, rather than relying on high-stakes tests. Our learners graduate by a system of portfolio.

**Q. We know that all of this is not without its challenges. Fannie Lou is located in the poorest Congressional district in the country. How has this affected what goes on at Fannie Lou?**

**A. JEFF:** Our learners come to us with very large gaps in their education. All of our learners enter our school behind grade level and most have very challenging home lives. We have to do a lot of work to get them ready to dive in and lead their own learning. It isn’t easy; we have lots of challenges. But, we work really hard to instill in them a belief in themselves and their own potential. We often say, “Student resistance is met with teacher persistence.” We don’t give up.

It helps that we are a community school. This means that we focus on the whole child. For us, their health and well-being (whether they had breakfast that morning or their guardian came home the night before) matters just as much to us as their academic growth and development does. In this vein, we work very closely with the New York Children’s Aid Society to ensure our kids have access to the resources and supports that they need to succeed.

Furthermore, we work hard to ensure that our learners are able to reach the goals they want to achieve. We have four college counselors on staff. They not only provide advice and guidance to our kids but also take an active role in ensuring they are successful. We run college visits, help kids in writing their admissions essays and preparing for interviews, and assist with financial aid applications. We run the full gamut in making the college dream a reality for kids at Fannie Lou.

“We focus on the whole child—their health and well-being matters just as much to us as their academic growth and development.”

**Jeff Palladino**



Last year, we were achieved a Gold Recognition as a “School of Opportunity” from the National Education Policy Center. Given to schools that are making a real difference in closing the achievement gap for kids of color, this award has meant a great deal to us and was a nice reminder of our good work.



**Q. That is an incredible achievement and speaks to the great work that you are all doing. As you look forward, are there areas for growth that you are focused on?**

**A. JEFF:** One of our biggest challenges is to figure out how to continue to let learners move at their own pace. Even though we are a mastery-based school, we still cohort largely by age. So, when kids show mastery earlier, how do we continue to move and push those kids?

We're also working hard to discover how to let kids' passions lead the way. We are in the greatest city in the world with all of these opportunities, trades, and work to learn from. So, how do we build in opportunities for kids to relate their learning to the real world? We already have some great examples of this happening. A few months ago, three of our learners presented a documentary on immigration and police brutality through HBO's Educational Video Center. We're looking to make experiences like this available for more of our kids.

**Q. It sounds like Fannie Lou has really succeeded in fostering a safe environment for kids to discover untapped potential and figure out who they can be. What have you heard about their lives post-graduation?**

**A. JEFF:** We have kids come back all the time—to see how we're doing and update us on their lives. It is funny to hear those that go on to college talk about their college writing assignments. They say, “Professors ask me to write a three-page paper and all I can think is, ‘That’s it?’” Our kids are really not afraid to write. They do share that math is challenging. I think that it is indicative of a national struggle in higher education around the success of learners in mathematics.

With all of this, one of the things that makes me proudest is that our kids leave Fannie Lou ready and able to navigate the system, deal with the challenges that come their way, and advocate for themselves. They're ready to own their own learning and lives.

**Jeff Palladino** has been working in the NYC Department of Education (DOE) since 1997 in many capacities. In 2003, he was part of a team of educators that opened up The Bronx Guild: A Big Picture Learning school in the Soundview area of the Bronx. In 2003, he received his NYS Administration license and became the Co-director and Assistant Principal at The Bronx Guild. In 2011, he became an Assistant Principal at Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School in the South Bronx. He has been the Principal of Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School since 2014.



# The Next Generation is Remaking Education as We Know It

By Georgia Fowkes, learner at Montour School District, McKees Rocks, PA

**IMAGINE A WORLD WHERE CHILDREN BEG TO GO TO SCHOOL.** They wake up before their alarms, excitedly inhale their breakfast, and run to wait for the school bus. As they arrive to school, they each report to their student-led homerooms. Each homeroom is completely customized by the student group according to their divergent interests. The students then report to each class, which can only have a small number of students so that each one can have individual attention. The classes are not called English, Math, or Science. They have names like Bookkeeping, Political Mindfulness, and Global Perspectives. For a majority of class time, students are not listening to a lecture. They are participating in hands-on learning, engaging in group projects, listening to guest speakers who are experts in their field, learning practical life skills, and traveling to real companies to see how they operate. One student wants to be a doctor. Instead of being loaded with rigorous biology and chemistry classes, the school gives the student the option to do an internship at a hospital in exchange for academic credit. The school also incentivizes the student to lead a Pre-Medical studies group for additional credit.

Now, reflect on current educational reality. Students barely wake up, are too tired to eat breakfast, and all too often miss the bus. They arrive to school and socialize



Georgia Fowkes

**Hi, I'm Georgia!** I'm 18 and just graduated from Montour High School. I'm from Pittsburgh, PA. I'll be attending Point Park University to study Entertainment Management! Music and art are my passions. I hope to end up producing in film or being involved with the music industry. I live my life in the moment, and I can't wait to see what the next adventure will be!



until they are forced to attend their mundane homeroom. The classes they take part in are overpopulated and of little to no interest to them. There is no individualism in education today. And, there is a lack of hands-on learning, internships, and valuable class trips. There are usually no options for a student to take on a specific study schedule if they know what their career goals are.

That is why I took the initiative to go beyond the expectations. I started my career from day one as a freshman by engaging in programs around my local city; one of which I am still involved with today—Steeltown Entertainment. Here, not only did I learn early on what my interests are, but I also got the hands-on experience that allowed me to have already begun my career and leave high school with an impressive resume. Such experiences include: interviewing the producer of *Saturday Night Live*, Don Roy King; interviewing James Widdoes, director and mastermind behind *Two and a Half Men* and *8 Simple Rules*; touring the set of the recent hit movie *The Last Witch Hunter*; and directing, producing, and starring in my own television show, *The Reel Teens* on Fox Network! This show dives into the culture and diversity the city of Pittsburgh has to offer. At just age eighteen, I can already say that I have produced, directed, edited, screen wrote, etc. an entire television show—on top of several other film and television positions.

This is what students need to be experiencing! The gap needs to be bridged. There needs to be more teachers who are student-focused and more students who are not apathetic towards learning. And, this can begin with the student's voice. At Montour High School, our Marketing teacher, Mrs. April Fisher, contributes tremendously to this movement. She cares about her students both in and out of the classroom and does everything she can to help them succeed. For example, she helped me put on my own small music festival with my school, which connected me to local Pittsburgh bands and opened the door for endless opportunities that I soon will be able to take advantage of at Point Park University.

In regards to her classroom participation, she launched a student-run district Facebook account, where her classes have the privilege to access and post whatever they wish—connecting them to the community. Not only is this a step closer to repairing our students' ambition, but it also broadens their awareness for what is "beyond the classroom."

I truly believe that if students realized that school is the way to achieving their dreams, they would beg teachers to guide them towards a brighter path. Realizing my potential and dreams at such a young age has thus inspired me to want to do anything I possibly can to reach my goals. And, isn't that the purpose of education?

"I truly believe that if students realized that school is the way to achieving their dreams, they would beg teachers to guide them towards a brighter path."

Georgia Fowkes

## CALL FOR LEARNER SUBMISSIONS

Thanks Georgia! As you can see, the most powerful advocates for learner-centered education are the learners themselves. So, we'd like your help in sharing learners' stories. We want to provide a space for learners to speak their minds, showcase their projects, and be active participants in the process of education transformation. **Please contact us for learner submission guidelines. ([email](#))**



# Center for the Future of Museums

The **Center for the Future of Museums** ([link](#)) is helping museums shape a better tomorrow by exploring the cultural, political and economic challenges of the present and future—mapping museums’ roles in our rapidly changing world. An initiative of the **American Alliance of Museums** ([link](#)), the Center monitors cultural, technological, political, and economic trends of importance; equips museums with the tools and resources to help their communities address the challenges of the coming decades; and builds connections between museums and other sectors. Its flagship publication is the yearly “Trendswatch” series, which identifies societal trends impacting museums and the communities they serve—including micro-credentialing and personalization—and imagines how museums can take the lead in creating this new future. Another impactful publication released by the Center is “Building the Future of Education” (2013), the result of a convening of education and museums leaders working to build a future where a community’s learning assets are integrated into a open-walled “vibrant learning grid.” Check out what this “learning grid” could mean for your learning community!

**Trendswatch** [link](#)

**Building the Future of Education: Museums and the Learning Ecosystem** [link](#)

## Digital Youth Network (DYN)

The creation of the **Digital Youth Network (DYN)** ([link](#)) was inspired by a question: How do we produce reliably excellent learning opportunities for children growing up in urban America? DYN saw that a crucial piece to this puzzle lay in two “simple” facts: 1) learning is happening all the time—both in and out of school—and 2) digital media is an invaluable access point for learners to not only develop a whole host of knowledge, skills, and dispositions but also to express their own creativity and passion. Now ten years in, DYN is “a project that supports organizations, educators, and researchers in learning best practices to help develop our youths’ technical, creative, and analytical skills.” They’ve created programs, platforms, and networks that open up possibilities for urban youth to understand how to use digital media in all aspects of their lives. Although much of DYN’s work is focused on their hometown of Chicago (like Chicago City of Learning), many of their tools offer opportunities for anyone, anywhere. iRemix Social Learning Network, for example, is a “cloud-based social learning platform available to schools and organizations seeking to safely connect youth with extended learning and mentorship opportunities.” And, Spokes is a tool “primed for educators to create new connected ways for youth to create reviews, reflections, or remixes to books, music, and movies.” Tap into what DYN has to offer!

**iRemix Social Learning Network** [link](#)

**Spokes** [link](#)

**Chicago City of Learning** [link](#)

## UPCOMING EVENTS

Mark your calendars! We will be speaking at some and hosting workshops at others. In all cases, pioneers will be front and center! Join us.

**Global MindED**

**Denver, CO**

**June 9-10**

[Conference Website](#)

**National Forum on Education Policy**

**Washington, DC**

**June 29-July 1**

[Conference Website](#)

**ERDI Summer Conference 2016**

**St. Louis, MO**

**July 6-12**

[Conference Website](#)

**Big Picture’s Big Bang**

**Orlando, FL**

**July 26-29**

[Conference Website](#)

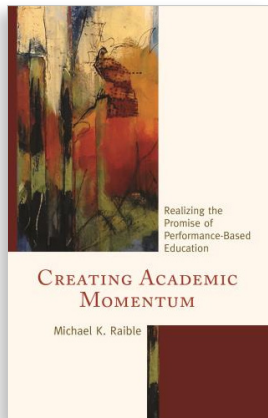


## TLTALK RADIO

Host Randy Ziegenfuss and Lynn Fuini-Hetten chat with Bobbi Macdonald—Founder, City Neighbors Schools, Baltimore, MD  
[Listen here](#)

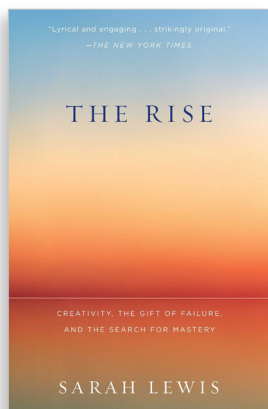


## ON OUR BOOKSHELF



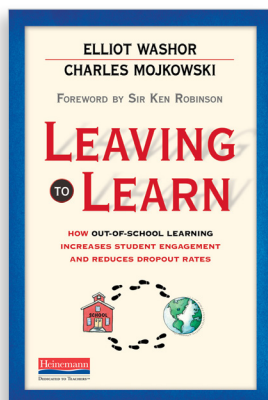
### Creating Academic Momentum by Mike Raible

How do successful innovators take their big ideas and turn them into real, transformational actions? Few have spent more time studying why and how competency-based models flourish than *Creating Academic Momentum* author Mike Raible, who also penned *Every Child, Every Day* (a profile of Taylor County School District). Throughout *Creating Academic Momentum*, Raible delivers observations, ideas, and advice (but never instructions) on how to overcome institutional inertia and create environments where competency-based education can take root.



### The Rise by Sarah Lewis

To the outside world, success often comes suddenly, as if shot out of a cannon. However, the most successful, original people know that their greatest achievements were more iteration than inspiration—built from countless, uncelebrated failures. Sarah Lewis' *The Rise* is a study of people—like Frederick Douglass and J.K. Rowling—whose failures played a crucial role in developing the ideas and inventions that shape our world today. And, from celebrating the power of creative play to recognizing failure as essential, *The Rise* contains important and timely lessons for learners and educators today.



### Leaving to Learn: How Out-of-School Learning Increases Student Engagement and Reduces Dropout Rates by Elliot Washor and Charles Mojkowski

In *Leaving to Learn*, Elliot Washor and Charles Mojkowski identify widespread disengagement as the prime driver of the dropout crisis that claims 1 learner every 12 seconds. Their solution? Open up the walls of school and connect learning in authentic ways to the outside world of life and work. The book is as much practical as intellectual. Big Picture Learning, co-founded by Washor, has spent 20 years bringing *Leaving to Learn*'s model to life through out-of-school internships, apprenticeships, and deeply personalized projects. Most of all, the book shows how recognition of relevant open-walled learning experiences engage and leverage the natural curiosity of all learners.

## WORTH YOUR TIME

### Why one school district tried something new — even though people were happy with the status quo

By traditional standards Cedar Rapids School District was excelling—but district leaders knew they could and should do better. Discover how one community challenged every assumption about school to create a space where learners know their passions and are in charge of their learning.

[Read here](#)

### How a Strengths-Based Approach to Math Redefines Who Is 'Smart'

"I'm not good at math." Heard that before? What if we focused mathematics education around a learner's strengths, instead of their weaknesses? Many environments nationwide are doing just that—engaging learners in collaborative group projects where each learner has a role that is both geared to their individual strengths and critical to the group's overall success.

[Read here](#)

### Future Ready: Learning Without Boundaries: Create House

Get an inside look at Kettle Moraine's Create House, a personalized learning space that's the result of a total transformation of the district's paradigm. With complete buy-in from learners and educators, Create House is an exciting, messy beehive of activity that stays focused on learners' needs, passions, and goals.

[Watch here](#)

“We do not need magic to change the world, we carry all the power we need inside ourselves already: we have the power to imagine better.”

— J. K. ROWLING

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