

pioneering

ISSUE 1 • NOVEMBER 4, 2015 • EDUCATION REIMAGINED

A NOTE FROM EDUCATION REIMAGINED

Kelly Young, Director

TAYLOR COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Profile of their Learning Environment

A Conversation with Superintendent Roger Cook

LEARNER VOICES

Let's hear what learners have to say
about their education

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education 
reimagined

connect. share. discover. lead.

pioneering

Dear Pioneers,

We are so pleased to be sharing our first issue of our new e-magazine: **Pioneering!** We hope that you find inspiration, ideas, and information from other pioneers that excite you and remind you of the possibilities of learner-centered education.

Education Reimagined sees an emerging movement of pioneering people and institutions committed to making learner-centered education available to every child in the country. This e-magazine is for and about those pioneers—you!

We are guided by a transformational vision for education in the U.S. A vision that sees children as wondrous, curious, capable human beings. It imagines a system designed to adapt to the needs of each child, supporting them to reach their full potential.

It is a vision that does not yet exist in its entirety anywhere. But, it does exist in pieces all over the country. As William Gibson said, “The future is already here—it’s just not evenly distributed.”

Through all of our work, we hope to learn of and amplify the big and small pieces of the future that are already here so that more and more of those pieces show up in the same place. In fact, we have an ambition that by 2020, so many of you are innovating together that there are hundreds of learning environments across the country demonstrating the full expression of the vision.

Whether this publication represents your first step to learn more or you have been on this journey for decades, we hope to provide a space for you to learn from others, share with us—and one another, and encourage more to discover a new paradigm that sees the limitless possibility of learners.

We’d also love to meet you in-person. We’ll be attending great conferences and events in the coming months—join us!

We hope you enjoy this publication. We’d love to hear from you with your comments, your stories from the field, or anything you think we should know about.

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 by connecting, amplifying, and empowering pioneers and contributing to a new public conversation. 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.





FROM THE VISION

The Future: A Learner-Centered Paradigm

To contextualize the transformation of education, we see a paradigm shift—from the Industrial Age’s school-centric paradigm to a new learner-centered, network-era paradigm. The learner-centered paradigm for learning functions like a pair of lenses that offers a new way to look at, think about, talk about, and act on education. It constitutes a shift of perspective that places every learner at its center, structures the system to build appropriate supports around him or her, and acknowledges the need to adapt and alter to meet the needs of all children.

The learner-centered paradigm changes our very view of learners themselves. Learners are seen and known as wondrous, curious individuals with vast capabilities and limitless potential. This paradigm recognizes that learning is a lifelong pursuit and that our natural excitement and eagerness to discover and learn should be fostered throughout our lives, particularly in our earliest years. Thus, in this paradigm, learners are active participants in their learning as they gradually become owners of it, and learning itself is seen as an engaging and exciting process. Each child’s interests, passions, dreams, skills, and needs shape his or her learning experience and drive the commitments and actions of the adults and communities supporting him or her.

The chart below highlights some of the key contrasts between the current paradigm and the new one that we envision.

ASPECT	CURRENT PARADIGM	LEARNER-CENTERED PARADIGM
World View	INDUSTRIAL AGE	NETWORKED AGE
Frame of Reference	Factories and Assembly Lines	Networks and Lateral Connections
Model	SCHOOL-CENTRIC : All components of the system are designed for efficiency of education delivery in the context of standardized schools	LEARNER-CENTRIC : All components are designed for the education experience to be adaptable to the needs and potential of each learner and supports the highest possible outcomes for each and every learner
Model Components	Standardized age cohorts Linear curricula divided into subjects Education factories called “schools” Learning experiences designed to impart knowledge in long-established categories	Personalized learning that is competency-based and has a range of learning environments and adult roles Learning experiences enable learners to develop their knowledge, skills, and dispositions in a relevant and contextualized manner Learners are embedded in a network of stable and supportive relationships with adults and are encouraged to learn through self-directed discovery, with their peers, and with the guidance of adults

IN THE NEWS

The vision was released to the public on September 29th and has received media attention from a myriad of sources. Below are links to a few articles that highlight the vision itself and the process, led by **Convergence**, through which it was developed.

New York Times Fixes: Daniel Bornstien
Nov. 3, 2015

The Art of Getting Opponents to “We”
[\(link\)](#)

“...individuals came to see one another beyond the labels that had divided them, and they developed a better understanding of one another’s goals and constraints.”

Forbes: Michael Horn
Oct. 1, 2015

Unlikely Bedfellows Converge to Create Inspired Vision for Future of Education
[\(link\)](#)

“It’s a stunning effort and document that **Convergence**, a non-profit, non-partisan center for policy resolution, helped broker. Stunning not for its “answer” to the challenges we face in education, but stunning for its consensus around the end vision of what our education system should look like.”

Mind/Shift: Katrina Shwartz
Oct. 5, 2015

An Unlikely Group Forms Unified Vision for the Future of Education
[\(link\)](#)



TAYLOR COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Campbellsville, Kentucky

You get to learn the way you want, anytime you want. The doors never close at Taylor County Schools. —Roger Cook, Superintendent

TAYLOR COUNTY'S TRANSFORMATION BEGAN WITH ONE BIG IDEA: "One size definitely does not fit all." Learners don't all learn at the same pace or in the same way. Educators don't all teach in the same way either. And why would we expect them to?

Freedom and flexibility characterize every aspect of Kentucky's Taylor County School District. Learners choose where, how, what, and with whom they learn. It all comes down to this: They are simply expected to learn. Educators and learners work together to create individualized learning plans (ILPs) guided by a set of standards. **Personalized and relevant**, these reflect the unique needs, interests, and potential career paths of each child. This allows learners to move at their own pace, giving them **agency** over their learning. There are no limits to how many courses they can attempt or how far beyond the "classroom" they can explore.

This **competency-based**, or as they call it—performance-based, system takes the shape of a six-spoked wagon wheel of learning:

1. **Online Learning:** Learners log in to learn, participating in a virtual academy with the support of on-site educator guides.
2. **Project-based Learning:** Learners' context shapes their learning. They tackle curriculum through authentic, real-world projects with support from local businesses and organizations.
3. **Self-paced Learning:** In a personalized, blended learning approach, learners access teacher-created video lessons. They then move at their own pace, while educators play a facilitator role. Learners' understanding is formatively assessed on a daily basis through partner activities, projects, online simulations and exercises, whole group activities, and one-on-one instruction.
4. **Peer-led Instruction:** Learners learn from each other, with educators serving as facilitators.
5. **Cardinal Academy:** Learners direct their own learning plan, path, and progress. With the guidance of an advisor, these high schoolers choose their own subjects and timelines and often take advantage of off-campus opportunities and internships.
6. **Traditional Learning:** For those who prefer the teacher-led model, the 176-day, direct instruction option remains available.

And guess what? Kids are moving at amazing rates through Taylor's innovative model. They bus hundreds of elementary schoolers to the middle school daily. Middle schoolers are doing high school-level work. Many finish their core requirements by their sophomore or mid-junior year—and they move on to earning college credits.

The traditional lines are blurred, assumptions about what kids are capable of are being shattered, and innovations just keep emerging. The results speak for themselves. Taylor has had no drop outs in the last six years and, in the last three, has had a 100% graduation rate. As Superintendent Roger Cook says, "Bottom line: we don't give up on our kids—not a single one!"

LEARN MORE

[This Innovative District Lets Students Choose How to Learn](#)

[Everyone Graduates](#)

[How a District Ended learner Dropouts with Personalized Learning](#)

[Kentucky School Uses Tech to Rethink Schooling](#)

[Taylor County: The district that's shaking things up to keep kids from dropping out](#)

[VIDEO Taylor County Schools](#)

FACTS & FIGURES

District of Distinction
National Award

Public, PK-12

2,900 learners

3 schools

ELL or Primary Language other
than English: 3%

Learners with disabilities: 11.4%

Free or reduced lunch: 60%

Graduation rates: 100%

College enrollment: 43%

CONNECT

Website

[Taylor County School District](#)

Facebook Page

[Taylor County Schools](#)

Twitter

[@TC_Schools_KY](#)

For more information contact:
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A Conversation with Taylor County Schools

The **Education Reimagined** team recently connected with Roger Cook, Taylor County Superintendent, and two of his amazing educators, Jessica McCubbin and Sarah Hayes. Below the conversation unfolds as we discuss what it really takes to transform your system.

Q. We know you've had zero drop-outs in the last six years. How did you do that?

A. ROGER: We are open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The doors never close at Taylor County Schools. And you get to learn the way you want to learn, anytime you want. We have our six-spoke wagon wheel of learning (see the previous page for more details), which lets our kids and our teachers learn and teach the way they like.

Q. How does technology play into all of this?

A. ROGER: Without technology, my vision of performance-based education wouldn't have come to fruition. Sarah and Jessica (my technology integration specialists) are the best of the best. They work closely with all of our educators to figure out ways to leverage the technology to create innovative and engaging learning environments. Even our "traditional educators" are not traditional, and they don't really want to be. They're working hard to integrate technology to make sure their kids are engaged and energized.

JESSICA: A great example of how we've used technology to change the classroom environment is through the creation of our self-paced classrooms. We start every class as a whole group, formatively assessing to ensure students are on track with learning the standards. After that, students separate into their own cooperative groups—sitting on the floor, at desks, in the hall—wherever they want. They receive their instruction by watching our teacher-created video lessons on their devices and then complete assignments, activities, projects, simulations, etc. to practice the content.

SARAH: It's important to remember that because we have the technology, the cooperative groups can be on different levels and learning different things at the same time. It really creates an atmosphere of learning and engagement. At Taylor County, it's the teacher's job to facilitate learning, not to lecture, and technology tools allow us to do this well.

ROGER: We also have Odysseyware software to address the needs of the virtual learners. It has courses from 3rd grade and up that cover all content areas. We have every type of student imaginable, from students who struggle to students who are taking advanced classes, in our Virtual Academy. They can utilize Odysseyware at any given time, both during and outside of the regular school day.



Roger Cook



Sarah Hayes



Jessica McCubbin

Q. So, with such a different model for learning, how do you evaluate progress or success?

A. ROGER: We try to think about the question: “Are we getting kids career- and college- ready?” Our college and career-readiness stats are getting better all the time. Our ACT scores aren’t as high as we’d like them to be—we averaged a 19, and we’ve been as high as the low 20’s before. But we’re working on it, and there’s no doubt our learners are more prepared to enter college, the world, and the workplace based on what we’re doing at Taylor County.

I will also add that I wish test scores were not as emphasized in Kentucky. I’ve been summoned more than once to do a presentation on the importance of test scores, and I tell them that test scores are only a small sample of what schools are about. For example, I have kids who just don’t test well, but they can tear a diesel engine down and rebuild it. I keep telling the legislators: “You have to expand your criteria.” I will likely be on a committee helping our state legislature expand them. I actually wrote a total performance-based accountability system for our state. It made it through the Senate but was, unfortunately, shot down in the House. We’re hoping that over the next few years, we’ll see a shift toward other ways to think about progress and success.

Q. It sounds like things look pretty different at Taylor County. What are visitors’ first reactions?

A. JESSICA: It overwhelms them when they hear us talk about it at first. However, once they see it in action, it makes logical sense to them. They see kids working together cooperatively and the teacher facilitating the classroom and meeting the needs of every child. They see what it means to be a performance-based (competency-based) system. At Taylor County, if kids meet the criteria, they get to move forward in their learning. It does mean, however, that we don’t look like a traditional school.

ROGER: Now, for us, this is old hat—I’ve been doing this for ten years now. And, once people get over the initial surprise, the reactions get much better. We’ve had people look around and say in amazement, “Everybody seems to be so happy! Even your teachers seem happy.” It’s great to be able to show people what happens when kids and teachers are set free to learn and teach in ways best for them.

Q. And what about your parents, what do they think? Was it a difficult transition when you first started?

A. ROGER: Our parents are happy. When I first came here, they were worried and had a lot of questions and concerns. They just couldn’t imagine what all these transitions would mean for their kids. We worked hard to get them on board and continue to emphasize parent outreach.

And, the transformation has been great to watch. I do meetings every three months with the parents, and it is so clear that not only are they on board with the way we do things at Taylor County, but they are also incredibly engaged with their kids’ learning. They’re asking questions, using the education lingo, and figuring out ways to make sure their kid is doing their best.

It’s also really exciting that our kids can take college classes while they’re still in high school. That’s been a huge thing for the parents. With our performance-based system, we have tons of fifth graders taking middle and high school classes. So, by sophomore or mid-junior year, they’ve finished their high school credits. But, they

“It isn’t rocket science, giving education to kids the way they want it. I’ll say, ‘Ma’am, do you mind if I teach your child in the way they learn best?’ Are they going to say, ‘No’?”

ROGER COOK

don't want to leave, so we have an early college. It costs their parents \$60 per credit hour. That is nothing compared to what they'd pay anywhere else! And, it means that we graduate seniors who can enter college as mid-term sophomores. As you'd guess, our parents are huge advocates for these early college opportunities. We calculated that, just last year, we saved them \$260K in college tuition. They encourage their kids to keep moving in their learning, saying, "Save us some college money!"

All this parent support helps to create a system that is self-perpetuating.

Q. What about the surrounding communities? Do you get questions from educators outside of or from elsewhere in Kentucky?

A. ROGER: Yes, we do. A major question we hear: "How can we go back and sell our community on this?" I have even gone and made presentations to other boards of education. I try to tell them that this isn't rocket science. If I say, "Ma'am, do you mind if I teach your child in the way they learn best?" or "Can I let your child's teachers teach in the way they love most?" Who's going to say "No"? We are giving education to kids in the way they want it.

When I hear this method can't get the same results, I share that our test scores are in the 83rd percentile in KY. We are a proficient school district. We are one of the designated districts of innovation in Kentucky. And when they hear all that, no one can question it.

Q. We assume the question of funding also comes up a lot. Has this cost Taylor County a lot more money?

A. ROGER: No, not really. The traditional amount of funding we get covers it. We just use the money differently. I am originally from the world of construction. I was one of those kids who came from a broken home, a government housing project. I grew up figuring out how to fix or build what I needed. I've been able to put that to use as Superintendent. For example, we had a \$90,000 air conditioner go down. We purchased aluminum and welded it ourselves. We fixed it for \$5,000. We put those savings to work for us. We used the money to buy more technology—we put it back toward our learners.

SARAH: A major issue for most districts is class size—but not as much for us. Teachers here have had up to 36 students in their classes, but if they are teaching in a self-paced environment, those large numbers aren't as overwhelming. Class size would be an issue if we had our teachers standing up at the front of the classroom lecturing and trying to keep everyone together on the same concept. As we shared earlier, we've also been able to use technology in a lot of great ways. All of this has meant that we haven't had to hire additional personnel. ●



FATHER & SON GO BACK TO FINISH HIGH SCHOOL

Pictured above Superintendent Roger Cook (left) on behalf of the Taylor County School District presents George Ratliff (right) and his son Terry Ratliff (center) with their high school diplomas.

George dropped out just two weeks before his graduation in 1985. Prompted by comments from his grandson, George was referred to Taylor County High School's Virtual Learning Academy, where he found out that he was only a few credits short of receiving his diploma. George's son, Terry, had a similar story. Because of the Virtual Learning Academy, both father and son graduated from high school and are now enrolled in classes at a local technical college—George in criminal justice and Terry in Computer Science and Computer Aided Drafting.



LEARNER VOICES

Check out the articles and videos below. They might just challenge your assumptions of what kids are capable of creating and doing if we let go of the current Industrial-era paradigm and move towards learner-centered education.



FROM MIND/SHIFT

What a Student Learned From a Short Experiment in Self-Directed Learning

How do you reignite someone's love and passion for learning? In this case, let them direct their own experience! Discover what one student's self-directed semester meant to him. [Read here](#)

Created in the Corridor: Iowa BIG

Pioneer Iowa BIG was recently featured by their local news for the great work they are doing to bring the real world to their learners. As you'll hear, these kids are doing some extraordinary things to address vital needs "right here in Cedar Rapids." [Watch here](#)

MetWest Partnership brings Big Picture Senior to Woolman

Brian Gil-Rios talks about his experience studying social justice and environmental studies at the Woolman Semester School. Brian shares what it's like to transition from the hustle of a metropolitan learning environment to one which, as Brian admits, benefits from a certain level of calmness. [Read here](#)

FROM GOOD

This 15-Year-Old's Invention Converts Ocean Currents Into Energy—for Cheap
[Read here](#)

TED TALK

Hacking Schooling Makes Me Happy: Logan LaPlante at TEDx University of Nevada [Watch here](#)

Sugata Mitra's famous experiment in India showed how children living in Indian slums could teach themselves to use a computer and led 17-year-old Nick Bain to come up with his own unusual experiment in learning. He would spend the final trimester of his junior year learning on his own.

What a Student Learned from a Short Experiment in Self-Directed Learning

—MIND/SHIFT



TOOLS & RESOURCES

iNACOL

The **International Association for K-12 Online Learning** is a leading advocate for the transformation of learning in America. They seek ways to support their extensive and active network of practitioners innovating with education models that leverage online, blended, and competency-based learning. With a primary focus on transforming the policy landscape, iNACOL conducts research, publishes in-depth reports, and advocates for new learning models. In addition, they host an annual Blended and Online Learning Symposium that draws thousands to engage, connect, learn, and discover together. If you are interested in delving into how policy might shift to support innovation or into how to implement blended or competency-based learning models, iNACOL's trove of reports, webinars, and blog posts is the place for you. See a few great examples of what they have to offer below:

The iNACOL State Policy Frameworks: 5 Critical Issues to Transform K-12 Education ([link](#))

Partnering for Success: A 21st Century Model for Teacher Preparation ([link](#))

WEBINAR: Blended Learning Leaders Discuss their Roadmap for Success ([link](#))

CompetencyWorks

CompetencyWorks, which is a collaborative initiative led by **iNACOL**, is a fantastic online resource for practitioners at every stage of competency-based implementation. Their informative blog is chock full of original in-depth profiles of learner-centered environments from all across the country. It also provides survey pieces that compile the best resources on policy advancements and emerging issues around competency-based education. CompetencyWorks also hosts a higher education blog highlighting that sector's shifts toward competency-based learning. Finally, on the CompetencyWorks [Wiki](#), you can find resources and tools on competency-based innovations at the classroom, school, district, and state levels.

To get a taste for what you can find, check out these links:

It's Time for Mid-Course Corrections in K-12 Competency-Based Education ([link](#))

Multiple Pathways to Competency-Based Education ([link](#))

Summer Reading: What Does Competency Education Look Like? ([link](#))



Co-published: "Maximizing Competency Education and Blended Learning: Insights from Experts" ([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.

iNACOL Blended and Online Learning Symposium

Kelly Young; Becky Pringle, VP of the National Education Association; and Gisèle Huff, ED of the Jaquelin Hume Foundation, will be presenting the closing keynote Wednesday, Nov. 11 from 9:00am-9:45am.

Orlando, Nov. 8-11, 2015
[Conference website](#)

SXSWedu

Panel Discussion: Abandoning Age-Based Learning with Roger Cook, Taylor County Schools; Dr. Marina Walne, EduStart LLC; Stephan Turnipseed, former president LEGO Education North America

Education Reimagined Summit: A three-hour session for pioneers to learn, share, and explore the possibilities of learner-centered education. More details to come!

Austin, March 7-10, 2016
[Conference website](#)

Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA) Midwinter Conference

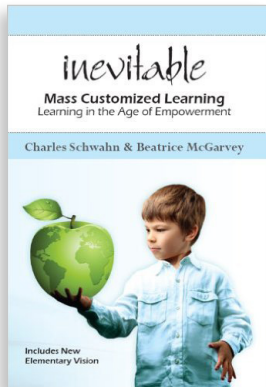
More details to come!
Austin, Jan. 24-27, 2016

EduCon 2.8

More details to come!
Philadelphia, Jan. 29-31, 2016

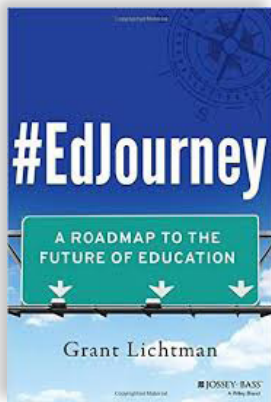


ON OUR BOOKSHELF



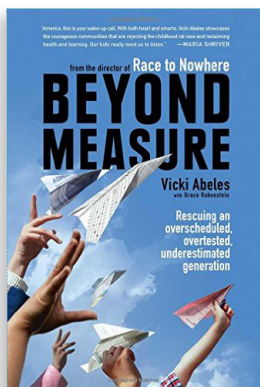
INEVITABLE: Mass Customized Learning by Beatrice McGarvey and Charles Schwahn

Individualized learning—everybody wants it, but how do we get it? More and more, forward-thinking practitioners are realizing that real individualized learning will require a radical shift away from our Industrial-era models. They see that it is time for an entire system rethink—or as McGarvey and Schwahn phrase it, “It is time to bring education into the 21st century.” Check out the book that challenges our conventional knowledge of what education is and encourages us to discover a new future for learning.



#EdJourney by Grant Lichtman

In Grant Lichtman’s *#EdJourney*, he highlights the “brushfires of innovation” burning across America. Revolving around 600+ interviews that took place over the course of a three-month cross-country road trip, Lichtman looks at what practitioners, parents, and administrators are doing right now to prepare learners for the future. *#EdJourney* goes well beyond the theoretical to explore concrete examples of pioneers from diverse communities across the country already far along the path of transforming their education environments and systems.



Beyond Measure: Rescuing an Overscheduled, Overtested, Understimulated Generation by Vicki Abeles

In *Beyond Measure*, Vicki Abeles—director of the 2010 documentary *Race to Nowhere*—tells the stories of educators who are tapping into the passion, drive, and joy of their learners to re-orient their educational systems to support the child’s holistic development—physical, mental, emotional, and academic. With the simultaneous release of a **film** by the same name, *Beyond Measure* highlights these stories as opportunities for communities—educators, parents, learners, and community members—to explore how they could transform their education systems to reflect their own values of health, happiness, and genuine learning for all children.

WORTH YOUR TIME

Finland Schools: Subjects Scrapped and Replaced with ‘Topics’ as Country Reforms its Education System

What do you do when you are one of world’s most highly esteemed education systems and, yet, are discovering that your learners are not prepared to participate fully in the market and society? If you are Finland, you do something radically new—you embark on a transformation of your world-renowned system!

[Read more...](#)

Why Realizing the Full Promise of Education Requires a Fresh Approach

Can shifting the paradigm of how we view education from a standardized model to a learner-centric model address the inequalities apparent in our current education system? Take a look at this article that explores this very question!

[Read more...](#)

Learner-Centered Tip of the Week: Choice Words

Every day now a new book or research paper is released, detailing the connection between a teacher’s expectations of a student’s capacity to learn and their ability to do so. In this article, Courtney Belonan of RSU2 in Maine gives three suggestions on language framing. [Read more...](#)

“Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.” —**MARK TWAIN**



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