

pioneering

ISSUE 29 • MARCH 2, 2017 • EDUCATION REIMAGINED

A NOTE FROM EDUCATION REIMAGINED

Kelly Young, Executive Director

McCOMB SCHOOL DISTRICT

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A Conversation with Dr. Cederick Ellis

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education 
reimagined

• connect. share. discover. lead. • pioneering

Dear Pioneers,

I'm in Chapel Hill this week for the Oak Foundation's Grantee Consortium meeting with an amazing group of learner-centered pioneers who are all working to build the field's capacity to support a wide range of learner variability. Recognizing we all learn differently, the Oak Foundation is investing in the research, tools, and professional development that can enable learners, parents, and educators to recognize, embrace, and support that diversity. Thank you Oak Foundation for your generous and vital contribution to the movement!

Also, this week, we are preparing for the fun adventure we'll be having at SXSWedu starting next Monday. If you are attending, we hope you will join us and other learner-centered pioneers on Tuesday, March 7th from 12-6pm in the Austin Hilton Downtown (Salon F) for our Summit: It's A Paradigm Shift. So What? We have a jam-packed session that will stretch your mind and push your thinking (learn more [here](#)). And, immediately following our Summit, we're co-hosting a Texas-size cocktail party at the Iron Cactus (6-9pm) with Next Generation Learning Challenges and The Learning Accelerator. We'd love to see you there!

For the Summit, we are honored to have Cederick Ellis, Superintendent of McComb School District; Jim Rickabaugh, Senior Advisor for The Institute of Personalized Learning; and Trace Pickering, our new Associate Director and Co-Founder of Iowa BIG, share their insights on the opportunities and challenges they have faced in leading the work of transformation in their communities. We also have an amazing group of learners coming from around the country—Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School (Bronx, NY), Iowa BIG (Cedar Rapids, IA), Summit Elementary School in McComb School District (McComb, MS), and A+ Unlimited Potential (Houston, TX). Beyond our Tuesday Summit and party, be sure to follow our SXSWedu Guide ([link](#)) to find other learner-centered presentations and opportunities throughout the week.

We have a great issue for you! To get us all excited about our SXSWedu Summit, it starts off with featuring one of our panelists, Superintendent, Dr. Cederick Ellis, and his heroic efforts to lead transformation in McComb, Mississippi. Following this incredible story, discover how five educators decided now was the time to transform. And, saving the best for last, hear from a learner from RSU 2 in Maine and how learning at his desired pace has put him years ahead of his previous academic track. Enjoy!

Warm wishes,
Kelly Young



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Published by Education Reimagined,
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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.





McComb School District

MCCOMB, MS

“Each race offers a different combination of obstacles and difficulties. No matter which race you’re running, all of them have at least two things in common: the pain and the finish line.” – DR. CEDERICK ELLIS

AT FIRST GLANCE, McCOMB SCHOOL DISTRICT looks like any other public district—two elementary and middle schools, one high school, and one alternative school. But then, you’ll find a business and technology complex and an early childhood learning center. What are these doing here?

Digging in, you discover a palpable energy that permeates one McComb school in particular: Summit Elementary School. Walking into the building, you are greeted by a man sporting a playful bow tie and candid smile. He simply says, “We’re producing students empowered to change the world. That’s what you’re feeling. Let me show you what I mean.”

You discover this man is none other than Superintendent, Dr. Cederick Ellis. He shares about the past’s many unproductive tweaks and changes and McComb’s “Mindset Shift into World Class” (2015) ([link](#)) designed to break away from these old practices. And, it turns out—Summit Elementary was ground zero for this transformation. You learn the model has been expanded to the brand new Kennedy Early Childhood Center.

What kind of learning goes on here? Dr. Ellis declares passionately that learners are all met where they are and supported to accelerate the development of their **knowledge, skills, and dispositions**. At McComb, these kids are intensely engaged because grade cohorts no longer hold them back or force them forward—**competency-based** learning is the name of the game here.

He talks about Kiana, who always felt like a crutch for her peers because her learning pace had her acting as a second teacher for others. Now, she can accelerate her learning, knowing she won’t be held back, and remain **socially embedded** through collaboration with peers and mentors.

Dr. Ellis reiterates how dynamic education can be if all learners are recognized for their passions and interests, rather than their test scores. You hear about Patricia, who loves learning through technology and coding and couldn’t stand the pencil and paper ways of the past. With integrated technology, Patricia can now explore **open-walled** opportunities virtually and within her community.

These anecdotes are only snippets of the full transformation Dr. Ellis envisions. With one elementary school serving as the pilot and catalyst, he sees learner-centered education becoming the norm for the whole system. He and his team are looking to push the envelop even beyond the district—having every learner in Mississippi placed at the center of their learning.

LEARN MORE

[McComb School District Strategic Plan](#)

[A Message from Superintendent, Dr. Cederick Ellis](#)

[McComb taking different approach with new school](#)

[McComb School district transforms classrooms with new technology](#)

FACTS & FIGURES

Public School

2,600 K-12 learners served

75.5% Graduation Rate

6 public housing complexes in which learners reside

Excel by 5 Certified Early Learning Community

CONNECT

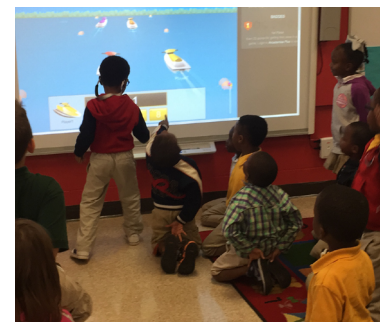
Website

[McComb School District](#)

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[Twitter](#)

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McComb School District: A Conversation with Dr. Cederick Ellis



DR. CEDERICK ELLIS

Q. What sparked your interest in pursuing a career in education? What do you see as the key components to shifting mindsets?

A. I come from a family of educators. Therefore, becoming an educator was probably a part of my DNA and an inevitable path for my unknown future. However, becoming an educator was not initially in my future plans. In college, I studied computer science and computer information systems and had goals of becoming a computer scientist. Somehow, I landed a position as a computer science professor at a community college. It was during that time I realized being an educator was my calling. Also during that time, I came to the realization that K-12 education was where I could make the greatest impact on the lives of students. After serving 23.5 years in education and 15.5 as an educational administrator, I'm convinced that education is my ministry.

Regarding mindset shifts, I've noticed mindset shifts only occur when there is a cultural shift. Our way of life must shift in order for our mindset to shift. I've also found that mindset shifts are most profound and sustainable when they reach a person's heart and soul.

Q. Historically, Mississippi's education system has performed poorly relative to other states. What opportunities did you see given these circumstances? And, did McComb provide anything exceptionally unique to act on those possibilities?

A. The McComb School District has faced the harsh reality that our 1850's model of public schooling must change, and we accept the urgency now. Fully cognizant that change is always painful, difficult, and divisive, we also recognize and take full responsibility for a very basic and fundamental truth—our state's and school district's educational system, as it is currently designed and operated, will not meet the needs of our 21st century, digital-native learners.

As a result, the McComb School District embarked on the creation and implementation of a highly innovative approach to 21st-century teaching and learning. Our version of learner-centered education, student-centered-teaching and learning, has the potential to change the educational landscape for a state that has been traditionally underperforming.

It is our belief that our model will drive the constructive disruption of traditional public schooling in Mississippi by delivering a "death blow" to the "one-size-fits-all" approach to teaching and learning and provide a scalable prototype for realistic, valid, reliable, and much needed school and school district reform elsewhere. Student-centered teaching and learning has the potential to serve as a proof point for the effectiveness of personalized learning related to school turnaround.

As we continue our implementation, we believe a diffusion of ideas will spread, helping to influence the adoption of learner-centered, student-centered teaching and learning throughout the district and perhaps throughout the State of Mississippi as a viable and successful turnaround model.

This cultural educational shift; where pedagogy, assessments, support systems, and culture are refocused to facilitate student progress organized around mastery instead of age and seat time; is intended to transform schools into stable, well-governed, high-performing, and financially-responsible public schools. This cultural educational shift meets the needs of ALL students through personalized instruction. All students are provided multiple and unique opportunities to acquire the skills needed to be successful and graduate high school “Next Generation Ready.”

Q. What has been the most significant shift you've seen in the mindsets of your learners, families, and community as a whole? Has everyone bought in? Is the communication continuous between all stakeholders?

A. Because of the promise of this model, the mindset shifts of learners has increased motivation, engagement, curiosity, risk taking, and confidence that they can control their own learning. Additionally, many school district personnel's mindsets have shifted to trusting that our educational system has the potential of providing globally competitive educational programs and services of the highest quality.

These school district personnel are of the mindset that student-centered teaching and learning will be the catalyst for change that will aid in eliminating an educational system that is no longer being compromised by an agrarian system of public schooling. Of course, this system is no longer applicable for 21st century, digital-native learners. For families, confidence in public education in McComb is being restored.

A key support to the implementation of student-centered teaching and learning is it addresses the curriculum, pedagogy, and delivery systems our strategic plan recommends. This was one of five core recommendations of a 38-member Strategic Planning Working Group. The membership included teacher leaders and school-based administrators; business, religious, and civic leaders; parent and student leaders; and representatives from higher education.

Although the members devoted nearly 400 hours to crafting the future of public education for McComb School District's children, capturing the spirit and nuance of all the participants remains a challenge. To date, not all stakeholders have bought into student-centered teaching and learning.

We will continue to foster continuous communication among stakeholders through ongoing community conversations and print and social media. The community conversations will always include an opportunity to engage stakeholders regarding their perspectives, concerns, criticisms, and the potential pitfalls they see relating to student-centered teaching and learning. For reflection purposes, recording the community conversations may be optional.

To obtain additional buy-in, we will utilize the voices of passionate, early adopters to garner mainstream support. On a quarterly basis, we allow students and parents to share how student-centered teaching and learning has impacted their learning experience. Quick videos will be created to capture the voices and used in the district's campaign to widen its reach. Additional videos will be used to produce behind-the-scene peeks of the “real” implementation of student-centered teaching and learning.

“...mindset shifts
are most profound
and sustainable
when they reach a
person's heart and
soul.”

DR. CEDERICK ELLIS

Q. What new opportunities have become available to the learners at McComb?

A. Learners have the opportunity to help shape the movement for personalized learning. Visits from school districts, educators, policy makers, and other advocates provide learners with the opportunity to share how learner-centered, student-centered teaching and learning, has transformed their learning experience.

Learners' voices can be heard globally through the *Pioneering* publication and case studies conducted highlighting the district's learning-centered journey.

**Q. What has been your favorite story during your time at McComb?
What matters to you about that?**

A. I have several favorite stories. My first favorite story is the number of parents who wanted something different for their children, recognized the need for a pedagogical shift that would take into consideration their children's personalized needs, and had the courage to boldly act. Secondly, the gaze of hope in the students' eyes regarding personalizing their learning. Thirdly, the self-confidence gained by a male student who had become lost in our traditional educational system, who could not read nor write his name prior to his experience with student-centered teaching and learning.

What matters to me most is the future of our children, specifically the children who attend the McComb School District. My primary concern is for continuous academic growth of all students and their mastery of skills and competencies needed for them to successfully complete their school experience having reached their full potential.

Q. What does the future of McComb look like?

A. The future of the McComb School District is very bright. For too long, our public schools have not been working for many students. This is especially true for our most vulnerable students—those from socio-economically deprived backgrounds. It is, unfortunately, a continuing national trend. Preliminary plans suggest that learner-centered, student-centered teaching and learning will usher in a new learning culture that engages and empowers all learners, 100% of whom are in need of high-quality and equitable educational opportunities. It is our belief that McComb School District has positioned itself to become a leader in innovative and proactive transformation. We are determined not to allow our students to remain a part of local, state, and national damning statistics that have become commonplace in failing schools.

“Because of the promise of this model, the mindset shifts of learners has increased motivation, engagement, curiosity, risk taking, and confidence that they can control their own learning.”

DR. CEDERICK ELLIS

Dr. Cederick Ellis is superintendent of the McComb School District and was recently one of three Mississippians to receive the National School Leadership Coach credential from the National Institute for School Leaders. He was recognized by the National Association of School Superintendents as the 2015 Superintendent of the Year Runner-Up. His primary goal is to develop a “World Class” school district that constantly strives for excellence in preparing its students to both meet and exceed state and national educational standards. Ellis is proud of his life's greatest accomplishments—his wife Carmelle, daughter Caira, and son Cederick II.



SXSWedu, Here We Come!

The Education Reimagined team is heading down to Austin, Texas next week for #SXSWedu 2017! We will be joining thousands of educators, learners, school and district leaders, higher education professionals, policymakers, business leaders, and union leaders to explore innovative insights, ideas, and success stories that are collectively transforming the future of education in the United States. We can't wait to meet, learn from, and be inspired by fellow learner-centered pioneers during the four-day event. And, to have some Texas-style tacos and margaritas!

On Tuesday, March 7th, we'll be hosting our invigorating and interactive **"It's A Paradigm Shift. So What?" Summit from 12-6pm at the Austin Hilton Downtown (Salon F).** It'll be a day packed with mind-stretching, out-of-the-box conversations and exercises will all of our panelists and attendees (that's you!). [Check out](#) our Summit agenda, a custom guide to all things learner-centered at SXSWedu 2017, and details on our post-Summit cocktail party.

So, who's going to be in the room? First and foremost, we have a fantastic group of young learners coming in from Iowa, New York, Mississippi, and Texas (of course) to share their first-hand learner-centered experiences. No learner-centered conversation is complete without the voices of the learners themselves!

In addition to our stellar cast of young learners, we will also have an all-star panel of leading learner-centered pioneers who are fired up to be with us all day. And that's not just us saying so, check out what they had to say:



What I am most looking forward to from the Summit and SXSWedu is the opportunity to see how the personalized learning movement and supporting innovations are transforming K-12 educational equity for children across America. Learning from other pioneers and innovators regarding developing and sustaining a culture that sparks curiosity and nurtures creativity and innovation will serve beneficial to my attendance. Networking with these pioneers and innovators will provide a sense of camaraderie and collaboration in my quest to shape the broader movement for personalized learning and educational equity.

Dr. Cederick L. Ellis, Sr.

SUPERINTENDENT OF THE McCOMB SCHOOL DISTRICT



I am looking forward to the variety of engagement opportunities offered throughout the Education Reimagined Summit. Regardless of the learner-centered learning experience or expertise we bring, there will be much for us to discuss, learn, and share. I am especially excited about these conversations occurring within the context of SXSWedu, an event that features the intersection of technology, design and learning; a powerful combination.

Jim Rickabaugh

SENIOR ADVISOR OF THE INSTITUTE FOR PERSONALIZED LEARNING



I'm excited to connect with educators from around the country interested in moving learner-centered education forward for all learners. Cederick and Jim bring a wealth of amazing experiences and that, along with strong learner voice in the room, will make for a fruitful time together.

Dr. Trace Pickering

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR FOR EDUCATION REIMAGINED
AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND CO-FOUNDER OF IOWA BIG

Our Guide to All Things Learner-Centered at SXSWedu 2017

We are looking forward to learning, engaging, and exploring with education pioneers from all across the country.

With so much to do at SXSWedu, we've created a guide to the learner-centered presentations, keynotes, panels, and summits that we are most excited about!

MONDAY, MARCH 6, 2017

WE GOT IT FROM HERE...THANK YOU 4 YOUR SERVICE

Christopher Emdin, Columbia University
Teachers College

Keynote
Equity

9:30am - 10:30am
Austin Convention
Center, Ballroom D

A NEW SCHOOL MODEL? WILL IT LAST?

4.0 Schools, Blyth-Templeton Academy,
The Hechinger Report, Unlearn Education

Panel
Entrepreneurialism

11:00am - 12:00pm
Hilton Austin
Downtown, Salon G

WHY ARE WE STILL USING CURRICULUM FROM THE 1800S?

Bernie Trilling, author

Future20
Instruction

11:00am - 11:20pm
JW Marriott
Room 201-202

THE END OF SCHOOL AS WE KNOW IT

Will Richardson, Connective Learning LLC

Future20
Leadership

11:30am - 11:50pm
JW Marriott
Room 201-202



March 6-7, 2017

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MONDAY, MARCH 6, 2017 (CONT.)

CREATING WITHIN CONSTRAINTS: NEW MEETS OLD Oakdale Elementary Magnet School, Richland School District 2, Lexington School District 3	Workshop Implementation	1:30pm - 3:30pm Hilton Austin Downtown, Room 410
FORGET WHAT YOU KNOW: THE POWER OF UNLEARNING Harvard Graduate School of Education, Beaver Country Day School	Panel Instruction	2:00pm - 3:00pm Hilton Austin Downtown, Salon G
SCALING GLOBAL COMPETENCY EDUCATION Global Nomads Group, Madrasati, Kentucky Education Development	Policy Forum Leadership	3:30pm - 4:30pm Hilton Austin Downtown, Salon H
POP UP PROBLEMS OF PRACTICE IN COMPETENCY ED <i>CompetencyWorks</i> , KnowledgeWorks, iNACOL	Problem Solver Implementation	4:00pm - 6:00pm Hilton Austin Downtown, Room 408
ESCAPE ROOM IN ACTION	Special Event Instruction	6:00pm - 7:00pm Hilton Austin Downtown, Salon E

TUESDAY, MARCH 7, 2017

ELEVATING EDUCATOR PREP WITH MICRO-CREDENTIALS Educators Rising, Digital Promise	Panel Instruction	11:00am - 12:00pm JW Marriott, Salon E
IT'S A PARADIGM SHIFT. SO WHAT? Education Reimagined, Institute for Personalized Learning, Iowa BIG, McComb School District	Summit Leadership	12:00pm - 6:00pm Hilton Austin Downtown, Salon F
STUDENT EMPOWERMENT: WHO'S THE BOSS? Taylor Beckweth, Excelsior Springs SD	Core Conversation Instruction	12:30pm - 1:30pm Hilton Austin Downtown, Salon A
NETWORK EFFECT: ROBUST LEARNING PATHWAYS FOR ALL Digital Promise, CommunityShare, Remake Learning Council, Kentucky Valley Educational Cooperative	Panel Equity	12:30pm - 1:30pm Hilton Austin Downtown, Salon J
LEARN BY DESIGN COMPETITIONS AND PARTY Big Picture Learning	Learn by Design Learning Spaces	2:00pm - 7:00pm Austin Convention Center, Room 16AB
BUILDING AN INQUIRY-BASED SCHOOL MODEL Google, School District of Philadelphia, Inquiry Schools	Panel Instruction	2:00pm - 3:00pm Hilton Austin Downtown, Salon G
STUDENTS AS EDUCATION INNOVATORS Inspirare Institute, Media Education Lab (MEL), UniCEUB	Panel Implementation	5:00pm - 6:00pm Hilton Austin Downtown, Salon D

“Learner-Centered”
isn't just a phrase;
it's a way of
thinking, acting,
and being.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 8, 2017

DESIGN + LEADERSHIP

Olin College, i2i Experience, Vista Unified SD, High Tech High

Workshop

Leadership

11:00am - 1:00pm

Hilton Austin
Downtown, Salon K

COMBAT INEQUITY WITH MASTERY

Mastery Collaborative

Core Conversation

Equity

12:30pm - 1:30pm

JW Marriott, Salon C

PRESERVING CREATIVITY WITH INTENTIONALITY

Destination Imagination, University of Connecticut, BrightBytes, The Walt Disney Company

Panel

Instruction

12:30pm - 1:30pm

Austin Convention Center, Room 16AB

NOW TRENDING: STATE ASSESSMENTS WORTH TAKING

CCSSO's Innovation Lab Network, Orange City Schools, Ohio Department of Education

Policy Forum

Implementation

12:45pm - 1:15pm

Hilton Austin
Downtown, Salon H

9 BILLION SCHOOLS: THE LAUNCH OF A MOVEMENT

SHP Leading Design, Arizona State University

Show & Tell

Learning Spaces

1:00pm - 1:30pm

Hilton Austin
Downtown, Salon B

EDUCATION OF THE FUTURE: COMPETENCY-DRIVEN MOTIVATION

Rybakov Foundation, Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology

Industry Talk

Implementation

2:00pm - 2:30pm

JW Marriott,
Griffin Hall

TEACHERS ARE LEARNERS, TOO: NEXT GEN LEARNING & PD

Next Generation Learning Challenges, Digital Promise, Thrive Public School, Jobs for the Future

Panel

Leadership

5:00pm - 6:00pm

Hilton Austin
Downtown, Salon J

THINK OUTSIDE THE BUBBLE: REIMAGINING ASSESSMENT

Summit Public Schools, New Hampshire Learning Initiative, Del Lago Academy, Next Generation Learning Challenges

Panel

Leadership

5:00pm - 6:00pm

Austin Convention Center, Room 12AB

THURSDAY, MARCH 9, 2017

STARTUP 101: EXPERIENCING ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN K-12

BluTours, Columbia University Teachers College, Duke University, Montclair Kimberley Academy

Panel

Entrepreneurialism

9:30am - 10:30am

Hilton Austin
Downtown, Salon D

PERSONALIZED LEARNING & THE TECH TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

LearnLaunch, EdSurge, Silicon Valley Education Foundation, LEAP Innovations

Panel

Leadership

9:30am - 10:30am

Austin Convention Center, Room 12AB

TEACHERS AS DESIGNERS

Business Innovation Factory

Workshop

Instruction

10:00am - 12:00pm

JW Marriott,
Salon H

Learner-Centered Education is an idea whose time has come. Join us in making it a reality for ALL kids!

THURSDAY, MARCH 9, 2017 (CONT.)

**DEVELOPING STUDENT AGENCY VIA
INTERNSHIPS AT SCALE**

Andrew Frishman, Big Picture

Future20

Employability

10:30am - 10:50am

JW Marriott
Room 201-202

**LEARNING FROM CHILDREN IN THE
MOST REMOTE PLACES**

The World School, Projects For All

Panel

Equity

11:00am - 12:00pm

Hilton Austin
Downtown, Salon C

**THE WORLD NEEDS MORE INVENTORS,
STARTING WITH KIDS**

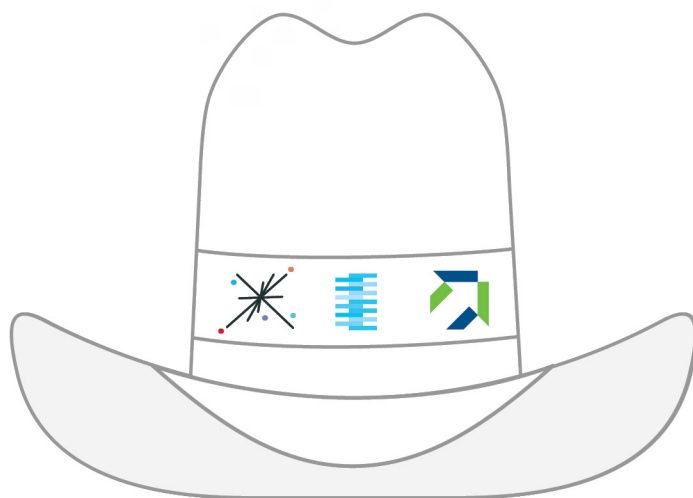
Other Machine Co, JoyLabz/Makey Makey,
Project H

Panel

Instruction

11:00am - 12:00pm

Austin Convention
Center, Room 12AB



TEXASSIZE
10 GALLON PARTY!

HOSTED BY

Education Reimagined

**Next Generation
Learning Challenges**

**The Learning
Accelerator**

MARCH 7TH

6:30 pm - 9:00 pm

Immediately following
Education Reimagined's Summit

IRON CACTUS

606 Trinity Street

RSVP



A VOICE FROM THE FIELD

How Five Educators Decided to Act on Their Beliefs and Transform Their Environment

by Danae Secunde

At Line Elementary in West Newfield, Maine, there is a buzz in the air. All learners, regardless of age or grade level, are working together on projects of their choosing within broad units like weather, cultures, landmarks and landforms, and space. In these units, you'll find learners discussing the types of animals found in the Okefenokee Swamp, how magma turns into lava, and the impact of the Hoover Dam on soil erosion. Come back three months later and you'll find another slate of topics being dug into. The question is, where did this idea of units come from and why has it led to an excitedly engaged learning community that sustains itself throughout the year?

Let's go back two years, where the seed for our Vertical Learning Team (VLT) was planted. After my colleagues and I received training on proficiency-based learning, we were intrigued by the opportunity for our learners to move along various material at their desired pace. We were also eager to look at other ways to mix learning on a larger scale, not just in academics. We wanted to develop working relationships across the various ages. There was discussion about the workforce—people work with others regardless of their age or backgrounds to investigate and solve problems. Using that foundation, we aspired to create an integrated community within our larger school.

Before we took action at the school, we took action at my dinner table. As educators, we wanted to establish a clear moral purpose for our VLT framework. We collectively agreed to promote rigor, relevance, and relationships in all of our future actions.

We started with multi-age lunch and recess, where learners from all grades could play and eat together. At the same time, we implemented the idea of the units mentioned above, which fulfill our desired learning targets. Once these broad units are in place, learners choose an essential question and/or product they want to dive into. In these units, older students mentor younger students as they work together to learn new information or build products that showcase their learning. To ensure each learner is being met where they are and moving forward at a comfortable pace, they receive lessons at their appropriate instructional level.



DANAE SECUNDE

The team has also focused on building both grit and mindfulness within our community of learners. The value of having GRIT was our community focus during the first year. We defined grit as the determination to work toward a long-term goal despite obstacles and failures, focusing on what is learned on the road to meeting that goal. To build this understanding with our students, they participated in a living metaphor experience about grit.

Each student was given a rough piece of wood and sandpaper. They sanded their wood using different "grit" sandpaper and reflected on the process and how it related to grit in the classroom. They saw that not everyone ended up with the same product, that some people have to work harder than others to get the desired outcome, and that everyone has to use grit to accomplish their goal, regardless of their age or ability.

Now in our second year, we've added mindfulness to the recipe. Learners are encouraged and supported to tune into how they feel about and react to different situations and find strategies to help focus their mind and body to calm themselves. Together as a whole community, the children created calming glitter jars to assist in quieting their mind and bodies. In most classrooms, there are calming stations for learners to utilize throughout the day. Some teachers use breathing exercises and visualization to calm and focus learners.

Overall, these values of grit and mindfulness are part of a greater effort to focus our energy towards creating a collaborative culture to show learners that building ties within and outside our school walls can benefit them as human beings. In our first year of this collaborative effort, the team reached out to the larger community by connecting with a local apple orchard. Parents and learners came together to pick apples for a local shelter under a Picking for a Purpose event. Over fifteen bushels of apples were picked and donated. This was the kickoff to a weather unit where a local TV meteorologist interviewed students and engaged them in a presentation on weather.

Since this time, the team has connected with the shelter on two more occasions for an event called "Socktober," where socks were donated to the shelter for their residents. More socks were later collected for veterans in collaboration with the Daughters of the American Revolution. The team has also been working with a senior citizens home during each holiday. Children make various gifts for the seniors, including creating valentine bookmarks; potting spring flowers; and, this past Christmas, producing a holiday song iMovie.

In rural Maine, developing these ties to the larger community plays a vital role in furthering the learners' outlook on their impact as a learner and a person. It helps set those expectations that the culture we're trying to establish also bleeds over into life outside the classroom walls. For many, this opportunity has led to better engagement in the school setting, established a purpose for their learning, and increased their educational and life knowledge.

The past two years of collaborating with, designing alongside, and teaching in this community of learners and passionate educators has been exhilarating and rewarding. This cultural change has furthered our belief that a shared instructional environment is what is best for learners, whether in our own classroom or in each other's classrooms. This environment allows us to tap into each learner's potential and develop relationships across the grade levels. Just as they would in a future workplace, students team up with diverse members of various backgrounds and ages to engage in learning and community-building activities.

This community of learners and their parents are starting to realize the benefits to this vertical team approach. The acknowledgement of creating credible, authentic opportunities of learning, based on students' choice and research, is seen as a positive step forward.

“...developing these ties to the larger community plays a vital role in furthering the learners' outlook on their impact as a learner and a person.”

DANAE SECUNDE

After many years working in government as a legislative aide, lobbyist, and ombudsman; in addition to the private sector as a Marketing Director; **Mrs. Danae Secunde** ventured into the education field. She received her teaching certification through the University of New England, while her bachelor's degree is in Social Work. Mrs. Secunde comes to Maine from the great state of Ohio, where she married her husband and had two fabulous boys. Mrs. Secunde has been teaching for eleven years, both in second and fifth grade, where she has enjoyed creating units and lessons for her learners.



Why the Freedom to Choose Changed My Future

by Bryce Bragdon



BRYCE BAGDON

For the first nine years of my education (K-8), I was in a school-centered learning environment. When seventh grade rolled around, I started noticing the barriers of this system. I remember entering my history class one day with all of my homework complete, ready to move on with my learning. Unfortunately, a majority of the class came in with the work incomplete, so the teacher simply allowed the kids to work on the assignment during class rather than teach anything new. This left me with nothing to do, which I didn't believe was right or fair.

This wasn't an isolated occurrence—students not doing their work and slowing many of us down. This occurred on a weekly basis, and it would get very frustrating. I felt like I was being held back from achieving my full potential.

The summer of my seventh grade year, I attended a guitar learning rock camp. For the first time, I was shown what I could do when a healthy work load was given to me. The camp made me work really hard. This experience exposed me to the possibility of what I could achieve. Reflecting back on my school experience, I now knew I was capable of so much more than I would ever be able to show in these circumstances.

Finally, in 2015, I began high school at Hall-Dale in Farmingdale, Maine, which uses a learner-centered model of education. This school allowed me to break free from the chains that were holding me back all those years.

It began with what I thought was my biggest weakness and least favorite subject: English (I could never score highly in my school-centered environment). During my freshman English class, I was allowed to demonstrate the Learning Targets (LT) anyway I wanted. I was able to demonstrate one of the poetry LT's by writing a song that made it easier for me to understand what I was learning.

I had a lot more experience writing song lyrics than creating traditional poetry. Since my work had something to do with a skill I want to build in the future, I was interested in my learning. Taking it a step further, using this system of applied learning allowed me to explore many different projects that incorporated English LT's. I actually finished freshman year with the highest possible grade in English. This new system allowed me to discover my hidden strengths in a course that used to be my enemy and something that I thought was of no interest to me at all. This general idea of applied learning allows me to connect multiple "subjects" in one project.

In my freshman science class, we were studying different waves, such as those of light and sound. For our final project, we had to do something that would demonstrate our understanding of the waves Learning Targets. With the freedom to choose, I was able

to combine my interests in music, sound engineering, mathematics, and science and apply my knowledge of sound and speakers to experiment with breaking glass at a particular frequency of sound.

I tested different tone settings and described my results to express the knowledge I gained about soundwaves during the process. Being able to attempt to break glass with the knowledge that I learned from the unit showed me that I could do things with the basic knowledge of science and have it be fun. It helped me to think critically and work to get the best results. Although I was unsuccessful at breaking the glass, my approach and ability to express my learning was rewarded with a top score for this LT.

Being able to fail and still get good scores demonstrates what they are trying to achieve at Hall-Dale. Even when we are unable to complete something successfully, we still learn about that topic and can see how we may have been able to go about making it more successful. It teaches us that failure is actually good and a key part of the learning process.

The only way we have discovered the things we have in science is because of all of the times that people have failed. For example, Einstein's theories relied on the idea of a static universe—the universe doesn't expand or shrink. He incorporated this into his theory of relativity, but later, static universe was proven wrong. Although pieces of this theory were correct and helped future researchers, even Einstein had his failures and had much to discover about his theories. There is always more failure than success in these sorts of scientific inquiries, but through that, humanity has accomplished so much.

Mathematics and science are by far my favorite subject areas, and I plan on going into a field that will require a college education. When I first arrived at Hall-Dale, I had only completed coursework up through Algebra I. Continuing on this limited path, I would have graduated with only Pre-Calculus on my record. Since Hall-Dale allows for individual pacing, I was able to double up on mathematics—Algebra II and Geometry—in my first semester and move on to an advanced math class second semester to allow me to do some Pre-Calculus work and explore Physics and Engineering.

This year, I doubled up on math again, and I'm on track to finish Pre-Calc and AP Statistics by the end of this school year. As a result, I'm able to take the SAT earlier than most of my peers, which will allow me to apply for some science and math summer programs at MIT through JHU ([link](#)) and WPI ([link](#)). These programs have all kinds of different fields of science in them. Although I am more into physical sciences and space sciences, I can get my hands wet with all different types of sciences through these programs. This will look great on my resume and will help me gain acceptance into my preferred science and math colleges when I get older.

For my future at Hall-Dale, I foresee being able to take an advanced college math course my senior year, something like Calc II. This will allow me to get college credit for free. Taking this class will also look good for when I apply for college. I believe that I will have up to AP Physics II completed for my science classes by the time I receive my high school diploma.

All of this will be possible because of Hall-Dale's student-centered learning curriculum. This system has impacted me in more ways than just academics; it has allowed me to think outside of the box more often, since sometimes we have to come up with projects for ourselves to get a higher grade. It has also shown me that I am able to accomplish pretty much anything that I want as long as I try my hardest and find ways to make the work more relevant to my own interests. This system has worked well for me, and I believe will work well for most everyone else.

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BRYCE BRAGDON

Bryce Bragdon is a 16-year-old sophomore at Hall-Dale High School in Windsor, Maine. He began his learner-centered journey his freshman year. His passion is in Mathematics, Science, and Music. He is currently at the top of his class in GPA and is on track to finish all of the maths offered at Hall-Dale by the end of his junior year and plans to complete his science courses up through AP Physics II. He credits his achievements in math and science to his learner-centered school system and believes that learner-centered learning is a good opportunity/program for most learners.



Fresh Grade

A reimagined way of assessing learner outcomes is paramount to the transformation of the education system. For any of the work in learner-centered environments to be proven effective, qualitative and quantitative data must be effectively communicated to all stakeholders. Fortunately, we have the technology today that learner-centered pioneers from decades ago did not have the privilege to deploy. The more learners take ownership of their learning, the more nuanced the assessment of learning becomes. Enter **Fresh Grade** ([link](#)). A tool in use by some environments we've profiled in the past, Fresh Grade provides a "research-backed portfolio platform" that connects educators, learners, and their parents. This allows everyone to be accountable for the role they play in the child's learning. Learner progress can be tracked over time, and the data points are customizable to each learner. Fresh Grade's platform is designed to work on the educator level all that way up to the district level, so the entire ecosystem can be in sync.

Reaching the Tipping Point

Chris Sturgis from *CompetencyWorks* has been sharing insights from her report **Reaching the Tipping Point** ([link](#)) on the *CompetencyWorks* blog for some time, and we wanted to make sure you knew where you can find all of her work in one place. After months of traveling throughout the New England region, touring a wide variety of learning environments, and interviewing education leaders from urban and rural areas, her report shares key insights on how states are accelerating and advocating the implementation of competency-based education. As Chris describes in her introduction, "educators turn to competency education when they realize the traditional system isn't working for many students—and is never going to work for all students." Leaders across the Northeast are no longer accepting the status quo. Explore their stories and discover what strategies might be a good fit for your community!

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.

SXSWEDU 2017

Austin, TX

March 6-9

[Education Reimagined Summit & Cocktail Party](#)

TRANSFORMSC SPRING CONFERENCE

Greenville, SC

March 13

[Conference Website](#)

EDUCATION ELEMENTS PERSONALIZED LEARNING SUMMIT 2017

San Francisco, CA

May 10-12

[Conference Website](#)

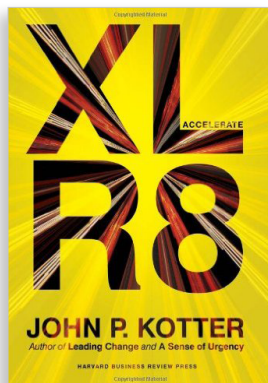
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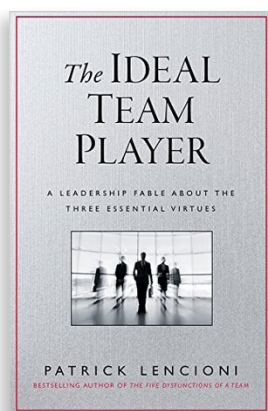
is hiring for three dynamic, diverse team members! We're seeking an **Associate Director of National Outreach & Community Building**; a **Web & Social Media Manager**; and a **Personal Assistant**.

[Learn more here!](#)

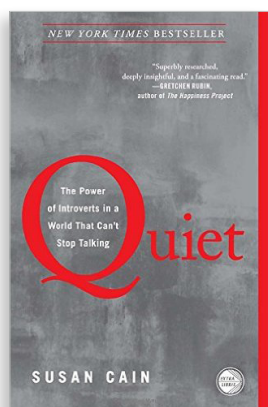
B4KIDS is seeking a founding **Head of School** for their 2017/18 academic year! [Apply here](#)

**Accelerate: Building Strategic Agility for a Faster-Moving World** by John P. Kotter

When an idea arises ready to cause disruption, there are often too many barriers in place for it to become the new norm. John P. Kotter, world-renowned expert on leadership, saw this happening again and again in corporations. He noticed hierarchies built for old, predictable futures—unable to adjust to today's unpredictable world. To help leaders buck the trend, he wrote *Accelerate: Building Strategic Agility for a Faster-Moving World*. In it, he explores what it looks like to transform a single operating system into a dual operating system that keeps the original goals in place but allows for greater adaptability to the strategies invoked.

**The Ideal Team Player: How to Recognize and Cultivate The Three Essential Virtues** by Patrick Lencioni

When leading a group of coworkers, learners, or even an entire community, your work can only go as far as the role you decide to play. In Patrick Lencioni's *The Ideal Team Player: How to Recognize and Cultivate The Three Essential Virtues*, he creates a fictional story to express the various ways his nonfictional framework and tools can be translated to your personal and team development. Discover how you might use his tools to “create a cultural commitment to teamwork.”

**Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking** by Susan Cain

There is much to gain from outcome-driven sessions of collaboration with your team. But, solely relying on this practice to produce innovative output could be holding you and your learners back. Have you ever noticed an imbalance in participation when you have these sessions? And, when everyone is participating, who's asking questions versus who's offering ideas? Who's the introvert, and who's the extrovert? In Susan Cain's *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*, she asks you to question whether your culture with coworkers and with learners is maximizing the potential of all personality types.

WORTH YOUR TIME

A New Federal Role for Competency Education

Few to no barriers exist at the federal level when it comes to implementing competency-based learning. How might national policymakers support state and local governments in stepping toward this type of learning? [Read here](#)

VIDEO: Proficiency in Education—Part One

Maine is pushing the envelope in transforming their education system by establishing a new way of measuring learner performance. Discover their guiding principles and why each environment has the freedom to define how they apply them.

[Watch here](#)

What Works Can Hurt: Side Effects in Education

There are many aspects of our lives where we go to make a purchase and are informed of the possible side-effects of the product. This, by law, is a fact in the pharmaceutical and food industries. Why do we treat education differently?

[Read here](#)

“You are always a student,
never a master. You have
to keep moving forward.”
— **CONRAD HALL**

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