pioneering

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education
reimagined

Dear Pioneers,

I am excited to wish Education Reimagined a happy birthday! It was just over two years ago (September 29th) that the vision was released and a community of learner-centered pioneers began to blossom. We are inspired by how much the community has grown since the original 28 education leaders signed and released the vision. We are now more sure than ever that together we can make learner-centered education a reality for the country.

A birthday is always a good time to reflect on what you are grateful for, acknowledge what has been accomplished so far, and recalibrate what your future ambitions hold.

We are so grateful for the opportunity to give our lives to such a worthwhile vision and be in partnership with the most courageous and enlivening people we know—all of you. We are grateful for the inspiring leadership of the young leaders in Spark-House, the bold vision and fearless leadership of those in Pioneer Lab, and the foresight and continued leadership of our Advisory Board and national players.

We have put a great deal of focus and intention into growing each of these communities. And, we will continue to do so because our collective effort is the only thing that will make the national shift to learner-centered education inevitable and irreversible. There is no quick fix or silver bullet.

Collectively, members of the community are building communities of practice and supporting educators; advancing learner-centered models; and creating new systems that support those models. They are also changing the conditions in which learner-centered environments exist—shifting the public narrative and creating demand (like **Sam Chaltain** and **Todd Rose**); removing policy barriers to innovation (like **KnowledgeWorks, Education Evolving,** and **iNACOL**); and ensuring the learner-centered ecosystem has the needed financial support (like Nellie Mae, Jaquelin Hume Foundation, Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, and Bush Foundation).

On this birthday, we are more present than ever to the unprecedented opportunity learner-centered pioneers have to collectively ensure this is not another flash in the pan but that it is a shift that endures and transforms the lives of kids everywhere.

Warm wishes,
Kelly Young

P.S. Don't miss **the three sessions,** including the closing keynote, we'll be hosting at iNACOL Symposium 2017.

SPRINGFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS
SPRINGFIELD, MO

> "We listen to the needs of our learners and community; designing solutions and delivering educational experiences that prepare our learners for their futures"

—DR. JOHN JUNGMANN, SUPERINTENDENT

GO BIG OR GO HOME. That's the driving mentality underlying the learner-centered transformation happening in Springfield, Missouri. Dr. John Jungmann, Springfield Public Schools' superintendent, is currently leading his third district in reimagining what it means to educate our youth.

Every educator at SPS is challenged to go toe-to-toe with the rational fears that crop up when any change conversation takes the stage. Those fears are even more present when that change challenges everything you've been taught and trained in your entire career. But, by providing the appropriate professional development and peer support, SPS leaders are able to break through their fears and create a culture built on **personalized, relevant, and contextualized** content for every learner.

This core philosophy opens up the door, literally, for deep engagement within the community. Learners at SPS are guided by their educators to explore their interests and passions, which are tracked on individual IGNiTE Plans. These plans allow learners to identify the "must-dos" and "may-dos" of their daily learning. The "must-dos" equate to foundational learning that SPS believes every learner should engage in to be successful today and tomorrow. The "may-dos" allow learners to dive into work that fits their specific interests, which will change or deepen over the course of their academic journeys.

To enhance this "may-do" philosophy, SPS partners with local business and industry to provide learners **open-walled** opportunities that are naturally **socially embedded.** These experiences are transformative for learners and educators alike. When a learner begins the day at SPS, exploring core subject matter like English and biology, she can apply this **knowledge** in the afternoon at the local health clinic. In the process, she develops industry-specific and transferable **skills** and positive **dispositions** toward learning that are hard to come by in a traditional setting.

These community partnerships aren't only a narrow exchange between young learners and community members. SPS educators are also engaged in this work. Through a summer externship program, SPS educators pair up with industry professionals who perform work related to their core role at SPS. Through this experience, educators develop brand new lenses for how they can make learning much more relevant for their learners. For many, it's the first time in their professional careers that they have experienced the real-world application of information they've passed along to learners for so many years.

As the largest district in Missouri, SPS has the unique opportunity to make an immutable impact on how the entire state approaches education in years to come. And, with their "go big or go home" philosophy, that kind of impact would fit in just fine.

LEARN MORE

Portrait of a Graduate

GO CAPS

How Community Voice Can Drive Change in Schools

FACTS & FIGURES

Public

Ages 5-18

Celebrating 150 years of educating learners (1867-2017)

25,000 learners (largest public school district in Missouri)

54.4% free and reduced lunch

Only Missouri school district to offer a K-12 International Baccalaureate program

Fourth largest employer in Springfield

87.8% four-year graduation rate

Half of SPS learners participate in summer learning opportunities

CONNECT

Website
Springfield Public Schools

Social Media
Facebook
Twitter

A Conversation with Dr. John Jungmann

DR. JOHN JUNGMANN

Q. What paths led you to your superintendency at Springfield Public Schools?

A. Born in Missouri, I went through my entire educational experience in Lamar, Missouri. As the youngest of six kids, I was the first in my family to go to college. I often reflect on the great educators who shaped my path and gave me the passion to give back through education, which resulted in my now 20 years of service in public education in Missouri.

I went to college at Missouri Southern in Joplin and received a degree in teaching high school English. My plan was to teach and coach my entire career, but I was encouraged by my administrators to pursue my administrative degree. Low and behold, a few years later, I became the Assistant Principal at a small district in Monett, MO, which led me to becoming a middle school principal and, ultimately, the district's superintendent six years later.

Spending a decade in administrative positions within that district really shaped my thinking. As a district with a high ELL population, we had opportunities to take risks on behalf of the kids. I eventually moved to Liberty (a suburb of Kansas City) to work as the Deputy Superintendent, until I was promoted to the superintendency just one year later. I thought I would be there for the long-term, but then I had the opportunity to come back closer to home and serve the largest district in the state in Springfield, MO. I've been the Superintendent here for four years now.

Q. Although your career path perfectly aligns with the traditional track many educators pursue, you mentioned the unique opportunity you experienced in working with a high ELL population in Monett. What about this experience reshaped how you viewed education?

A. I've experienced two of those "epiphany" moments. One, as you said, occurred in Monett. While there, I saw learners who were passionate about growth, and parents who wanted to support them but just didn't know how. Our system was forced to take significant risks to reach out to these kids and break through the traditional mold because we didn't think they were going to grow to the level they needed to within the traditional system. That allowed us to integrate technology and experiment with different learning environments early on in Monett.

The second place I experienced growth in my perspective was in Liberty. That experience was completely different. The free and reduced lunch rate was significantly lower, the socio-economic status of the community was much higher, and there were many fewer ELL learners. But, as I walked through the district, I noticed the same challenge—the system was not stretching and growing some of our most gifted learners. We needed to find a way to increase engagement and relevance in the classroom on a daily basis if we really wanted to help these learners develop a passion for learning.

I often use the Gallup data **(link)**, which reflect the year-over-year decline in engagement that occurs as a child moves through the system. I witnessed that phenomenon

in a few different settings, and I wanted to do better. I knew educators wanted to do better, too. They just want the opportunity to do so. I think we provide that opportunity by giving flexibility and resources to think differently about how they serve their kids.

Q. We know SPS is seeking to increase engagement through your "Modern Tool Deployment" strategy. Can you share about this strategy for our readers?

A. The idea of a Modern Tool Deployment came out of our conversations at Springfield. I've been involved in deploying one-to-one integration systems at each district I've worked in. In Monett, we started with it at the high school level. In Liberty and Springfield, we did full deployment for grades 3-12. The point of this Modern Tool Deployment (MTD) was to move beyond this one-to-one deployment conversation of a single device. It's so much more than that. It should encompass all modern tools and resources. In Springfield, it means we provide each K-12 classroom with iPad Mini 2 tablets and access to a cart of 30 Chromebooks that are shared between classrooms. Students in grade 3-12 each receive a HP Chromebook 11 for their use throughout the school year.

What does it look like to give teachers and kids access to information and resources in a way that is relevant to the world that they're living in? Of course, that is going to look different five years from now, so we will look at the MTD, refresh it, and think differently about what tools are necessary. Right now, our MTD focuses on equity of access. We have a program where we have deployed around 15,000 Kajeet hotspots within our system for those students who can't access the internet at home. So, we ensure the modern tool they receive at school doesn't become a barrier at home. If you give a student a tool, like a tablet, but they have no access to the information (i.e. the internet), this has become a barrier.

This is just a district commitment. We all have limited budgets, and we decide how to spend those dollars. We went back and reviewed our resource—materials, curriculum, and technology—budget. We thought strategically about how we were going to do that in the future, and we've repurposed dollars with an equity lens to accomplish what we need to do. We need to make sure we're taking care of all kids in an equitable way.

Q. Through these shifts in budget priorities, what changes are you seeing?

A. First and foremost, we are very cognizant of keeping our educators—they are our number one resource. So, even through this shift in resources, we've made no attempt to reduce staff. We believe relationship is the core to education, and it always happens between a teacher and a student. How they do that and where they do that is where there's flexibility, but that is the one investment I haven't seen change, and I hope to have it stay that way.

The places where we do have flexibility is in the resources that we buy and use and the cycles that we use for curriculum. We've started to rethink how we buy the resources and how long we're willing to commit to them. We ask how much feedback the resource is providing—is it one-way or two-way feedback? We ask how fresh and current they will remain over the life of our relationship with that resource. Those are big deciding factors. Big budget dollars haven't really increased or decreased, but we are certainly spending them in different ways around modern tools and resources that do different things for our kids than the old resource buys we used to make.

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Q. When environments make the choice to pursue transformative work, we often see that they either have a staff who is all in on experimenting with new ideas from the beginning or they experience significant staff turnover. What have you experienced?

A. Anytime you're asking a system—and the people in it—to reflect and think about new practices and ways to improve, that's going to result in a "change" conversation. That will then result in fear, and that fear is going to create pushback. Sometimes that isn't because people don't want to change, they just don't know how to.

We try to reframe the conversation by providing resources to help them overcome their fear and build the confidence to be successful. I wouldn't be honest if I didn't tell you there is always some pushback. But, the system can do things to quell those fears and overcome them in time.

Q: What is the biggest fear you see?

A. For both parents and educators, the biggest fear, if you go down to the basic class-room environment, is losing control. When they see a modern learning environment where voice and choice are a central component and students have the ability to control some of their learning, that's not how our educators were trained in the traditional system or how our parents experienced their own education. So, they're not sure how to do that successfully and wonder if it will result in great learning for their kids. We have to help them with developing those skills and recognizing what it looks like in a classroom to gradually release students to have their own agency and be the learners we want them to be.

Q: What does the structure of your internal professional development look like, and what external resources have you found fruitful in smoothing out the transition?

A. We always try to start with the why. We talk about why we are having this conversation about the necessity for change and rethinking what the classroom experience should look like. First, we try to educate and bring people to the table to have a conversation. At Springfield, we started with our Envisioning Excellence Committee of community leaders, teachers, students, and board members to talk about where we are today and what we envision for tomorrow.

That led us to our new strategic plan. That plan is what guides our everyday work. Our biggest shift was moving away from an outcome-metric type of plan to preparing all of our students for tomorrow. We do that by providing an engaging, relevant, and personal educational experience. We try to also shape that experience into the professional learning for our team.

When you look at our tagline, we say "every learner" very strategically because we don't think it's every student. We think it's every staff and community member, too. When they engage with SPS, we want their experience to be engaging, relevant, and personal every day.

Our PD system is built on some voice and choice options. Through our "appy hour" construct, we have leaders at the site level who we give the freedom to make their decisions based on the needs of their individual sites and then provide district resources to help support their growth based on exactly where they are.

We try to provide them with data to make good decisions, as well. There are many different data points we provide, like the BrightBytes data on integration, of what's going on at the

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site level, as well as feedback data from community members. We're about to provide them direct student feedback data regarding the culture of the classroom. All of this allows educators to have data in their hands, so the conversation is being brought to them. And, with this available to them, now they can ask, "What should I do in order to impact the learning environment?"

In summary, we try to make the learning environment we provide our teachers reflect the learning environment we want for our kids.

Q: How do you think about empowering learner voice at Springfield Public Schools?

A. That's always a delicate balance. When do you turn agency over to them? We believe the sooner, the better. When we say engaging, relevant, and personal, we have specific definitions for those:

- **Engaging:** Learning experiences that are irresistible due to connection with student interest. All students experience a culture of inquiry and instructional choice and are encouraged to value learning above the letter grade.

- **Relevant:** Learning experiences that challenge all students to exhibit the ability to solve real-world problems for authentic audiences and connect learning to their own life and the world around them.

- **Personal:** Learning experiences founded in relationships that connect educators with students to set goals and monitor progress. All students are inspired to maximize their potential, while receiving appropriate levels of support. Flexibility exists in pace, place, and path of learning.

One of our concrete strategies in making this possible is requesting our teachers to think about "must-dos" and "may-dos" for their students. We understand there are things that have to be part of the learning environment—things we have to cover (must-dos). We also want them to have choice (may-dos). If you were to walk into many of our classrooms, you'll notice there are charts up for each student that show what they need to get done but also where they have flexibility to pursue something that is within their scope of interest or can be delivered in a non-traditional way.

We also built up a significant online system at the secondary level that allows kids to think differently about how and when they learn. This has multiplied the amount of engagement we see because they have choice in how they capture their learning.

In addition, we have other opportunites that seek to broaden kids' understanding of what's out there in the world that could spark their interest. A lot of our system is designed around starting with that exposure moment. We have a significant number of under-resourced students that don't know what's out there. Until they do, they may not know what their interests could be.

Q: What is your favorite story to share about a Springfield learner?

A. One of our favorite stories to highlight is about a former dropout of ours named Nicki. The system wasn't meeting her needs, so she had dropped out. This was a much too common story, so we decided to develop a dropout reengagement system. We constructed a team to review the dropout list and passionately pursue getting these kids reengaged in the educational experience on whatever front was necessary to get them there.

We believe in that personalization definition—flexibility must exist in pace, place, and path of learning. Nicki reengaged, made it through, and received her diploma this summer.

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These are the examples of kids who are just falling through the cracks of the traditional system. There are so many kids that are just a credit or two short of graduating, and the system didn't capture them when they started to slip. So, we have this reengagement process that just saw two more kids receive diplomas right in my office as they caught up on their learning through online coursework.

Q: Springfield is developing a strong relationship between the physical learning environment and the community at-large. What does open-walled learning look like at SPS?

A. Our GO CAPS (Greater Ozarks Centers for Advanced Professional Studies) program is a great example of our kids leaving the classroom and branching out into business and industry environments. They always come back and tell us those are the most relevant learning environments they have ever experienced at the secondary level and that they helped shape their future. It's really about helping them get energized around learning and drawing a connection to something that makes learning more relevant.

I can think back to a story of when I sat down with a student, and he talked about how the CAPS program he participated in made his classes feel relevant for the first time. Now he understands the need for math and science because of the engineering experience he encounters on a daily basis. We hear these stories over and over again from students and their parents. It improves their attendance, increases their passion, and gives them a sense of direction. That's something we struggle with providing as educators.

I'm a perfect example. As an English teacher who went straight from high school through the traditional college route, I didn't have much time to create a lot of relevance to help make that come alive for kids. That's what our passion is—to expose educators to activities that will help draw relevance back into the classroom. We started a teacher externship program where we put 70 teachers into one-week externships with business and industry professionals. Those teachers who go out and have these experiences tell us they will never teach the same way because they've learned something about how to connect content to the world outside of school.

The connection we have with our community is the number one asset we have. It differentiates us, and we have to learn how to take advantage of it. We redesigned our leadership around that belief. We have an Executive Director of Learning Support and Partnerships and an Executive Director of Innovation and Information. Between those two teams, they do significant work to go out and discover different ways to meet our kids' needs and use our community resources in ways we've never tapped before.

When we allow educators and community members to connect and collaborate, we can do awesome things. But, what inhibits us the most is our own history and unwillingness to take a risk. When we get over that, there are great accomplishments to be had.

Q: How has the business community reacted to the connections SPS has made?

A. That's the fun part. We think there's a saturation point somewhere, but we're far from getting there. The more we have engaged, the more people come to the table saying, "Hey, I could do something." Before, those in the business community never thought a small business with two or three employees had anything to give. They previously thought these types of partnerships were only for the big players, and that's far from the truth.

When those adults are working at the accounting firm, engineering site, or manufacturing plant and they get to engage with kids who are inquisitive, that adds a layer of purpose for their jobs. The businesses tell us that's one of the things they can't quantify, but it does re-

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sult in a value add to their culture and systems. We think that's the key to moving this kind of work forward. They have to see a return on their investment. If they're going to give us their time and opportunity to engage at the site—interrupting their workflow—there better be a value proposition. The giving back, contributions, smiles, and the engagement is what I think brings the most value.

Q: We normally wrap up our conversations with a question about the future, but for leaders who are often answering the same questions from parents, community leaders, education leaders, and the like, there is one question they don't often hear. What is a question that nobody asks you that you wish was asked more often?

A. We have a lot of conversations about "why," but one thing we fail to dialogue about is what happens if we don't? I don't think we have enough conversations about the consequences of us remaining static. That is what keeps me up at night. I want to make these changes for all the right reasons—for kids, obviously—but what's driving me and our system to have real conversations about this are these consequences. If we don't change, what are the consequences? If we don't have the courage to take more risks and be more flexible in our approach to meeting the needs of our kids then what I value the most in public education—the kids—is at risk. I don't think we ask ourselves enough, what if we don't have the courage to move?

Dr. John Jungmann became superintendent of Missouri's largest school district in 2014. Since then, he has worked to define a path to move Springfield Public Schools forward on its journey to excellence and, as a result, equip all of its 25,000 learners to be successful in their future pursuits.

Innovative initiatives he has launched during that time include the IGNiTE technology initiative and Greater Ozarks Center for Advanced Professional Studies. In 2016, he was named Missouri Superintendent of the Year.

How Educators Might Partner (and Pitch) Community Businesses

by Patty Alper

PATTY ALPER

Patty Alper, author of Teach to Work, *is collaborating with Education Reimagined to produce a series of articles that connects learner-centered educators with the perspectives and insights of the business community. In her second article,* How Educators Might Partner (and Pitch) Community Businesses, *Alper provides a framework for educators to gather motivated team members and cultivate community partnerships that provide value for everyone involved.*

In my **article** published last month, we looked at the phenomenal pace of change happening in the workplace—how we all are impacted by technology, culture, and environmental influences. A series of pressing questions followed: How do we best prepare youth for the jobs of tomorrow? Whose responsibility is it to close the skills gap? Can there be a partnership between the academic and business sectors? And, what would that look like?

We are embarking on a big idea here—bridging two sectors, **education and business,** in a new way—for the benefit of our youth. More specifically, this article will explore putting these two sectors together through a program introduced in my last article: *Project Based Mentorship* ®. This means of fostering a partnership between businesses and educators can benefit overall economic development, better train our workforce, and better prepare youth for 21st century jobs.

But, before we realize the benefits, the bridge has to be built. And, both sectors need to be proactive in its construction. Although this series focuses on the educator, I also encourage business leaders to reflect where they fit within this discussion.

So, how would an educator begin to develop relationships with local businesses? In this article, I will be sharing some suggested practical and doable first steps to do so.

IDENTIFY INTERNAL RESOURCES

One of the first things to identify is where a *Project Based Mentorship*® program best fits within your model. Perhaps you're already testing project-based learning and need heightened focus and direction within its design. Or, maybe you want to enhance the way your students interact with the community and want to put this program to the test. Find and sit down with your fellow educators who want to be

part of your pilot mentor program and who intend to work with students in finding projects that fit their interests.

You will also want to identify who can act as your mentorship coordinator and community liaison. Resources aside, your team of educators needs to determine who has the inclination, public relations, language, and sales skills to serve in this position. You may consider people who already represent your school in the community at-large or who are members of and have relationships with various organization and business leadership boards throughout the community.

SET YOUR TARGETS

Once you have identified the internal resources that will drive this work forward, it's time to build out a Target List. Start by assembling a list of industry leaders whose business services and employee skillsets relate to the interests expressed by your students. Prior to reaching out to the corporation, visit their website and understand that your extensive research can go a long way when courting a company. Here are some questions worth asking yourself:

- What is the corporation's posture in the community and proclivity for engagement and giving?
- Does your school have a relationship with your city's economic development department?
- Does your state have an active labor secretary?
- Does your school board know business leaders in the community?

These entities can best provide information regarding which companies are moving to town, have won new contracts, or are philanthropically active.

Now that you have your Target List, it's time to identify the Target Positions and Departments you want to deliver your initial correspondence to. In my experience, you are best off starting conversations with a senior manager of corporate social responsibility, the chief executive officer, the director of human resources, or possibly the director of public relations.

You have the target businesses, you have the target people, and now you need to deliver a Target Invitation. The same way a political candidate does a listening tour with town hall meetings, I suggest hosting a series of small breakfasts on your campus where you invite 6-8 business people to conduct your own listening tour. There are many names it could go by: The Principal's (or Dean's or President's) Community Roundtable. Or you could steal my book title, with my blessing, and call it the Teach to Work Roundtable Breakfast. (I would wholeheartedly suggest to have a book accompany an invitation or be a breakfast giveaway as they depart!)

The purpose of your breakfast should be stated in your invitation. Here is a simple template to guide your drafting of the invitation:

> **"We all live together in this community. As educators, we want to learn more about your employment needs. We want to begin a series of conversations to better understand where the industry is going and how technology is impacting you. We want to think about ways we can better prepare our students to meet your needs. And, we cannot do this without better understanding you."**

What business leader could say "no" to that invitation?

> " How can we tap into the treasure trove of knowledge just outside our school walls and harness it effectively and efficiently?"
>
> **PATTY ALPER**

For your gathering, I suggest preparing a conversational list of thoughtful questions that can be sent in advance, such as:

- When you are hiring, what are the most important characteristics a future employee can exemplify?

- If you had to suggest three priorities for educators to better prepare youth for employment, what would you offer?

- What kinds of technologies are you currently using? Are you envisioning some of those changing in your future? If so, please describe.

- What obstacles do you most often experience with new hires? What preparation would you like to see that would overcome that?

- Can you help us to understand how soft skills and hard skills apply to your culture? Can you share two examples?

- What can we do to prepare students for tomorrow's jobs?

With these questions guiding the conversation, you'll be better able to pitch your request for the businesses to team up with your students and provide mentors. Toward the end of the meeting, your goal is to learn more about what the company would be willing to do:

- Would you be willing to work with us on developing a new mentorship model, where you and your key employees would have a role in education?

- Would you be willing to underwrite this *Project Based Mentorship®* experience? Your funds would go toward experiential learning, administering the mentoring program, field trips, research, and bringing learning to life for our students. (optional)

- Most importantly, we think your knowledge, skills, and support would be a wonderful addition in student preparation. This role would be adjunct, defined, and project-based and would work around your schedule of availability. Your participation will make a huge difference in our students' motivation and in their work-readiness.

Remember, all of the steps laid out above are setting up the opportunity for you to listen. Indeed, anyone in sales, development, or marketing understands the importance of this fundamental first step. Whether you are a business person who seeks a better understanding of your consumer, an advertiser who assembles a focus group to understand procurement trends, a political candidate who gauges their message by audience polling, or even someone engaged in an avid courtship toward a new romantic interest. The first rule of thumb for success is always, always, always: **Know and Understand Your Audience.**

As in business, it is incumbent upon schools to know your audience—and with regard to this mentorship initiative, your target audience is your neighboring business community. If you'll recall in my first article, we examined the pace of change in work culture and the growing need to partner with businesses to better prepare youth for 21st century jobs. I cited examples of how SAP and Accenture have worked closely with both non-profits and educators to help teach new skills.

As you embark on creating your new relationships with potential mentors, you (and your breakfast guests) can gain insights as to why other big Fortune 500 companies are dedicating vast resources, finances, and employee time to mentoring youth. Consider the numerous reasons corporations engage in these mentorship opportunities.

> " What can we do to prepare students for tomorrow's jobs?"
>
> **PATTY ALPER**

EXPLORING THE WAR STORIES OF CORPORATE MENTORING

I am continually astounded at the myriad reasons companies give for their participation in mentoring programs. I encourage you to look into the logic behind other companies' corporate social responsibility decisions. I like to call them War Stories. In your conversational dialogue, being able to cite what other companies are doing makes you a student of their world. And, companies always like to hear what peer companies are doing and why.

I welcome you to use my research. In both my book and subsequent newsletters, I have interviewed corporate social responsibility officers from a wide variety of businesses including companies rooted in manufacturing, consulting, media, finance, pharmaceuticals, and technology. Some notes from my Pfizer case study are available **here,** and several of my other corporate studies are detailed in my book. I have continued to interview corporations and schools post-publication, and you can see those reports on my **blog page.** The following is a snapshot of reasons why corporations engage in mentoring:

Pipeline: One of the biggest business concerns today is the skills gap. Companies are not finding job applicants with the skills they seek. Through active mentorship, internship, and apprenticeship programs, companies are able to proactively train their future pipeline of employees.

Moreover, as Gallup reported in its **"Great Jobs, Great Lives"** study, students were twice as likely to be engaged in their work and internalize a sense of well-being later in life if they had several career experiences while in school.

Hiring Advantage and Culture: In this day and age, Millennials—and others—seek out companies that have a social imprint, care about community, and have active programs that involve employees. By having an active corporate social responsibility program, an applicant is more likely to select a company over another that does not engage in civic-minded activities. In addition, mentorship programs, more so than random charitable endeavors, can further a corporation's culture, morale, and corporate purpose.

> **"Employees want to be part of something that is bigger than a company. The business culture is internally based, but the philanthropy is external. That volunteer ethos provides something more than a quarterly return on earnings . . . it stretches employees beyond their day-to-day job."**
> **— Rick Luftglass, former Senior Director of Corporate Philanthropy and Commmunity Engagement, Pfizer, Inc.**

Loyalty: Companies find that when they give employees an opportunity to give back, they are giving the employees a new experience—one they may not have had of their own accord. These employee volunteers are acting as ambassadors for their company. Mentorship makes them feel valued and important and provides opportunities to socialize with other mentors at the corporation. Cumulatively, this results in less turnover because there is an increased sense of happiness and loyalty between the employee and the company.

Leadership Training: Employees who become mentors also grow during the mentorship experience. As Susan Warner, Vice President of Worldwide Communications at MasterCard, says, "Leveraging the unique skill sets of our employees and allowing them to bring their whole self to a volunteer experience has proven to be a win-win for all." Employees find themselves being viewed as their company's expert; they are

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> **PATTY ALPER**

valued in this intergenerational relationship; and through speaking to small groups of youth, employees build confidence that transfers to their corporate journey. Companies report that these mentorship roles develop new leadership skills, jumpstart a young professional's understanding of their own impact on the next generation, and offer a new sense of responsibility to all participants.

Integrated Employees: Companies report that having robust volunteer programs introduce another dimension to company life, bringing a broader sense of purpose to the different layers of the organization. New collaborations form when working in the program, whereby an entry-level staffer and a vice president might be paired to come to a school together, forming a unique bond. Interestingly, employees who queue up for the volunteer roles report feeling happier and more satisfied with their jobs. Teamwork often improves as a result of volunteer programs, and more fulfilled employees exhibit better job performance. Higher morale, improved employee productivity, and overall better employee retention result.

Community Relations: Mentorship programs make it clear that a corporation cares. The goodwill trickles throughout the community, from youth and their families, to a business district, to local political arenas. A new face on the corporate landscape paves a road to better relationships as the mentorship effort publicly states, "We want to help our community." A culture shift unfolds as employees share stories about their own community efforts, and quite frankly, these often supersede the stories about a corporation's products or services.

Sales: Not to be missed, corporations will also reap financial benefits. For all the reasons above, employees are happier and more motivated, and that attitude can be sensed by customers and clients. Moreover, as news of the company's mentorship efforts make waves in the community, customers become more aware of and loyal to the company's brand.

GET YOUR DUCKS IN A ROW

As I have emphasized above, before courting any companies, it is wise to get your ducks in a row. What will a mentoring experience be like for them? I have found companies value mentorship opportunities that have structure, rigor, and training. Your preparation for your breakfasts will demonstrate how easy it will be for a corporation to plug in. Therefore, you will ideally already have a key point person throughout their experience, a mentoring game plan, bios of your teachers, and a list of areas of expertise that would be ideal for your mentorship program.

How can we tap into the treasure trove of knowledge just outside our school walls and harness it effectively and efficiently? I urge educators to think about it from the mentor's point of view. From the moment he or she sets foot on your campus, they should meet your school liaison and begin forming a relationship with your designated partnering educator. Their experience should feel orchestrated and organized. The more you can define the mentor's job description and expectations, the more comfortable they will feel. My experience suggests that these opportunities also work best if the mentor is trained and there is a clear understanding between the educator and mentor about how the *Project Based Mentorship*® tasks will be organized. Of course, the beauty of this concept is it fits squarely in a mentor's wheelhouse of knowledge.

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START SMALL, START EARLY

I suggest starting small and early. Make the commitment minimal: perhaps a few hours a month.

Then, plan backwards. Create a calendar with benchmark dates, such as the following:

April: Spring Cultivation Breakfasts

May through July: One-on-One Meetings

August: Training

September: Fall Semester Mentoring Begins

Finally, mentorship opportunities offer a win-win-win for the educator, the business, and the student. This new-fangled partnership (corporate mentors teaching skills to youth) will make enormous strides in closing the skills gap. Just by listening to business perspectives, educators will begin to learn more about the future of work, the inherent challenges employers face, the shifts brought about from technological change, and most importantly, employers newest hiring needs. This effort will begin to bridge a tenured divide between two sectors that have been traditionally siloed with seemingly divergent missions.

Ultimately, my objective, my vision in writing this article (and my book) is to help you take these first steps toward closing a dangerous and growing divide. Learning how to partner and pitch a business begins with a dyadic encounter—simply to ask and listen. This first gesture will help educators begin to understand the future of employment. What you do with that knowledge is the next step.

Patty Alper is president of the Alper Portfolio Group and is a board member of both the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE) and US2020—the White House initiative to build mentorship in STEM careers. She also serves on the corporate committee for Million Women Mentors. Patty's two decades of hands-on experience working with over 750 youth in eight schools has led her to create a Project Based Mentorship® model, bringing corporate employees to classrooms with the goal of passing on skills to the next generation.

Leadership Competencies for Learner-Centered, Personalized Education

Jobs for the Future and the Council of Chief State School Officers, in collaboration with 150 education leaders, have just published *Leadership Competencies for Learner-Centered, Personalized Education.* In this publication, authors Rebecca E. Wolfe and Sarah Hatton take a deep dive into the leadership competencies that must be developed to foster and advance a learner-centered environment. "The Leadership Competencies are primarily written for early adopter leaders in K-16 learning communities who are responsible for the learning outcomes of a group of students and the support and guidance of a group of educators." This publication presents a guiding framework for learner-centered leaders to build their leadership around the themes of Equity, Risk-Taking and Innovation, Continuous Improvement, Change Management, Learner-Centered Approaches, and Coherence and Alignment. There is a treasure trove of great insights, so don't delay!

Leadership Competencies for Learner-Centered, Personalized Education (link)

Fast Track Project

In 1991, the Fast Track Project **(link)** began. It is a longitudinal study to determine the common characteristics that inhibit the natural development of social-emotional growth in adolescents and has resulted in uninterrupted data collection on over 700 kids in four cities across the US since its launch. Included in the study was an intervention program created to course correct and accelerate this development throughout a child's time in school. The interventions included parent training groups, home visits, child social skills training, tutoring, child friendship enhancement, and individualized plans for older learners. Since the study began, there have been numerous publications produced by the project's researchers. The project has also resulted in the creation of three programs for educators to consider employing in their learning environment. If you're interested in exploring a set of research-backed tools to aid the development of social-emotional skills and dispositions in your learners, check out the links below.

Guidelines for Implementing Fast Track (3 Tools) (link)

PATHS Training (link)

Publications (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 SYMPOSIUM PERSONALIZING LEARNING: EQUITY, ACCESS, QUALITY
Orlando, FL
Oct 23-25
Conference Website

8TH ANNUAL NATIONAL CONVENING ON PERSONALIZED LEARNING
Milwaukee, WI
Oct 31-Nov 1
Conference Website

EDSURGE FUSION CONFERENCE
**Burlingame, CA**
Nov 1-3
Conference Website

OPPORTUNITY BOARD

Crosstown High, a brand new learner-centered environment set to open July 1st, 2018, is hiring for a variety of educator positions. Find out more and apply **here.**

Trailblazers, a learner-driven publication created by Spark-House participants from Mount Vernon Presbyterian School, is calling all learners to contribute their stories to its second issue. Learners, if you're interested, **email** Abigail Emerson.

**The Nellie Mae Education Foundation** has a series of requests for proposals open. Learn more **here.**
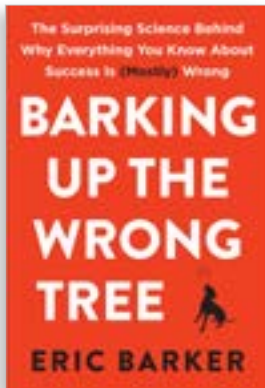
Barking Up the Wrong Tree: The Surprising Science Behind Why Everything You Know About Success is (Mostly) Wrong by Eric Barker

Self-help and personal development books are a dime a dozen and have been for many decades. Most preach vague advice from a lens of absolutism or relativism, neither of which hone in on real-world application. That's why blogger and author, Eric Barker, took it upon himself to write *Barking Up the Wrong Tree*. Barker's goal was to test the sage advice from self-help gurus through science-backed data. Wrapping it all up in entertaining anecdotes, Barker provides a new way to think about what it means to be successful.

How to Think: A Survival Guide for a World at Odds by Alan Jacobs

When experiencing life "in the moment," our assessment of the current situation can be exaggerated due to incomplete information and letting our imaginations run wild. We tend to tell ourselves we have collected all of the information necessary to draw reasonable solutions about whatever seems to be happening all around us. Alan Jacobs wanted to explore this behavior and whether or not it might be fruitful to reset our beliefs about our own reliability. In *How to Think,* Jacobs argues we aren't divisive on big issues like politics or religion simply because we carry different views of the world. Rather, we choose not to think—it's uncomfortable and makes us look into the unfamiliar—so we don't have to consider there might be multiple paths to the same destination.
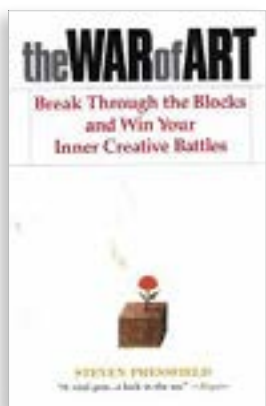
The War of Art: Break Through the Blocks and Win Your Inner Creative Battle by Steven Pressfield

Learner-centered pioneers are on a 24/7 cycle that demands creative solutions over and over again. This endless call to action results in creative blocks that can feel like there is nothing left to try. When the wall goes up, we often find ourselves addressing other to-dos to take our mind off the elephant in the room, what Steven Pressfield calls "The Resistance." In his book, *The War of Art,* he invites readers to look at every distraction that screams for attention when you are striving to produce creative work. And, how calling these distractions out by name can help you combat their negative impact on achieving your best work.

#thisis180
Last Thursday, a new film project was launched by Sam Chaltain encouraging our communities to reimagine the how and what in regard to the stories we share about transforming our future. Check out the first video in the series and follow #thisis180 **(link)** on Twitter for updates. **View here**

Why Are More American Teenagers Than Ever Suffering From Severe Anxiety?
What is driving the high correlation between online accessibility and the development of severe anxiety in our youth? In this featured story by *The New York Times,* explore why parents and educators are focusing more and more on social emotional development. **Read here**

Busting the Learning Boundary Between School and World

The learner-centered movement, among many other things, is striving to transform the belief that the "real world" and "school" must exist as separate entities. Discover more on that belief in this *EdWeek* article by the author of *Moving the Rock*, Grant Lichtman. **Read here**

"Every great and deep difficulty bears in itself its own solution. It forces us to change our thinking in order to find it." **—NIELS BOHR**