

# pioneering

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## A NOTE FROM EDUCATION REIMAGINED

Kelly Young, Executive Director

## FUTURE SCHOOL

Profile of their Learning Environment

A Conversation with Trish Flanagan

## INSIGHTS

iNACOL Symposium 2017: Culminating  
the Year of Learner Voice

## LEARNER VOICE

Lucky Me: The Unexpected Opportunity  
that Put My Town on the Map  
by Colby Mills

## TOOLS & RESOURCES

## UPCOMING EVENTS

## OPPORTUNITY BOARD

## ON OUR BOOKSHELF

## WORTH YOUR TIME

connect. share. discover. lead.

# pioneering

## Dear Pioneers,

At Education Reimagined, we constantly talk about the paradigm shift to learner-centered education—a type of shift that fundamentally changes how we see learners and learning. For those who have made this shift, it is self-evident that this is a paradigm shift. Everything about learning and education is changed even though nothing but our way of seeing has shifted.

In this new world, new questions and an insatiable curiosity begin to emerge. Nothing is taken for granted and we consistently ask ourselves, “am I doing this because that’s how it’s always been done and is labeled “best practice” in the dominant paradigm or, given my new view of learners and learning, is this what is best for learners?” With this new lens, we are able to distinguish whether our work is improving the current model of education or inventing a new one.

Why does this distinction matter? Isn’t most innovation worth doing if it is at least an improvement for the learners in that school? At Education Reimagined, we would say it depends on your goal.

If your goal is to create a school with better outcomes for most or all of the students in your community, reform is a path you can take. If your goal is to have a system that can reliably produce unheard of results for ALL learners nationwide, systemic transformation is the only path. The current model has shown it can’t produce knowledge transfer, let alone 21st century results, to ALL learners. According to Thomas Kuhn, when anomalies are seen as the norm by society at large, we find ourselves in a state of crisis, looking for something new to fill the void. That is when paradigm shifts happen.

We become more present to how common anomalies in the current paradigm are when we are able to point to an overwhelming body of evidence. Much of this evidence resides in the experiences of young learners who have experienced learning in traditional and learner-centered systems. A few weeks ago, our Associate Director, Ulcca Joshi Hansen joined five learners on stage at iNACOL Symposium 2017 to showcase this evidence to thousands of attendees. Check out that story and more in the latest issue of *Pioneering*.

Enjoy!

**Kelly Young**



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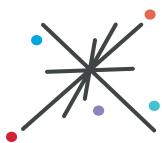
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**Connect. Share. Discover. Lead.**

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.





# Future School

FORT SMITH, AR

“Often, we underestimate young people, overlooking our greatest resource—our kids. Our goal is to develop a strategic system that champions student voice and equitable learning opportunities for all.”

— TRISH FLANAGAN, SUPERINTENDENT

**SINCE THE START OF SUBURBANIZATION**, once thriving urban centers have spent decades watching the resources and vibrant culture of their communities be stripped away. Such was the case in Fort Smith, Arkansas where population growth was less than two-percent from 1980 to 1990. But, today, younger generations are flocking back to these urban communities, and businesses are taking notice.

In 2015, Fort Smith came to a crossroads when a proposal to build a new high school out in the suburbs emerged. An unexpected coalition of business and community leaders spoke out against it. Having invested their time and money in revitalizing the urban center, these leaders recognized a strong learning network was an essential, still missing element in their push to elevate the downtown community to new heights. Rather than only speak against the proposal, this coalition sought out a leader who could convince city decision makers to invest in an urban education endeavor.

Trish Flanagan, founder, superintendent, and principal of Future School was that leader. She worked tirelessly to connect with the community and hold conversations with charter supporters and dissenters alike. After garnering enough support to submit their application to the Board of Education, Future School welcomed its first cohort of learners in the fall of 2016.

Operating within the Big Picture Learning framework, **open-walled** opportunities and community connections are fundamental. Future School leaders are building a robust system of support for learners to explore and learn out in the community, where real-world learning happens 24/7.

Kylee is harnessing the power of opinion by interning at the local paper and publishing her very own advice column. She is constantly receiving feedback that is **personalized, relevant, and contextualized**. Caleb ventures to a ranch in Oklahoma to get hands-on experience delivering newborn calves and mending fences. He is immersed in a **socially embedded** environment that demands clear communication among all of the ranch employees. Mykale has formed a partnership with a local graphic designer and is using those skills to help market Future School's mission. Each opportunity cultivates **learner agency** and shows youth they don't have to wait to explore their interests and make an impact in the world around them.

At Future School, everyone can show up as their whole, authentic selves. By acknowledging the unique life experiences of every learner, traditional labels (i.e. gifted, special ed, etc.) and the limitations that accompany them melt away. For all Future School learners, they are engaged, resourceful, and ready to tackle any challenge thrown their way.

## LEARN MORE

[Future School of Fort Smith Wraps Up First Year](#)

[A Look into the Future \[School\]](#)

## FACTS & FIGURES

**Public Charter**

**Opened Fall 2016**

**15-18 ages served**

**53% low-income learners served**

**45% minority learners served**

**87% of learners have completed a “real world” internship**

**55% of 11th grade learners currently enrolled in concurrent college classes**

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# A Conversation with Trish Flanagan

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TRISH FLANAGAN

## Q. How was your passion for education born?

**A.** My parents did a great thing for me when I was young. They brought me to volunteer in the inner city of St. Louis, MO. That's where my passion for this work emerged. I remember being in my car seat in the back of a station wagon with homeless men sitting on either side of me as we dropped them off at the homeless shelter. And, I remember becoming friends with some of the these folks' children and visiting their homes once they got out of the shelter. When I saw how different their neighborhood was from mine, as a little kid, I wondered, "Why the difference?" It didn't make sense to me. I've been obsessed with equity and the solutions to it because of those childhood experiences.

## Q. How did your childhood experiences guide your future endeavors?

**A.** In high school and college, I performed a lot of work in the social services (i.e. food banks, Big Brother Big Sister, etc.). As a sophomore in college, I headed to Limerick, Ireland to study abroad, but when I arrived, I became more interested in the traveling kids—homeless, transient youth—I was teaching than my actual classes.

Catholic Charities operated a working farm run by my students. While working there, they built wood products that were sold at a local shop in town and tended a farm whose produce was used by a local restaurant run by mentally handicapped children. The work-study program provided an opportunity for the kids to earn a few dollars per day through work and receive lessons from qualified educators. I wanted to dedicate my time with these kids, so I dropped my classes and focused on teaching them how to read.

This program made a lot of sense to me. It showed how you can have win-wins with marginalized kids and their families. They don't have to operate in isolation. In fact, they can be part of a fully integrated system of society, so the cycle of poverty can be eradicated.

Along the road, I didn't have a specific goal in mind. I was interested in studying people as part of my degree in anthropology at Northern Arizona University. After graduating, I moved to San Francisco and did social work for a couple of years. That's where I learned, if you want to break the cycle, you have to start with the kids. It's a logistical thing. Kids don't have debt yet; they don't have kids yet; they don't have mortgages or jobs. With kids, you have a very captivated audience. That stuck with me.

I wanted to see what the classroom was like because I thought: This is where kids have to be. I was running an after-school program. This meant I was trying to catch people as they were really just wanting to get home and cook dinner. I kept wondering, "What would happen if we had eight hours of these kids' time every day?"

With this thought still swimming in my mind, I ended up landing in Brownsville, Texas with Teach For America (TFA) for two years. I learned a ton about how to create a fo-

cused learning environment in what can sometimes seem like total chaos. After TFA, I wanted to see what the United States looked like from the outside.

I originally planned on traveling for a couple of months but found myself in the Caribbean for three years. One day, I woke up and realized I was working with some of the most marginalized and muted people in the world. I knew their voices needed to make it to the decision-making table, so I looked at grad school. This next step in my journey landed me in Arkansas.

While I attended the Clinton School of Public Service in Little Rock, the school suggested I go get my M.B.A. I had no prior business background, but once I got in there, it blew the doors wide open. I was introduced to many valuable business concepts that showed me how to scale a solution and focus on the impact and metrics that would be meaningful to everyone involved.

**Q. So many twists and turns to get you to Arkansas. What specifically led you to Fort Smith and to starting Future School?**

**A.** While at the Walton College of Business, I met Steve Clark, a supportive mentor and innovative business partner. Before Future School, we worked on another education project. I think it was after we discussed a recent trip to Liberia, where I'd been invited to start a school, he suggested I consider opening a new school in his hometown of Fort Smith. We explored the idea for a year, during which I put in an application that was immediately approved by the Board of Education. We had eight months to get everything together to open the school that fall; find and prepare a building, hire and train a team, recruit and enroll students!

It was daunting to consider at first, but with the incredible amount of support from stakeholders throughout the state, we knew we had to strike while the iron was hot. Regardless of when you start, you have to learn from your mistakes and make it better from there. That's the whole reason for charter schools—don't be afraid to get outside the box. But, don't do it haphazardly. You have to do it with intention to study and learn from what you're doing. Most importantly, we knew we had to start with the goal of sharing and collaborating within our community.

**Q. There was a specific ask from community leaders in Fort Smith to open a school. Can you elaborate on how that happened?**

**A.** There was a group of community and business leaders who were pushing back against a \$60 million construction plan for a third high school out in the suburbs. Our stakeholders felt that size of investment was unnecessary. It was more bricks and mortar and much of the same. The leaders asked the district to run a needs assessment.

It was incredible to see how a group of community leaders connected the idea of community development with meeting education needs. They were investing in property, businesses, and the people. So, they were saying there needs to be a new school in that area, not in a community that already has a bunch of resources. It was our community insisting that we can't drain our urban centers and leave those kids behind.

**Q. As an outsider, how did you garner trust with the community?**

**A.** One of the tips I've picked up along the way, as I've worked in communities around the world, is if you work with kids, people in the community will generally assume you have the best intentions. Of course, that's not always the case, but everyone wants their children to have a good education. If you're the person who works

“We had eight months to get everything together to open the school that fall. There are definitely times along the way where it's tempting to wait another year before opening, but you can't wait. Regardless of when you start, you have to learn from your mistakes and make it better from there.”

**TRISH FLANAGAN**

with their kids, that sometimes cuts through the “you’re a stranger” mentality. You can be taken in by the community.

As part of the charter application process, we had to hold a community meeting to collect signatures of support for Future School. Informed by my background in social work—doing workshops all the time—we decided to have a series of these meetings happening all summer long. We had people who opposed charters (and therefore, us) come to every meeting, sit in the front row, and grill me with questions. They weren’t so much in opposition to our particular mission as they were with the unknown. We were the first charter within 100 miles in every direction, so there was reasonable fear about what we were trying to create. We weren’t going to be overcome by these challenges because we understood where they were coming from.

To build buy-in, we explained our position as advocates for public education and social justice—that’s why we’re doing this. I believe there are systematic policies that ultimately lead to the segregation of kids and constant labeling. Quite honestly, all of this furthers the prevalence of racism and inequity.

**Q. How have you measured your impact since opening in 2016?**

**A.** As soon as we opened, we were immediately being copied. For example, the high school we’re closest to now has an internship program. This is exciting and can sometimes lead to challenges. We’re strongly supported by the public school board, but when it comes further down the pipe, there is a lot more resistance. As others begin using our language and mimicking some of our practices, it starts to turn into a competition analogy, which I don’t agree with.

In a competition, there are winners and losers. This isn’t even about school choice because if you have a “choice,” there will then be good versus bad, and kids will lose. It’s about scientifically looking at the whole system and finding the variables we can change to get the outcomes we want.

When the Board of Education approved our charter, they requested we document what we’re doing because they want to share the work. Of course, fulfilling that request becomes very hard. Since we’ve been up and running with everyone wearing ten different hats, it’s been tricky to evaluate what we’re doing. But, despite this, I do think we’re doing a good job.

We consistently conduct surveys and actively seek feedback. Something I think we’re really improving on is asking students to be problem solvers on campus. When there’s conflict, we tell them they have the biggest voice in this environment. We ask them to consider, “If there are distractions caused by other students, how can you take action, rather than sitting idly?” So, the challenge then becomes about how we are able to measure that impact—that shift in culture.

More significantly, here’s one story that I think speaks to our unique environment. We have a handful of students who many would say are on the autism spectrum. Some started with us feeling isolated; now, they are flourishing. Some are taking college classes and others in the school are looking out for them. It’s amazing to see. We could resign ourselves and say kids will bully each other at times and be small-minded and hateful. But, at Future School, we know that doesn’t have to be true. Our kids really take care of each other because they see the school as a community. Because of that, those kids are thriving.

“This isn’t even about school choice because if you have a “choice,” there will then be good versus bad, and kids will lose. It’s about scientifically looking at the whole system...”

**TRISH FLANAGAN**

Outside of our surveys, which we push out through Google Classroom, we don't collect as much information as I would like. As we get our internships more solidified, we're going to use it as a baseline to measure the effectiveness of our practice.

I think a big piece of this conversation is about the shift we need to make from measuring outputs to measuring outcomes. I can tell you how many volunteers came to an event or how much money we've raised. But, I'd rather tell you how many kids' life trajectories are changing. At 15 years old, they have a mentor who is a CEO and meets with them every week to introduce them to their network.

**Q. That sounds like an incredible story. Can you share more about it?**

**A.** Mario is a 4.0 student from Latin America who didn't want to come here at all. He had it made at the other school he was attending. Everyone knew him. But, as his mom built a relationship with us over many months, she knew this school would be better for him. As he got going here, he discovered he had an interest in finance.

He never knew that before and is now on his second internship project with the same oil and gas company he started with last school year. He works directly with the C-suite. His mentor is the CFO of this multi-million dollar company. When we brought him over to do his initial interview, he came back to school the next day and told us his mom is actually the mentor's housekeeper. Additionally, his sister is caught up in the DACA dilemma because she is undocumented. She was starting her second year of college, was in need of financial assistance, and couldn't pull any strings. With Mario's connection, she now has a part-time job with the company, which will help her pay for school.

This is what it's all about—a community that isn't going to wait for the next best thing to figure this out, and people who are willing to give someone a shot. It starts with creating a set of expectations and making something real. Mario's highest bar, when looking at the context of his life, may not have been as career-focused in a traditional school. He was a French horn player, had a 4.0 GPA, yet his mom realized there was a "so what?" She didn't know what he was going to do with that in the long run.

I'm friends with the CEO of the company Mario is interning with. So, when I checked in with Bill to see how Mario was doing, he told me to ask Mario what the price of gas is the next time I saw him. That's a thing now around school—asking Mario what the price of gas is. Why does he know this? When people in the C-suite ask him for information about the stock market, he has to be ready to give an answer about all of the high-level information.

**Q. As Future School grows and develops, what shifts do you hope to see within the community?**

**A.** Often, we underestimate young people, overlooking our greatest resource—our kids. Whether it's in public service, politics, or leadership, we don't trust someone who is 5, 10, or 15 years old to be committed, determined, and have good ideas. Yet, that's exactly what we need to do. Our team is inspired by the work we are doing to pave new ground. Our goal is to develop a strategic system that champions student voice and equitable learning opportunities that can be implemented in every high school.

"This is what it's all about—a community that isn't going to wait for the next best thing to figure this out, and people who are willing to give someone a shot. It starts with creating a set of expectations and making something real."

**TRISH FLANAGAN**

**Trish Flanagan** has spent the past 15 years as an educator working with communities around the United States and abroad. Currently, Trish is leading the development of a new, tuition-free public high school in Fort Smith, the Future School of Fort Smith. She is also the co-founder of Noble Impact, a K-12 education initiative integrating public service with an entrepreneurial mindset. In 2013, Trish was named one of Arkansas Times' Visionaries of 2013.



# iNACOL Symposium 2017: Culminating the Year of Learner Voice

There is great value in creating the space for learner-centered pioneers to discuss how we can build systems that support the uniqueness of each young learner. Being in a room with like-minded people who collectively believe in the importance of education transformation is irreplaceable. It allows pioneers to engage in conversations that dive deep into the “how” of transformation, rather than getting caught in conversations about the “why” or “what.”

These are the rooms that beg the question, how do we bring the learner-centered conversation to a more general audience? How do we cultivate in others the same deep-seeded passion for learner-centered transformation we recognize in ourselves? To spark uninitiated minds to engage in the learner-centered conversation, one source uniquely stands out as providing the necessary energy—young learners.

When learners are asked how this new mindset toward education impacts their lives, you can't help but put your phone down, sit up straight, and listen carefully. We know these insights are far more powerful than any article or speech you've experienced in the past or will experience in the future (even those we produce).

Acknowledging this reality and wanting to quickly act on it, Education Reimagined made a commitment for 2017 to amplify learner voices in brand new ways. After building a foundation in *Pioneering* through our Learner Voice articles and hosting our first SparkHouse gathering last November, we were ready to showcase the wisdom of learners in front of audiences across the country.

The plan was simple: When selected or invited to speak at a gathering, we would evaluate our capacity to support learners to attend with us. If the capacity was there and learners were available, we would invite them into the experience with a simple piece of advice—be yourself, and you'll inspire everyone in the room.

Our goal to bring learners wherever we go has grown into something with far more reach than we initially set out to accomplish. Although we are far from the sole cause of this shift, the demand for learner voices across the country this year has been remarkable. This demand has culminated in a month's worth of high-impact events that have featured learners at conferences with thousands of attendees from around the nation. From iNACOL Symposium 2017 to EdSurge Fusion to our second Spark-House gathering next week, listening to the voices of learners is becoming a conscious choice we can no longer be apathetic about.



Left to Right: Ulcca Joshi Hansen, Education Reimagined; Vanella Tadjuidje, Pike Road Schools, AL; Keyonna Griffin and Jada Rollins, McComb School District, MS; Ikonkar Kaur Khalsa, Lindsay, USD, CA.

The momentum began with an iNACOL Symposium tradition, featuring a panel of young people sharing their insights and experiences with the audience. This year, after submitting our session as one among many looking to find a slot within the busy conference schedule, iNACOL leaders invited us to take the stage in this year's conference closing keynote. For iNACOL, this tradition is at the core of the Symposium's purpose, regardless of the year's theme.

*"All of our attendees, be they a classroom teacher, school or district leader, or policy maker, come to the Symposium with the goal of listening and learning from those who are creating personalized learning environments. The Student Panel Keynote is always one of the highlights. Ultimately, it is the students' voice that helps us understand not only the progress we have made but also the great work that has yet to be accomplished."*

—Bruce Friend, Chief Operating Officer, iNACOL

As Bruce mentioned above, these learners are the evidence of the impact learner-centered implementation has made to date. And, when given the space, they will be the first to let us know when what we're doing is not meeting their needs. With the opportunity to bring learners from learner-centered environments, we couldn't wait to show just how powerful these environments are for learners of all ages.



[Watch the Full Keynote  
Learner Panel](#)

For the keynote, our very own Ulcca Joshi Hansen, Associate Director of Education Reimagined, moderated a panel of five learners from Iowa BIG, Lindsay Unified School District, McComb School District, and Pike Road Schools. Learners discussed questions like “Why does it matter to you that you’re attending a learner-centered environment?” and “What impact has the role of failure played in your learning?” With each response, symposium attendees were lighting up Twitter in awe of the compelling presence each learner exhibited on stage.

jabezelbret [Follow](#) I want to hangout with this student panel all day! They rock! #inacol17

1:54 PM - 25 Oct 2017

Ellie Avishai [Follow](#) #inacol17 student panel: Leaving the traditional model let me spread my wings. I was no longer held back. We don't want to be robots.

1:25 PM - 25 Oct 2017

Ashley Ireland Dann [Follow](#) I don't think about failure because there is no such thing at my school." Deep insights from student panel at #inacol2017 @nacol

1:37 PM - 25 Oct 2017

The inspiration educators garner during these sessions is one thing, but the experience for the learners themselves is something that should be examined. Imagine yourself at the age of 10, 11, 16, or 17, and what it would have meant for you to travel and represent your family, peers, learning environment, and community in front of a national audience of educators. What sense of agency would you have developed from that experience?

When learners are invited to fully express their learning experiences to adults who are willing to listen and take action on what they hear, learners realize they have the power to make an impact now, not just in some distant future.

Leaning into that power, these learners are ready to bring an honest and important question to the nation, “What are we waiting for?”

This question coming from a learner has our go-to excuses fall by the wayside and our minds poignantly ponder, “What are we waiting for?” It can also make our stomachs drop.

## THE EXPERIENCE

Attending iNACOL and having my voice heard in front of so many educators, leaders, and advocates left me feeling inspired and hopeful. To see so many individuals working so hard for such a needed change that has affected my life in so many aspects, deeply inspires me! It's heartwarming to know my story and learner perspective is helping support change in other communities and might even ignite more learner involvement in this learner-centered movement. —**Jemar Lee, Learner at Iowa BIG**

It felt good to know that I was being heard and to know that many lives will be affected by my voice. My families thought that after I spoke I could do anything and my mom said to me that I had set the bar. I always had faith in being heard and now I have been. It means so much to me that people took time out of their day to listen to me and my fellow learners. —**Keyonna Griffin, Learner at McComb SD**

I was very proud of myself that I was picked out of a school that is in a small community to speak out about how we do personalized learning, which is a big deal to many people. My family was proud of me, too. They always told me I was a smart child and I would accomplish big things when I grow up and that inspired me to be the person I am today. I can be courageous and brave enough to go in front of 3,000 people and talk about my experience as a learner. —**Jada Rollins, Learner at McComb SD**



We might feel as though we have failed the very kids we promised to devote our every day to. But, it's important to remember this challenge is not an admonishment. Just as you strive to spark the young minds of learners in your community, they are striving to spark yours. And, together, we can build learner-centered systems that represent the voices of our learners and, on a larger scale, the voices of our communities.

As you become more and more present to the power learner voices bring to the education conversation, take a breath and reflect. Ask yourself why their voice is so palpable. Explore how you can keep their voices at the forefront of your work. Share the lessons you're learning with friends, family, neighbors, and colleagues. Pose the same challenge the young learners at iNACOL posed to you, "What are we waiting for?" Because as Keyonna from McComb School District mentioned in her closing comments, "Please don't walk away from this and not let it change your mind."

### **Explore Education Reimagined's Journey at iNACOL Symposium 2017**

[Storify: Unleashing the Most Underutilized Resource in Education—The Learner](#)

[Podcast: iNACOL with Kelly Young & Ulcca Joshi Hansen of Education Reimagined](#)

[Storify: Education Reimagined at iNACOL 2017](#)



LUCKY ME

LEADER ME

ANXIOUS ME

# Lucky Me: The Unexpected Opportunity that Put My Town on the Map

By Colby Mills

Complacency is the first word that comes to mind when I think about my educational experience before moving to Pike Road Schools (PRS). As I attended rigorously academic magnet schools in Montgomery, I recall sitting at a desk for hours and receiving monotonous instructions to jot down and memorize “important” details, which I would certainly forget the next week. “How will I use this in the real world?” was my recurring question school day after school day. But, a more essential question—“Will this be on the test?”—kept me engaged just enough to cram for the tests and forget the information soon after.

As an overtly curious child, I silently questioned my teachers’ undying love for the dreaded worksheet. I understood from an early age that I learned more efficiently with hands-on activities, but I was never presented with real opportunities to do so in school. This created a significant issue in my ability to show my learning—I could understand material in great detail and still not test well on it.

## LUCKY ME

Fortunately, in the last year, I transitioned to a school focused primarily on project-based learning (PBL) and student involvement.

Throughout my childhood, as I grew, so did my hometown, Pike Road, Alabama. I watched the town library transition from a small trailer on the corner to a new building closer to the city and my once small church grow rapidly year after year. Pike Road was clearly becoming a place to be. While our community blossomed, citizens came



COLBY MILLS

together to discuss the rebirth of a significant facet our town hadn't had since the 70's: a school. After a few years of construction, orientations, and announcements, the new school was launched. My family and I were ecstatic to hear the news.

Pike Road Schools (PRS) came as a great beacon of hope for my family, the community, and me. Project-based learning was a foreign concept to me, but I felt endlessly fortunate that I would have the opportunity to explore it.

### **ANXIOUS ME**

I was among the group of learners lucky enough to transition to PRS from day one. The first day of school was boisterous. There was a cluttered mass of hundreds of learners, each attempting to find their place in the classes' arrangements, figure out the school's innovative agenda, and identify comfort amongst unfamiliar sets of eyes. It was a box of "firsts" spilled all at once. A disorganized assortment of discovering how to learn in this new environment, seeking out anyone resembling an adult who could direct you to the "Collaborative Learning Center," and frantically searching for someone to sit with at lunch.

I was full of anxiety, but I managed to take home two things that day: a conviction that this school and its leaders truly understood what learning was, and a pink slip of paper for my parents to fill out. I held onto the former and returned the latter (signed) to my homeroom Lead Learner the next day.

Although I was excited for what tomorrow would bring, making the transition from my previous eight years of traditional schooling to this learner-centered environment was more challenging than I had anticipated. News of flexible deadlines, student voice, and collaborative learning should have excited me. But, instead, I felt inexperienced and uncomfortable. My conventional mindset was being yanked away from me. In exchange, I was being presented with a system in which I was expected to be the leader of my own learning. As I began to accept the facts of what was (and wasn't) required of me, though, I thrived.

As I shifted my learning style, I also needed to shift my language to follow our new progressive and familial vocabulary; classes were named "families," grade levels were called "communities," teachers were, fittingly, "Lead Learners" (they learn just as we do), and students became "Learners."

Although it took months of transition and shifting around, which was chaotic for everyone, PRS eventually began running smoothly and fulfilled many of the goals it originally set. Learning was inspiring all ages: Learners, Lead Learners, and PRS Leadership. I felt more motivated, and less stressed, than ever before.

### **LEADER ME**

As a newborn school, talk of students' wants and ideas for the school's immediate future was commonplace. But, a problem stemmed from this: these ideas and hopes had no ordered way of reaching the administration, thus festering and transforming into complaints which hovered over learners' heads. As a proponent of mental health and positivity, the abundant complaints dulled my hopeful spirit, leading me to search for a solution.

It wasn't long before I arrived at an idea. For context, I was the president of my previous Student Government Association (SGA) and was passionate about legislative and political functions at the time. I saw it as an organized way for students to share their concerns and propose solutions; our opportunity to form this miniature government

"I understood from an early age that I learned more efficiently with hands-on activities, but I was never presented with real opportunities to do so in school."

**COLBY MILLS**

was essential to having students' voices heard. I knew we could reach the administration and, even more easily, our teachers through a simple proposal process, all while being taught order and democracy.

As we created a committee to propose and build this SGA, we opted to formulate a new take on student-led governing. This led to mine and the committee's continued efforts to create a perfect and unique representation of law in PRS. We wrote an innovative dictionary for our process and created titles and positions that appeared advantageous and essential. I wrote a dense jungle of a constitution, heavily revised by the committee and our advisor, Ms. Austin, that became the standing reference for the association. Thus, the PRS SGA was born.

In the beginning, we worked tirelessly and intentionally. Murmurs of the upcoming officer and representative elections were catalyzed by my tour (there is no better way to describe it) of the school, making my way to every class from Community Four to Community Eight to find students eager to join their family (class), community (grade), or even school-wide races. Among this process I also kickstarted my small poster/social-media campaign for President. As we neared our planned speech/debate ceremony, the excited murmurs blossomed into enthused shouts and words of encouragement. Our ornately and patriotically decorated campaign event took place in our gymnasium on a morning of nerves and excitement. Anticipatory shivers tickled every candidate as voting opened and closed within the matter of a school day. The results were announced at the end of that day, and I was (spoiler alert) the new president.

Planning something as colossal and permanent as a student-government organization was a new trek that, although it took my anxiety to new and exciting (if you will) levels, came somewhat naturally and effortlessly to me. It made me realize a talent and passion I'd never known before: leadership. My previous experiences in traditional schools had only allowed me to experience leadership in constricted, somewhat forced, environments.

After leading too many clubs and committees to count and actually having my and my peers' ideas listened to and implemented by an incredibly understanding administration and superintendent at PRS, I'm convinced it is imperative that student voice is heard. Not long ago, I had a friend tell me a story about her teacher informing the class that their classroom was "not a democracy." When the classroom is led by an ironhanded teacher and students have no say, learning and passions are inhibited. And without learning and passion, what do we have, really?

"Planning something as colossal and permanent as a student-government organization...made me realize a talent and passion I'd never known before: leadership."

**COLBY MILLS**

**Colby Mills** is a passionate Community 10 learner at Pike Road High School. His early school experience was built upon a magnet program in Montgomery, from Kindergarten to 8th Grade, after which he moved to PRS. Colby's interests range from music to social media to running, but one thing has become his passion: writing. He has dreams of becoming a digital journalist one day, and hopes that through the personalization, integration of technology, and innovation of learning at PRS, he can ultimately achieve this goal.



# The Age of Agility: Education Pathways for the Future of Work

America Succeeds ([link](#)) has released a brand new [publication](#) that articulates the shifts they believe are necessary to prepare communities across the nation for a new age in education *and* business. “Education and business” is the operative phrase here. If one shifts without the other, the education-to-workforce pipeline will break. Citing powerful workforce predictions from worldwide economic institutions, America Succeeds provides evidence of why education needs to be transformed. Of course, this is nothing new. What is new is the call to action they are setting out. From coast to coast, they are looking “for visionary education and business leaders to join forces with policymakers to declare a national emergency and attack this problem with the same urgency that drove us to the moon in the 1960s.” Education Reimagined, cited as a pioneer in creating the space for such conversations within our Pioneer Lab Community, is answering this call today and looks forward to more flags being planted in this new age of education exploration.

**The Age of Agility Website** ([link](#))

## Diversity Talks

In 2016, at the Highlander Institute’s Startup Weekend Education (SWEDU) in Providence, Rhode Island, the idea for [Diversity Talks](#) was born. Three individuals looking to amplify learner voice came up with an ambitious idea—empower learners to lead professional development training on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Two of the three cofounders were high school juniors when the idea came into being. Although they learned in an environment that celebrated everyone’s unique identities, they knew this was an exception to the rule. Their third partner, a Special Assistant to the Superintendent of Providence Public Schools, provided further confirmation of this belief and knew the power learners could bring to the conversation. Diversity Talks is now a limited liability company looking to expand its work across the country. The program focuses on three principles: Learner Voice, Advocacy, and Mentoring. They seek to “provide a platform for the voices of students of color to be heard, advocate for high quality K-12 culturally responsive curricula and professional development for educators, and strengthen the pipeline for students of color to become leaders in education through peer reviews and student coaching supports.”

**Workshops** ([link](#))

180°

### **Jet Cockpits and The End of Average**

Why powerful social institutions of the future (and present) embrace individuality, excellence, and equal fit for the common good. [Watch here](#)

**Mississippi Rising** The future of this country is bound to the future of Mississippi. [Watch here](#)

### **The Bell Curve is Nonsense**

How what we have assumed to be true have resulted in us distorting, and limiting, human potential. [Watch here](#)

**Thrive** Modernizing the structure and purpose of school.

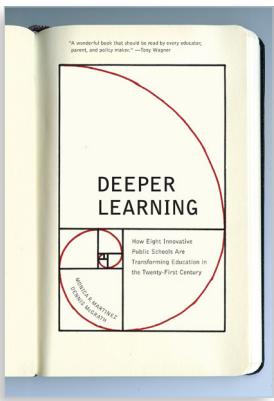
[Watch here](#)

### 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](#).

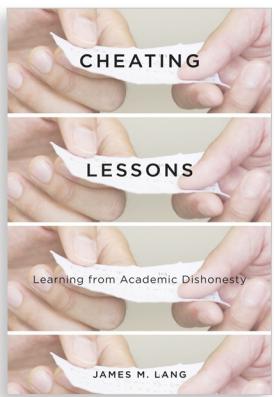
**iNACOL** is hiring for a **Communications Director** who can work collaboratively with senior leadership to develop and implement holistic communication strategies to broaden the awareness and impact of iNACOL’s programs and brand. Apply [here](#).

**The Nellie Mae Education Foundation** is requesting proposals for a series of exciting grant opportunities. Learn more and apply [here](#).



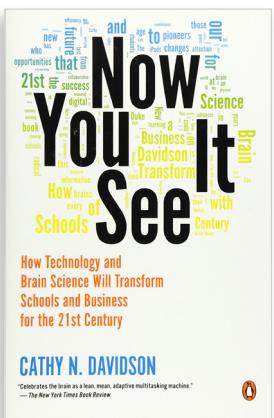
### Deeper Learning: How Eight Innovative Public Schools Are Transforming Education in the Twenty-First Century by Monica Martinez and Dennis McGrath

When reading about learner-centered transformation for the first time, it can seem like little more than idyllic dialogue with no possibility of real-world application. But, we all know better. And, as the movement grows, the present day, on-the-ground work happening across the country is being amplified like never before. As pioneers in this effort, authors Monica Martinez and Dennis McGrath have brought these real-world stories of education transformation to life in *Deeper Learning*. Discover in-depth stories from eight unique learning environments and their communities, and see how real learner-centered education can be.



### Cheating Lessons: Learning from Academic Dishonesty by James M. Lang

In his book, *Cheating Lessons*, James M. Lang wanted to explore the cultural norms of dishonesty, particularly in the academic setting. With the rise of behavioral economics and psychology, one truth about human nature has become nearly irrefutable—people trend toward minor acts of dishonesty in their day-to-day lives. So, how do we ensure these minor acts don't turn into major problems for our learners? Journey with Lang as he uncovers the subtle yet transformational shifts we can make in creating a culture of honesty and trust within our learning environments.



### Now You See It: How Technology and Brain Science Will Transform Schools and Business for the 21st Century by Cathy N. Davidson

As the world becomes more agile and unpredictable, we aren't preparing ourselves or our children for rigid lives. Rather, we're preparing for lives focused on daily adaptations. Cathy N. Davidson, author of *Now You See It*, wants to show readers how this shift will impact education and business as we know it. As a primary actor in the creation of Duke University's Program in Information Science and Information Studies and the Center for Cognitive Neuroscience, Davidson has bore witness to the evolution of these two realms of science that will shape our collective futures. Join her as she explores how these burgeoning fields will allow us to reimagine education and beyond.

### Hilde Lysiak, Reporter, Author, 10-Year-Old

When learning is truly open-walled, children are recognized as invaluable assets within their communities. In this profile by the *The New York Times*, readers meet a reporter who brought her passion into the world and her community into the spotlight. [Read here](#)

### What Colleges Want in an Applicant (Everything)

As learner-centeredness begins to transform the K-12 landscape, what does that mean for college admissions? Learn more about why some institutions are embracing new ways to get to know their applicants and determine college readiness, while many are reluctant to depart from the era of SAT/ACT scores and personal essays. [Read here](#)

### Readiness for College, Career and Life: The Purpose of K-12 Public Education Today

How can we consider competency-based education through the lens of equity, quality, policy, and meeting students where they are? Check out the iNACOL blog for reflections on a new report on competency-based systems from CompetencyWorks.

[Read here](#)

“I’m not afraid of failure because there is no such thing. There is always room to grow.”

— JADA, 10-YEAR-OLD LEARNER

Read past issues of  
**PIONEERING : A LEARNER-CENTERED PUBLICATION**  
[www.education-reimagined.org](http://www.education-reimagined.org)



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