

pioneering

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A NOTE FROM EDUCATION REIMAGINED

Kelly Young, Executive Director

NORRIS ACADEMY

Profile of their Learning Environment

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Dear Pioneers,

I hope you had a wonderful Thanksgiving holiday! As always, we are grateful for your enduring and courageous commitment to bringing learner-centered education to life for young people across the country.

As the year is coming to a close and we are preparing for next year, our guiding question is: How do we make the shift to the learner-centered paradigm inevitable and irreversible? Asked more plainly, how do we make learner-centered education the new normal?

We think there are three important areas that have to be advanced simultaneously:

- **Building the public will** to create an education system that produces holistic, 21st-century knowledge, skills, and dispositions for each and every learner;
- **Creating the policy environments** and conditions for learner-centered pioneers to thrive; and
- **Demonstrating proof of concept.** While this is based on unequivocal research around how learning happens, we still have a long way to go in developing the systems and structures that reliably enable learning ecosystems to deliver 21st century results for all learners.

It takes a movement—people all across the country acting separately in ways that contribute to the whole—to make all these things happen.

Education Reimagined plays the role of a movement builder. Our work is to elevate and amplify the voices and stories of the many people in the field advancing the work in those three areas. We help people see the coherence and unifying paradigm and beliefs behind the diverse activities and models of learner-centered pioneers.

Through our publications, public speaking, and meetings, we nourish, embolden, and build support for the pioneers who work tirelessly to go against the tide to bring learner-centered education to life. We enable pioneers to be nationally recognized as a movement and to advocate, collaborate, and advance the field together.

For the first time, we are directly inviting our readers to share our work with your friends, families, and networks and to contribute financially to our work. We hope that you find Education Reimagined a valuable resource in the field and will consider supporting us to continue accelerating the learner-centered movement in whatever way makes sense for you.

With gratitude,
Kelly Young



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Connect. Share. Discover. Lead.

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

[DONATE HERE](#)





NORRIS ACADEMY

MUKWONAGO, WI

“At Norris Academy, it’s amazing to see traditionally unmotivated learners become passionate about what they are doing and creating some amazing final products at the same time.” – ROBERT KUPRENAS, LEARNING SPECIALIST

WHAT IF YOUR FIRST ASSIGNMENT when entering a new learning community was to simply spend time discovering yourself—your interests and passions, strengths and weaknesses, and overall wellness? At Norris Academy, that is exactly what new learners are tasked with. By focusing on four interwoven diagnostic assessments, learners at Norris Academy explore their unique identities through the lenses of academics, citizenship, employability, and wellness (physical and mental). These assessments form the foundation for tracking future growth as the learner develops their **knowledge, skills, and dispositions** toward learning.

During the 30-60 days of self-reflection and exploration, learners engage in “mini explorations” that immediately introduce them to **open-walled** experiences within the broad disciplines of Skill Trades, STEM, Business, and Creative and Community. By creating multiple touchpoints throughout the Waukesha community, learners develop a rough road map of the possibilities Norris Academy and the overall community provides.

They are able to develop a master plan to accelerate their growth and development as lifelong learners. And, if learners have already identified their passions before setting foot in this learner-centered environment, they can head straight to the makerspace to work on individual and collaborative pursuits.

When the creative gears start churning inside each learner’s head and the individualized learning paths are established, learners take their newly developed **agency** and begin advancing their self-accountability in dynamic ways.

One learner discovered a curious concept known as a **backwards bicycle**. While this might come off as little more than an insignificant curiosity for most, Norris Academy’s learning framework allowed him to run with it. He identified a specialist within the Skill Trades sector, created a learning plan that would backwards map the **competencies** he developed throughout the project, and identified opportunities where he could demonstrate his learning. During the research and making phase of the project, this learner built competencies in ELA and geometry, while continuously growing his **socially embedded** skills in communication, collaboration, and failing forward. So, from just watching an eight-minute video on “backwards bicycle”—an activity that could have been seen as a distraction to be quelled in other settings—months of purposeful learning were launched for this young man.

Norris Academy provides a great lesson in how taking a simple first step toward something as complex as learner-centered transformation can catapult a learning environment into creating **personalized, relevant, and contextualized** opportunities for each and every learner. As their system continues to grow and develop, they will continue reaching into the unknowns of what’s possible in learner-centered education.

LEARN MORE

[Rewriting the Game of School: An Alternative Model for Learning](#)

[Podcast: Build the Plane While It’s Flying with Johnna Noll](#)

FACTS & FIGURES

Public

Opened Fall 2016

Learners ages 10-18 served (plans to expand to ages 5-18)

53% Students with Disabilities

58% White, 38% Black, 4% Other

93% Economically Disadvantaged

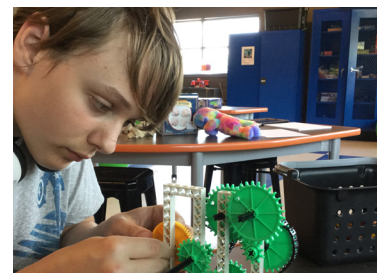
Learning Specialists confer with learners 240 days annually to co-design learning plans and verify competency attainment

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Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can.
Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do.



INSIGHTS



Let Learners Lead: Activating Irreversible Learner-Centered Transformation

by Education Reimagined

Earlier this month, Education Reimagined hosted its second SparkHouse gathering in Washington, DC. Fifty-five learners from 12 states and 15 learning environments joined us for two days of incredible discovery.

When we wrote about [SparkHouse](#) last year, we were so impressed by the learners we had gathered, we wanted their voices to be amplified for all to hear. So, rather than describe the ins and outs of what went on during the gathering, we focused on the most important aspect of all: the power and significance of learner voice.

Suffice it to say with more participants, this year's event had even more impact on everyone in attendance. For the second year in a row, we witnessed the remarkable ease with which these young learners comprehend the complex information presented and provide fodder that advances our collective knowledge.

One of the most difficult aspects of discussing learner-centered education to general audiences is the barrier of talking across paradigms. For example, the challenge of speaking about learner agency with someone who relates to learners as vessels to be filled with knowledge. Neither person is "wrong;" they are just not speaking from the same worldview. However, when a young learner is asked to describe learner-centered education, they are not only able to candidly speak to their own experiences



SparkHouse

It just takes one spark.
Leader in the house!



Kesia speaks passionately about her experiences at EMBARC, a city-wide program in Chicago, IL, to Peter McWalters and David Fairman, program leaders for Education Reimagined

but are, in themselves, the actual evidence of what learner-centered education makes possible. So, these young learners, in less than 48 hours, are able to provide new and effective communication strategies that articulate the power of learner-centered education in ways only they know how.

It's almost comical looking around the room as the adults intently digest every word coming out of the learners' mouths. If we hit pause during these moments and asked the learners to look around, they might be a bit worried by our dumbfounded gazes. Thankfully, they are as engaged as we are, so we can collect ourselves as the conversation goes on.

It can't be stressed enough that the evidence of this movement's effectiveness is contained in their stories and in their articulations of why learner-centered transformation holds so much promise for every child. Acknowledging this power, Education Reimagined brings these learners together to:

- Get clear on what we mean when we say "learner-centered;"
- Deepen relationships with their peers from across the country;
- Cultivate a rich sense of community that expands beyond their time together in DC;
- Realize and gain confidence in the power of their voices;
- Discover new opportunities to contribute to the learner-centered movement; and
- Emerge as a community of movement leaders ready to champion learner-centered education for all kids.

The first four bullet points are right in our wheelhouse and more or less represent the intended outcomes of our Pioneer Lab Training. And, when we discovered the wisdom of last year's SparkHouse participants, it begged the question, what next? How can we support these learners to ensure their work, voices, and contributions are leveraged, not diluted to the point of being undetectable? A more whimsical way to put it, how do we make sure the heat inside SparkHouse isn't immediately dispersed when someone opens the door?

"Learner-centered schools not only focus on what your passion is but [they focus on] you as a person. We are taught to be original in the beginning and to carry that on through high school. In public schools, no one asked you who you are as a person."

**LEARNER, HIGH SCHOOL
FOR THE RECORDING
ARTS**



Isaiah speaks to the impact Camden Big Picture Learning Academy (Camden, NJ) has had on his life to a captive audience of learners and adults

We didn't have a clear answer to these questions last year, but thankfully, the learners only needed a two-day gathering to launch themselves into learner-driven, local and national efforts. This year was our chance to synthesize everything we learned from the year before and provide guideposts for learners to stretch their thinking even further as we head into 2018.

Our goal was to design Launch Points to inspire learners to discover how their gifts could be most utilized and celebrated within the learner-centered movement. To jumpstart their thinking, we identified three main buckets—Communicate and Share, Advance the Learner-Centered Field, and Create Something New.

COMMUNICATE AND SHARE

The learner-centered movement won't go anywhere if we aren't talking about it. Given the countless modes of communication the new millennium has graced us with, everything from hosting a webinar to launching a social media campaign to hosting a virtual dinner conversation can work as a model to engage curious minds in the learner-centered conversation. And, who would you rather accept an invitation from? An impassioned learner from your community or an outside adult with an unfamiliar job title? When we hear learner-centered, we should expect learners to not only be the center of the conversation but actually be at the center of the conversation.

For learners who recognize their communication gifts are best expressed in a non-orary fashion, they have the opportunity to share their message in publications like *Pioneering*, *Trailblazers*, or local media outlets.

ADVANCE THE LEARNER-CENTERED FIELD

Communicating and sharing the learner-centered message expands the size of the movement. We believe this is what it will take to reach a national tipping point where the predominant school-centered paradigm begins to give way. Simultaneously though, the learner-centered field itself must be robust enough for a smooth transformation to take place, avoiding the possibility of bouncing back to our old ways.

Learners have been encouraged to work internally and externally from their primary learning environments—to see the entire community as an interconnected web of

“Each of us is going to take this back to our schools and talk to our faculty and principals to spread the word about it. It has to be us. Especially at my school, they don't care to spread the word. I think they're afraid that they're going to be forced to do something they don't want to.”

LEARNER, IOWA BIG

possibility in making learner-centered education the norm rather than the exception. Within their own learning environments, they can encourage new learning practices or co-design professional development opportunities for educators and district leaders. In the community, they can take a seat at the table in School Board meetings, set up meetings with education department heads in government and at universities, or partner with local policymakers to enlighten them on the learner-centered experience.

CREATE SOMETHING NEW

After our 2016 launch of the SparkHouse community, learners went home to their communities and began building unexpected and remarkable things. This creative freedom had to be included in the development of these Launch Points. We—at Education Reimagined or adults in general—can only see so many possibilities before the limitations of our experience gets in the way. There is no limit to the ideas and campaigns that can be developed by these learners, and we wanted to encourage them to think beyond what is known. For them, the sky is the limit.

We wanted to share these Launch Points with our readership to bring greater understanding to the intention behind our SparkHouse gatherings. But, even more so, to inspire action by learners all across the country. We are committed to dispelling the tendency to question the realistic nature of a young learner's ability to make any significant impact. Instead, we hope this makes educators ask themselves, "How might I empower my learners to tackle similar challenges?" It's already happening, and it's our responsibility and opportunity to accelerate this work in every corner of the country.

Learners are acutely aware of the impact learner-centered education has had on their lives and are hungry for the opportunity to provide similar experiences to every learner in their community. Let's be activators (not detractors) in this inevitable and irreversible educational transformation.



Ikonkar, a learner from Lindsay USD in CA who returned for her second SparkHouse, and Kelly Young share a moment.

“We would like to host our own conference and teach the staff and students about what we learned at SparkHouse. We also want to have a coaching session with teachers so as the year goes along and people show interest in our model, we could coach them.”

**LEARNER, CAMDEN BIG
PICUTRE LEARNING**



Jasmine of High School for the Recording Arts (St Paul, MN) shares about how she plans to accelerate the learner-centered movement in her hometown of St Paul.



Structure versus Freedom: A Delicate Balance

by Jenny Finn, founder of Springhouse Community School

Several years ago, my colleagues and I co-founded [**Springhouse Community School**](#)—a living laboratory where we use each day to advance our learning in what it takes to create a learning environment that truly prepares adolescents for young adulthood. At Springhouse, we are cultivating a community where learners can discover the unique gifts they came into this world with, while also explore the barriers that get in the way of offering these gifts to the world. With this audacious and rigorous vision for learning, we knew this learning community would need a sturdy structure that inherently allowed for expansive, individual freedoms for each learner.

We also recognized that if the intention is to build a structure that is inherently expansive, what comes forth from it will be too. Looking at our current educational system, the structure is often too tight. Standardized testing, content-driven instruction, and even the physical space youth learn in do not promote creativity and collaboration.

In fact, this level of structure can be stifling—leading to boredom, frustration, and a lack of curiosity, passion, and purpose. Many Springhouse learners join us with reports from worried parents that their child “does not like to learn anymore.” Learning has become associated with a structure that is so tight it does not allow for basic human capacities like connectedness, curiosity, and creativity. However, just as a structure that is too tight does not bring forth vitality and authenticity, a learning structure that is too expansive leaves learners parameter-less and not knowing where their edges are, leading to stress, overwhelm, and failure that is not transformative.

CREATING BALANCE IN THE MIDST OF COMPLEXITY

The relationship between freedom and structure is complex. And, creating Springhouse with this relationship as its foundation was a huge risk. Were we truly prepared to implement education in a dramatically new way? Could we actually be sustainable in a rural area with this pioneering approach? How could we both address the individual needs of each learner while, at the same time, maintaining a sense of unity in the community? With these questions and more swimming in our heads, we knew their answers came down to one thing: providing the proper amount of attention and care to ensure this complex relationship remained healthy and strong.

With each iteration of the school’s program, we pay very close attention to what is, and what is not, working. When things are working, the solution to the last question above



JENNY FINN

is fully implemented—the learner’s individual needs are met while unity amongst the learning community is maintained.

In our earlier years, students were given unprecedented freedom to engage in project-based learning. With minimal structure provided, we saw students flailing rather than thriving. We quickly learned the essential freedom to explore one’s interests still demands a common structure for learning. Otherwise, the learning community loses connection and momentum.

This year, we have initiated an Independent Project Studio where, just as they had in the past, learners explore various topics such as pottery making, developing a clothing brand, learning the guitar, and examining the relationship between humans and nature through photography. The key differences in this year’s implementation has been the introduction of direct mentorship, a universal expectation of presenting project proposals, and engaging in an adaptable evaluation process that includes a community presentation night.

SUMMONING THE COURAGE TO ITERATE, PIVOT, AND GROW

When things aren’t working, we summon the courage and cultivate the skills necessary to make changes that better serve our community. Making these changes can be unnerving. Finding the sweet spot, where the programmatic structure supports the freedom needed for students to more deeply connect with their unique gifts, requires the ability to let go of what isn’t needed, regardless of how great of a fit we thought it was before. And, as highlighted above, sometimes we start too thin and need to make original ideas a little more dynamic.

Learning by doing has been our most effective method of tending to this complexity. This action-based and organic approach can be messy with its inherent uncertainty and requires the support of a healthy community. This approach also often includes creative tension throughout the community—between adults, adults and learners, and within the larger community. To experience the positive power of this creative tension, skills are needed to navigate the unknowns.

Springhouse learners (at every age) build these skills through classes offered within the learning environment and the larger community. It is not uncommon to see tense conversations transform into new approaches and possibilities at Springhouse. We have learned authentic and honest relationships are essential in creating an environment that prepares learners for the unknown paths ahead. In a lot of ways, the community itself is the structure, the choreographer that enables the dance between structure and freedom to gracefully unfold.

SURRENDERING TO OUR INNATE ABILITY AND DESIRE TO LEARN

Greater freedom in the learning environment, to put it plainly, means the adults have to be well-practiced in the art of getting out of the way. Surrendering to the unknowns of the learning process, but at the same time holding a structure for learning, is a true skill.

This year, in an entrepreneurship class at Springhouse, the facilitators prepared students to dive deeply into a problem that was felt and owned by the entire learning community — recruitment. Initially, the board and staff were taking on this issue without learner involvement, but as the class progressed, the facilitators realized the students had both investment and great ideas about how to proceed with a marketing plan. Students learned about systems thinking, the entrepreneurial spirit, and marketing, and then were asked to apply this learning to the problem at hand.

“Learning by doing has been our most effective method of tending to this complexity.”

JENNY FINN

Because this is a real problem, and one that is relevant to the students, they became actively engaged—taking on leadership and conducting a market analysis to address this issue. Students decided to research and debunk the misconceptions about the school, survey current and potential enrollees, and create a marketing video that the school could use to recruit students.

The project facilitators stayed far enough away from the work to see the organic, creative solutions that came forth from these students were truly the students' doing. The solutions were innovative and inspired, and when questions arose, the facilitators were there for support. Learning is a conversation between the learner and the guide. To be open to this, adults must surrender some of their power and be in relationship with the learner. Learners then have ownership in the creative process and are much more engaged as a result.

CATALYZING LEARNERS TO READILY NAVIGATE THE FREEDOMS OF ADULTHOOD

The structure that holds the creative or learning process is as important as the creativity that flows through the structure. To illustrate this further, I will use the example of the emergence of a butterfly. For a butterfly to emerge, it must have a sturdy structure. As we know, a butterfly forms in a chrysalis, but before it transforms from a caterpillar to its new form, it liquefies and becomes unrecognizable from what it once was. To undergo this radical metamorphosis, the caterpillar must first weave itself into a container that is sturdy enough for the massive change it is about to undergo. Without the structure of the chrysalis, the transformation will not take place. Like a baby in the mother's womb—or a well laid out plan for a project—these structures support the creativity that is longing to come through.

We intend for Springhouse Community School to be a container for young people to shed what they no longer need, and a place where learners can connect with the source of their own vitality and sense of purpose. The word spring evokes an image of the source of vitality coming out of the Earth, and the word springhouse refers to the built structure that both develops and protects that vital source. Like the chrysalis to the butterfly, Springhouse is the container from which each member of the community can emerge more whole, more true to who they came to this world to be.

If Springhouse learners feel prepared to navigate the freedom that lies before them when they graduate, we know we are living from the sweet spot where freedom and structure dance together. I will leave you with these words from one of our recent graduates who speaks to this beautifully:

“Springhouse has been a place that has held me but has never held me back. It has been the kick in the butt that I often needed to remind me what I'm capable of, and also the grounded reality check when I started to lose myself in the other direction. Being here has showed me a different way of being and showing up in the world. It has opened me up to parts of myself that used to terrify me, but that I am now ready to embrace with curiosity and love. When I was younger, maybe even just last year, the future terrified me. It really did. I didn't know how I was going to exist once I became an adult. I was terrified to walk into the world and lose myself completely, in the day-to-day existence of a humanity that's losing touch with itself. But, somehow, I don't feel like that now. Springhouse has shown me that if you really work for something, you truly can be the change you want to see in the world. The tools that I have found here are ones that I will carry with me for the rest of my life, no matter the path I follow.”

“Learning by doing has been our most effective method of tending to this complexity.”

JENNY FINN

Jenny Finn has a Ph.D. in Sustainability Education from Prescott College and a master's degree in Social Work from Colorado State University. Jenny understands that relationship to the world begins with connection to oneself, and her work fosters this deep connection. She has worked in the healing arts field for nearly twenty years serving in various areas including non-profit management, trauma and hospice care, spiritual care and chaplaincy, clinical private practice, and education.



Eleven Essential Steps to Building Mentoring Partnerships with Companies

by Patty Alper

In [my first article](#) for Education Reimagined, I reported an extremely significant finding from Gallup's "[Great Jobs, Great Lives](#)" study. Students were twice as likely to be engaged in their work and cultivate a sense of well-being later in life if they had two particular experiences while in school:

- 1. Received one-on-one attention from an adult (mentor or professor) who encouraged the pursuit of individual goals and dreams; and**
- 2. Applied learning to long-term school projects and real-world internships.**

These findings concur with a new concept I call Project Based Mentoring™, which brings two different generations and (potentially) culturally diverse people together around something to "do." An experienced professional mentors a student one-on-one within the framework of a long-term project, bringing vast experience and practical knowledge to a student's hypothetical concept.

Within this design, the student is the idea generator—responsible for the design of the activity and its execution. Together, the student and mentor develop a master plan, work through real-world obstacles, prepare for an oral defense, and calculate the project's real-world impact. With multiple touchpoints along this learning journey, the student receives guidance and collaboration that mimics workplace scenarios. In the process, a new kind of relationship develops that leaves a door open to new experiential learning, as well as the potential for future endorsements, internships, apprenticeships, or job opportunities.

The beauty of this idea is that the Project is owned by the student, resides easily within the wheelhouse of a mentor's knowledge, creates synergy between the business and academic sectors, and functions as a logical catalyst in an intergenerational relationship.

The following suggested outline of activities is based on the design of Project Based Mentoring™ but can also be used as a general framework to fit within programs you may have already developed in your community. Consider these next steps to further deepen your partnerships with community businesses.

It is understandable for schools to question designating resources toward a mentoring partnership. After all, it's new, and there may never before have been a line-item in the budget for something like this. I feel confident in unabashedly saying there needs to be. With the eleven essential elements below, I want to demonstrate why it's worth the relatively small investment compared to the tremendous return that will result.



PATTY ALPER

1. START SMALL

Pick one or two educators who might already include projects in their class curriculum, i.e. Social Media Marketing (a Blog Project assignment), Business (a Business Plan project), Technology (an App Development project). Discuss the idea of welcoming a handful of members of the business community as mentors in these select fields. You will need one designee who will act as your school's community liaison. This could be a part-time role to start your mentorship initiative, with the promise that the designee will be given proper support. This person's role might include business courtship, background checks, mentor training and preparation, classroom placement, teacher support, and follow-up communications.

2. ASK THE CORPORATION FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

When we explored pitching community businesses, we discussed the possibility of requesting financial assistance from the corporation. I've witnessed corporate philanthropic programs and individual mentors each underwrite such program elements as: project research, field trip expenses, end-of-year student awards, teacher stipends. They may also be willing to cover the administrative costs for the overall mentoring program.

3. CREATE CLEAR RULES OF ENGAGEMENT AND EXPECTATIONS

It is always best to be forthright about the expectations you have of the partnership. It is suggested to review parameters and define them from the beginning. What's the class schedule? What's the commitment of understanding for a semester or full year? How many in-person visits will the mentor and student have on a monthly basis? What is the best way to communicate between the student, mentor, and school liaison? How many students will be mentored by the company? What are your snow day cancellation procedures? What's the fallback plan if the placement goes awry?

4. ADEQUATE TIME FOR TRAINING

You should never assume corporate mentors already know how to mentor students. There is a culture gap between the business community and the 21st-century school environment. This gap will become less significant as these partnerships become more commonplace throughout your community, but for now, it shouldn't be ignored. Training prepares the mentor for this cultural shift and presents ideas for best practices and preparation for working with teachers and one-on-one with students. I often suggest August or January for training before the semester begins. A mentor who knows what she's expected to do is a happy mentor.

5. MENTOR PLACEMENT: CONSIDER PERSONALITY, EXPERIENCE, AND GEOGRAPHY

Not every mentor is a match for every group or individual. And, several mentor scenarios can be at play depending on your priorities, such as: mentor is placed in the classroom and works under the tutelage of a teacher; or an afterschool program working through a non-profit; or periodically bringing the student to the mentor's place of work; or a blend of face-to-face time combined with online coaching.

Consider the age and needs of the students. Consider the mentor's unique personality. Question if there is compatibility with the teacher, and more importantly, with the student. Consider the business proximity to the school. And, think about the alignment of your student's interests with the mentor's experiences.

“Consider the age and needs of the students. Consider the mentor's unique personality.”

PATTY ALPER

6. PLAN FOR TOUCHPOINTS

Build time for check-ins between teacher, mentor, and liaison. This can be a simple call or email. Mentors are often excited to share their experiences and crave feedback. This is a time to learn of any issues that have arisen or hear about progress. Also, pay attention to what the students are saying outside of the mentoring sessions. Keep all parties informed so the path forward is clearly understood.

7. PLAN AT LEAST ONE (EXTRANEOUS) FIELD TRIP

If the student hasn't already had the opportunity to work with their mentor within the mentor's work environment, suggest to the mentor and their employer that this be arranged. The hands-on experience will further introduce students to the business concepts and new methodologies shared by the mentor. If your student has already been working within the mentor's work environment, are there locations in the city that could further demonstrate certain lessons? How might the experience benefit both the student and the mentor? These should be planned with all parties involved, allowing students to look forward to further connecting the dots between learning and doing.

8. INCORPORATE ORAL PRESENTATIONS

One critical aspect is a formal oral presentation. Once students have chosen a project and have implemented their plans, they should have the ability to communicate their work standing before a public audience and offering a succinct synopsis of their project's findings. This experience cements the project as an important accomplishment, builds confidence, and develops one of the most in-demand skills for the 21st-century workplace. For the presentation, you might use some guiding questions: What is the problem you are addressing and why did you choose it? What is your objective? Describe your implementation plan. What obstacles did you face? What was the real-world impact? When the students present, invite mentors, associates, teachers, parents, and other relevant community members to provide feedback from various lenses.

9. WRITE LETTERS OF APPRECIATION

Writing a thank you note is pivotal in one's career path, as it demonstrates courtesy, respect, and a level of intentionality. Not to mention, it can also keep important doors open long into the future. There is no greater gift than sharing time and knowledge, and it's important for students to recognize and reflect on receiving this gift. A book of classroom letters presented to a company or individual at year's end also strengthens the bond between the school and the business.

10. PLAN AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT EVENT

Plan a small event for mentors and students to share stories. Have the school formally thank the mentors and corporations. Hand out awards to students who showed notable progress or skill sets. Take photos. Invite city leaders. Include the media!

11. REVIEW, AND REPEAT

Last but not least, make sure you set aside time to review the year's activities after a successful semester. What improvements can each party offer? What can be added to the following semester's cycle? What additional classes can be added to the mentor initiative? What else can be done to increase student engagement? What other cohorts and/or corporations might be worthy expansions during the next school year?

“What is the problem you are addressing and why did you choose it? What is your objective?...What obstacles did you face? What was the real-world impact?”

PATTY ALPER

HOW IS MENTORSHIP A WIN-WIN?

After many years of developing a mentor model and iterating along the way, I've seen it all—in every permutation. I've seen the incredible student outcomes from my very own mentees—some still in touch 18 years later; I've witnessed the relationships forged by countless other mentor-mentee relationships; I've seen mentors return year after year and bring new associates to participate; I've observed the indelible bonds between a teacher and her company team; and I've noted the county, regional, and state authorities who praise this work.

Through all of my research and interviews, the following highlights how Project Based Mentoring™ is a win-win relationship from each constituent's point of view.

WHY IS THE PARTNERSHIP A WIN FOR THE CORPORATION?

- The HR department views mentoring as a form of management training—mentors gain leadership proficiencies, management skills, confidence, and a new sense of responsibility for educating the next generation.
- The company and employees benefit from the good will this partnership creates in the community.
- For many organizations, the Corporate Social Responsibility department now has a key role in supporting the Human Resources department. Through mentoring, CSR builds a pipeline of skilled applicants and generates greater interest in STEM studies.
- Millennials prefer to work at companies that are visibly doing something good. A corporation that builds community liaisons and assists local institutions will attract more Millennial job applicants.
- The corporation's retirees become ambassadors for the company. Most corporate retirees find the transition to a life without a career to be daunting. By volunteering in their field of knowledge, retirees become the corporation's accomplished ambassadors. They enjoy community engagement and are respected. They are sharing their knowledge with the next generation.

WHY IS THE PARTNERSHIP A WIN FOR THE SCHOOL?

- The educators can see students connecting the dots from book learning to real-world application.
- The school can see a pathway from their mentorship program to new opportunities for their students: endorsements, internships, apprenticeships, and jobs.
- Educators enjoy a broadened horizon with new partnerships, as they expand their own world view and understanding of the resources available for their students in the community.
- Greater community support infiltrates education decision makers and elected officials.
- Depending on the kind of school, a deepened engagement is fostered with donors, alumni, or community businesses.

WHY IS THE PARTNERSHIP A WIN FOR STUDENTS?

- Students are introduced to long-term projects, master planning, and an oral defense of projects. New skill sets, new language, and a new professional demeanor accompany these outcomes.

“I’ve seen the incredible student outcomes from my very own mentees—some still in touch 18 years later.”

PATTY ALPER

- Students connect dots between their education and the real world, which results in increased motivation and new interest in scholastic success.
- Students learn to collaborate in an intergenerational relationship.
- Students learn the value of grit, confidence, and team work within an industry sector.
- Students can add a real-world project experience to their resumes and their college applications.
- Students enjoy increased internship opportunities and obtain stronger skill sets for a corporate career or endorsements for their future work life.

WHY IS THE PARTNERSHIP A WIN FOR THE CITY?

- Cities benefit from higher-trained employees.
- More employment increases community-wide economic development and revenue generation.
- New industries consider relocation to the city because youth are educated to work-ready standards.
- Cities see job growth and property value growth.
- Cities benefit from the economic development witnessed by schools and corporations.

It's hard to believe that a short-term, limited connection like mentorship can make much of a difference in a student's adventure toward maturation. But, most of us still remember that visitor who came by the house; that stranger who made the important, unexpected observation; or the individual who functioned as sort of ambassador from a world that was still very far away. If that stranger managed to speak to our own place of possibility, an inner dialogue began and continued long after the memorable outsider moved on.

I am certain of this: students want to find ways to connect to a world that they suspect is different from either school or home. They need to feel connected to a world that looks complex and incoherent. Real-world projects coupled with a mentor's guidance can introduce a brand new learning pathway that reenergizes disengaged youth.

To these ends, this is but a small investment for an enormous return.

I believe that Project Based Mentoring™ can change a student's trajectory—that educators and businesses together can transition concepts of mentorship from simply an act of charity, toward being an educational necessity. Consider supporting an infrastructure and training that would welcome this new partnership and better prepare our youth through innovation, projects, and skills that are applicable to the 21st-century job market.

come to the edge

she said.

they came.

she pushed them

and they flew....

—SEKEITHIA, 2006 MENTEE, RECORDED POET

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 that brings corporate employees to classrooms with the goal of passing on skills to the next generation.



Colleges That Change Lives

For learners who have experienced learner-centered education, the transition to higher education—where the traditional paradigm is predominant—can present a major challenge. We often ask learner-centered pioneers, how do you help young learners transition back into the traditional system when they go to college? Thankfully, because learners' agency and holistic development are so mature, they are able to navigate the challenges without skipping a beat. And, they are able to maintain their love for learning. As the movement grows, this topic of conversation will become more and more present. Thanks to a recommendation from one of our SparkHouse participants, we encourage learners and educators to consider the colleges and universities highlighted by [Colleges That Change Lives](#). These 44 environments provide a new way of thinking about what we all look for in a quality higher education experience.

College Profiles ([link](#))

College Map ([link](#))

Learner Request for Information ([link](#))

Blueprints (for Assessment)

Developing an assessment framework that contains enough structure to clearly communicate the growth of an individual learner while still retaining the learner's unique qualities is headache inducing. [HundrED](#), an international organization scanning the globe for innovative practices in education, has put the spotlight on learner-centered work happening at [MUSE School](#) in California. In particular, they've highlighted their work in [Blueprints](#)—a framing for “an holistic assessment method that addresses every aspect of a student's learning experience, including their abilities to live and contribute to a sustainable lifestyle.” HundrED partnered with MUSE to provide educators a step-by-step look at what's needed to implement this assessment strategy. Consider the possibility a learner Blueprint might create in your community and let us know how you would adapt it for your learners.

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.

NEW PROFIT REIMAGINE LEARNING FUND “VOICES FROM THE FIELD” WEBINAR

Featuring SparkHouse Youth
Dec 12, 3-4pm ET

IMPROVING SCHOOL OUTCOMES THROUGH STUDENT CENTERED LEARNING & TEACHING

Sacramento, CA
Dec 15

[Register](#)

EDVISIONS ED°EXPO 2018 TWIN CITIES: FUEL YOUR VISION!

Falcon Heights, MN
Jan 26

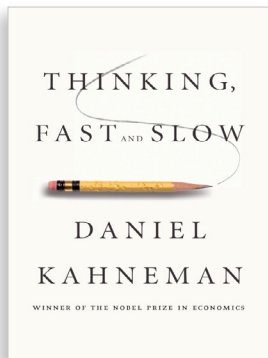
[Register](#)

OPPORTUNITY BOARD

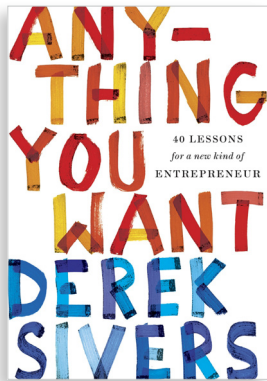
HundrED is accepting submissions for their 2018 HundrED Schools initiative, which scours the globe for innovative environments changing the face of education. Apply [here](#).

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](#).

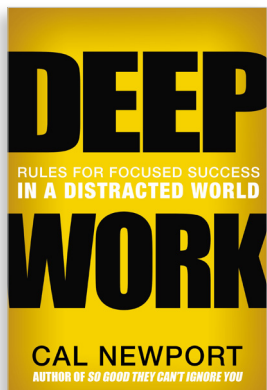
The Nellie Mae Education Foundation released a request for proposals to support a 12-18 month grant for state education agencies and public school districts. Learn more [here](#).

**Thinking, Fast and Slow** by Daniel Kahneman

Oftentimes, we wish we could control every second of our lives. Or, at the very least, control what's happening between our ears. But, as Daniel Kahneman points out in *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, our behavior can often be misguided by our neurological processes when we are making quick, intuition-based decisions. In his groundbreaking book, Kahneman, a Nobel laureate in Economics, takes readers on an interwoven journey through the two systems that make up our everyday thinking. As you explore his work, discover insights into which thoughts are in your control, which are not, and how this knowledge can be applied in future decision making and strategic thinking.

**Anything You Want: 40 Lessons for a New Kind of Entrepreneur** by Derek Sivers

Along any transformational journey, feelings of isolation and abandonment are often the biggest hurdles. As those feelings creep in, we must find ways to rejuvenate and reenergize many times over before our efforts become sustainable. One of the most powerful ways to recharge our batteries is by learning from individuals who have experienced similar journeys of hard work, failure, and, ultimately, success. One such story comes from Derek Sivers in his book, *Anything You Want*. Known as the “last music-business folk hero,” Sivers invites readers to consider his non-traditional business story—he was someone who simply wanted to follow his dreams.

**Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World** by Cal Newport

Distractions are nothing new, but in today's digital age, we have created distractions that feel like productive work. As we give into this false sense of productivity (e.g. email, social media, etc.), we become less and less skilled at staying focused on tasks that demand our undivided attention for long periods of time. Cal Newport, author of *Deep Work*, wants to help put an end to our attention spans' decline. By outlining key areas where we can better prioritize our daily work and, more importantly, eliminate shallow distractions, Newport exposes a new path toward living into our best selves.

WORTH YOUR TIME

Backwards Brain Bicycle

Attempting to convey the message of paradigm shifting through words alone is an arduous task. Thanks to our most recent learning environment profile, we discovered a popular video that entertainingly presents the nature of paradigm shifts in real-time. [Watch here](#)

How one district solved its special education dropout problem

“Kids will be kids.” A justification that can often perpetuate the negative aspects of our learning community's culture. Discover how one environment refused to accept this narrative any longer, and transformed their culture into one that accepts and celebrates all learners. [Read here](#)

No laptops in the lecture hall. How about no lecture hall?

In response to an opinion piece in the *New York Times*, Seth Godin challenges the author to think beyond the argument of tech versus no tech in a college lecture and asks: What if we transformed the delivery of lectures altogether? [Read here](#)

“Individually we are one drop,
together we are an ocean.”

— **RYUNOSUKE SATORO**

Read past issues of
PIONEERING : A LEARNER-CENTERED PUBLICATION
www.education-reimagined.org



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