



2012 WASHINGTON IDEAS FORUM

WORKING SUMMIT OVERVIEW: EDUCATION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Prepared by Emily Barasch, *The Atlantic*

EDUCATION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY:

Exit strategies and innovations in a struggling field

THE CONVERSATION

Expert thinkers and practitioners in the education field met at the Washington Ideas Forum to discuss how to improve education in the U.S. When compared to students in the top 65 most industrialized nations, American students ranked 23rd in math and 31st in science in 2009. Meanwhile, over the last year tuition at public universities increased at a rate more than double the rate of inflation, and the most expensive undergraduate institutions cost nearly \$60,000 for a single year of instruction.

Worse, for the first time, the current generation of Americans entering the workforce is less educated than the generation which is now retiring – a worrisome trend which doesn't appear to be happening in other developing countries. The correlation between educational attainment and employment opportunity is undeniable; in the recession, four out of five people who lost a job lacked a college degree while four million of the new jobs created went to college graduates. As moderator Clive Crook of *The Atlantic* noted, “The country needs to be able to say education is crucial and mean it.”

Participants opened with arguments for how to best leverage technology to improve education. Karen Cator, Director for Education Technology at the U.S. Department of Education asserted that, “...technology has gone untapped in systematic ways, especially with the incredible growing wealth of digital content.” The Department of Ed's goal, Cator said, is to transition schools to digital in five years.

Pearson Education's Shilpi Niyog argued that researchers should focus on technologies that study how the brain works, rather than solely rely on policy-based data.

Many participants highlighted the need to increase emphasis on early learning. Lesli Rotenberg of PBS cited her organization's funding of research with early learners (two through eight years) using technology. These studies proved that the use of technology has strengthened literacy, science, and math skills in low-income classrooms.

Others warned that technology cannot be thought of as a cure-all for the widening educational gap in this country. Technology, the large majority of the participants agreed, should be integrated with competent and good teachers who are well trained. The importance of teacher quality became a dominant theme. “Being a high school teacher was the hardest job I've ever had,” said Linda Rosen, President of the non-profit STEM advocacy group, Change the Equation. “In the end, it comes down to teaching.”

Randi Weingarten, President of the American Federation of Teachers, a major labor union which was an underwriter of the larger Forum, argued that good teachers are made better when they understand and faithfully implement an agreed-upon core curriculum. “If we're going to grow the economy, we need kids who not just know things, but can apply things,” she said.

FIVE BIG IDEAS

1. Technology should be leveraged to improve the academic lives of student across the socioeconomic spectrum.
2. More longitudinal educational data documenting K-12 student learning would be beneficial
3. A post-secondary education should be available to all students, regardless of age, lifestyle and social class. Non-traditional programs and online learning can be effective tools for some of these students.
4. The Common Core Curriculum seeks to align students nationwide, collect crucial and uniform data on their learning experiences, and protect schools from local interests which may undermine learning.
5. Early childhood development and mentoring programs are critical ingredients for long-term educational success

ATTENDEES

Moderator: Clive Crook *Senior Editor* **The Atlantic**

Host: Katherine Bradley *President* **CityBridge Foundation**

Participants:

- Stephanie Banchemo *National Education Reporter* **Wall Street Journal**
- Sharon Sayles Belton *Vice President, Government Affairs and Community Relations, Legal* **Thomson Reuters**
- Dan Cardinali *Chief Executive Officer* **Communities in Schools**
- Karen Cator *Director, Education Technology* **United States Department of Education**
- Alan Cheville *Program Director of Engineering Education and Centers Division* **National Science Foundation**
- Boykin Curry *Partner* **Eagle Capital**
- William Gormley *University Professor* **Georgetown University**
- Fred Humphries **Microsoft**
- Fawn Johnson *Correspondent* **National Journal**
- Lyndsey Layton *National Education Reporter* **The Washington Post**
- Doug Lederman *Co-Editor* **Inside Higher Ed**
- Susan Lees *Executive Vice President and General Counsel* **Allstate Insurance Company**
- Jamie Merisotis *President and Chief Executive Officer* **Lumina Foundation**
- Marilyn Mohrman-Gillis *Managing Director Public Policy and Communications* **CFP Board**
- Shilpi Niyogi *Executive Vice President, Public Affairs* **Pearson**
- Joseph Osterman *Major General* **United States Marines**
- Brian Parish *President* **IData**
- Linda Rosen *Chief Executive Officer* **Change the Equation**
- Lesli Rotenberg *Senior Vice President of Children's Media* **PBS**
- Randi Weingarten *President* **American Federation of Teachers**
- Ross Wiener *Vice President and the Executive Director of the Education and Society Program* Arra Yerganian
Chief Marketing Officer **University of Phoenix, The Apollo Group**
- Tae Yoo *Senior Vice President, Corporate Affairs* **Cisco**