

BACK TO WHY: EDUCATION AT ITS CORE – 2015 SESSIONS

Beyond our Borders: The Global Education Crisis

Since 2000, the world has made significant progress towards the goal of achieving universal primary education. However, ensuring that all children receive a quality education still remains a considerable challenge. In what ways are institutions like Pencils of Promise and Teach for All adapting in regions where infrastructure still doesn't support the development of quality education systems? How can systems in these regions reallocate already scarce funds, increase the pipeline for quality teaching, and use technology to increase effectiveness?

Boon or Boondoggle: Integrating Technology Into Classrooms

Classrooms across the country are integrating technology with varying levels of success. In an effort to be on the cutting edge of transforming teaching and learning, some districts invest a significant amount in technology programs that have not been fully researched or piloted. This panel will explore the most important metrics to consider when measuring the impact of technology in the classroom. How can schools identify the ed-tech products that best meet their needs? How much preparation, planning and teacher input go into schools' choices of classroom technology products and what major trade-offs are involved?

Breaking Barriers: Multifaceted Strategies to Close the Black Male Achievement Gap

Black males in public education consistently lag behind all other demographics groups in terms of student achievement. They are often the most highly disciplined subgroup, and have the lowest high school graduation rates. How successful have practical on-the-ground initiatives been in tackling the issue of black male achievement? Are there certain policy changes that should be implemented to enable our educational system to better serve black boys? What types of models are most effective in educating black boys and ensuring college matriculation and persistence?

Closing the Poles: Finding Common Ground in Education Reform

While the education reform debate can be very polarizing, there are examples of partnership between school districts, charters, and teachers' unions that have developed a common vision of reform. However, these partnerships are sometimes short-lived and prone to political turnover. What examples of charter-district and union-district collaboration have proven effective and what underpins those successes? How are these partnerships sustained in the midst of political turnover?

CMO Growth: Spreading Innovation or Next-generation Bureaucracy?

Are today's best practices tomorrow's barriers to reform? Charter management organizations (CMOs) have chosen a variety of paths to tackle this question. Ranging from rapid national expansion to more targeted growth, these organizations have charted different paths with varying results. Which approach(es) drive the best results for students and their communities? What steps will they take next to maintain their focus on academic achievement and educational equity?

Depth Over Breadth: Teaching Teachers to Master the Common Core

A goal of the Common Core standards is to develop critical thinking in students and promote deep understanding and mastery of a narrower set of topics. Making the shift to this new set of standards has not only changed what we teach, but it has required a significant paradigm shift in how we teach. Districts and schools have invested a lot in professional development over the past few years to prepare teachers for this transition. This panel will examine what pedagogical shifts are necessary as we move to the Common Core in Connecticut, as well as lessons we can learn from local districts and schools that have been highly effective in this transition.

Developing Young Brains: The Intersection of Early Education and Neuroscience

This past fall, President Obama challenged educators across the country to enroll 6 million children in high quality preschool programs. Early childhood education reform is critical in achieving this ambitious goal. What organizations and educators are on the leading edge of innovation for early education? What insights does educational neuroscience research provide to implement new early education programs, initiatives, and curricula? How are practitioners, policy leaders, and educational neuroscientists thinking with regard to early childhood supports for our children and next steps to improving early education?

Expressive Learning: Integrating Arts and Education

Success in today's society thrives on creativity, where innovators must think and view the world in new ways. The arts play an essential role in affirming and developing the creative abilities of students of all skill and education levels. What are the best avenues through which the arts can be successfully integrated into a holistic child education? Which schools best combine the arts with traditional curriculum, and what barriers exist for the establishment of comparable schools? How do community-based organizations, enrichment programs, and policy movements work to cultivate arts education in and out of the classroom?

For-Profit Schools: Potential or Poison?

For-profit K-12 education models have grown dramatically in recent years. Supporters believe these schools spur innovation, reach underserved populations, and demonstrate financial discipline. Critics assert that these schools are exploitative, corrupt, and toxic to the very idea of education. How do for-profit education organizations work, and what are their strengths and weaknesses? How do they perceive their role in public education as they continue to grow in size and influence? How will for-profit schools catalyze and impact education, and how should the public hold them accountable?

From Induction to Infinity: Redefining Effective Teacher Training

Amidst an ever-changing educational landscape, how do teachers acquire and build the necessary skills to effectively engage and educate? The breadth resources is constantly increasing as are opportunities to refine the teaching craft. How do education schools, districts, and other influencers ensure that teachers are finding and implementing the optimal tools into their classrooms? This panel will use existing avenues for teacher growth to explore and evaluate the best ways to train our teachers.

Got Grit? Examining Links Between Non-Cognitive Skills and Academic Achievement

What are the most important skills kids need in order to achieve academic success? According to a growing number of researchers and educators, the answer is not simply math and reading, but non-cognitive skills such as grit and resilience. Initiatives such as Character Lab are building tools for measuring these character traits, but figuring out how to teach grit has been a challenge for many schools. The grit movement has also faced criticism from those that argue that social-emotional learning needs to encompass a wider range of traits, such as empathy and compassion. This panel will examine those tensions.

Hacking Higher Ed: The Future of Postsecondary Learning

With declining acceptance rates, rising tuition, and lower completion rates, fewer and fewer students have the opportunity to receive degrees from traditional post-secondary institutions. From MOOCs and coding academies to distance college programs and proprietary low-cost universities, new models of higher education have sprouted across the country to address these problems. What are the best practices of these new models in providing quality post-secondary education? How do education technology companies impact the higher education landscape? What are traditional and nontraditional institutions doing to mitigate barriers to university-level education?

It Takes a Village: Building and Sustaining Community Engagement in Schools

Successful schools do not exist in a vacuum. They require an engaged community that informs and sustains education reform efforts. Who bears the responsibility for building community involvement—the school or the community? What are the gains to be drawn from community engagement, and what level of investment is necessary to achieve them? How are initiatives like Promise Neighborhoods and Community Schools changing the long-term outcomes of the communities they serve, and what challenges do they face?

Lessons from Brick City: Newark School Reform at a Crossroads

20 years since the New Jersey State Department of Education took control of Newark Public Schools, the district has been the recipient of praise, criticism, significant funding and public interest. School performance, however, has lagged behind the great expectations of a Newark education revival. This session will examine Newark's education reform efforts, and pose questions about the future of the reform movement in Brick City. What were the significant roadblocks to reform in Newark? What lessons can other district leaders learn from the successes and challenges in the city? What's next?

Measuring What Matters: Using Data to Transform Student Outcomes

Education is being transformed by the potential of data. Teachers, schools, content providers, and system leaders are increasingly using data to set goals and monitor progress, and in doing so, they are helping to identify which tactics truly move the needle in improving student outcomes. But are we asking the right questions about data, and how can we use it to more effectively help learners? How can we use data to identify and scale solutions that work?

Next Generation School Leadership: Pipeline or Pipe Dream?

Many districts struggle to recruit experienced K-12 leaders for AP, principal, and district leadership roles. Several new organizations have devised approaches to build the “bench” of high-quality schools and districts. Are these organizations training the right leaders for the job at an appropriate scale, or are they distractions from a larger conversation? What conversations should we be having? How are traditional leadership pipelines responding to the work of these new programs?

Policy to Practice: How States Respond to Federal Mandates

Our state-led public education system has experienced successes and failures in adopting and expanding federal policies. A state’s ability to effectively implement change hinges on whether or not it can transform federal funding into district- and school-wide programs. Using New York as a case study, this panel addresses the following questions: How has a state translated funding into meaningful reform initiatives? How has the relationship between federal policy and statewide practice changed teacher evaluations, charter school expansions, and Common Core implementation? What impact do these changes have on the daily activities of districts, schools, and classrooms?

Reforming the Rural School: Spotlight on Rural Education

In the United States, over half of school districts and about one-third of all public schools are located in rural areas. While much investment has flowed towards improving urban education across the United States, there is demonstrated need to explore and discuss solutions to solve rural education problems as well. How are rural schools structured and what unique struggles do they face? What roles do the community and economy play in providing rural education solutions? What differences and parallels exist between rural and urban schools in the reform context?

Retention with Intention: Supporting Teachers with Purpose

Schools across the nation are working tirelessly to develop ways to better support and retain high quality teachers, yet many teachers still choose to leave the profession. Has teacher preparation and professional development hit a plateau? What is the leading research on teacher development and how can it be integrated into existing professional development programs? Most importantly, what do teachers have to say about their profession and their pursuit for a life-long career?

Students Left Behind: Our Special Education Population

In our current education system, special education (SPED) initiatives are often cloudy and difficult to define, compared to those geared towards the general student population. Individual school initiatives tend to focus on the general student population and sometimes neglect the SPED student contingent. Moreover, leaders find it difficult to implement special education policy in a consolidated fashion from the federal level down to the state and district levels. How can we improve resources for special education students both in public and private schools? What model schools have a disproportionately high special education population and are high performing? How can we ensure that charter schools are meeting the needs of SPED students?

To and Through: Ensuring Success in College

For many disadvantaged students, the journey to a complete education and fulfilling future doesn't end with high school graduation. But those students often face great challenges to completing their post-secondary degrees. How are high schools and community-based organizations partnering with higher education institutions to improve the chances that their alumni will graduate? What are the key factors enabling first-generation students to succeed? Which bright spots of program success can we learn from?