Foundations Gather To Discuss Future of Education

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Save the Date!

Mark your calendars now: EdVisions will be hosting a conference at our new headquarters on Friday, January 26, 2018. The day will consist of informative workshops, student presentations, breakout sessions, and the opportunity for immersive tours of EdVisions model schools. We hope you can join us!

Foundations Gather To Discuss Future of Education

Dr. Lisa Snyder  | Executive Director

EdVisions and The Center for School Change recently invited Minnesota-based foundations to come to the table to discuss the most compelling drivers for change and improvement in education. Officials from more than 25 foundations gathered in St. Paul at meetings or events scheduled over a two-day period in mid October.

The meetings were scheduled in part to host the visit of Dr. Don Shalvey, K-12 deputy director at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation who was in the region to speak at a Minneapolis-based event. At the meetings, Dr. Shalvey shared a summary of the upcoming K-12 education strategy set to be released by Bill Gates on October 19, 2017. The Gates Foundation strategy will focus on empowering networks of secondary schools to transform learning through focused, school level innovations in the areas of distributive leadership, curriculum and resource alignment, data driven improvement, improved transitions, high performing faculty, family & community connections and student-centered learning.

“We hope that bringing Minnesota-based foundations together as part of a larger, national discussion, they would consider aligning their efforts and goals of philanthropy in Minnesota toward a common vision for education that will better prepare our students for a changing world,” stated Doug Thomas, development director at EdVisions.

Among the participants was Kayla Yang-Best, who oversees the strategic investment and partnerships in education for the Bush Foundation who explained the foundation’s investment in education in the region centers around making education more relevant for today’s students through individualizing learning for all.

Officials from the ECMC Foundation who are currently the primary funding source for the EdVisions’s strategic plan, presented their support for networks of schools that promote deeper learning which includes a set of six interrelated competencies: mastering rigorous academic content, learning how to think critically and solve problems, working collaboratively, communicating effectively, directing one’s own learning, and developing an academic mindset—a belief in one’s ability to grow.
The first month of school has passed and I often step back and reflect on all the ideas we had as a team over the summer and how they were implemented at the start of the school year. I am often surprised when I look at what I thought was such a great plan and when we went to implement, the work struggled. As a team we often have to rework great ideas, apply band-aids or abandon the idea totally. Over time I have gotten used to the idea that when we team, the collective work we develop often has to go through a phase of “continuous improvement” before we get to a process that really matches our intent and school culture.

I have also learned to honor the reality that for most teams, whenever we are trying to learn something new, we will experience an “implementation dip” as we move to implementation. In other words, the first attempts look pretty ugly and clumsy.

Michael Fullan (2001) states that all successful schools experience implementation dips as they implement new ideas, observable with a literal dip in performance.

Before I kick new ideas to the curb during the implantation dip, I like to stop and review of the work of Knoester (1991) and Ambrose (1987) on the Factors of Managing Complex Change. This work has been extremely useful in helping teams identify the missing components needed to be successful. Review the graphic below and facilitate a discussion with your team before you abandon new ideas/innovation. The essential question: as we moved to implement XYZ do we need to revisit and strengthen any of these areas (Vision, Skills, Incentives, Resources and Action Plan)?

Education in the United States needs to be fueled with new ideas and innovation. Being aware of the “Implementation Dip” and the Factors in Managing Complex Change can be very useful in helping take great ideas into sustainable best practices. If you would like help facilitating this discussion with your team or more information on our professional development services, contact us at info@edvisions.org.

EdVisions’ students are highly motivated about learning because they are working on projects that are interesting and relevant to their lives and their community. They plan projects from start to finish that will make a practical, real-world impact on the community.

"*Dr. Scott Wurdinger, Minnesota State University-Mankato

*Scott Wurdinger is a professor of experiential education and leadership studies at Minnesota State University in Mankato, and currently serves as the coordinator of the Educational Leadership Doctoral Program."
The ASCD Yearbook for 1999 included an article by Brian J. Caldwell called Education for the Public Good: Strategic Intentions for the 21st Century. In his essay, Caldwell outlined eight concepts that the future school would utilize:

- **Life-long Learning**, the view that learning would become a pleasurable activity, inspiring people to wish to continually learn, rather than the force-fed curriculum-based, time-based compulsory education method that made learning a drudgery;
- **Learner-Driven-Learning** applies to learning beyond adolescence, using technologies beyond teachers and school buildings, learning developed from student interest;
- **Just-in-Time Learning** recognizes that the best learning opportunities are created when interest and motivation are at their peak, which could happen at any time of day;
- **Transformative Learning** refers to learning that commits to changing attitudes, aspirations, values and beliefs to a higher sense of purpose and productivity than before the education intervention;
- **Collaborative Learning** uses technology to shift individualistic modes of learning and doing to collaborative means of learning and doing, allowing teams of students and adults to collaborate regardless of geographic location;
- **Contextual Learning** states that learning is more effective when it is connected to relevant, real-world experiences;
- **Learning-to-Learn** refers to gaining skills that allow a person to learn what they need or want at any time they decide they need or want it.

Caldwell’s view was optimistically written in the late 1990’s, when technology and global economies began making great changes in the workplace and in the marketplace. Educators attempted many reforms in the past 30 years, but very few schools adopted Caldwell’s list in full. Until EdVisions’ Schools were created. All of the above can be witnessed in most of the schools in our network.

What remains is to find ways to assess what happens to students in these schools. Test scores are not the best way to do so. Seat time does not tell us what is learned because students are on personalized paths to mastering standards and graduation. So what do schools use to assess their student success?

The purpose of the EdVisions Comprehensive Plan is to help schools not only assess basic skills, but also to correlate them to dispositional hope (which is a product of engagement) and life skill development; then to relate all of this to college and work readiness and persistence. When schools adopt all of Caldwell’s concepts into their mission, it will become evident in the assessment numbers. We need means by which we can assess transformative learning, the attitudes, dispositions, values and beliefs of our students. We believe the Hope Surveys and life skill rubrics do just that.

When our schools fully adopt the above concepts, and can show the impact it has on student growth, and those students are transformed into life-long-learners with a higher sense of purpose and a higher sense of hope, then we will truly be schools for the public good!
Ed°Essentials Build Awareness and Community

The Authentic Learning Community Ed°Essential is about developing a strong, healthy and highly personalized learning community where every student is treated as an individual. Advisories focus on Social Emotional Learning through positive, caring relationships that model and practice respect, responsibility and Restorative Justice. Community engagement is highly encouraged by the advisory groupings, student voice in the school community, and student participation in community events.

October is National Bullying Prevention Awareness Month and November is Transgender Awareness Month. Focus on Social Emotional Learning by participating in activities sponsored by local and national organizations. Engage your students by helping them create projects and campaigns to promote Bullying Prevention and Transgender Awareness.

A couple great resources to get the conversations started include:

The Bully Project - thebullyproject.com

Trans Student Educational Resources - transstudent.org/sites

I feel fortunate to have experienced the EdVisions model as a graduate of the Minnesota New Country School. Much of the agency and passion I feel as an adult I trace back to my ability to shape and guide my own learning as a student, and to watching the MNCS teacher team modeling democratic leadership in running the school.

-Lars Esdal, Executive Director, Education Evolving
What It Takes to Successfully Launch an Innovation

Doug Thomas  | Director of Development

People often ask about the chances for successfully launching a new school or education program and what it takes to make that happen. After years of helping and being part of various startup groups, I’ve come up with five supporting essentials that seem to be necessary to at least give a planning group a fighting chance for successful implementation. It seems as though they could be the keys to any innovator or entrepreneur’s playbook.

1. The idea or innovation needs to offer something new and different. We have a plethora of failed attempts that only seem to propose a new version of the old ways. Doing better is a great goal but realistic improvement has to be supported by different method to attract students and parents. Being innovative is risky, but that’s the whole idea. Better and different doesn’t come without risk.

2. Those attempting to make the changes (start something new) must be given the autonomy to go forward without being sabotaged or side-tracked by others, especially those who really have no authority over the process. This is most difficult for boards to do as it often involves ‘redesign and reallocation’, not exactly what boards are typically trained for or their reasons for serving.

3. In line with ‘reallocation’, those making the changes or creating a new entity, should be given control over their budget. It is often the most unjust action when administrators or boards tell groups, “Great, innovate/improve all you want” and then not relinquish the funding that the group needs or deserves. This is a major issue for district innovation and an even greater issue in chartering where states do not provide full or equitable funding.

4. Those attempting a new and different model and increased autonomy, must be willing to share results, good or bad. True accountability involves being open and honest about what works and what doesn’t. Over a reasonable amount of time, a team should account for the promise they made to achieve independence and better/different results. This can come in the form of new measures and different ways of reporting. That’s the whole idea with innovation.

5. The startup should be relatively small but big enough to be functional and efficient. We’ve found over the years that the ‘rule of 150’ from the Tipping Point is a good guide to optimum size. Growing intently from there makes sense.

We’ve favored the charter strategy over the years because all five of these essentials are generally present in most state charter laws. Missing any one of these can doom your efforts. And, they tend to support the notion of trading autonomy for accountability with a definite twist toward innovation. At EdVisions, we’ve been helping fulfill the promise and potential for new and better schools for nearly twenty years. If you need assistance with any of these essentials, call on us. We’d be happy to help.
Hope Survey Update

If you have not sent your enrollment numbers for 2017-2018, please send them to marymoening@edvisions.org and make sure that either:

ALL students (for brand new schools)
or
NEW students (for continuing schools)

have taken the survey this fall.

On Thursday, September 28th, we held our first “Hope Survey Coffee Talk” video conference to provide an opportunity for school staff to join in on a conversation to address questions or provide thoughts they have as they are administering the fall survey to new students. We were joined by folks from 3 different schools with some questions around follow up reports after survey completion and beginning discussions on surveys to be directed to staff members in addition to students.

Our intent is to offer coffee talks on various days/times in the hope of igniting conversations over common thoughts and questions. We will send emails announcing upcoming sessions. Feel free to tune in with your thoughts and/or just to listen in at any time during the session.

Our next Coffee Talk will be held from 9:00-10:30 am on Thurs, Oct 26. The video conference link will be sent a few days prior to the event.

If you have any questions in the meantime, please contact Mary Moening at marymoening@edvisions.org or 612-601-1073.

Check Out

The EdEssentials

The EdSurveys

Social Media

Facebook: facebook.com/edvisionsinc
Twitter: twitter.com/edvisions
Instagram: instagram.com/edvisionsinc

Let’s Keep In Touch

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