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## Setting the Table for Transformation

**A**hh . . . the so-called perfect storm: that coalescence of circumstances that leads to a force never before seen, and it's coming soon to a public school near you. In the past, some of these pressures may have existed, but never with such power and all at once. Virtually unfathomable . . . a Category 6 hurricane.

There is ever-increasing pressure on public education to change. While most educators around the country are keenly aware of the pressure, for many, it is still difficult to envision what it will change into. Most have difficulty envisioning a system that is substantially different than the model that they have known for their entire lives. They still see buildings with classrooms, clocks on the walls, buses that bring students back and forth, textbooks, homework, 180 days, and so on, and so on. So, while the cry for change is loud and clear, for most, the actual picture of what that change could be is very murky—except, of course, in the New Hampshire vision.

Without a logical vision of what to change to, real education redesign will continue to be painfully slow. The proof is borne out in the history of cries for education reform. These cries didn't just start a few years ago. They've been there for decades with failed attempt after failed attempt, to the point that a common phrase among longtime educators is "this, too, shall pass."

"Ya, ya, ya! We know. You want change. You wanted open classrooms, and then you didn't. You wanted new math, and then you didn't. You wanted individualized learning, then you wanted differentiated

learning; now you want personalized learning. This, too, shall pass.” It’s very understandable why many veteran educators feel this way. It’s not very different than the story of “The Boy Who Cried Wolf” too often. When the wolf actually showed up, and when the boy cried out once again, many heard the cries but didn’t take them seriously.

So, to those skeptics among the education ranks, the reasoning behind this skepticism is understandable. However, to understand the New Hampshire vision and the resulting conversations at the highest levels of America’s educational brain trust is to recognize and realize that change is coming. It is real. This change will come so hard and fast that the unprepared may risk becoming casualties.

How can we say with such confidence that this change is coming, that this time the change is real, and that there are no more false alarms? In one word: *leverage*. It’s not that there hasn’t been leverage in the past, it’s that there has never been this perfect storm of leverage. Public education in America is in the early stages of a perfect storm of leveraging forces. When the storm is over, likely within 10 years, we will have a new system of public education that will change how we look at student learning forever and for the better.

## THE ECONOMIC IMPERATIVE

In the chambers of our nation’s congress, there are virtually no arguments regarding whether America is in an economic crisis, only disagreements on how to cure our financial ills.

Democrats will claim that the \$700 billion stimulus package passed in 2009 saved America from a second Great Depression. They claim that it saved our auto industry, saved our banking industry, kept our unemployment rate from going beyond 10%, and saved or created hundreds of thousands of jobs, including jobs in education.

Republicans will claim that the stimulus put America deeper in debt, closer to financial disaster, was a factor in America’s credit rating downgrade by Standard & Poor’s, and was socialism in action; that the banks and car companies should have had to find a private-sector solution or fail; that we are putting the quality of life for future generations at risk.

In the 2010 elections, it seemed that the Republican arguments won the day. State and local elections swung in a dramatically different direction than the 2006 and 2008 elections in which Democrats won huge victories, including the office of the president of the United States.

So, who’s right? The fact is that there’s merit in the claims of both sides. And both sides agree, without some dramatic changes in how we do things, the financial stability of our country is in peril.

During the 2008 New Hampshire Presidential Primary, Brian Wallach, a state director for the New Hampshire Obama campaign, then a 28-year-old attorney who took time off from his practice to take a position with the campaign, made the striking comment: “I want to live my life in another American Century.”

*Fred notes: During the 2008 New Hampshire presidential primary, Fred cochaired the state campaign for Mike Huckabee while his wife, Bette, was a member of the Obama team.*

Here we are, in the early stages of the 21st century, with a significant economic lead over other countries, yet if we called Las Vegas to wager on who the economic champion of the 21st century will be, would the United States be the favorite? If America is not the economic champion of the 21st century, is the American quality of life at risk?

On the presidential campaign trail, former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee would often ask audiences, “How many of you are living better than your parents?” Virtually all of the hands would go up. Then he would ask, “How many of you believe that your kids are going to live better than you?” Many fewer hands would go up. Are Americans concluding that our best days are behind us? This can’t be! We can’t allow this to happen. How can we stop this from happening? As President Obama would say, “the fierce urgency of now” is upon us.

The implications from the 2010 elections have been dramatic. While Democrats, from President Obama on down, continue to fight hard to protect public education and argue that America’s economic future will be highly dependent on our ability to educate our students, Republicans are looking at every line item, questioning the real value of program after program and even talking about eliminating the U.S. Department of Education. Federal monies to states are being cut, and, in turn, state monies to local districts are being axed. With tremendous pressures at the local level, more and more conservatives are being elected to local school boards to fight for lower property taxes for a cash-strapped citizenry.

At state houses around the country, Republican are challenging collective bargaining rights of unions in order to find precious dollars in what many perceive as overly generous benefit packages. The state house in Madison, Wisconsin (2011), labeled by many teachers’ union supporters as Ground Zero, became symbolic of the fight that educators across the country find themselves in.

While we’ve seen battles over teacher contracts for decades, in most of our lifetimes, we’ve never seen anything like this. Some estimate that the

number of professional educators who will lose their jobs in the next few years will be in the hundreds of thousands, and if so, does that not put even more pressure on public education to transform into something more efficient and more effective or die?

Education has weathered many economic storms in the past. We've seen deep recessions that have forced Americans to modify habits, change lifestyles, and cut back on things that they took for granted. The result, in most cases, had little impact on education. In the tough times of the past, the education community may have been one of the least hard hit. But this economic storm is a big one, and education will not be spared.

If we take huge sums of money out a system that most Americans, Republicans and Democrats, believe is not getting the job done, do we not make an inadequate system worse? Today, economics alone is a force so powerful that the existence of our system of public education, as we know it, is at risk.

While the economics may seem scary to most educators, money problems are the friend of transformation. Without the great financial pressures, public education would likely attempt, once again, to ride this storm out.

## THE MORAL IMPERATIVE

Below are excerpts from Bill Gates's 2005 speech to the National Commission on High School Dropouts:

The more we looked at the data, the more we came to see that there is more than one barrier to college. There's the barrier of being able to pay for college; and there's the barrier of being prepared for it.

When we looked at the millions of students that our high schools are not preparing for higher education—and we looked at the damaging impact that has on their lives—we came to a painful conclusion: America's high schools are obsolete.

By obsolete, I mean that our high schools—even when they're working exactly as designed—cannot teach our kids what they need to know today.

Training the workforce of tomorrow with the high schools of today is like trying to teach kids about today's computers on a 50-year-old mainframe. It's the wrong tool for the times.

Our high schools were designed . . . to meet the needs of another age. Until we design them to meet the needs of the 21st century, we

will keep limiting—even ruining—the lives of millions of American every year.

Today, only one-third of our students graduate from high school ready for college, work, and citizenship.

The other two-thirds, most of the low-income and minority students, are tracked into courses that won't ever get them ready for college or prepare them for a family-wage job—no matter how well the student learns or the teachers teach.

This isn't an accident or a flaw in the system; it is the system.

The first group goes on to college and careers; the second group will struggle to make a living wage.

Let's be clear. Thanks to dedicated teachers and principals around the country, the best-educated kids in the United States are the best-educated kids in the world. We should be proud of that. But only a fraction of our kids are getting the best education.

We have one of the highest high school dropout rates in the industrialized world. Many who graduate do not go on to college. And many who do go on to college are not well prepared—and end up dropping out.

In the international competition to have the biggest and best supply of knowledge workers, America is falling behind.

That is the heart of the economic argument for better high schools . . . but there's also a moral argument.

Only half of all students who enter high school ever enroll in a postsecondary institution.

Students who graduate from high school, but never go on to college, will earn—on average—about twenty-five thousand dollars a year . . . if you're Hispanic, you earn less. If you're black, you earn even less.

Those who drop out have it even worse. Only 40 percent have jobs . . . nearly four times more likely to be arrested . . . more likely to have children in their teens. One in four turn to welfare or other kinds of government assistance.

But these are our high schools that keep letting these kids fall through the cracks, and we act as if it can't be helped.

It can be helped. We designed these high schools; we can redesign them." (Gates, 2005)

Bill Gates's 2005 call to action to redesign our schools occurred before we started slashing school budgets across America. In 2005, many were concluding that our schools, especially our high schools, were obsolete, that they needed to be redesigned, but where's the redesign? Have Americans seen a viable, systemic, and systematic redesign of secondary education in the United States? When Bill Gates delivered that speech in 2005, we had no clue that the biggest financial crisis since the Great Depression was a few short years away.

So, if you concluded that we were cheating huge percentages of our kids, as told by Jonathan Kozol's (1991) *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*, and that we were still cheating huge percentages of our students in 2005 as stated by Bill Gates, what are we to expect for results for our students when huge sums of money are taken out of what most of us see as a woefully inadequate system of public education? As never before, the financial imperative has crashed into the moral imperative. The storm is fierce.

## THE GRAYING DEMOGRAPHIC

As Americans live longer, as all of us want to, the consequences of an aging population are getting more and more clear in the health care debate, in the Medicare and Medicaid debates, and, yes, in the local education debates.

With an aging population and reduced percentage of households with school-aged children, it should come as no surprise that many of those grayhairs populate the membership of vocal taxpayer associations whose prime target is what they perceive as the runaway train of school spending. This is not hard to understand. While many are loving grandparents, many are also on fixed incomes. Higher school budgets translate into higher property taxes. For too many of our seniors, we've asked them to make a choice between helping the children of their communities and their personal financial survival. In numerous cases, they live in homes that they have owned for decades, many of which are where they've raised their children. To many seniors, these homes are more than a place to live. They are, in a sense, a significant part of their family. What, in the past, may have felt like a never-ending succession of painful increases in school property taxes is now the primary issue that may cost them their ability to remain in their homes. Seniors vote and vote regularly. Their growing numbers do not bode well for favorable school outcomes at the ballot box, including votes for positions on local school boards.

Never before in the history of our country have we had this phenomenon. The Baby Boomers (post–World War II babies) are starting to turn 65 and will add tremendously to that graying population of retirees on fixed incomes.

Now, add to that a huge percentage of our current teaching workforce among those Baby Boomers who are getting ready to retire. Although many may delay retirement for financial reasons, when they do retire, will they be replaced with younger teachers, or will many of those positions be eliminated? Could these impending retirements be a part of a just-in-time solution?

## THE CHANGING STUDENT DEMOGRAPHIC

In addition to the changing demographic of the teaching workforce, there is also a changing demographic in the student population. Due to the prolonged recession, the birth rate has slowed so that, in many areas of the country, pupil populations are shrinking, with the result that teachers are being laid off. Many Millennials are returning to their nests following college, waiting to find employment and trying to make ends meet while paying off college loans. The Pew Foundation (Pew Research Center, 2010) has reported that this boomerang phenomenon has resulted in many Millennials and Gen Xers delaying marriage and/or starting a family. The direct economic effect of this demographic is that the annual cost to educate children in our system presently and in the next few years is rising. The capital costs of running a school building do not decrease if the population housed within it decreases.

## TECHNOLOGY

In industry after industry, technology has been a game changer, resulting in both job cuts and jobs added in virtually every industry. In the 1960s, a keyboard instrument called the Mellotron was invented. The concept of the Mellotron was that it would record notes played on stringed instruments, violins, violas, cellos, and basses, one note at a time for each of its keys. So, with 10 fingers, a keyboard player could play up to 10 actual recordings of professional string players playing those notes. You could, therefore, hire someone with a Mellotron to act as a string section for your concert or recording session. The musicians' union was up in arms. They believed that Mellotrons would put musicians out of work.

Today, Mellotrons are in museums. Technology won the war. Today's synthesizers are capable of reproducing far more than just the string sounds of the Mellotron. Virtually any instrument sound is now available on keyboards costing as little as \$100.

Did these instruments cost some musicians jobs? In some ways, yes, but in other ways, they made the cost of a performance affordable enough to open doors for other opportunities that may have been previously unaffordable, including lighting, video, live recording, special effects, and so forth. And all of these enhanced opportunities have jobs attached to them.

The emerging integration of technology in teaching and learning in our classrooms is as significant a disruptive force in education as it is in other industries. Many educators attempt to keep a chipper attitude regarding technology and try to position it solely as a great tool in school improvement. Districts boast about their new schools with great technology in every classroom. Yet many of our educators are still struggling to get comfortable with technology, while others feel constrained by local Internet restrictions at the policy level that inhibit full integration of technology-based learning tools.

Today, more sophisticated technology is used by students to support their learning and recreation outside of the classroom, while teachers underuse technology to support learning in the classroom. Our educators must make the most efficient and effective use of technology, even if it totally changes the nature of their roles.

According to Susan Patrick, President of the International Association for K-12 Online Learning, iNACOL, Turkey has created the capacity to serve 15 million students online in 3 years, while, after 14 years, the United States has only 2 million students learning online. But that is changing. iNACOL (2011) projects that by 2019, half of the courses offered in the United States will be online courses. What does that portend for our current learning model?

The studies that compare online learning to traditional classroom learning show that online learning may produce better results than the traditional approach. A meta-analysis of 99 studies that compared student learning in online courses to traditional classrooms showed that "students doing some or all of the coursework online would rank in the 59th percentile in tested performance, compared with the average classroom student scoring in the 50th percentile" and referred to as a "statistically meaningful difference" (Lohr, 2009, p. 1). Students retained 59% of what they were taught in the online format versus 50% in classrooms. The researchers claimed that this was a statistically significant difference (iNACOL, 2011).

In a conversation with Mark Huddleston, President of the University of New Hampshire, he said that they used to make jokes about the



University of Phoenix. Today, they no longer make jokes. The University of Phoenix now has more than 600,000 students. Khan Academy is an online school offering “world-class education for anyone, anywhere.” Students engage in short video presentations with ongoing assessment and relearning resources available. Courses are free of charge. Whether in hybrid format to support classroom learning or a total virtual learning environment, the access to web-based learning has moved the notion of technology in the classroom from being standalone hardware and software sets to creating virtual learning communities of learners supported by teachers through personalized learning experiences. The potentially disruptive influence of technology in successfully educating our children at a significantly lower cost can no longer be ignored. As the storm grows, technology will be viewed, by many, as a far less expensive safe harbor.

## THE VISION

While the pressure to redesign is great, without having a sense of what that change will look like, we risk a doomed attempt at clinging to a model that we have been comfortable with for too long. Only when a clear vision for public education emerges will stakeholders be willing to move to a new model. This book details the emerging new vision for public education. It is a clear vision with amazing benefits for virtually all stakeholders.

The vision is fairly simple. Instead of time being the primary constant (180 days; 5½ hours of instruction per day; first, second, third, and fourth quarters; Grades 1, 2, 8, 12) with achievement the variable (grades of A, B, C, D, or F), the exact opposite will be the tenets for the new system. Time and place will be the variables and achievement will be the constant.

“That’s it?” In large part, yes, but, unless you understand the power that is unleashed when you take off the time shackles, you won’t clearly understand the magnificence of this new vision. Herein lies the purpose of this book.

The vision is fairly simple: Time and place will be the variables and achievement will be the constant.