

# CHILDHOOD EDUCATION INNOVATIONS

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2022

Transforming education  
through new ideas  
and approaches.

**Environmental  
Education**

**Learning Through  
Architecture**

**Power of  
Performing Arts**

**Educational  
Cultural  
Competence**



# Our Big Bet

## Strategic Partnerships for Innovative Teaching and Learning and Career Readiness

**S**omething unprecedented is happening in Ohio. The state's economy and workforce needs are surging in what can be described as a growing

COVID-endemic economy. As local, national, and global economies begin to rebound, we would be remiss if we did not ask ourselves whether preK-12 student

success, as supported by excellent, innovative teaching and learning, is surging at the same level, or an even greater pace, to make up for lost learning. If not, then what steps can be taken to help fuel and sustain such a surge?

These questions matter—a lot. Especially if one agrees that a state's preK-12 education system is its largest long-term provider of future workers who are prepared and eager to step into tomorrow's most in-demand jobs. Unfortunately, the pandemic's impact on student performance since March 2020, when school buildings closed, has been severe. We are at an inflection point where we must continue to respond to the lingering impacts of a global pandemic while prioritizing excellent, innovative teaching and learning because it is just the right thing to do for students.

The PAST Foundation and StartSOLE, two Ohio-based

organizations that build capacity in key education practice areas, are joining hands with other partners to help schools spread and scale excellent, innovative teaching and learning. The newly created joint venture adheres to five guiding principles: 1) equity is first and foremost; 2) smart partnerships, data, and translational research support everything we do; 3) learning—regardless of grade level—must be linked to life for relevancy; 4) our energy in education advances credible, simple, and transformative practices that can inform local, state, and national policies; and 5) follow-through is the new innovation. We believe it is imperative that policymakers, education leaders, business and philanthropic partners, and other influencers embrace this focus and commit to ensuring that high school graduates are well-prepared for tomorrow's jobs. This is a lofty endeavor, as many of tomorrow's jobs do not exist today and we cannot even begin to imagine what some of them will be given the fast pace of change.

In this article, we traverse the effects of the pandemic on education over the last two years, explore Ohio's current economic and workforce needs, and propose steps we will take with partners to respond in the most effective way possible. Our aim is to inspire a similar focus across Ohio and the nation. To be sure,

this work will not be easy, and it will take time to accomplish. Nevertheless, we are collectively up to the challenge.

### The Pandemic's Impact on Education

We applaud how students, families, educators, and school leaders navigated and, in many cases, overcame significant disruptions to the delivery of caring, supportive, and engaging teaching and learning opportunities. As practitioners, parents, and communities, we have been living and struggling with the impacts of the pandemic over the last two years.

But let's not forget, student performance data, prior to the pandemic, points to an education system that was not effectively serving and meeting the needs of each student, especially when considering race, disability, and income. During the pandemic, these glaring disparities emerged with the force of a hurricane. Many schools struggled with the most basic of resources necessary to reach, and teach, children. Inequities affecting teaching materials and technology for virtual instruction, as well as the need for food and basic necessities, came roaring to the surface, not to mention how best to handle the social and emotional trauma that grew while the world paused at home.

Let's consider how Ohio and the United States fared through

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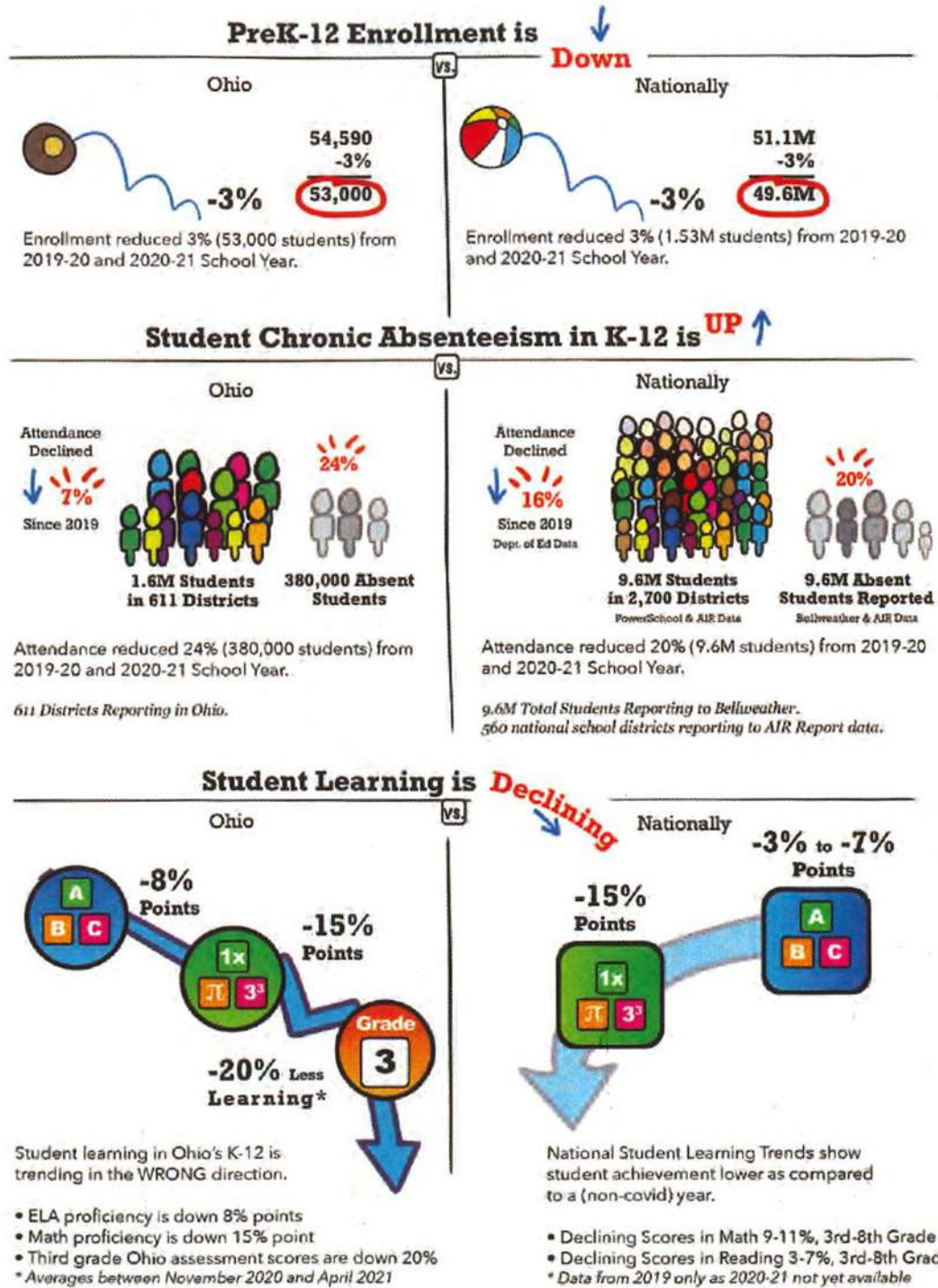
**Jeffrey McClellan**  
StartSOLE

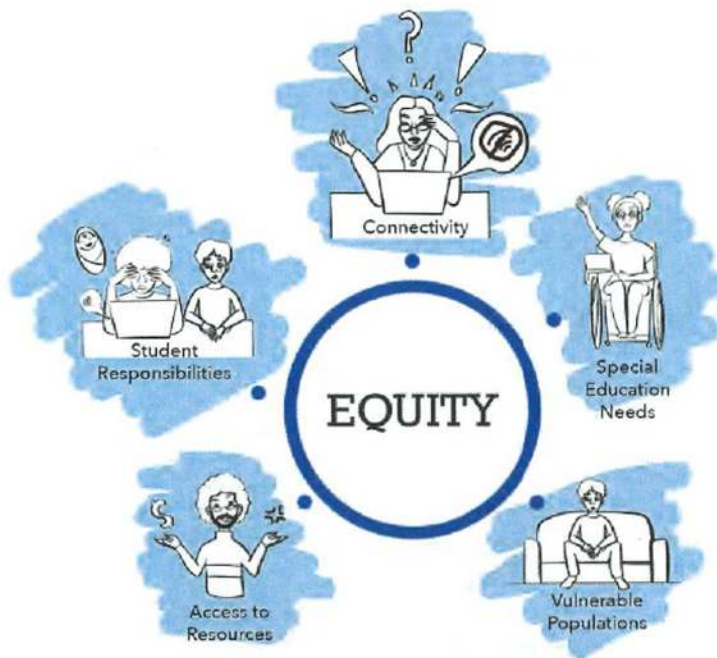
the pandemic. In both cases, the pandemic's impact was significant. Figure 1 displays student enrollment, chronic absenteeism, and performance data for the 2020-21 school year.

The long-term effects of the pandemic extend well beyond student enrollment, attendance, and performance. According to findings of a spring 2021 listening tour conducted by The PAST

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FIGURE 1





Foundation, which engaged nearly 2,000 stakeholders from 69 of 88 Ohio counties, three significant themes encapsulate the pandemic’s effects on student success: equity in education opportunity; mental health of students, parents, and educators; and learning models.<sup>1</sup>

**Equity in Education Opportunity.** The pandemic exposed inequities and intensified the struggles of Ohio’s most vulnerable students and families. Data from the Ohio Department of Education indicate that students of color and students enrolled in disconnected rural areas were hit particularly hard.<sup>2</sup> Primary factors affecting student learning and impacting equity included the lack of internet connectivity, reduced student responsibilities, limited access to resources, and challenges supporting vulnerable student populations and

meeting special education needs.<sup>3</sup>

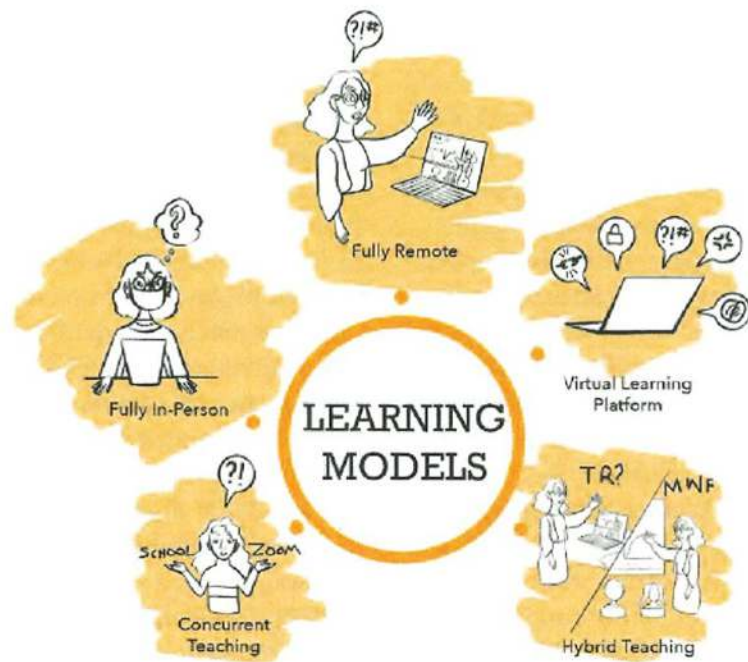
**Mental Health of Students, Parents, and Educators.**

The pandemic exacerbated student, parent, and educator mental and behavioral health issues. Many students continue to feel socially and intellectually isolated and many educators and parents

face unusually stressful situations.<sup>4</sup> Sadly, from 2011 to 2020, the rate of suicide deaths among youth ages 10-24 in Ohio increased overall, from 20% to 26%. In 2020, 247 Ohioans between the ages of 10 to 24 died by suicide. From January to February 2021, youth suicide deaths increased 29%.<sup>5</sup>

**Learning Models.** Students, families, and educators experienced a wide variety of learning models during the 2020-21 school year, including hybrid, blended, concurrent, fully remote, and fully in-person. Schools and districts determined their learning models locally and, in many cases, the quality and consistency of implementation varied widely across the state. For example, some schools, especially rural districts without internet access, issued paper packets to guide remote education opportunities. Others were able to launch high-quality





### The Future of Work in Ohio

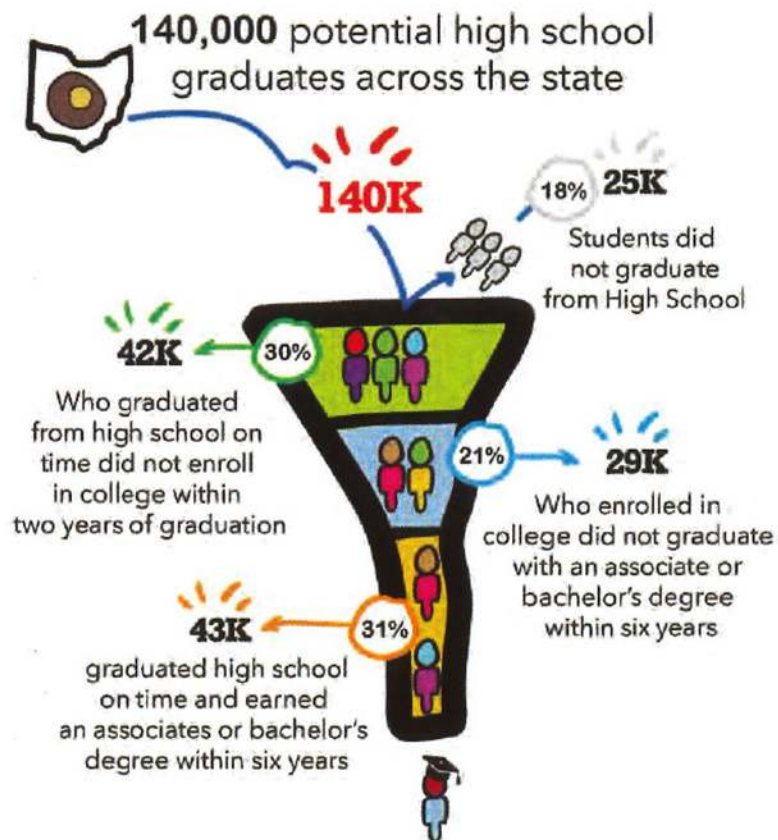
Based on current trends in the state's economy and workforce, Ohio does not have time to wait years or decades to recover. Chief among those trends is Intel's recent announcement regarding a \$20 billion investment to build two state-of-the-art factories in Ohio by 2025, which will increase the U.S. share of the global semiconductor supply chain and generate more than 20,000 jobs in the state. Of those, 3,000 will pay more than \$135,000 per year, 7,000 will be in construction, and tens of thousands will be created indirectly.<sup>7</sup> This development secures Ohio's

remote education opportunities with ease, thanks to previous investments in technologies and digital learning platforms.

As author Arundhati Roy recently remarked, "Nothing could be worse than a return to normality. Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next."<sup>6</sup> Clearly, there are lessons to be learned from educating students in the midst of a pandemic. Those lessons, especially innovations specific to how schools used technology to enhance instructional delivery, must be considered as we think forward. We also must be realistic about how long it might take to support student learning and make up for lost face-to-face instructional time. Some experts predict it could take years, or even decades, for student success to fully recover.

FIGURE 2

### Outcomes for Ohio's High School Graduating Class of 2014



position as a world leader in high-tech manufacturing.<sup>8</sup>

Intel's announcement, along with others, comes at a time when the state wrestles with a growing demand-supply gap that, according to a recent analysis by McKinsey & Company,<sup>9</sup> threatens the state's long-term prosperity. For example, in 2021, Ohio had 5.7 million jobs available, but only 5.4 million workers employed; most of the 300,000 available and unfilled jobs were in STEM fields. By 2026, the state's "job gap" is expected to be 500,000. The same analysis warns that Ohio's talent gaps could increase because of a projected decline in our working-age population.

At the same time, the current rate of high school graduation and postsecondary attainment will not support the state's future need for skilled talent. A recently conducted analysis of Ohio high school students in the 2014 graduation cohort, for instance, reveals 140,000 potential high school graduates across the state. The long-term outcomes of those potential high school graduates, depicted in Figure 2, indicate the following: approximately 25,000 students (18%) did not graduate from high school on time; nearly 42,000 students (30%) who graduated from high school on time did not enroll in college

within two years of graduation; nearly 29,000 students (21%) who enrolled in college did not graduate with an associate's or bachelor's degree within six years; and more than 43,000 students (31%) graduated high school on time and earned an associate's or bachelor's degree within six years. These numbers signal an intense funnel effect that will hold the state back from meeting its future workforce needs.

The same analysis points out that the tasks associated with the jobs of the future will require more social, emotional, and technological skills. The increasingly automated, hybrid world emphasizes the importance of adaptability, which includes life-long learning, aspiration, growth mindset, self-direction, and comfort with change and uncertainty. Demand for social-emotional skills is increasing as machines take on more knowledge work. This means students will benefit from skills in creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, social intelligence, and communication and influence. Finally, students will need adaptable technical skills and knowledge in the areas of software development, design, product management, big data analytics, agile methodologies, and lean management practices.

### Solutions Involve Smart Partnerships That Drive Collective Impact, Spread, and Scale

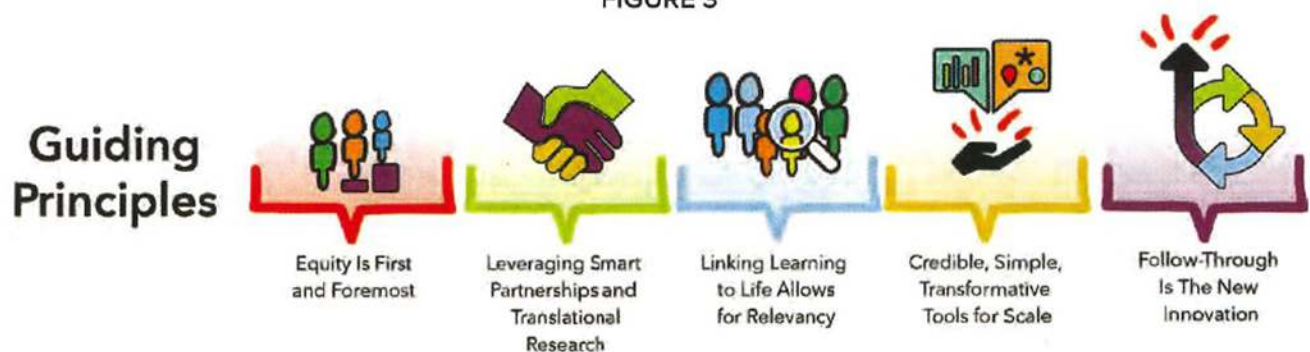
The effects of the pandemic on student learning, combined with Ohio's rapidly changing workforce needs based on in-demand jobs, create a sense of urgency for implementing solutions that are student-centered and academically challenging, while helping the state prime the pump to ensure the talent necessary to fill tomorrow's jobs.

The PAST Foundation and Start-SOLE are in the beginning stages of working with a set of partners to co-design a portfolio of systemic initiatives aimed at advancing excellent, innovative teaching and learning and integrating career connections into learning and instruction. These two aims are not mutually exclusive. In fact, one leads to the other. Figure 3 illustrates how we are thinking about the work ahead.

### Equity Is First and Foremost

Through our partnerships, we are committed to co-designing solutions directly with students and educators, particularly those who come from or are serving marginalized populations. Ohio has been facing the same achievement gaps since the state started disaggregating student performance data in 2002. Let's be clear: It is impossible for Ohio to address its demand-supply gap without prioritizing equity.

FIGURE 3



More than 40% of Ohio's future workforce—today's students—are enrolled in one of the state's urban or rural public schools, many of which were particularly affected during the pandemic.<sup>10</sup> A number of Ohio's urban and rural school districts faced unique challenges that require an equity-focused solution. This is where Ohio, and other states, should be prepared to apply lessons learned and innovative approaches, especially specific to the effective use of technology, witnessed during the pandemic.

### Leveraging Smart Partnerships and Translational Research

The research specific to excellent teaching and learning and student success is clear about the ingredients that comprise it. University of Chicago Consortium on School Research identifies those ingredients as effective leaders, ambitious instruction, supportive environments, collaborative teachers, and involved families.<sup>11</sup> Research also points to the importance of deep levels of engagement and transdisciplinary approaches to teaching and learning. We will leverage research already in place, and build on that base through our own data collection and original research, which we plan to rapidly test in the field.

### Linking Learning to Life Allows for Relevancy

The research, coupled with our own professional experiences, points out that students learn more when they are deeply engaged. This linkage helps students make sense of the world around them, and can even promote career exploration in powerful ways for students—regardless of grade level. We will focus on using inquiry-based learning experiences to help students explore possible careers as early

as kindergarten. We think about it as career awareness in grades preK-4, career exploration in grades 5-8, and career planning in grades 9-12.

Career planning takes on more significance when it is embedded into an engaging learning experience. One example we are excited to share in the public domain is our STEM Identity project. We want to influence the way underrepresented students in STEM “think about themselves as STEM learners and develop an identity as someone who knows about, uses, and sometimes contributes to science.” As Milbrey McCloughlin wrote, “You can't be what you can't see.” We believe a student's STEM identity plays a powerful role in their success in educational environments, as well as their career goals and the ability to earn a sustainable wage in STEM careers after high school or college.

### Credible, Simple, and Transformative Tools for Scale

We have been working with educators for some time, and one of our most important observations over the years has been that teachers and school leaders are busy; that busyness was magnified during the pandemic. Additionally, Ohio also faces an imminent shortage of teachers, occurring across the preK-12 continuum. Scaling excellent, innovative teaching and learning means that approaches must be simple, credible, and transformative—only then can they be applied and ultimately endure potential churn occurring within the field.

### Follow-Through Is the New Innovation<sup>12</sup>

In education, we seem to always

be drawn to the new, shiny solution, sometimes at the expense of a previous solution that never benefited from full implementation. This whipsawing effect tires educators and students alike. This is where data and translational research comes into play. We are on a mission to use data, research, and student and educator voices to co-design and prototype a solution that can be rapidly tested in the field, refined, and fully implemented with fidelity—in ways that recognize the realities of the system, its students, and its educators.

We are excited about what the future holds for the future of education, and we welcome input and feedback from our fellow educators and the *Childhood Education Innovations* community of readers as we collectively reimagine global education.

#### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> RemotEDx Listening Tour Final Report, Volume 1, June 15, 2021; PAST Foundation Research: Maria Green Cohen, Impact Officer and Director of Research; Kayla Galloway, Research Associate.

<sup>2</sup> <https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Reset-and-Restart/Data-Insights-on-the-2020-2021-School-Year>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ohio Department of Health.

<sup>6</sup> Roy, A. (2020, April 4). The pandemic is a portal. *Financial Times*.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.jobsohio.com/news-press/intel-chooses-ohio-for-chip-manufacturing/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.jobsohio.com/why-ohio/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://ohioexcels.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/20220504-Future-of-Work-in-Ohio-DRAFT-vFINAL-Sh.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://education.ohio.gov/Media/Facts-and-Figures>

<sup>11</sup> [https://consortium.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/2018-11/UChicago-Consortium\\_Brochure\\_2015.pdf](https://consortium.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/2018-11/UChicago-Consortium_Brochure_2015.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> “Follow-through is the new innovation” is a phrase coined by Marc Frazer, former partner at Education First.