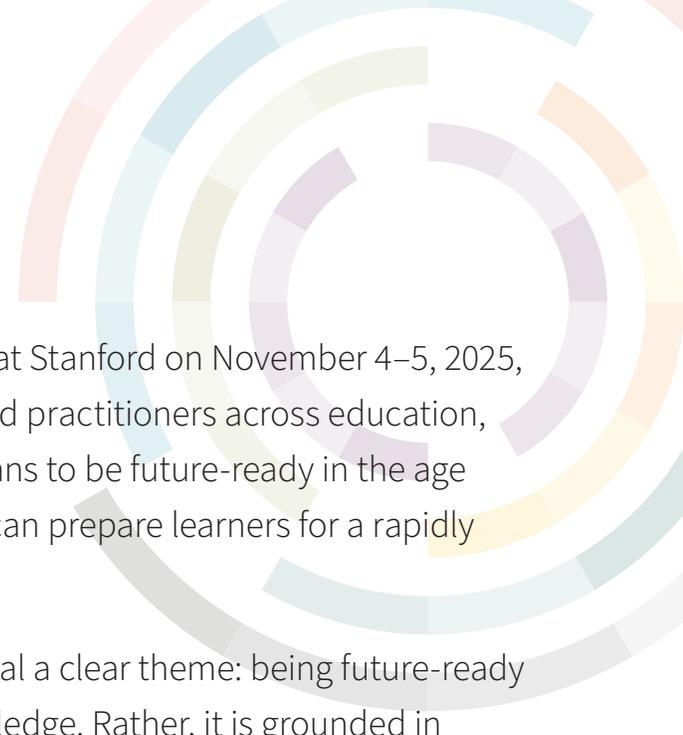ACCELERATE EDTECH IMPACT
SUMMIT 2025

FUTURE-READY VOICES

Stanford | Accelerator for Learning

INTRODUCTION

As part of the **Accelerate Edtech Impact Summit** held at Stanford on November 4–5, 2025, the Stanford Accelerator for Learning invited leaders and practitioners across education, research, and technology to reflect on what it truly means to be future-ready in the age of Artificial Intelligence, and how educational systems can prepare learners for a rapidly evolving world.

The conversations captured in the following pages reveal a clear theme: being future-ready is not defined by a specific set of skills or content knowledge. Rather, it is grounded in cultivating adaptive mindsets — mindsets that embrace change, navigate uncertainty, and remain open to new possibilities.

Across interviews, several core competencies consistently emerged as essential for the decade ahead: curiosity, ethical reasoning, collaboration, adaptability, and digital literacy. Participants emphasized that future-ready learners must be able to distinguish credible information from misinformation, engage empathetically with diverse perspectives, and nurture a sustained passion for lifelong learning.

As technological advances accelerate, they argued, education systems must shift away from rote memorization and standardized assessments toward experiential, inquiry-driven approaches. Such models encourage learners not only to understand emerging technologies, but to use them responsibly, creatively, and ethically.

Finally, interviewees stressed the importance of learning environments that foster resilience, creativity, meaningful relationships, and community engagement. By developing these competencies and centering human connection within the learning experience, we can empower young people not merely to navigate an uncertain future, but to shape it.

Together, these insights offer a powerful narrative—and a guiding framework—for redesigning educational practices and policies to meet the demands of tomorrow.

CONTRIBUTORS

THE THREE QUESTIONS POSED

When you think about the future of learning and work, what does it mean to be "future-ready?"

Which skills, mindsets, or literacies will matter most in the next decade for learners?

What would you like our education systems to do more and/or less of in preparing young people for the future?

SARA ALLAN

Sara Allan is president of the Valhalla Foundation.

When you think about the future of learning and work, what does it mean to be "future-ready?"

The future of work demands adaptive, creative problem solvers who can combine expert knowledge with the ability to apply it to uncertain situations. Note — this hasn't changed in the past 20 years, but it's gotten more urgent.

Which skills, mindsets, or literacies will matter most in the next decade for learners?

Curiosity, paying attention, moral reasoning, and empathy combined with logical and critical thinking, the ability to recognize cognitive and factual bias and ability to weigh competing ideas.

What would you like our education systems to do more and/or less of in preparing young people for the future?

Active and applied learning needs to be the core approach to instruction vs passive transfer of information. Deconstructing schedules to enable deeper learning and problem solving.

Active and applied learning needs to be the core approach to instruction vs passive transfer of information. Deconstructing schedules to enable deeper learning and problem solving. We also need to design curricula that continuously expose young people to a wide range of ideas from a wide range of thinkers.

DON AUSTIN

Don Austin is the superintendent of schools at the Palo Alto Unified School District.

When you think about the future of learning and work, what does it mean to be "future-ready?"

To be "future-ready" means being human ready. Technology will continue to evolve at a speed we can't predict, but our ability to think critically, adapt, and lead others will remain constant. Artificial intelligence will change how we access information and complete tasks, but it will not replace the uniquely human qualities of judgment, empathy, and leadership. The people who thrive in the future will be those who contribute more than they consume and those who can build teams, navigate ambiguity, and stay curious when others freeze.

We are also seeing a major shift in priorities. Younger generations are valuing time, flexibility, and purpose more than the accumulation of things. Being "future-ready" is less about mastering a single trade and more about being able to learn, unlearn, and relearn as the environment changes. The future will reward those who can operate across disciplines, communicate effectively, and maintain the ability to work well with others. At its core, being future-ready means embracing uncertainty without fear, leading with authenticity, and using technology as a tool rather than a crutch.

Which skills, mindsets, or literacies will matter most in the next decade for learners?

The next decade will be defined less by what we know and more by how we think. Learners who can leverage technology to reduce their cognitive load, freeing up their mental capacity for deeper problem solving, will stand out. Traditional technical skills like coding will still exist, but for most people, they will matter less than the ability to design, prompt, and interpret results from intelligent systems.

Prompt writing will emerge as a new literacy. The ability to frame questions, test assumptions through simulations, and refine results will become central to both learning and leadership. As tools become more capable, discernment will become the new differentiator by knowing what to trust, how to apply insights, and when to push beyond the data.

The concept of "cheating" will evolve. Brainstorming, editing, and analysis will be powered by tools, but originality and ethical use will define excellence. Learners who maintain humility, curiosity, and the discipline to think independently, even when supported by tools and computers, will be the ones driving innovation rather than being replaced by it.

The next decade will be defined less by what we know and more by how we think.

What would you like our education systems to do more and/or less of in preparing young people for the future?

Let's start with the "less." We need to stop seeing education through the nostalgic lens of our own experiences. The world our students inhabit is fundamentally different and harder. They balance more responsibilities, face relentless visibility through social media, and operate in a world that expects constant connectivity. Despite that, they are achieving at higher levels than any generation before them. We should celebrate that rather than romanticizing the past.

On the "more" side, I would like to see education systems place a stronger emphasis on the skills that sustain healthy communities such as civility, respectful debate, self-regulation, and resilience. These are the human competencies that will never go out of style. While our legislature focuses on adding courses like financial literacy and computer science, we must also prioritize emotional intelligence and perspective-taking.

We have the responsibility to prepare students not only to compete, but to coexist. The ability to disagree respectfully, manage disappointment, and recover from setbacks is the foundation of leadership and citizenship. Preparing students for the future means helping them navigate complexity with confidence, optimism, and care for others which are skills that no algorithm can teach.

BRYAN BROWN

Bryan Brown is the Kamalachari Professor of Science Education at Stanford Graduate School of Education and a faculty affiliate of the Stanford Accelerator for Learning.

When you think about the future of learning and work, what does it mean to be "future-ready?"

Being "future-ready" no longer means acquiring a fixed set of skills or knowledge that will carry learners through their careers. Instead, it requires a fundamental reorientation toward continuous learning and adaptation. As artificial intelligence accelerates the pace at which knowledge evolves and becomes obsolete, the definition of preparedness itself must change.

The most significant shift involves moving from knowledge production to knowledge discernment. In an age where information is abundant and AI can generate responses instantaneously, simply knowing facts has lost its currency. What matters now is the capacity to evaluate information critically, to distinguish accurate claims from misinformation, and to construct evidence-based arguments. This represents an epistemic transformation in how we understand learning itself.

> ## The complexity of integrating AI into learning environments demands collaborative co-design, bringing together technological capability with pedagogical expertise.

Future readiness also demands comfort with uncertainty. The knowledge domains that students master today may evolve dramatically within years, if not months. Fields once considered stable now require practitioners to track rapid developments continuously. This means that truly prepared learners must develop what might be called a "healthy growth mindset"; an ability to remain productive and engaged while operating in a state of not-knowing, recognizing that discomfort as the essential first step toward understanding.

Perhaps most importantly, future readiness requires abandoning the traditional top-down model where technology experts dictate tools and methods to educators. The complexity of integrating AI into learning environments demands collaborative co-design, bringing together technological capability with pedagogical expertise. Neither technologists nor educators can navigate this transformation alone; the future belongs to those who can bridge these domains effectively.

Which skills, mindsets, or literacies will matter most in the next decade for learners?

Information systems literacy emerges as the foundational competency for the coming decade. Learners must understand not just how to use AI and digital tools, but how to critique their design, evaluate their limitations, and recognize their biases. This goes beyond traditional digital literacy to encompass a critical awareness of how information systems shape what we know and how we think.

Equally crucial is a transformed conception of expertise itself. The institutional validation of knowledge; degrees, certifications, credentials while still valuable, will matter less than demonstrated capacity for rapid skill development. Expertise in the new era is more quickly acquired and more rapidly obsolete, shifting value toward those who can continuously rebuild their competencies rather than rest on established knowledge.
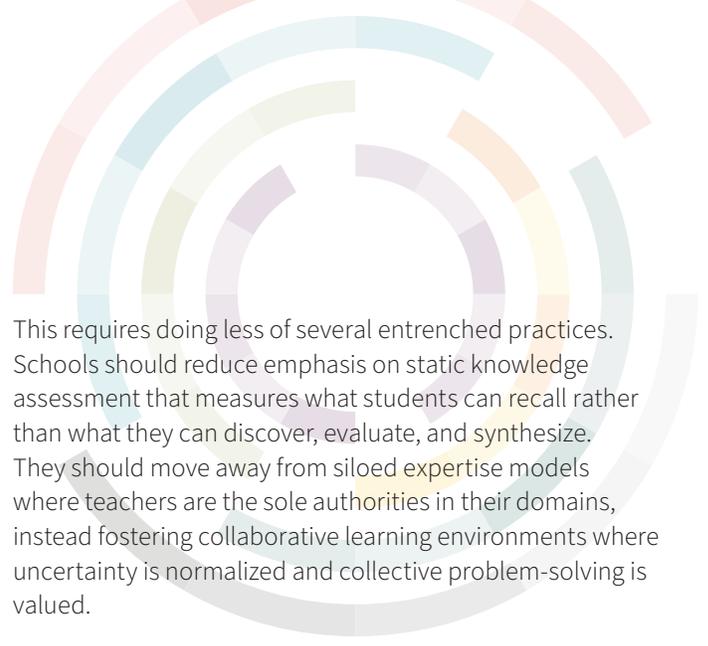
This reality necessitates what might be called collaborative learning capacity. Future-ready learners must be comfortable operating within communities of practice, where expertise is distributed and co-created rather than hierarchical. They need to embrace the "uncomfortable middle space" of learning new skills with evolving tools, where no one holds complete mastery and everyone contributes to collective understanding.

The mindset requirements are as important as technical skills. Learners need intellectual flexibility; the ability to let go of outdated knowledge without clinging to sunk costs. They require resilience in the face of repeated obsolescence, finding motivation not in mastery but in growth. And they must develop meta-learning capabilities: understanding how they learn best, recognizing when their learning strategies need adjustment, and transferring learning approaches across different contexts and challenges.

What would you like our education systems to do more and/or less of in preparing young people for the future?

Education systems face a fundamental choice: continue optimizing for core competency development, or pivot toward cultivating learning competencies. The traditional model prepares students with a defined skill set intended to serve them in the next life stage. This approach made sense when knowledge and career paths were relatively stable. It fails in an environment of perpetual transformation.

Schools should do more to develop transcendent learning skills, capabilities that remain valuable regardless of what specific content or context students encounter. This means prioritizing how to learn over what to learn, emphasizing adaptation over memorization, and valuing intellectual curiosity over domain expertise. The goal shifts from producing graduates who know certain things to producing graduates who can learn anything.

This requires doing less of several entrenched practices. Schools should reduce emphasis on static knowledge assessment that measures what students can recall rather than what they can discover, evaluate, and synthesize. They should move away from siloed expertise models where teachers are the sole authorities in their domains, instead fostering collaborative learning environments where uncertainty is normalized and collective problem-solving is valued.

Educational institutions must also embrace what they've traditionally resisted: rapid adaptation of their own structures and methods. If schools expect students to be comfortable with continuous learning, they must model that behavior institutionally. This means creating academic spaces that permit experimentation, that reward intellectual risk-taking, and that allow for the "free thinking and intellectual growth" that emerges from collaborative design and shared expertise.

The transition won't be comfortable. It requires educators to surrender some traditional authority, administrators to accept organizational flexibility, and policymakers to measure outcomes differently. But in an era where the half-life of skills continues to shrink, preparing students to be excellent learners, rather than knowledgeable graduates, may be the only preparation that truly endures.

JENNIFER CAROLAN

Jennifer Carolan is co-founder and general partner at Reach Capital.

When you think about the future of learning and work, what does it mean to be "future-ready?"

Education is not just a preparation for a future life, but as John Dewey said, a continuous living process of social experience. Our democracy needs citizens who can problem-solve, appreciate different perspectives and the skills to cooperate and contribute to the common good. Those values have stood the test of time and perhaps are needed now more than ever. What's new is that our students need a working understanding of the technological layers and algorithms that increasingly generate content, shape decisions, and influence our lives.

> Students need more opportunity to practice agency, collaboration, and ethical decision-making.

Which skills, mindsets, or literacies will matter most in the next decade for learners?

The stimulus for action. Our learners don't just need to know; they need to do. Entrepreneurial skills—spotting opportunities, creating value for others, taking initiative, iterating through feedback, and persisting through setbacks—turn passive learning into purposeful problem-solving. Students need more opportunity to practice agency, collaboration, and ethical decision-making. This active stance prepares them not only for work, but for contribution to society.

What would you like our education systems to do more and/or less of in preparing young people for the future?

Our education system will need to do a greater focus on student agency. It will need to shift from compliance to contribution through micro-internships and more authentic assessments.

Emotional awareness will be important as our daily lives become more intertwined with technology. I think children need to understand how emotions are shaped by algorithms, how to interpret nonhuman "affect" and how to discern simulated empathy from genuine care.

Education systems should place less emphasis on isolated skill drills and content coverage. The nuanced, human-centered work of cultivating interpersonal dynamics, emotional self-awareness, and intrinsic motivation belongs in the realm of the sentient teacher.
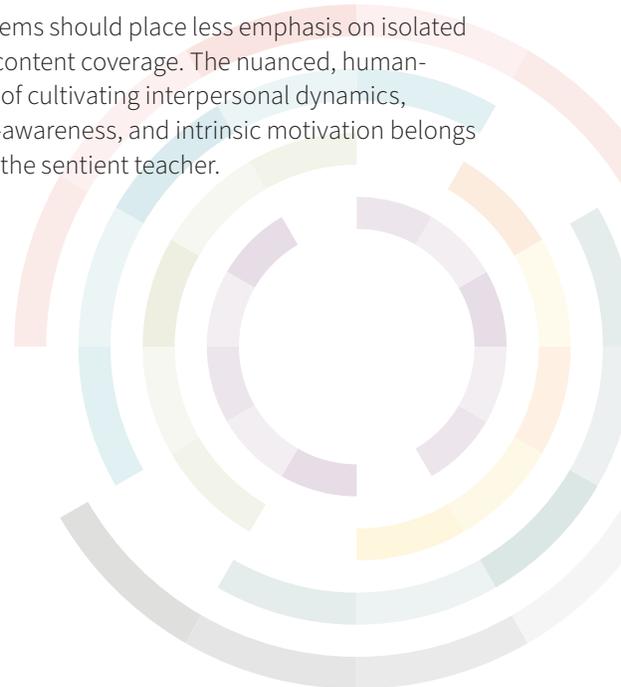
RICHARD CHARLES

Richard Charles is chief information officer at Denver Public Schools.

When you think about the future of learning and work, what does it mean to be "future-ready?"

I believe that being future-ready has been a moving target over the past century. For example, in the early 1900s, to be future-ready meant that you could learn about air conditioners that were invented in 1902 and for the next 123 years, could have a significant career repairing, manufacturing and supporting these devices. Although the technology changed, it still allowed for fruitful careers for all fields related to the technology well beyond the 30 year span for a career. Whereas Moore's law has effectively governed the pace at which we expect technology to change, technological advances have disrupted its ability to predict future trends. With the more widespread use of AI through the use of LLMS, researchers now envision a world that is rapidly evolving at an increasingly alarming rate. We have seen examples of this with the pace of smartphone releases.

> I'd like to see less lecturing, pontificating, rote memorization and having students performing menial tasks as creative problem solvers as early and as often as possible.

Because of these 1-2 year release schedules, users never get to master many of the features available on smartphones today. A 2015 study suggests that almost no users knew how to do all tasks on their device. It also suggested that only about one-third of mobile phone apps and features are being leveraged. What this means is that users of technology will become increasingly frustrated with their lack of ability to keep up with the rapid pace of technological change. As such, future workforce employees and students must know themselves as learners. They must know their preferences for learning and digesting new information quickly and deeply with a bias for applying their newly acquired knowledge with an eye for continuous improvement. Future student and worker knowledge must also now take into account, a world of multiple intelligences working side-by-side. They must be skilled in the operation of and communication with the same technology being used like never before. They must be effective, ethical and unbiased in their interactions. Most importantly, they must now understand that future technologies allow them to magnify their agency and to scale their impact on the world.

Which skills, mindsets, or literacies will matter most in the next decade for learners?

With the rapid proliferation of AI models leveraging deep learning through the use of neural networks, there will be increasing demand for understanding how these black-boxes are making their decisions. Coding more sophisticated models, having a growth mindset, knowledge of the scientific method, engineering design process, communication skills, empathy, ethics, machine intelligence, machine learning,

What would you like our education systems to do more and/or less of in preparing young people for the future?

Have students solve major problems in a variety of fields starting from kindergarten to 12th grade. Embed the standards and objectives into their routines while they are tackling monumental tasks. Established as a norm, students reflect on their learning experiences and fostering a continuous improvement mindset. Students should have K-12 portfolios of their work that illustrates their ability to problem-solve and to innovate. Some of the byproducts of their learning should be:

1. New policies,
2. Persuasive speeches,
3. Patents,
4. Inventions,
5. Published book,
6. Published papers in peer-reviewed journals,
7. Job offers,
8. New software applications,
9. Paper presentation at a major conference,
10. Partnerships/roles at major corporations that provide value, and
11. Self-directed learning.

ANTERO GARCIA

Antero Garcia is an associate professor at Stanford Graduate School of Education and a faculty affiliate of the Stanford Accelerator for Learning.

When you think about the future of learning and work, what does it mean to be "future-ready?"

The phrase "future-ready" might convey a fantastic vision of hyper-technical progress, learning, building, innovating alongside the resources of digitally mediated tools. But, before we more fully go down this path, we must first consider: for whose future are we readying ourselves? The future that students are being trained and prepared for, often, is being defined by terms, conditions, and values that they have not necessarily asked for. When I think of "future-ready," I imagine a future that takes seriously the agency, ideas, and dreams of young people. To be ready for that future, we need to establish a model of learning and work (now and tomorrow) that centers the ideas and co-generativity of groups of individuals that are not always mediated by devices or algorithms.

> I imagine a future that takes seriously the agency, ideas, and dreams of young people.

Which skills, mindsets, or literacies will matter most in the next decade for learners?

The skills needed are not tied to the latest tools or software. They are tied, instead, to age old values that we don't emphasize as core to future-ready learning:

- Imagination
- Compassion
- Civic Ingenuity

Given the uncertainties of the future – both democratically and technically – students need skills that offer nimbleness when interacting with one another and the ability to speak across differences and center our shared humanity.

What would you like our education systems to do more and/or less of in preparing young people for the future?

We must invest in systems that are people centered. These are systems, too, that build learning spaces for centering trust and imagination for young people. Our systems must create meaningful, localized opportunities for students to understand the world they are entering and the roles they'll play within it. This includes understanding the diverse contexts of who individuals are, understanding the variety of skills we possess as learners, and working to interact with one another in times of ecological, political, and social crises.

BEN GOMES

Ben Gomes is Chief Technologist for Learning and Sustainability at Google.

When you think about the future of learning and work, what does it mean to be "future-ready?"

There are a lot of things we don't know about the future, but the one thing we do know is that the pace of change continues to increase. A long time ago, generation upon generation led almost identical work lives. Today it is increasingly clear that people will have multiple work lives in the course of one human life. So, the ability to learn and to adapt is fundamental to success. Beyond that, for a fulfilling life, it will be important to enjoy the process of learning. So being future-ready requires igniting that desire to learn. To be "future-ready" is, at its core, about facing change with a sense of curiosity and a desire to learn.

AI is also enabling an important shift in our relationship with knowledge. For twenty years, the internet removed the barrier to accessing information, but that information access was still largely passive. With AI, the access to information can be a much more active process for the consumer — and that opens up the possibility of active learning which can lead to much deeper understanding.

AI is fundamentally altering the landscape of work. Most jobs consist of a mixture of mechanical tasks and human aspects. When mechanical tasks become automated, the more centrally human contributions become more critical. The human element, with our capabilities of judgment and understanding of complex problems and human relations, remains paramount. While the workforce has long been moving in the direction of specialization, AI is also causing a significant shift in the opposite direction — from traditional, siloed specializations to a more flexible, adaptive skill set. With AI making tools so much easier to use, people will be able to operate across multiple disciplines, and I believe it will become important for people to be able to straddle boundaries, exercising a range of skills. Being 'future-ready' becomes about being a capable generalist, an empathetic problem-solver, and a lifelong, enthusiastic learner in this ever-evolving space.

Which skills, mindsets, or literacies will matter most in the next decade for learners?

We already alluded to the importance of a flexible, learning oriented, mindset in a constantly evolving world. One set of skills that matter the most then are the meta skills around learning — meta cognition around learning. To achieve this, it will become more and more important for people to approach learning with curiosity and interest — understanding how to learn, rather than just what to learn.

I went through a school system where people lectured at you and all of my active learning was my own interests. I see the ways AI is beginning to be used in colleges and schools and I'm seeing a lot of innovation, and ways that I hadn't even thought of that shows learning going from something passive to something much more active — which is really important for learning. You have to have that productive struggle but it is ideally something that you are motivated towards. Motivation generally comes from other people — people learn because of other people, for other people, but technology can help. Teachers are central to this process, so we invest heavily in supporting teachers to create more engaging & dynamic classrooms.

In the coming decade, the landscape of necessary skills will be reshaped dramatically, emphasizing innate human capabilities. The new tools with AI are almost infinitely flexible but may have significant gaps — for instance, knowing everything but getting basic arithmetic sometimes wrong. This is very different from most traditional tools — traditional tools are hard to learn and limited in what they do — but they are deterministic. AI tools that we see are extremely flexible and easy to learn, but require a probabilistic mindset that is quite different than required by most tools people use today.

Problem identification and collaborative problem-solving will be indispensable. We will need to be able to identify the right problems to solve, break down those problems through analysis, and ultimately have the ability to collaborate with others to find a solution. AI will be an indispensable tool in this process, and having the literacy to interact effectively with AI, using language itself as the medium of interaction, will be critically important.

Finally, we will need to prioritize the "why" over the "how". The 'why' often gets to the core of the human motivation to solve a problem.

Teachers are central to this process, so we invest heavily in supporting teachers to create more engaging & dynamic classrooms.

What would you like our education systems to do more and/or less of in preparing young people for the future?

We need to prepare young people for a future that is still being written. I believe that one aspect of a future where mechanical tasks will be automated is that the concepts involved in every field become more critical. Today, it is not uncommon for people to become very good at the mechanics of a task while being hazy on the underlying concepts — to be able to solve calculus problems by mechanical manipulation without having intuition for the underlying concept. If there is much less need to teach mechanical things, it opens up space to teach concepts more deeply — the fundamental theorem of calculus becomes more central than integration by parts. Understanding how normal distributions arise becomes more important than the mechanics of computing statistics about them.

It is also rapidly becoming critical for students to reach the work force with usable skills, not just theoretical knowledge. To that end, we also need to help connect learning to the real world, whether through internships or other means. This approach will also help motivate students and prepare them to apply their learning to real world problems. Ideally, education should empower students through practical engagement in order to create curious, well-rounded individuals ready to apply their understanding in practical ways.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we should do more to integrate AI tools in order to personalize learning. While structured education has had success in teaching large groups, it often struggles to meet the diverse skill needs of individual students. AI may ultimately allow every learner to take a truly individualized learning journey, realizing the promise of massive personalization like never before.

AI is changing how we all learn. It is posing a lot of valid questions and we are all figuring this out at the same time. My ask of the educator community is to help us on this journey of co-evolving the education system. This is a new technology that enables new things to happen. We are the technologists, not the educators, so there are many questions we are not in a position to answer. We must lean on our partnership with the educator community to help us understand the vision they have for what their institutions should look like and how we should think about the technology required to make that a reality.

VICTOR LEE

Victor Lee is an associate professor at Stanford Graduate School of Education and faculty lead for AI+Education at the Stanford Accelerator for Learning.

Education systems need to help students to critically yet productively evaluate information.

When you think about the future of learning and work, what does it mean to be "future-ready?"

Being future-ready is to be equipped — intellectually, relationally, physically — in such a way that you can deeply immerse yourself in a meaningful societal contribution and also step back regularly to ask yourself what should be a personally meaningful societal contribution, whether your actions and capabilities align with that, and what further changes you to make in order to actualize what you want your contribution to be.

Which skills, mindsets, or literacies will matter most in the next decade for learners?

What will matter most in the next decade is computational literacies that encompass the ability to understand what technology can and cannot do and to use technology as media for creation, expression, and reflection. Epistemic vigilance will matter as we consider quality of information and tools in service of knowledge work.

What would you like our education systems to do more and/or less of in preparing young people for the future?

We need to develop more high-quality collaboration capabilities in our education systems. We also need to help students to critically, yet productively, evaluate information. Education systems need to help students to critically yet productively evaluate information.

Photo credit: Ryan Zhang

CHRISTOPHER LEMONS

Christopher Lemons is a professor of special education at Stanford Graduate School of Education and faculty director of the Learning Differences Initiative at the Stanford Accelerator for Learning.

When you think about the future of learning and work, what does it mean to be "future-ready?"

Future-ready means having a skills set and a mind set to rapidly adapt to new ways of doing things. Schools currently prepare students for today — we need to get more innovative so we are preparing for the unknown world that will exist when your students transition into the post-secondary world. Considering ways to reshape the structure of our education system and on the skills that we prioritize is essential for this transformation.

Which skills, mindsets, or literacies will matter most in the next decade for learners?

I think the most critical skill for the future will be the ability to evaluate sources and information for the truth. Technology and our increasingly connected planet have many positive benefits. However, the amount of disinformation that exists causes major problems. Successful individuals will need to be able to rapidly differentiate real from fake news and other misinformation.

> We need to be bold and consider alternate structures and pathways by which individuals can increase their knowledge and skill, even if that is outside the current model.

What would you like our education systems to do more and/or less of in preparing young people for the future?

We have to transition from a schooling system that is focused on increasing the amount of basic information that individuals store in their head (e.g., learning facts, dates, formulas) to one that also focuses on locating reliable, trustworthy sources for information, being able to use technology and other resources to rapidly learn 'just-in-time' content as it applies to novel situations, and to ensure that we maintain a strong focus on human-to-human relationships in the rise of technology. Our schooling system from K-12 and college has had the same format for a very, very long time. We need to be bold and consider alternate structures and pathways by which individuals can increase their knowledge and skill, even if that is outside the current model.

ISABELLE HAU

Isabelle Hau is executive director of the Stanford Accelerator for Learning.

When you think about the future of learning and work, what does it mean to be "future-ready?"

To be future-ready means being prepared not just for the jobs of tomorrow, but for the humanity of tomorrow. In a world transformed by artificial intelligence, automation, and planetary challenges, readiness will depend less on what we know and more on how we relate, adapt, and learn together.

Future-ready learners are curious, adaptive, resilient, and relational—able to work across differences, build trust, and navigate complexity with compassion and creativity. At its core, being future-ready is about cultivating relational intelligence (RQ): the ability to understand, nurture, and grow through human connection. RQ enables us to listen deeply, collaborate meaningfully, and design solutions that serve the collective good.

When we place relationships at the center of learning and work, we prepare for a future that is not only smarter—but profoundly more human.

Which skills, mindsets, or literacies will matter most in the next decade for learners?

The next decade will reward those who can combine technological fluency with human depth.

Three broad domains of literacy will matter most:

1. Technological and AI Literacy — the ability to understand, question, and responsibly use intelligent systems. Learners must grasp not only how technologies work, but how they shape human lives and societies.

2. Human and Relational Literacies — the capacity to connect across cultures and disciplines, build trust, and collaborate meaningfully. This includes relational intelligence (RQ)—the ability to understand, nurture, and grow through human connection. RQ will define how we lead, learn, and innovate together.

3. Reflective and Ethical Literacies — the mindsets that enable continual growth: curiosity, creativity, adaptability, and moral courage. These qualities help learners turn uncertainty into opportunity and align action with purpose.

As AI accelerates change, the essential meta-skill will be learning how to learn—the ability to re-skill, reflect, and renew one's sense of meaning. Ultimately, the most powerful literacy of all will be learning how to be human together—recognizing that our future depends not only on intelligence, but on interdependence.

At its core, being future-ready is about cultivating relational intelligence (RQ).

What would you like our education systems to do more and/or less of in preparing young people for the future?

I would like our education systems to do more learning and less schooling. Too often, we equate education with instruction and testing rather than with the deeper process of curiosity, discovery, and connection that true learning requires. To prepare young people for the future, we need to design environments where learning is active, relational, and lifelong—not only confined to classrooms or measured only by exams.

We should do more of what helps learners make meaning—hands-on projects, collaboration across differences, inquiry that links disciplines to real-world challenges. And we should do less of what narrows learning—rote memorization, standardized pacing, and systems that reward compliance over creativity.

Our schools must nurture learning to learn and love to learn as a foundational skill—helping students develop the curiosity, adaptability, relational, and reflective habits that will allow them to grow in a rapidly changing world. That means empowering educators as learning designers an relational brain builders, making space for experimentation, and embracing AI and emerging technologies as partners in learning, not replacements for it.

Ultimately, the goal should be to build learning ecosystems, not just education systems—places where young people are supported by relationships, purpose, and the joy of learning throughout their lives.

MAUREEN HEYMANS

Maureen Heymans is Vice President of Engineering, Learning, and Sustainability at Google.

When you think about the future of learning and work, what does it mean to be "future-ready?"

To be "future-ready" in the rapidly evolving landscape of learning and work means mastering a critical combination of human skills, digital competencies, and an adaptive mindset. This preparedness is vital because every job and the entire workforce are projected to fundamentally change as AI dramatically augments human roles and evolves job functions

Put simply, we're all going to have to continue to learn new skills! It's essential to be adaptable, proactively looking for opportunities to learn. Upskilling and reskilling both technical and human skills are something that everyone should be open to. Today there are micro-learning and adaptive training platforms to address real-time skill gaps that can make learning feel less overwhelming.

A big part of understanding where those skill gaps are is the ability to break down work to identify what can be extended by AI versus what requires human oversight, empathy, and strategic thinking. These skills have always been important but are only increasing in relevance today. It's important to know where you excel. By clearly understanding the opportunities that AI offers as a partner and extension of your work and how you can uniquely leverage it, you can improve both your own productivity and system efficiency.

To be "future-ready" schools and workplaces will need to adapt education to develop skill sets that complement, and indeed co-create with AI. Focusing purely on technology misses the true value of human capital.

Which skills, mindsets, or literacies will matter most in the next decade for learners?

Often we think about AI only in terms of productivity, however to truly be future-ready, students need uniquely human skills. It's so much more than just prompt engineering. I think of three buckets of skills:

Cognitive and Interpersonal Skills

These have always been essential in the workplace and are now more important than ever as they complement and improve how we can use AI. Critical thinking is paramount to judge and evaluate AI Outputs, for example, fact-checking "hallucinations." Without strong collaboration and communication skills it will be impossible to work effectively in a group. Creativity will help find novel ways to engineer prompts and leverage the full opportunities of AI. With these skills, you can leverage AI as a co-creation tool rather than a replacement for cognitive tasks.

Digital and AI Literacy

A fundamental understanding of AI tools and concepts such as a basic grasp of the responsible and ethical uses of AI are essential. For example, without understanding algorithmic bias and data privacy concerns there's scope for misuse. Foundational skills like literacy, numeracy, and adaptive problem-solving remain vital as the bedrock that facilitates adaptation to any change.

> Learners should focus on mastering uniquely human skills while becoming technologically savvy enough to partner with AI responsibly.

Lifelong Learning

Future readiness demands a growth mindset and a passion for self-directed learning, as well as adaptability and resilience. By taking ownership of one's learning journey, you can proactively explore your career, ensuring smoother transitions and alignment with purpose.

In short, learners should focus on mastering uniquely human skills while becoming technologically savvy enough to partner with AI responsibly, all framed by a mindset of continuous, self-directed learning.

What would you like our education systems to do more and/or less of in preparing young people for the future?

To prepare young people for a future defined by AI and continuous change, educational systems should prioritize active, hands-on learning that not only teaches AI literacy, but also fosters student ownership and self-awareness to build the student's capacity to direct their own learning. It's essential that students become active, strategic learners who set their own goals, ready for whatever comes their way!

Experiential learning with project-based assignments that incorporate AI while building skills such as collaboration, creative synthesis, self-reflection and adaptive problem solving are great ways to do this.

Some examples:

- **Vibecoding and creative hands-on projects:** Students take a personal passion (e.g., gaming) and create a tangible app, building creativity and agency by overcoming real-world hurdles and seeing their ideas come to life.

- **Structured AI Co-Creation Sprints:** Teach responsible AI literacy by having students brainstorm alone first, then use AI (like Gemini) to expand ideas. Students must then critically evaluate the AI's output, identifying biases and errors, thereby exercising judgment and not simply offloading cognitive tasks.

- **Research & Synthesis Challenges:** Engage students with complex, conflicting data and require them to use tools (like NotebookLM) to synthesize key arguments and propose a path forward. This develops high-level critical thinking and perspective management by forcing students to reflect on and manage multiple perspectives—a key metacognitive exercise.

By focusing on these active methods, education systems can ensure that young people treat AI as an intellectual partner and an extension of their strategic, self-directed abilities.

BEN KORNELL

Ben Kornell is co-founder of Edtech Insiders and CEO at Art of Problem-Solving.

When you think about the future of learning and work, what does it mean to be "future-ready?"

In finance they use the term 'beta' to define the rate of change or volatility. High beta stocks are where investors take the most risks and get the highest potential reward. We are heading toward a high beta future — kids will have to reinvent themselves multiple times over to adapt to rapid, unpredictable change. And while that will create real risk, I also think there will be incredible opportunities across learning, career, and life.

> We are heading toward a high beta future — kids will have to reinvent themselves multiple times over to adapt to rapid, unpredictable change.

Which skills, mindsets, or literacies will matter most in the next decade for learners?

Future-ready students will be problem solvers, critical thinkers, and advanced communicators. They will be resilient, creative, and analytical. They will find continuity in mission and purpose. They will find joy in solving novel challenges.

What would you like our education systems to do more and/or less of in preparing young people for the future?

Education systems need to raise the bar with rigorous, deep, longitudinal learning, as opposed to drilling on discrete knowledge in the pursuit of a proficient standardized test score.

Photo credit: Ryan Zhang

AMIT PATEL

Amit Patel is Managing Director at Owl Ventures.

When you think about the future of learning and work, what does it mean to be "future-ready?"

We are living in a world that has fully embraced a global digital economy — one where innovation moves at an unprecedented pace and lifelong learning is no longer optional but essential. To thrive in careers that may span 40 to 50 years, individuals must cultivate the courage to continuously learn, reskill, and engage with new technologies, regardless of their age or stage in life. The willingness to stay curious — to learn, unlearn, and relearn — will define the difference between simply adapting to shaping the future.

For organizations, the same holds true. Staying competitive will depend not only on adopting emerging technologies quickly, but also on investing deeply in their people—creating pathways for upskilling and growth that empower employees to adapt and lead through change.

Artificial intelligence has given us a glimpse into what the future of learning might look like: personalized, accessible, and responsive to each individual's needs in ways previously unimaginable. Rather than replacing human potential, AI has the power to amplify it — allowing people to focus on creativity, problem-solving, and human connection while technology handles routine or repetitive tasks.

Being future-ready is ultimately about mindset. It means meeting uncertainty with confidence, approaching change with a childlike sense of wonder, and believing that imagination and innovation are limitless human strengths. The future belongs to those who remain curious, adaptable, and inspired to keep learning—because readiness is no longer a destination, but a lifelong journey.

Which skills, mindsets, or literacies will matter most in the next decade for learners?

It's easy to imagine a future where knowledge flows as quickly as ideas — where data and insights are instantly accessible between thought and articulation. Tasks that once took hours will happen in seconds, and learning will meet each person exactly where they are — in the place, time, and format that keeps them in their proximal zone of development.

In that world, technology won't diminish what makes us human; it will amplify it. AI and automation will handle what's routine so that we can focus on what's creative, relational, and deeply meaningful.

The skills that will matter most are the ones rooted in our humanity — skills such as perseverance, imagination, collaboration, and compassion. These skills will allow us to work alongside technology to explore ideas across disciplines, unlock new insights, and solve problems that don't have a single right answer.

> ## The skills that will matter most are the ones rooted in our humanity - skills such as perseverance, imagination, collaboration, and compassion.

Together, human ingenuity and technological capability will expand what's possible — enabling us to collaborate across cultures and even across planets. It will allow us to tackle some of the most difficult challenges facing our world such as fully harnessing sustainable energy, curing diseases once thought untreatable, and creating a world of shared abundance.

Being future-ready means not choosing between humanity and technology, but understanding how the two can evolve together — each pushing the other toward its fullest potential.

What would you like our education systems to do more and/or less of in preparing young people for the future?

The next generation of education systems must be able to learn in real time — not just about students, but about the system itself. Today, critical information about learners is collected across schools, districts, and agencies but remains fragmented, outdated, and inaccessible to the people who need it most. By the time data is compiled and analyzed, it often reflects what has already happened rather than what's happening now.

A system that learns would close this gap. It would connect academic progress, attendance, social indicators, and even postsecondary and workforce outcomes into a living feedback loop — one that evolves as students do. Educators and policymakers could see, in real time, which supports are working, where learners are getting lost, and which pathways lead to lasting success.

This isn't about collecting more data; it's about making the information we already have more useful. A learning system would transform static reports into dynamic insight — enabling education to anticipate change rather than react to it.

Such a system could continually align learning experiences with the demands of a changing world, helping students build not just knowledge, but resilience, curiosity, and purpose. When education itself can learn, it ensures that progress — for students, schools, and society — never stands still.

Photo credit: Ryan Zhang

MATTHEW MONTGOMERY

Matthew Montgomery is superintendent of Lake Forest School Districts 67 & 115, and co-chair of the Innovation for Transformation Consortium at AASA, the School Superintendents Association.

When you think about the future of learning and work, what does it mean to be "future-ready?"

Being "future-ready" isn't about mastering every new tool; it's about cultivating the mindset to adapt as the world changes. At Lake Forest, our Portrait of a Learner defines that readiness. Built through hundreds of hours of community input, it focuses on how our students learn — adaptable, confident, and ready for whatever comes next.

Which skills, mindsets, or literacies will matter most in the next decade for learners?

The skills that will matter most are the ones that technology can't replace — communication, empathy, critical thinking, citizenship, confidence, and adaptability. We call them durable skills because they stand the test of time.

Our Portrait of a Learner, developed before the rise of generative AI, identified these very competencies, and they've only grown more relevant. Tools will evolve, but human connection, creativity, and character remain timeless.

> We're in a moment of disruption, and schools have to adapt with the same empathy, adaptability, and critical thinking we want our learners to develop.

What would you like our education systems to do more and/or less of in preparing young people for the future?

Education systems must do more to model the agility we hope to instill in students. We're in a moment of disruption, and schools have to adapt with the same empathy, adaptability, and critical thinking we want our learners to develop.

At Lake Forest, that means practicing collective leadership (empowering more internal and external stakeholders at the decision-making table), elevating student voice, and aligning our measures of success to mirror both our Portrait of a Learner competencies and academic excellence.

DAN SCHWARTZ

Dan Schwartz is the I. James Quillen Dean and the Nomellini & Olivier Professor of Educational Technology at Stanford Graduate School of Education. He is also the Halper Family Faculty Director of the Stanford Accelerator for Learning.

When you think about the future of learning and work, what does it mean to be "future-ready?"

People will need to keep learning as times, technologies, and knowledge bases change. Mastery of the content, once-and-for-all, will be insufficient. Preparation for future learning depends on many things including experiencing the satisfaction of understanding something deeply. Perhaps one of the most important is experiencing the satisfaction of understanding a thing deeply. It becomes the internal standard to measure against.

Which skills, mindsets, or literacies will matter most in the next decade for learners?

If we assume that people will need to continue adapting to a changing future, then the starting point is people's abilities to recognize that there is something new. If people cannot pick up that there is something new, they cannot adapt. It is an exciting instructional challenge to prepare people to recognize what is new instead of over-relying on what they already know.

What would you like our education systems to do more and/or less of in preparing young people for the future?

Our current instructional models have a tell-and-copy flavor where students replicate what they are told or shown. This is a mismatch for a future where there will be a premium on human generativity. An alternative approach asks students to invent solutions and explanations. This not only prepares them with the dispositions to be generative, it also creates a time-for-telling so they understand subsequent explanations more deeply.

> Our current instructional models have a tell-and-copy flavor where students replicate what they are told or shown. This is a mismatch for a future where there will be a premium on human generativity.

Photo credit: Ryan Zhang

ADAM SIEGEL

Adam Siegel is science department co-chair and teacher at New Valley High School.

When you think about the future of learning and work, what does it mean to be "future-ready?"

Future readiness means preparing my students for an ever-changing world while also ensuring they are not left out of upcoming opportunities. For many continuation school and alt. ed. students, the focus is getting them "now ready." They are usually behind in credits, and many are working below grade level in core academic and life skills. These students are trying to get caught up while also navigating high levels of trauma, systemic racism, financial instability, housing insecurity, and work to help families financially. Before they can innovate, they must build trust in the system and reconnect with learning.

Future readiness requires equitable access to learning tools, including AI and tech literacy. This will ensure that innovation doesn't increase existing inequities. It means designing education for students who have been left out. Every learner deserves to step into the future confidently. When we prepare those furthest from opportunity, everyone benefits.

> ## Future readiness requires equitable access to learning tools, including AI and tech literacy. It means designing education for students who have been left out.

Which skills, mindsets, or literacies will matter most in the next decade for learners?

My students need to develop their skills across ELA, math, soft skills, and tech literacy. Many are working at elementary or middle school levels. Despite this, they need to engage in high school content. They need targeted remediation as well as tools that let them keep moving forward while they are filling academic gaps.

Relationship building and social-emotional development are essential. Students need to rebuild trust in schools, develop healthy stress-coping strategies, and grow their academic confidence. My classroom motto is "Be willing to be wrong."

Tech and AI literacies are critical to accessing future careers. Students need to learn to use generative AI, and other advanced tech tools, but also to question digital information rather than accept it passively.

Most importantly, students need to see themselves in a tech-focused future, even if life has taught them to focus only on surviving today.

What would you like our education systems to do more and/or less of in preparing young people for the future?

Education systems need to focus on the 62,700+ credit-deficient students in California, as well as their peers across the country. We need to increase individualized, tech-supported pathways that close academic gaps and open doors to tech-integrated careers.

Schools should invest in tools and experiences that give underserved learners direct access to advanced technology and technology literacy. Equity means not just giving students a Chromebook or an iPad, but also giving them access to the same advanced skills and training that their more privileged peers have access to.

EdTech needs to continue to partner with experienced educators who excel at building relationships, restorative practices, and increasing student academic risk-taking. Technology needs to support their learning, not replace it.

Education must exclude less and include more: re-engagement first, then foundational skills and tech literacy for all.

BROOKE STAFFORD-BRIZARD

Brooke Stafford-Brizard is Senior Vice President for Innovation and Impact at Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

I believe to be future-ready, students must have the skills, motivation, and support to play a role in shaping their own future across both the workforce and their communities. We see this vision for "future-ready" represented in almost half of our states now, who have developed Portraits of a Graduate — often in partnership with community, workforce and higher education — naming the broader set of skills young people will need to thrive.

> I would like our education systems to efficiently reboot the operating system that was put in place over a century ago. This is a significant undertaking, but absolutely possible if we leverage science, technology and the wisdom of our educators.

Which skills, mindsets, or literacies will matter most in the next decade for learners?

Many of these skills are named in Portraits of a Graduates because they are responsive to what community, workforce and higher education are naming as critical for success. These include core academic skills — the foundations of the traditional diploma will continue to matter. And, what we have come to label "durable skills" will be just as important. These skills will allow students to be shapers of their futures in both work and life, not just reactors. This includes how we engage with and use AI (aka AI literacy), which not only includes those foundation skills for understanding and using AI, but the critical thinking skills to seek, analyze, and reason with data and information that will be produced through technology that is fast-advancing and inconsistently reliable.

In addition to AI literacy, young people will need the skills to engage with each other as human beings and our society, ensuring that we have the capacity to engage in ways that AI will never be able to replicate; this includes civic literacy, collaboration, communication, and interpersonal curiosity (how we seek to understand each other). Finally, to lead and shape our future, will require skills that allow students to navigate and embrace ambiguity as opportunity — skills like adaptability, creativity, and perseverance.

What would you like our education systems to do more and/or less of in preparing young people for the future?

I would like our education systems to efficiently reboot the operating system that was put in place over a century ago with the creation of the high school diploma (in 1894 with no significant changes since) and the Carnegie Unit, which has enforced limitations on teaching and student experience through the conflation of time and learning since 1906. This is a significant undertaking, but absolutely possible if we leverage science, technology and the wisdom of our educators.

MITCHELL STEVENS

Mitchell Stevens is a professor of education and, by courtesy, sociology, at Stanford Graduate School of Education. He is also a faculty affiliate of the Stanford Accelerator for Learning.

When you think about the future of learning and work, what does it mean to be "future-ready?"

I have a colleague at the University of Michigan who talked about being "poised" -- by which he means being sufficiently flexible to anticipate change but also prepared to take advantage of it. It's sort of like making sure your car always has a full tank of gas. One never knows what happens tomorrow; but anticipating challenges is a good thing.

For learning and work: for individuals, I believe that means making sure that core capacities -- critical and analytic thinking, teamwork, comfort with ambiguity -- remain honed. For schools and other organizations, I believe that means anticipating change, not stability, every single day.

Which skills, mindsets, or literacies will matter most in the next decade for learners?

Capacity for basic quantitative and mathematical reasoning is essential. Banish "I'm not a math person." It's sort of like saying "I'm not a language person." Machines can do the math for us, but they can't evaluate value for us. Comfort with ambiguity -- by which I mean accepting that situations and problems are complicated and there may be multiple right (and wrong) answers. Willingness, indeed eagerness, to work on teams and across differences is also essential.

What would you like our education systems to do more and/or less of in preparing young people for the future?

I'd like to see us focus much less on credentials and much more on learning. I worry that, for all its value, a focus on "skills" is going to lead us down a road to more pieces of (digital) paper, not fewer. Learning is what matters. Developing new ways to observe and verify learning is very important. But the vast majority of credentials neither observe nor verify learning. Instead they verify successful movement through a school. That's hardly the equivalent of learning.

> Capacity for basic quantitative and mathematical reasoning is essential. Machines can do the math for us, but they can't evaluate value for us.

CANDACE THILLE

Candace Thille is an associate professor at Stanford Graduate School of Education and faculty director of the Adult and Workforce Learning initiative of the Stanford Accelerator for Learning.

When you think about the future of learning and work, what does it mean to be "future-ready?"

To be future-ready we need to break the traditional linear model of research to practice and develop new models for integrated research and practice that result in continuous cycles of evidence-based innovation and improvement.

Which skills, mindsets, or literacies will matter most in the next decade for learners?

It will be important to manage distributed cognition and collaborative learning and work – collaboration with humans and machines. I also believe it will be important to be able to hear and consider diverse perspectives. The ability to hear and consider diverse perspectives.

What would you like our education systems to do more and/or less of in preparing young people for the future?

I would like our education system to focus less on memorizing facts and procedures and focus more on understanding history and developing critical judgment to prepare for a complex, evolving world. A democracy depends on an informed citizenry with an understanding of history and context, capable of discerning between facts and misinformation.

> To be future-ready we need to break the traditional linear model of research to practice and develop new models that result in continuous cycles of evidence-based innovation and improvement.

Photo credit: Ryan Zhang

MAISHA WINN

Maisha Winn is the Excellence in Learning Professor at Stanford Graduate School of Education and faculty director of the Equity in Learning Initiative at the Stanford Accelerator for Learning.

When you think about the future of learning and work, what does it mean to be "future-ready?"

Future readiness is inextricably linked to imagination and action. One must first dare to imagine the possibilities and then be willing to create a map of how to access the futures we wish to see. Future-ready is the mindset that we are consistently asking ourselves what our work will look like in 10, 15, and 20 years and how it will impact the next generations.

Which skills, mindsets, or literacies will matter most in the next decade for learners?

In order to be future-ready, one must be willing to look both ways--that is, look back and look ahead. Most people discount history as they imagine the future; however, I believe the future was already here and that there are important lessons learned from non-dominant communities in terms of how we curate dynamic and compelling learning environments.

> I believe that there are important lessons learned from non-dominant communities in how we curate dynamic and compelling learning environments.

What would you like our education systems to do more and/or less of in preparing young people for the future?

I am drawn to Alvin Toffler's ideas around creating Councils of the Future in every school and preparing children and their families with skills to imagine and plan for futures they desire and deserve.

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