

We—education practitioners, scholars, business and union leaders, parents, and advocates—gathered together because we believed it was time for a new conversation about education.

IN APRIL 2013, Convergence, a national non-profit that convenes sustained dialogues among leaders, doers, and thinkers with conflicting views to create breakthrough solutions on issues of national concern, brought us together in Washington, DC to reimagine education. We were a group of 28 ideologically diverse actors in education. No two of us held the same view of how to fix the current system. What we did share, however, was a fundamental commitment for all children to love learning and thrive regardless of their circumstances. We knew it was time to stop debating how to fix the system and start imagining a new one.

So, together, we engaged in a dialogic and challenging process in six two-day meetings over 18 months. Working with highly skilled facilitators, we went to work to:

- Create a shared, powerful vision of extraordinary education for the next generations of American children;
- Map key pathways to realize this vision;
- Define the essential actions and actors needed to begin moving forward; and
- Launch a partnership of leaders committed to realizing this vision together.

MEETING ONE: IDENTIFYING THE CHALLENGE

At our first gathering, we opened by sharing what had brought us all together—our commitment to children. Hearing this shared commitment, we were able to effectively examine the education system. We reviewed the historical context out of which it was created and the future economic, demographic, and technological trends projected to affect our graduates. From this, we acknowledged the limits of the current Industrial-era education system's ability to adapt to 21st century needs and aspirations. And so, together, we committed ourselves to imagining something new—a transformed system that would support what we all agreed is the purpose of education:

To enable all children to fulfill their full potential as empowered individuals, constructive members of their communities, productive participants in the economy, and engaged citizens of the US and the world.

MEETING TWO: FINDING COMMON GROUND

We returned ready to do the hard work of reimagining. We continued to get to know one another as people, not as representatives of institutions. And recognized that, despite our often-conflicting views, we all shared a powerful commitment to providing all kids with great learning.

Standing on this common ground, we began digging into the underlying assumptions that make up our current education system's design: Learning happens in schools and classrooms in 6-hour days. It's divided into subjects. All kids learn at the same pace and in the same way.

We could now see the constraints that box us in—the paradigm we’d all been living and thinking in. So, we asked ourselves, “**Why can’t we dream, imagine, create, and innovate outside of that box?**”

MEETING THREE: DEFINING OUR DESTINATION

Moving outside of that box, we explored what outcomes we wanted for children. In today’s fast-paced, ever-evolving world, what do kids need to thrive and be prepared for their futures? We answered with three words: knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Information and understanding of the world expands and evolves so quickly that memorizing no longer makes sense. Rather, learners need to master a strong combination of knowledge; skills—such as communication, collaboration, creativity, problem solving, metacognition, and critical thinking; and dispositions—like resilience, confidence, curiosity, resourcefulness, persistence, and adaptability.

From here came the next big question: What learning environments would support these outcomes for kids? So, we took the obvious next step: we did skits. Using profiles of learners—representing many ages and circumstances—we acted out what a day in their life might look like. With the skits, a future began to emerge.

MEETING FOUR: PUTTING THE LEARNER AT THE CENTER

We came back together eager to flesh out the future that we had glimpsed. And with a few more “Day in the life of skits,” that future came into focus. It was a future with the learner at the center. We saw kids progressing as they were ready and steadily taking ownership over their learning. We saw learning that was personalized to learners’ interests and needs and put in real-life contexts. We saw environments that fostered supportive relationships and allowed learning to happen anytime, anywhere. We saw five interrelated elements that when taken together form a new design for learning free from the Industrial-era assumptions about the box learning has to fit in:



MEETING FIVE: TRANSFORMING THE SYSTEM

At our fifth gathering, our questions turned to the systems level. What structures are needed to support these learning environments? Our answer: to realize the full expression of the five elements, the core components of the education system must be reimagined with the learner at the center. From assessments to the roles of adults to the places where learning happens, the entire system must be transformed. We knew that we did not have the answers for what those systems would look like and that a group of 28 in a conference room in Washington, DC was not the right group to answer them anyway.

Local practitioners need to experiment and discover in their own communities with how the five elements come together to best support each and every one of their learners.

MEETING SIX: COMMITTING TO CHANGE

Our final meeting saw us engage deeply on how we imagined this transformation happening. We wrestled with theories of change. And aligned behind the belief that the transformation will emerge—not from top-down mandates or one-size-fits-all implementation strategies—but from the innovation and experimentation of local communities and pioneers iterating their ways to new systems. Looking out at the world, we saw that more and more people are already at work doing just that. This is a growing movement of learner-centered education that is spreading across the country. And we could see that the path forward was to get behind and amplify the innovation already happening and find ways to grow this movement.

With the close of this process, each of us signed on to this transformational vision and joined together to commit ourselves to making learner-centered education available to all children in America. We are now seeking to accelerate the paradigm shift from school-centered to learner-centered education. We are sharing the possibility of transforming education, identifying, connecting and empowering the pioneers already at work to make it a reality, and contributing to a new conversation about education.

Over the past 9 months, **Education Reimagined**, an initiative of **Convergence**, was formed to support all of us in this pursuit. We know that there are many schools, districts, networks, funders, and others already working to transform education. Now, we are exploring ways to provide a space for those many pioneers to connect, share, discover, and create together.

And we cannot wait to see what happens.