

Looking At The ISSUES

Stark Education Partnership

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The Courage to Innovate

Greater Stark County: Hall of Fame Center of Creativity and Innovation

When you see obstacles as opportunities, the world becomes a limitless place.

This is my final *Looking at the Issues* article as I will be retiring from the Partnership in June. My final reflection is a call for **disruptive innovation** that gives our education leaders permission to more boldly change the education landscape.

A few years ago, when international education expert Sir Ken Robinson met with almost 900 Stark area educators and community leaders, he reinforced the beliefs of many in the room. Ohio's system of standardized instruction and over-reliance on state testing has not resulted in the excellence and equity for Ohio students that were intended. Sir Ken pointed to the changes made in the education system in number one ranked Finland as an example for Ohio to consider as our state strives for high achievement for all students. The Finns have gradually built trust in schools and strengthened professional responsibility among teachers and leaders so that the education system works as a self-improving organization.

If we want students to maximize their talents, our school design will need to provide opportunities for students to explore their potential and experience what it means to be an active compassionate citizen.

While the pandemic has caused anxiety, loss and economic stress on families and businesses, it has also given us a chance to stop some of the state testing. It has expanded our thinking about where we work and learn and how to maximize technology to innovate opportunities.

Dr. Bill Daggett, founder of the International Center for Leadership in Education, recently stated that **the nation's most rapidly improving schools are much more future-focused** than forward-focused. A forward-focused school looks to the past to determine what can be improved upon going forward. A **future-focused** school looks to the future to see "what will [students] need to know, do and be like to be successful in this changing world" and then build backward from that vision. ([Watch the video](#)).

One of Greater Stark County's many strengths is that best practices built on **future-focused** innovation abound within the county. Even so, perhaps **now is the time to gather the dreamers who will research the "best in class" models**



from around the globe to determine a future-focused cradle to career talent development model for Greater Stark County.

For students to experience what it means to be an active compassionate citizen, this model of education would not simply be school-based, but also **designed to embrace vast learning experiences in many settings**. Field trips would no longer be a once a year experience on a good year. The field would be where children and youth learn. The community would have a major role in this talent development work throughout the education process. Our students would benefit from the rich talents of our community members and better understand ways that they can make a difference in their community. An investment in this newly envisioned talent development pipeline would be an investment in a hopeful future for all students. Students would have an opportunity to understand the world around them and the potential within them so they could become fulfilled, compassionate citizens.

It will take bold, courageous leadership to embark on this new path forward of engaging students more actively. Our bold, new path would strengthen and attract families to live and thrive in Greater Stark County – *the Hall of Fame Center of Creativity and Innovation: Excellence in Academics, Arts and Athletics*.

For over 30 years, I have been powerfully impacted by the innovative initiatives of the Stark Education Partnership – from the award winning SEEDS elementary science initiative and College Credit Plus, to our latest early education coalition, Great Start for Great Futures. These collaborative, countywide efforts have transformed learning experiences for students and built educator capacity.

I truly appreciate the many partnerships in our cradle to career, talent development initiatives. **Your commitment to this work will change the lives of children and youth in our community.**

Jessica J. Purcell

The Stark Education Partnership (a 501(c)3 non-profit organization) collaborates with education, business, civic and community members across the entire spectrum – cradle to career – to create and respond to opportunities that will provide ALL students with education and career success.

