



# VIEW*S* & VISIONS

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## All-In for Education

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Dr. Amelia Courts is president and chief executive officer of The Education Alliance. She has extensive leadership experience in the education sector and a record of success in collaborating with business and community organizations to positively impact statewide initiatives.

Prior to coming to The Alliance, Dr. Courts served for three years as assistant state superintendent at the West Virginia Department of Education. In that work, she developed and implemented major policy directives, worked collaboratively with the Governor's office and Legislature, and coordinated programs to improve the educational outcomes of the state's 280,000 students.

Dr. Courts also served 13 years as executive director of the Office of International Schools, where she had extensive collaboration with some of the state's key international businesses and successfully designed programs to meet the needs of their employees.

She is both internationally and locally experienced, having taught English as a second language for approximately six years throughout Asia (Japan, China and briefly Korea) and at Marshall University. She completed her doctoral degree at West Virginia University, with a degree in education administration in 2002.

You may have heard the phrase “all-in” used as part of the recent dialogue related to our national energy policy. I'd like to borrow the phrase and suggest for the future success of the Class of 2025 we need an “all-in” education policy. The term is particularly applicable because it conveys two very different, yet critical components for our students' future.

First, the most important and obvious component for success in 2025 is the “all.” Dr. Lori Connors-Tadros, from the Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes, outlines four key strategies to improve third-grade reading success. Number one on her list is “convince the community that we have an urgent problem and give them tools to address it.” This is listed before “investing in high-quality early-childhood programs” (#2), before “reducing chronic absenteeism” (#3) and before “combatting summer learning loss” (#4). If we are serious about producing graduates in 2025 who have high degrees of literacy, graduates who can perform the complex and high-tech jobs needed for our state's economy, we must convince our business and community partners that we have an urgent problem and we must all work together to solve it. Educators will need to embrace this collaboration from many sectors.

And don't our business and community partners play a critical role in implementing the other three strategies? Early-childhood programs, combatting summer learning loss and reducing absenteeism can only be tackled with the collaboration of community organizations, buy-in from families and the collective muscle of business partners across the state. With this in mind, The Education Alliance hosted a summit titled “Excellence in Education: It's Everyone's



Business” on November 5, 2013. We believe that an “all-in” education policy is critical to our state's success. We invite business, education and community leaders to join the ongoing discussion on how we can work together to achieve excellence in education in West Virginia ([www.educationalalliance.org/summit](http://www.educationalalliance.org/summit)).

The second aspect of an “all-in for education” approach is clearly the “in” – that unyielding commitment needed for success. Just like the poker player who commits all of his or her remaining chips to a hand, West Virginia must go “all-in” for a public education system that prepares our children to compete in the world economy. There can be no reservation. There is no “Plan B.” We must be fully committed to do what it takes to enable the Class of 2025 to succeed.

**Going all-in for education inherently implies there are risks. It will require new ways of thinking and doing.**

There has been much forward progress in West Virginia's public education system in recent months. Governor Earl Ray Tomblin has taken a strong leadership role by focusing on education policy issues, supporting the recent passage of Senate Bill 359 and addressing underlying



systemic challenges to our education system, like substance abuse and dropout prevention. The West Virginia Board of Education is likewise taking an active role in its commitment to improve public education. Now is the time to build on our positive momentum and go “all-in” for education.

But, before we say we are fully committed, we need to be clear about the stakes. It means setting meaningful and measurable goals for our students and holding ourselves accountable to meet those goals. As we look to 2025, what are the benchmarks that we must meet in 2015 and 2020? Have we examined effective strategies from research and other neighboring states? Have we thought

about the resources that we must commit to help our schools reach their goals? How will community collaboration look and work? These questions must be answered in a fair and transparent way that builds trust and encourages all stakeholders to become fully committed to strengthening public education.

Going “all-in” for education inherently implies there are risks. It will require new ways of thinking and doing. The obstacles should not be underestimated. However, as we think about the graduates of 2025, we must see them as more than a far off, fuzzy cohort of faceless individuals. In reality, they are our sons, our daughters, our grandchildren, our future employees and business owners.

With these faces in mind, we will quickly conclude that the only real risk we face is NOT going “all-in for education.” ▾