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Dr. Amelia Courts serves as President and Chief Executive Officer of The Education Alliance, which advocates for a quality education for all West Virginia students. Under her leadership, the Alliance has been a leader in advancing STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) initiatives, including the Governor's STEM Council, STEM Network Schools and Computer Science education.

The Future of Learning

Class of 2033

The year is 2033, and West Virginia's graduating class of high school seniors are walking across the stage to receive their diplomas. Confetti fills the air. Parents, neighbors and friends have gathered to celebrate. The milestone is no longer a culminating event, but rather it marks a seamless transition for students taking their next steps toward a promising future here in the Mountain State.

In thinking about the future of learning, it is tempting to focus the discussion on the changing nature of work. According to a recent study by McKinsey & Company, the employment landscape is shifting, and jobs, such as food preparation, are expected to decline by 31 percent by the year 2030.¹

Technology is another potential focal point for the discussion. Research indicates that artificial intelligence (AI) will be a force in education. Just like Amazon generates customized ads, AI will help students receive customized assignments.² While these important topics will most certainly be influential, the most compelling view of the future of learning can be seen entirely from the lens of the learner.

What is the future of learning that we aspire for our students?

First, future learners will be **competent in "market-valued outcomes."** Forbes ties this to the development of a "Profile of a Graduate," which provides a clear description of the knowledge and skill sets graduates need to be successful.³ Sometimes called "soft skills" or executive functions, these attributes will become a key part of student readiness. The learners of tomorrow will cultivate these competencies. In addition to a strong foundation in reading, math and other traditional content, our graduates will be proficient in problem-solving, communication, work ethic and innovation.

The current "market," both workforce and societal, already promotes a high value for these competencies, and West Virginia students are responding (see www.WVGraduate.com). Today, we see promising results taking root



Photo Caption 1 A WV Ready Intern gives his final presentation to Appalachian Power supervisors.

Photo Caption 2 Supervisors pose with WV Ready Interns at Cabell Huntington Hospital.

Photo Caption 3 WV Ready Interns at Toyota Motor Manufacturing West Virginia meet with Senator Shelly Moore Captio.



through programs such as Code.org that help students develop skills like teamwork and problem solving while simultaneously teaching computer science.

Second, future learners will be **contributors to real-world solutions**. The graduates of 2033 will, from an early age, identify their individual talents and skills as they progress along the educational pathway. Their teachers structure learning environments to identify problems, encourage student “voice and choice” and work on real-world solutions. Students are excited and inspired to come to school every day. An example from today might be found in robotics and engineering programs that help students work with their local communities to address challenges such as West Virginia’s devastating 2016 flood.

There will still be challenges, such as poverty, discrimination and disease. But the students of tomorrow approach their learning not as a requirement or checklist but as an opportunity to address these challenges. Tomorrow’s students will see a very clear connection between school and life, as they are empowered to tackle problems that matter to them, and to become contributors to a better world.


Finally, future learners will be **credentialed with experiences**. Students today are moving rapidly toward a “show what you know” society that is transforming everything from college entrance exams to hiring processes. An early model of this experiential learning can be found in the WV Ready Internship Program. In 2019, the program provided a four-week, paid summer internship opportunity for rising high school juniors and seniors at three of the state’s leading employers – Toyota, Appalachian Power and Cabell Huntington Hospital.

The WV Ready Internship Program students received high quality training from The Education Alliance. At the end of their experience, each intern gave a final presentation to their



company’s leadership team. The results were incredible. Every intern showcased life-changing and eye-opening personal development. Seventy percent of the interns reported the experience had changed their career pathway, and the businesses reported the internships were a valid strategy to support their workforce needs. The learners of tomorrow will develop these same types of assets as they earn credentials that validate their learning experiences.

As we look with aspiration to the graduates of 2033, we see all learners as becoming competent in market-valued outcomes, contributors to real-world solutions and credentialed with experiences. We can help students reach these exciting aspirations if we start today and if we work together.

Today’s Pre-K students will be the Class of 2033. They are depending on educators, businesses, communities and families to work together to transform their tomorrow. The future of learning needs all of you. 

¹Manyika, James et al. 2017, McKinsey Global Institute, “Jobs Lost, Jobs Gained,” <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/jobs-lost-jobs-gained-what-the-future-of-work-will-mean-for-jobs-skills-and-wages>.

²Johnson, Alyssa, 2019, “5 ways AI is Changing the Education Industry,” <https://elearningindustry.com/ai-is-changing-the-education-industry-5-ways>.

³Vander Ark, Tom. 2019, Forbes, “How States can Jumpstart the Future of Learning,” <https://www.forbes.com/sites/tomvanderark/2019/11/04/how-states-can-jumpstart-the-future-of-learning/#74c909046fb7>.