



Governor Jeb Bush Opening Keynote - Full Transcript

2017 National Summit on Education Reform
Nov. 30, 2017

Thank you, Governor Haslam. It is great to be in this beautiful state.

There is a reason why we're here, and it's your leadership. If there wasn't the kind of rising student achievement that Tennessee students have seen because of your reforms, great teachers and committed parents, we [the National Summit on Education Reform] would probably be in some other place.

We're lucky to be in Nashville. It's an incredible city that's going to be on the vanguard of the New America, because it's focused on the things that will make it possible for the next generation to stay in their communities and have jobs of purpose and meaning.

I am excited about the Drive to 55 effort that Governor Haslam initiated. In our work at the Foundation [for Excellence in Education], we're seeing every state focus on how you connect education and make it relevant for the world we are moving toward, which is dramatically different than what we have today.

In fact, Alan Levine, who is now a citizen of your great state, stole your idea - literally stole it, lock, stock and barrel - and got the Board of Governors in Florida to approve the Drive to 55 effort - the exact same program to get the exact same percentage of working adults to achieve a four-year degree, AA [Associate of Arts] or AS [Associate of Science] degree, or a nationally recognized certificate.

That's what we all should be doing. The great thing about our efforts here, and the efforts you all make each and every day in your states is, it's okay to steal good ideas. In fact, in the next two days, we want you to steal every good idea you can - and not just talk about them, but implement them in your state.

I also want to thank the Nashville Classical Charter School - they were pretty good, weren't they?

What you didn't hear was that on their test scores, they hit it out of the park. They are one of the highest performing schools in Tennessee, and it's an example of why reform matters. If those kids didn't get the chance to go to a high quality public school, a charter school, who knows what the outcome would be.

We are delighted they are here, and I hope we implement more schools like that across the country so that we don't gather every year for our summits, figuring out how to change our education system - it will already be changed.

Good morning, everybody. Welcome to the 10th annual National Summit on Education Reform.

More than 1,100 people from more than 40 states are here. They have come to the Music City to learn what's working, what's new, and what's next in education reform. We're really glad you're here.



I want to thank our sponsors for their generosity. Without it, we could not make this happen, and we are delighted that they continue to provide support.

Ten years ago, Patricia and I, and a couple others, decided to host an education summit, and hoped and prayed that people would actually show up.

We did it in Orlando, a state we knew well. I was a little nervous about it, so I invited my Mother to guarantee we would have a good audience. Thankfully, she agreed! She remembered that I was her favorite son. She showed up, we had a good crowd, and we launched our efforts to work with states - with humility and in a collaborative way - to encourage people to be big and bold and to change things.

In this last year, you all have done extraordinary work. I think it's time to pause and recognize the outcomes of the cumulative effort of the people in this room over the last 10 years.

More than 3.5 million students are going to the public or private schools of their choice, which is more than double the number of students in 2007.

Nearly 90% of all states and the District of Columbia allow charter schools, with Kentucky joining the ranks just this year. Congratulations, Kentucky! We've got about four states left, and my guess is that will be done in the next few years.

More than half of all states and the District of Columbia offer at least one private school choice program as well. Congratulations, Illinois, for joining those ranks this year.

More than two-thirds of states have adopted laws or policies to help students learn to read independently by fourth grade - an important policy initiative that doesn't get the kind of attention that it needs. If a child doesn't learn to read by the beginning of fourth grade, that child will have dramatic changes in their life going forward. But, if they are literate by the start of fourth grade, they can begin to acquire knowledge.

More than a dozen states have joined Florida in grading schools on a scale of A through F. Transparency and accountability still matter. It's the great challenge of our time, but I hope you realize that if parents know where their children are, everyone aligns their interests to ensure there are learning gains for kids.

Several states have adopted funding strategies to create incentives for student success.

On behalf of the millions of families that are benefiting from education reform, thank you for challenging the status quo; thank you for advancing bold reform in the face of extraordinary and well-financed opposition; and thank you for putting kids first before politics, party-affiliation and partisanship.

At our first National Summit ten years ago, I said education was like an eight-track tape in an iPod world.

I thought it was really cool to pull out my iPod, thinking I was a very hip guy 10 years ago. I held up my Nano as an example of transformational innovation. That same year, Apple launched its first App Store.



Fast forward ten years. Today, the iPod is literally obsolete; a massive 92% of Americans between the ages of 18 and 29 own a Smartphone - a computer that has more power in it than a massive IBM from a generation ago; and consumers have access to millions of Apps on multiple platforms.

It's kind of hard to remember a world without Apps. Today, there is, quite literally, an App for everything. In fact, there's now an entire micro-industry devoted to developing Apps to help you find more Apps!

This has all happened in 10 years, and across the technological space, we've seen dramatic changes. And, yet sadly, our education system, in spite of the successes we've made, has only made incremental change.

This big challenge and the lessons over the last 10 years are important to remember.

First, rapid technological innovation and automation are doing the jobs that once were held by individuals with a high school diploma.

Drones are replacing delivery men. 3D printers are replacing assembly-line manufacturing workers. Robots are replacing retail and restaurant workers. And pretty soon driverless cars will replace bus drivers, truck drivers and even Uber drivers.

In fact, according to a recent study by McKinsey & Company last year, 60% of all jobs could experience some form of automation using today's technology, not some far-off technological advance. That will mean fewer jobs will be created, and it also means today that there is a suppression of wages. The jobs of today will have to acclimate to this change.

At the same time, the innovation economy is creating millions of new jobs, ones that can't be replaced by technology, but require higher levels of skill and some degree of humanity.

Last year - and this has been a chronic problem over the last four or five years - nearly six million jobs remained vacant because employers couldn't find qualified workers. As innovation continues to transform the economy, the gap between jobs and skills will continue to grow.

That brings me to my second lesson. The global economy is evolving at warp speed, and the rapid pace of change is far outpacing the adoption and implementation of education reform.

Think about it. In the ten years since our first summit, Apple has released thirteen versions of the iPhone. Thirteen versions in ten years.

By comparison, our education system, even with the progress we've made, remains virtually the same as it was fifty years ago, and even a hundred years ago in some ways. This growing gap is what we need to deal with.

The fact is, the economy isn't waiting for education to catch up. If we really care about student success, we need to significantly accelerate the pace of reform.



Frankly, good policy doesn't need a pilot program anymore. It needs relentless leaders who have the courage to advance bold and transformational reform now!

Look, this is probably the place in the speech where it is important to say that when it comes to the political arguments we have back home - because we do have them...Governor Haslam has tire marks on his forehead for the fights, I do too...my scars are finally going away...and you all have those too, for fighting the good fight - we need to get beyond them.

We need to recognize that whether you think our schools are great, and some people do, or whether you think our schools are failing our kids, they have to get better and they have to change to the world we are moving toward.

It's like a quarterback throwing into the end zone. You don't throw it to where the receiver is; you throw it to where the receiver needs to be. That's exactly what we have to do in education, and we have to rebuild the coalition of the willing to make that transformational change happen.

The third lesson is that innovation begets innovation. We see that each and every day, and reform works the same way. Reform fosters reform. The past has proven that success is never final, reform is never finished, and we need to encourage ourselves - those in the political arena and those supporting others in the political arena - to not 'check the box,' to not say, 'well, I got that done...now, I can go work on my child welfare system or change committees or go work on road building.'

All those things are important, but education reform requires constant attention. If you aren't moving forward, atrophy sets in and you begin to fall back.

Finally, the one thing that hasn't changed in the last ten years, or 20 years or 30 years, is the teachers union.

Entrenched special interests continue to focus on the adults in an outdated system and oppose choice, innovation and accountability. Don't get me wrong, they're doing their job. Their job is to organize for the economic interests of the adults in the system. We shouldn't be angry about that. We should recognize that is their job. But that does not mean we should not push back when it hurts children for their economic interests to be attained, at the expense of kids not learning. We should be on the side of families that are struggling.

So, I think about this massive change that we are going through, and I think that it helps explain some of the political angst we are feeling as a country these days.

It's not Mexico, and building a wall isn't going change this angst. It's not the Chinese; we have trade issues with them for sure, but it's not China that creates this angst and anger and disbelief in the institutions that people have relied on. It's this massive technological change and the anxiety that it brings, and the belief that the institutions we have relied on haven't worked, including education.

So what do we do? We love our children and grandchildren, so what do we do?



Well, we can fight it. Good luck with that! Fight the technological change and just think it's going to stop. Stick our heads in the sand and hope that happens.

We can ignore it. A lot of people do that. Denial is a river in Africa, it's not a strategy. To deny that this change is happening is ludicrous.

We can accept the status quo and give in. I think you know what my position on that is.

Or we can embrace the challenge, and turn this great challenge into a huge opportunity.

My hope is that we find coalitions of the willing to embrace the challenge in a way that will make sure students succeed.

To win this race against time, we need to tackle the knowledge gap epidemic - because it truly is one - which is the widespread disparity between what kids need to know and what they actually know.

By the way, this is not just about kids in poverty, this is about all children. The gaps that exist are real.

According to the Nation's Report Card, more than 60% of fourth graders can't read or do math on grade level, and nearly 50% of those students performing below grade level are from high-income families. Reading and math proficiency can no longer be dismissed as a problem for low-income students.

This is important because reading independently in the fourth grade is the first step to a purposeful life.

According to research by the Annie B. Casey Foundation, students who can't read on grade level in the fourth grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school.

Speaking of high school. A high school diploma should reflect readiness for college or careers, but sadly that's not the case today. The nation's high school graduation rate has advanced every year. Florida was at 50%, 50th in the country, in 1998. Every year it has gone up, and it's close to the national average now. But yet the Nation's Report Card suggests that just 37% of high school seniors are prepared for college-level courses or on-the-job training.

That gap between the high graduation rate we celebrate and the reality of where we are is something that is a problem in the political world, and it's up to us to make sure people understand that while we've had success, we need to build on it consistently.

The knowledge gap continues to grow in college, and the gap is pervasive. Among first-year college students, those leaving high school for college, 1.7 million need remedial help. Currently, more than half of students entering our 2-year community colleges, and nearly 1 in 5 students entering our 4-year universities, are placed in remedial courses, to in effect re-do high school math and high school English before they start getting college credit.



The lack of readiness for college could explain why less than one-third of full-time students earn a bachelor's degree in four years. That is an alarming statistic if you consider that we have \$1.2 trillion dollars in student debt, making it harder for families and for the next generation to live an independent life.

While the ever-changing economy may make it hard to predict the jobs of the future, we can define the skills high school graduates will need to be successful.

Graduates need to be ready with the knowledge and skills to succeed in life after high school, whether it's college, the military or the workforce. To prepare students, we need more rigorous coursework and an end to social promotion, not just in third grade but in every grade. And while rote learning can help build a foundation of knowledge, students need to learn how to apply knowledge and to think critically and creatively to solve real-world problems.

Graduates also need to be resilient. Students need to be able to adapt to the rapidly changing world, both professionally and personally. Maybe we should get rid of all those little micro-aggression safe spaces that exist in colleges to help enhance resiliency in our country. There are a lot of crazy things going on in this world!

Students who lack the coping skills needed to overcome adversity and bounce back from failure will struggle in the increasingly competitive global economy. To build resiliency, we need to move to a personalized learning system that gives students the time they need to master the material.

The seat-time model, which has been in existence since the beginning of the public education system in our country, retards the ability to gain resiliency in many ways. And, it also prevents excelling students, who quickly grasp content, to move ahead at a faster pace.

Finally, graduates need to understand what it means to be a responsible adult.

Our country will not survive if 75% of the population can't name the three branches of government or if more people depend on government-funded assistance programs than contribute to the federal coffers.

To instill a sense of civic and financial responsibility, we need a lot more high-quality civics education across the country and a lot more economics education.

But if we really want to succeed, reformers need to reform.

We need to have the courage to be bigger and bolder. We need to have a sense of urgency about this, and we need to have the perseverance to advance reform, every year, year in and year out.

And that includes election years, by the way!

Now more than ever, we need to separate the policy from the personalities.



If you support good policy but don't like the person proposing it, keep supporting the good policy. Don't let the contagion that exists in Washington, D.C., today, where everything is demonized and personalized, spread into your state capitals. Let's focus on building policy across the aisle.

Betsy DeVos is the epitome of a principled reformer who puts kids first. She has a proven record of working with leaders on both sides of the political aisle to advance reforms that help students succeed.

She is working hard to return power to state leaders and to parents who are better equipped to develop solutions for their students and for their kids. I applaud the work she is doing, I hope you all do as well.

The progress of education reform over the last decade is encouraging, but frankly, it's happening too slowly.

Incremental reforms can yield systemic change, but it will take too long. We need to be much more explosive in our efforts to bring about transformational change.

Keeping up with the disruptive nature of our economy requires policies that will upend our education system and yield results within this generation, not in the next.

You all are the ones that are going to make that happen. I wish you Godspeed in your efforts, and you know the Foundation will be there to help you along the way.

God bless and welcome to the summit.