

The Transformative Potential of Community-Based, Learner-Centered Ecosystems February 12, 2021

Katherine Plog-Martinez ([00:01](#)):

Welcome, everyone. We have a great group of attendees here and an exciting conversation. So excited to welcome all of you to what is officially the first of the Readiness Projects, Changing the Odds Thought Leader Interviews. As Karen has transitioned to her senior fellow role at the Forum for Youth Investment, each month, she'll be engaging with leaders and colleagues from across the thriving youth fields to have non-scripted one-on-one conversations about topics that can really help us dig in to changing the odds for young people.

Katherine Plog-Martinez ([00:36](#)):

And we're excited to kick off this series today with a conversation with Kelly Young. Kelly is the president of Education Reimagined previously served as the chief of Family and Community Engagement for DC Public Schools. And we're excited to hear more about the amazing work that has been going on with Education Reimagined and the growing partnership between Education Reimagined, and the Readiness Projects.

Katherine Plog-Martinez ([01:01](#)):

As Karen and Kelly dig in, please feel free to share questions in the chat, do your plus ones and things that jumped out at you. Kelly and Karen, we are so excited to hear from you today. And I will hand it off to Karen.

Karen Pittman ([01:15](#)):

Thank you, Katherine. This is really going to be great fun. I don't know how I have managed to go this long without knowing Kelly and knowing Education Reimagined. But over the past three months, I think it's been about that. We have spent a lot of time together. And I think I'm just so excited about the convergence that can happen when our two worlds come together. So we're really just going to start off even with that idea of convergence. And Kelly, tell us a little bit about how Education Reimagined was birthed.

Kelly Young ([01:50](#)):

Yeah, happy to. So it actually started at a nonprofit called Convergence, which is a nonprofit that brings people together across ideological and other diversity to tackle issues of national concern through sustained dialogue. And so I was leading the Education Project, and brought together 28 ideologically and otherwise diverse stakeholders. And the intention really was how do we bring the diversity of charter versus no charter testing, no testing, the balancing of social and emotional learning, blended learning, personalized learning, extended day, all of the debates that were raging at the time in education.

Kelly Young ([02:36](#)):

Could we bring those folks together to actually reimagine education? And so we had folks, the two presidents of the National Unions, along with former state chiefs of education and current principals of both charter and traditional. So we had business leaders from Lego, Disney, Microsoft there, and the ticket for admission was that you had to know that winning your debate is actually not going to lead to great education for every child.

Kelly Young ([03:08](#)):

And I actually saw Robert Sherman, who just said hello in the chat. And he was one of the original 20 folks, and also Bobbie MacDonald, who I also saw. And so they came together to reimagine education from scratch, actually setting aside all of those debates and answered the question, what would we design today, based on what we know about kids, society, learning, brain science, technology, all of it? And they created a vision for learner-centered education, that is now the guiding vision for our organization.

Kelly Young ([03:44](#)):

And they launched Education Reimagined. They said that they wanted to stay together and catalyze this shift. And we shared the vision in 2015, and so we've been around now for six years as an independent organization.

Karen Pittman ([04:01](#)):

So when you think about reimagining education, which is a big job, I think you've learned this about me, in particular, in the forum in general, and this youth development field even more broadly. There's always this question of, are we talking about an education system? Are we talking about an education ecosystem? Are we talking about community learning? Talk a little bit more, the people that you brought to the table had diverse and sometimes conflicting visions of how to reimagine the education system, where are you all now in thinking about system versus ecosystem and how does [crosstalk 00:04:42] fit into this in a more concrete way?

Kelly Young ([04:44](#)):

Yeah, really great question because it's been a big shift for us. So when the vision came out for learner-centered education, it really mirrors everything when I was Making the Invisible Visible series. I was like, "I have found my people." That it's about co-creating with young people. It's about starting with relationship and building the agency of young people. It's about starting with kids interests, allowing them to explore and deepen their curiosities and interests and competencies.

Kelly Young ([05:17](#)):

It's about not seeing learning as happening in a school building, but seeing learning happening... Seeing the community is the playground for learning, and the world is the playground for learning. And lastly, that we've always imagined that it's a competency based system, not a seat time system.

Kelly Young ([05:33](#)):

So that's the vision that we've always had. And without knowing it in the background, we always thought because this is transforming education, we must need to transform the district and community structures. And because of that framing of our conversation, out of school time people had a hard time understanding what their role would be, because the out of school time space, its job is not to transform the public education system.

Kelly Young ([06:01](#)):

And yet, we knew where most of the learner-centered activity was actually happening outside of school buildings, where there was the freedom to be able to do this. And that's where people were going when they got frustrated in the schools and couldn't do what they knew was best for kids. So since COVID happened, we really had a whole shift in our view of how this transformation is going to happen, and have embraced the idea of a learner-centered community based ecosystem, that this is about enabling all of the community to participate in the education of a child, and not separating formal learning from informal learning, but rather creating structures that would enable that to happen.

Kelly Young ([06:50](#)):

So right now, I don't need to tell you, it's this very thick wall that's hard to break through. And oftentimes, when you do break through, education puts its restrictions on what can happen. And in fact, what we want is the freedom that's available outside to do really creative and exciting things for kids and connect them to their interests. We want that actually coming in to the system.

Kelly Young ([07:20](#)):

So I can say more about the ecosystem, but it's a big shift in our thinking of how can we create parallel education systems that would enable a young person to have a home base, have an advisor who is helping them set goals, knows them, loves them, is helping them navigate a rich ecosystem of learning experiences that are both in community and virtual. Make sense of their learning and making sure it all adds up at the end of the day, that they have the sets of competencies to fulfill on their dreams.

Kelly Young (07:58):

But learning would be happening in lots of different places and no longer seeing wherever that your home base is, is the place that most of the learning has to happen.

Karen Pittman (08:10):

So lots packed in there. And we should probably, for folks who were trying to take notes, if we can drop in a link to those learning pillars and principles for what you mean by learning centered, and we'll say a couple more times, because they really are, if we do it right, not system or settings specific, they really are learning centered.

Karen Pittman (08:39):

But you just use the terms that are formal and informal. We have school and after school, we have formal and informal or formal and non-formal. And part of getting to this vision that you have and that we have is going to be just changing language, and unpacking what we mean by these very summery phrases. So one of the things that we've been doing, as we've just been having this conversation about what does it mean to build forward together, right?

Kelly Young (09:06):

Yes.

Karen Pittman (09:06):

So COVID has really let everybody say, "We can't go back to normal." That's now just the baseline given. We've got to do something different. We've also seen because of what happened when schools closed, that we actually have to build back broader. We at least have to acknowledge that families and community organizations can play a deeper, more meaningful role than school thought they could when we were just saying, "Hey, leave school and go somewhere and then come back tomorrow."

Karen Pittman (09:34):

Now we really understand more, or school leaders understand where where was and what they have to offer. But this idea of building forward together is going to need a different vision, it's going to need a sharper vision of what that means to get to those porous connections between these different systems. And in some ways, I think, and I'd love to hear you talk more about this, it really does require deep knowledge of these very different delivery systems. And I'm going to call them learning delivery systems intentionally for a while, so that we strip away when they happen, and we start to look more at actually how they do their work.

Karen Pittman (10:14):

So we've talked about school and after school, and now of course, as we're looking forward, there's a big push to talk about summer, and what do we do in summer? But talk a little bit about when you talk about parallel systems, what you see as the differences between these two or three different kinds of delivery systems that are associated with time periods, that are associated with specific kind of buildings, but they do have both huge differences and a lot of overlap. So talk a little bit more about what you're seeing now that these walls are coming down a little bit.

Kelly Young (10:48):

Yeah, so one thing is, regardless of delivery system, we do know that you can still be doing education to kids, or the learning can be done by them and with them. And that is probably one of the biggest distinctions for us is between what we call systems-centered or learner-centered. And so one thing is to just note that even inside of the delivery system of school, there are learner-centered educators trying to do their best by kids in circumstances that are not all that conducive to it.

Kelly Young (11:27):

And out of school time, or in the end, I guess, we have to come up with words, we have to have new words, because they do relate to time and place and not pedagogy and not the kinds of outcomes that young people are getting out of these kinds of experiences. But in what's classically known as the informal or out of school time space, I would say that there's a lot more of the learner-centered education kinds of experiences happening. But there's still others that are not, that are trying to make up for learning loss, and they're just extended day school time programs, for example.

Kelly Young ([12:07](#)):

So I guess, my first observation is just that in all of these delivery mechanisms, we are talking the kinds of learning that we want to promote is one subsection of all of these delivery systems. And that secondly, nobody to your point, is looking out for the whole of a child, right? Kids are getting opportunities in the, I'm going to use the word informal for right this moment, space, ad hoc, and we don't know who exactly is getting it, we do know that based on income, based on right, that much more is made available to young people.

Kelly Young ([12:50](#)):

And then for the programs that are really designed for our more marginalized kids, we don't have a system of knowing if all of them are getting access to what they need to get access to. So I think that's my biggest observation and that if in a new ecosystem, you would stop worrying about what the delivery mechanism was and you would be having a system that helped a child and the family along with an educator actually navigate this world to make sure that the custodial care, which is a major concern for many, the socialization, and then the most important thing, the learning is actually adding up to a whole for that child.

Karen Pittman ([13:41](#)):

So, I agree 100%. And I think one of the questions to ask, and I'm going to ask you to pick one of your favorite places where you see any of this happening and give us some examples. When we come into a place, let's say we come into a place that really does have an organized after school or at a school system that's operating in those after school hours and has perhaps different overlapping, but some robust summer activities with all the caveats that you said, because these systems are not driven primarily with integrated public funding, the inequities are there, the imbalances are there, the lack of accountability at a system level is there, the knowing which kids are getting what, et cetera, all that's there in that informal system.

Karen Pittman ([14:33](#)):

But it is a system. And if we're going to try to scale what you're talking about, we're going to have to bring those folks to the table with these other people that we call school or formal system. And have you seen that began to happen and how do you imagine. As you're reimagining education, and we're reimagining a more flexible way to make sure young people are moving in a meaningful way in this bigger time and place and space canvas? How do we these ideas to scale by talking to the people who are currently managing systems and not having them be defensive?

Kelly Young ([15:16](#)):

Yeah. So I'll start with where are some bright spots to start looking at? And then how do we then have the conversation about how do you help people see this possibility and not be defensive, and to be able to step towards it.

Kelly Young ([15:38](#)):

I think it's important to say that our vision for this does not exist yet. So we don't see the full blown learner-centered, community-based ecosystem where it is a holistic whole, and a child has an entry point into it, and somebody is overseeing their learning from sunup to sundown.

Kelly Young ([16:02](#)):

That said, there are incredible things, as many people on this call, I'm sure are aware of, but I'll start with the big picture model. And I'm starting with that, because I think it illuminates some of the basic structures that need to be in place that they're already doing, if you're going to have a system, and that is the system of

advisory. And that's the role of an adult who when kids describe their advisor, they talk about them as family members. It's not this hierarchical relationship.

Kelly Young ([16:38](#)):

They say, "I feel cared about, I feel known, I feel trusted." They're willing to take risks with this person, to share vulnerabilities with them to say... And vulnerabilities being everything from I want to try this to, I'm scared to try this, or my home life right now I've got a lot going on and I need help.

Kelly Young ([17:02](#)):

So that advisor and advisory is the way that they structure learning as a hub and spoke model. They're not an ecosystem, but they are a hub and spoke model where kids are going out to internships, they're going into the community, they might be going to a community college for dual credit programs, but they always have a home base to come back to, to make sense of their learning.

Kelly Young ([17:29](#)):

So that's one model to make visible is a system that's making sense of learning and credentialing that learning no matter where it happens. And then there's all of the work that's been happening in out of school time space, and cities of learning, Remake Learning in Pittsburgh, or Big Thought in Dallas, or some of the hives in our City of Learning in Chicago.

Kelly Young ([17:55](#)):

And that's where out of school time, folks came together to really map out all of the resources and make them visible and accessible to more and more kids. What they're missing is the credentialing of learning. So people have tried badging, people have tried lots of different ways to make it meaningful, but because those badges didn't "count for something in real life," like employment, or education credit, they remained external to the formal education. But with both of these models, you can begin to see all of the potential of an ecosystem.

Kelly Young ([18:35](#)):

And the credentialing of learning really is a piece that could hold it all together, and not credentialing of learning in the classic sense, where it's standards bitmapped to very narrow view of what kids need to know and be able to do, but rather to competencies that can be performance based, where kids can demonstrate their learning in lots of different ways, not just in written tests.

Kelly Young ([19:02](#)):

I think if you start to think of credentialing and learning that way, we would never ask a child to take a written test to tell us they can swim. They would show us that they can swim. And I'm sure, Karen, you have many examples of amazing things happening around the country as well. And I can also... Yeah, go ahead.

Karen Pittman ([19:29](#)):

No, keep going.

Kelly Young ([19:31](#)):

And then to address the question of, I don't think people on both sides see the full possibility. From education, they are relating to out of school time as an extra, as opposed to part of the fundamental structure of ecosystem. So we need to help people see and imagine what this could be like. And I would say the same thing on the out of school time, there used to being the appendage to The Tail That Wags the Dog, and not seen as actually critical to the child's learning or recognized as critical to a child's learning, I think they are, in fact, because they are.

Kelly Young ([20:19](#)):

So one piece is illuminating this possibility, because it has been the way it's been for over a hundred years. And so it is hard to imagine what it would be like if kids weren't cohorted by age, dividing learning up into subjects, spending six to eight hours in a school building all day, and to imagine what it would be like to go to a home base and spend time in lots of different places in your community throughout your week or month.

Karen Pittman ([20:51](#)):

So there are lots of questions coming in, which is great. And I'm going to come to some of the big questions which are coming in about how do we acknowledge the huge resource and funding imbalance between these systems if we're going to go from education system defined as school to ecosystem embracing everything that you said, which is more time, more space, more months of the year, and many, many more as less boxed opportunities for learning and development, how do the resources essentially flow with the kid? And I'm sure you have been thinking about that as well.

Karen Pittman ([21:27](#)):

But before we get there, let's say a little bit more on the differences between these systems, because as you said, there really are a lot. One that you just mentioned was just this, how to actually acknowledge competence development, competency development, and that file in the informal out of school space. Again, one of the things that people think is that there isn't any content being delivered. There's lots of content being delivered, it just doesn't happen to always be academic content.

Karen Pittman ([21:59](#)):

Now, you mentioned remake learning, and that's clearly a place of STEM, has been a place where after school has blossomed, because that kind of engagement in hands-on learning has been typical of what you found in after school spaces. But there's all kinds of content that's happening. And what we know is that the best after school and summer programs are really helping young people move, whether they're exploring or they're moving towards mastery in things that interest them, and things that aren't required, and things that if they really changed their mind and don't like it, they can probably change their mind and don't, "I think I'd rather not do puppetry anymore, I want to go over here and join the dance troupe," those things are available.

Karen Pittman ([22:48](#)):

So the voluntary nature of this, if we leave the resource just bury aside for a minute, and we will get to it before we end the call, if we leave that piece aside, talk a little bit about how you see young people and families and let's just focus on middle schoolers, so that we've got young people who certainly have opinions at that point about what they want to do. And they're not required year round to be someplace because they're old enough to not technically need childcare, but had to see young people and families navigating this space.

Karen Pittman ([23:22](#)):

You talked about having a home base, but can you talk a little bit more about if we get down to that level of really helping you have this kind of enriched learning plan, what does that look like? And do you have examples of that from any of the folks that you're working with?

Kelly Young ([23:39](#)):

Yeah, so mostly, the examples that I have for where it exists now are homeschooling models, and is one rich place to look for examples of how this is working. And knowing that that has equity concerns, that those families are able to resource and they have a parent who can be available.

Kelly Young ([24:05](#)):

But if you replace the parent with an advisor, and you replace the car transportation with, depending on the community, other means of it. And HopSkipDrive is a new thing that's coming into communities that allows for kids to take... It's an Uber for kids, for example. And so there's becoming actual ways that it could be made available. Taxis even could be made available to kids.

Kelly Young (24:41):

What it could look like is that voluntary nature, especially for middle schoolers, that is the age where you want them exposed to as much diversity of opportunity as possible and you want them... They have no idea if they're going to stick with something long-term, let alone maybe even for the next month. And so it's a great opportunity where you can imagine, like the Boys and Girls Club or a YMCA actually being the hub of connecting them to the Science Museum, to the zoo, to the local park service, to connect them to lots of opportunities, and then they can choose if they want to go deeper into those things.

Kelly Young (25:27):

And school is notoriously bad at doing that because of the structure of periods, and they've got so much time with a young person, and they set courses in advance for all year long. And so it's not this flexible, responsive kind of model. So I don't know if I'm getting it. I want to make sure I'm answering your question. But I think it's...

Kelly Young (26:01):

I'll describe one other place that's a [crosstalk 00:26:03] model that I love because of the possibility that it exposes, which is there's a place called Workspace Education in Bethel, Connecticut. And it was founded by a mom, who's a Montessori teacher, and she had her kids in Montessori, then she was homeschooling. But she didn't want to give up the community, which most home schoolers don't, they create some kind of network of families.

Kelly Young (26:29):

But she also didn't want to give up the ability for kids to convene, to be together, to take on group projects. And so she got a farm building, and inside, it's a science lab, a theater, a Sound Studio, a robotics, a makerspace. So imagine if this was a school, and that's the kind of thing you put in there rather than classrooms, as you put this rich hands-on learning materials in there.

Kelly Young (27:05):

And then they allow parents, kids, teachers to say, "I'm going to offer this class." And they will have during a semester 120 classes offered. The only ones that get run are the ones that have kids in them. And they use the space creatively, sometimes they meet elsewhere, like in a coffee shop, or someplace else, but they all manage in this location. And they also operate it like a club, as opposed to a school.

Kelly Young (27:38):

So families pay, in this case, \$5,000 a month to have access to the club. So they can spend all day there or three hours there. So again, this is a homeschooling model, so you have to now overlay a public institution on it so that there are supports and enablers and funding that enable any child to have access to this, not just parents who can do it, but it begins to give you this notion of like, wow, we could really use our physical space in radically different ways for different kinds of learning. And those hubs might be in the, not in school buildings.

Karen Pittman (28:20):

Right. So I hear you separating the physical space where the equipment, the things that we need to support learning could be as well as physical space that can be used for those hubs, separating the idea of the advisor or the guide, who presumably we can come back to this, whether if they don't have different training, they have a different orientation towards working with a young person, then a content expert. So talk a little bit more of that.

Karen Pittman (28:53):

Then you're talking about really a much more fluid approach to both time and space, which includes transportation. So I can figure out where I'm going to be over here all day, I'm going to go here half day. And then clearly, we're going to come right back to resources. But I think it's interesting to go over to the extreme of saying, how do you take the idea of homeschooling and folks that want to say, "I want to create a learning

community for my kid whose home base is literally home, my kitchen table," how do we make those connections and bring that all the way up into a system level?

Karen Pittman (29:30):

But talk for a little bit about both, more about the role of that home base advisor. What does that planning look like? What kind of people can those folks be? Is that a role that we can have that really begins to emphasize what do you want to call them community educators or how do we think about that role differently because it seems pretty critical to this model.

Kelly Young (29:56):

Yeah. And so the classic formula of this advisor, it would be that they are somebody that is well trained in human development, and youth development, and so that they are actually as a background really know and have a map of the kinds of competencies that all young people need to have to be successful in life. And that would be very different. It would be from a developmental standpoint, not a standards and curriculum standpoint. And they would have lots of different access to lots of different kinds of sets of competencies, especially as kids got older, that are industry dictated.

Kelly Young (30:42):

If you're going to go into architecture, you want to go to an architecture school, there are going to be sets of competencies that you're going to be wanting to build towards that are different if I'm going into engineering or if I'm going into plumbing. So how are we scaffolding the kinds of competencies as kids get older? So this advisor is, first of all has maps, but they're in the background, they're not in the foreground for the young person.

Kelly Young (31:11):

So what's in the foreground for the young person, at least in the beginning stages is their interests, their curiosities, and their aspirations. And those maps become more front stage as they really latch on to a particular pathway. It's like, okay, so if you want to go into a career in architecture, let's find out, like here are the kinds of colleges, here's what this is, and I bring colleges in knowing that they also have to change.

Kelly Young (31:41):

We are not talking about mapping to their current requirements, there are a lot of homeschoolers already getting into colleges with no trouble, and we need that extended to all of the kids so that we're not having the inferior in California, the A through G, which dictates every class that you have to have, which gives you no flexibility. But rather than thinking of his college admittance, like what are the competencies for the career path that you're on, that college will help you complete?

Kelly Young (32:18):

And I've lost track of the question, I apologize. It's, oh, the role of the advisor. So one, they're very knowledgeable about that. Number two, they're helping credential, the learning. So even their learning might happen and this credentialing part can happen with a lot. It doesn't have to be the advisor.

Kelly Young (32:34):

This is one of the cool pieces about unbundling this is that you can have different adults play different roles. So I know in the big picture model, the advisor actually credentials the learning. I know there's a high school for Recording Arts in Minneapolis, or in St. Paul, their advisor does not credential learning, they actually have an educator that sits alongside the advisor, and the advisor is somebody who is from the community, who knows the circumstances, knows the families, knows the environment really well. And the credential of learner is somebody who is an educator sitting side by side with them.

Kelly Young (33:12):

But if you can imagine if credentialing is no longer attached to the person delivering the education, you now have this freedom that a robotics club could be led by a community member. And it doesn't mean that you couldn't get the learning credential, it means you would go to an educator, and you would say, "Here's the project I'm doing, I want to be able to get credit for this." And they would say, "Okay, if you actually fulfill this project, you'd be demonstrating three of these six competencies that would be necessary to get a science "credit." And we can create another project so that you can demonstrate the other three competencies."

Kelly Young (33:51):

But this role of advisor, to your point, is incredibly critical in playing the role of making sure it's all adding up. That regardless of who credentials it, no matter where it happens, when it happens, or with whom it happens, that the young person is getting what they need holistically, and that it is getting them where they want to go.

Karen Pittman (34:14):

Yeah, and they clearly have to start and I think there have been some comments in the chat. As you said, they have to be steeped in sort of Child and Youth Development, they've got to start with relationships first, and getting to know the young person and their interests, et cetera, as well as then knowing in the back of their head these are the overall competencies that this young person is going to need in general in terms of general functional competencies, but also if they want to be X, if they're heading towards thinking about the arts or thinking about engineering or thinking about nursing, they're also going to want to build up some of these things so that they're really ready to go to the next thing.

Karen Pittman (34:50):

So it's a lot to navigate. And then the third thing that I heard you say is that obviously we're going to need for that advisor to be connected into some kind of relatively sophisticated map of where the learning assets are in the community. And those can be organizations like Science Museum, or like Boys and Girls Club or the Youth Arts Theater. They also can be people. And we'll talk a little bit about how in this model, we really have an opportunity, which we've seen in some cities like in Chicago, After School Matters, et cetera where you really are inviting the community in to bring their expertise in, you're bringing in people who have passion and expertise in a particular thing, because it's their job. And you're giving them an opportunity. Do you have examples of how we're really pushing out to really engage community in community learning?

Kelly Young (35:47):

Yeah, I have a great example in Tucson, Arizona, which there is a man, Josh Actor who created a platform that allows any community member to create a profile to say, "I'm at the wastewater treatment plant, and I am interested in clean water, and systems and whatever the three other things are interested in, and I'm happy to work with kids to do any of the following."

Kelly Young (36:17):

And they might say, "I'm happy to come talk to a class," this is still in the traditional system. So I'm happy to come talk to a class, I'm happy to advise, happy to, if they want to do an internship, whatever level they are. So young people in schools Google their interests, clean water, and they get this robust... And this is an example of in a big city, where it would be hard to have that community feel where you know the people three doors down to know who might be interested in clean water in your community.

Kelly Young (36:52):

And they just have amazing stories of people getting connected to the people whose passions are their passions, and they get exposed to these things and they have a lot of examples around artists, because school is conventionally as I now write really doesn't give much expression for outlet for expression for kids. And so a lot of the young people who are finding this an incredibly useful resource are the people who are into photography, want to do a community mural who have wanted to redo a park or reclaim public land to make a little community park.

Kelly Young (37:34):

And community members talk about being just reconnected to joy, to be able to be a part of these kids lives and the young people being exposed to what they actually might want to do in the future for their careers.

Karen Pittman (37:52):

Yeah, and as we're decoupling things and pulling them apart, the idea of there really being more interest driven pathways to competence is going to be critically important as we really are looking to really think about engaged learning and what that looks like, and recognizing that there are many pathways to get to the things that you want. And as you said, if I happen to be a 13-year-old, I need many pathways, I need to test out a lot of things.

Karen Pittman (38:29):

There are so many examples being dropped into the chat. I want to get us to the resource question. I want to pivot to the question that at least is big on my mind and on our minds when we're thinking about this, which is, how can we use summers? And in particular, how can we use this summer as a way to really stand up any of the ideas that you're talking about?

Karen Pittman (38:50):

But before we pivot to the resource question, talk a little bit if you can about when I'm the advisor, I'm the parent, I'm whoever is working with his young person, in addition to really testing out their interests and finding out what they're interested in, how can we get a sense of how they learn best, whether what they want to do is more formal, what we would think of as more formal instruction, even if they've selected it, whether they really are an experiential learner, whether they just want to go off on their own to the library museum and go dig in deep to a subject and come back. Where does getting a sense of how young people want to have a mix of learning approaches fit into this and how do they get credit for that?

Kelly Young (39:38):

Yeah, so one, the structure of the advisory would be one... That's part of what you're discovering for yourself. And it's explicitly part of the learning journey. Is not only what you're interested in, and what your gifts are, what your strengths are, the contributions you want to make, but also how do you learn best, and constantly making discoveries about that, and making that part of your learning journey that's explicit.

Kelly Young (40:10):

And for many of us, I include myself in this, my best expression was never taking a test or sitting doing wrote anything that was when I loved what I was doing, and I was deeply engaged in producing something. And for me, producing something with other people. I don't do so well on my own. My team knows. But even that, learning that I don't do well on isolated projects. I didn't learn until my 40s because I just thought I was inept. That I needed support, because it might seem like basic things done.

Kelly Young (41:01):

But when I have a team, it's like, oh, my gosh, what can happen? And so kids, if they can learn that way earlier, they have strengths, they have weaknesses, and some weaknesses, they'll be able to compensate for and others, they're going to be in teams with people who compensate for those. And so that would all be built in to the learning pathways. And if it was experiential, was what really turned kids on almost exclusively. Like that's how their learning journey would go.

Karen Pittman (41:32):

And at the end, they'd be able to get credit for however they did it, wherever they did it, with whom they did it, at the end if they learner, they get credit.

Kelly Young (41:41):

Yes.

Karen Pittman ([41:41](#)):

So where are you all, as you're thinking about this and you're thinking about really scaling this new vision, where are you on the resource issue? Is it really just that we need the dollars to follow the young person wherever they go? What's the model that gets these dollars out of the building and out to where young people are finding learning?

Kelly Young ([42:03](#)):

Yeah, I mean, ultimately, we're going to have to create a system that has a balance of funding the home bases, and the team members that need to be there to form the advisory role, our learning specialists that need to be the backbone or the ability to help kids navigate. But then when it comes to the learning experiences, the money will have to follow the child. And there are examples of that already happening in the country.

Kelly Young ([42:32](#)):

And it may sound surprising, because it sounds so impossible to imagine. And I'm sensitive, this is always a third real conversation to talk about how the money flows because it can be quite threatening to the existing system that they might be losing money. And I want to say that we think that there are responsible ways to do this that don't SAP the current system, and allow for wholly different funding models for the kids and the families that opt into them.

Kelly Young ([43:05](#)):

And to give one example that is an example for the funding model, specifically, not necessarily for all of it. There's a group called My Tech High, and they're in Utah, Colorado, Idaho. And it's M-Y, not High Tech High. And they allow for homeschoolers to come back to school and what they get when they come back to school, 20% of the funding goes to the district itself that they're going to, and that's just because to give them 20%, and it's actually the incentive that probably has the district's allow this to happen.

Kelly Young ([43:49](#)):

Another percentage goes to the My Tech High administering the program, which is the advisor role. And the coordination, or the, it's not even coordination, it's the aggregating of all the kinds of learning experiences that a young person can have access to. And then the remaining money follows the child to their learning experience, and that is negotiated with the family, the advisor, and the young person. And so it can go to their horseback riding lesson, to their math tutor, to a online program for literacy.

Kelly Young ([44:28](#)):

It goes wherever the child and the family and the educator see, and when I say follows the kid, it's always in the public system. The money is not literally being written to a parent. But it is and it has in those communities, a number of really cool things that kids can participate in has rapidly expanded because there's money.

Karen Pittman ([44:55](#)):

Yeah. So as you're talking, it's clear that it isn't just that the money follows the kid, it's that the money follows the function, that if we're decentralizing these functions, you're really helping to assess for competence, you're doing advising, you're supporting transportation, you're really doing these things that the dollars are flowing out to a broader mix of adults, and a broader mix of environments, which also means that we can come back around to that out of school, after school, these other delivery systems.

Karen Pittman ([45:29](#)):

There are people who are really good at this in these other delivery systems, so when we've come back to say, "Well, where are these people?" Well, yes, there are volunteers in the community, but there really are people in these other delivery systems that aren't playing these roles, who actually like full-time jobs. And there are people who are in many ways, from an equity perspective, more like the kids we're trying to support.

Karen Pittman ([45:56](#)):

So we're going to have another session that we're doing, I think, on the 22nd, but Katherine will remind me for sure, with the Soul Alliance, in the Who Gets to Thrive series, really asking about who are these other adults? And what roles do they play in? Literally, who are they and how do we build up this broader workforce? So you're really asking us to think about, not just the abstract learning happens everywhere, but how does the community actually say, "Well, really, where does it happen? Where could it happen? What spaces do we have? Who are the adults who already have some training, some connection, some job in this?"

Karen Pittman (46:39):

At some point words like standards and things come in, both for the young people, but for the other places, how do we get this started and my trick question is, can we use summer because nobody owns summer in the way that we've got this thing called school that runs nine to three. And then after school happens, but we also learned that when school suddenly didn't happen, those after school and summer delivery systems kicked in and filled in that space demonstrating their flexibility, demonstrating that they've got all the things we're asking for, people's faces, relationships, content, maybe not exactly the same way of school.

Karen Pittman (47:19):

So can we as people are thinking about summer, they are afraid of our least favorite term, learning loss, but that's motivating people to think what should we be putting into summer? Where are you all and helping us really reimagine summer as a springboard to getting to the vision that you want us to have?

Kelly Young (47:40):

Yeah. So I've thought a lot about this question, and so my handful of ideas are what I... Let me start with what I hope doesn't happen, which is-

Karen Pittman (47:55):

Yes, our fears are big.

Kelly Young (48:00):

... is that the focus on learning loss is the focus on what somehow that the kids did something that they shouldn't have done, as opposed to that there was a system failure that left them behind, nothing happened to them, and that it's our job to now rather than put them into remedial here, you've got to do two years now of English and math to catch up, which is double time, twice as much of each one of those, which we know it doesn't work, but yet, there's a lot of instinct to think if you just put more of the same thing, that you'll double the learning somehow.

Kelly Young (48:40):

So one, putting that aside, and not wanting the schools to dictate what happens during summertime. So I do think there's a lot of recognition right now that we do you need to know where our kids are, how they are doing, and that they are well, and to reconnect with them, and reconnect them to interests, to learning in a way that's healthy, that gets them connected. And how do we both do that and then share it out back with the school system to say, "Here's where they are, here's how they're doing." Not in an academic sense.

Kelly Young (49:24):

I have lots of flaws with every thing I come up with that for how to use summer. So Karen, I also want to ask a question back to you because I think you have some really good insights into how we might use summer. The flaws are that the system itself unless they care about something else are going to care about these narrow bands of learning. I do think COVID and there's been a lot around and thanks to a lot of you social and emotional learning, the health, the emotional health of kids, the physical health of kids that they might actually be interested to know this is working for these kids.

Kelly Young (50:05):

And how can the out of school time begin to demonstrate what is actually contributing to these young people and how might we have a more coordinated effort to say, "Let's make sure that every child is getting something this summer in a particular community," rather than letting it be haphazard, and especially kids that the district doesn't know where they are. And I have a feeling that a lot of our out of school time folks do know where those kids are.

Karen Pittman (50:35):

Absolutely.

Kelly Young (50:36):

And so how do we make a more concerted effort to say, "Where are our kids?" And that they're all somewhere. And then be able to share back, demonstrate that, wow, this ecosystem of learning outside of school... I actually was able to come together and form a web for kids. That's one idea, but I'm wondering, Karen, what you see.

Karen Pittman (51:05):

Yeah, well, I just want to start with and, again, there's so much incredible work happening in the chat, that we're going to have to take a few minutes at the end and ask how we stay connected to everybody who just has all these ideas. We'll certainly put them together and put them back out so they're out of the chat. But when I think about my greatest fears, for some reason, I do wake up at night worrying about this summer in particular, just for all the reasons you said.

Karen Pittman (51:35):

I'm visual so I start with just the Venn diagram of two overlapping circles. And right now, this concept of learning loss, and right along with it, in a deficit way, the concept of trauma just overlaps together. So whether people are coming in the learning loss door and talking about academic learning loss, or they're coming in the other door and say, "Don't worry about learning," because it's been so hard on the kids, we just need to hug them and get them reconnected.

Karen Pittman (52:10):

There's a lot of truth to both of those things, but for that to be the frame, that we're coming at this from two deficit perspectives, and that that's what we're competing for, do we make them sit down and start to do school because they missed a year? Or do we really find them and support them so that they're emotionally ready to go back to school in the fall?

Karen Pittman (52:35):

And what I want to do is to take those two circles that are now completely overlapping and pull them apart so that there's a little bit of overlap. But we have a circle called learning. And we have to ask, "What did they learn?" Because that's the dominant frame. They have learned an incredible amount. Everybody has, whether we've learned... You know all the things we've learned. So we need to ask them what have they learned? And then we also need to ask them what have they lost?

Karen Pittman (53:03):

But putting those together and smashing them into this narrow frame isn't helping. There's a piece that just came out a couple of days ago, I think on the second and if I don't get it dropped into the chat, because I'm not that great. It's an Ed Week that came out about students really giving their own views on Students Respond to Adults' Fixation on 'Learning Loss', February 2nd. And their answers are quite powerful. A teacher just said, "Let's ask you these questions, who has advisories every week that has been doing advisories with the students?" And so he brought that question in.

Karen Pittman (53:37):

There's a piece a couple weeks ago that Robert Slaven posted about, it's not about time, which is true. It's not about time, it is about quality. And so we can't do... More bad isn't good. And we do have these tensions going on. So I think probably one of the things that we could do, and I think one of the things that certainly the enthusiasm in the chat, everybody on this chat could really sign a declaration of don't do these stupid things. If we do anything else this summer, let's not do these things.

Karen Pittman (54:15):

And it is that sort of challenge to not come at it to these two competing deficit approaches to what we have to be doing with kids this summer to have them ready for the fall. This should be a summer of maximizing learning opportunities, and in some very creative ways, asking us while we've already given ourselves the benefit of the doubt, how can we as a community hold ourselves accountable for making sure as you said, every young person has some kind of learning experience, whether that means they need transportation, they needed to be paid for, for all those reasons, and it won't be perfect.

Karen Pittman (54:54):

But it could be a beginning of talking about what you all are so passionately trying to imagine because the pieces are there, but they truly are all in pieces and which ones we pick up and hold up first? I think this is going to be the question of how we sort of come into summer.

Kelly Young (55:12):

Yeah, well, I love and now I had a chance to look at the channel a bit [crosstalk 00:55:19].

Karen Pittman (55:18):

It's incredible.

Kelly Young (55:20):

[crosstalk 00:55:20].

Karen Pittman (55:21):

How do you want people to stay connected to you now that you've gotten this much enthusiasm?

Kelly Young (55:25):

Yeah. So one on our website, which is... And Bobby can drop our website into the chat. We have a wonderful magazine, just subscribing to that and through that we share all of the opportunities that we have going on. So one, that is a big one. And one of the projects that we are taking on is this question of how do we actually create the systems and structures for ecosystems to exist?

Kelly Young (56:00):

So as that conversation gets going more for the people who actually want to be a part of that conversation to rethink assessment, accountability, funding models. We would we know that this has to be hand in hand with all of the sources of learning experiences, workforce, all of our out of school time, the "formal education", all of it needs to be there and imagining from an ecosystem, what would actually serve our young people best? And how can we make this a seamless system as opposed to now we can barely talk about it without hacking it into pieces.

Karen Pittman (56:45):

Ah, well-

Kelly Young (56:46):

No, maybe Bobby's not there. So I'm going to put it in the website here.

Karen Pittman ([56:49](#)):

Good. Great. I think the time has gone by much too quickly. I'm going to give the last minute back to Katherine. I see so many folks that we know and care about in the... This has just been an incredible chat. It's been hard to both listen to you and watch the chat at the same time.

Karen Pittman ([57:07](#)):

I don't know whether we've exactly landed on a date, if so, Katherine will tell us. But I see that Heidi Chang is in the chat. And one of the discussions that we want to start with in terms of just how you unbundle all this is the most basic one of attendance. School as we define it is mandatory. If we expand school into this learning ecosystem, what happens to mandatory? Is it just mandatory that you learn something? Is it just you get to the end of the year and you test competency? How do we think about that?

Karen Pittman ([57:40](#)):

But we know right now that really, from a basic education advocacy perspective, we've got folks who are deeply concerned about the inequities that their young people have experienced in our traditional school systems, who are not just going to let go of basic things like attendance and achievement tests. They may not be what we want for the future, but we're going to have to very carefully replace them. And we're going to have to use the data that we have.

Karen Pittman ([58:08](#)):

So Heather is going to join us early in March, and we're going to talk about what do we know about attendance? How do we really make sure that we see attendance not just as a punitive thing, but a way to actually assess engagement to this idea of, if I'm not attending, there are reasons I'm not attending. What do we do to understand that? And then how do we bring that idea into something that is more porous, and flexible, because the money is going to follow where we have some way to track and how we track is going to be important.

Kelly Young ([58:41](#)):

Wonderful.

Karen Pittman ([58:41](#)):

I'm going to see you again next week, but these folks won't. We are ready to write that Manifesto. So just as a given, everybody who's on this call, we already have a draft in place, you'll get it. And this really is the time to basically say, it's not just abstract, we can't go back to normal. We have to build forward together, how do we put a vision out there for this. And Kelly, thank you so much for joining us and getting us started. Katherine, I'll give it back to you for last minutes.

Katherine Plog-Martinez ([59:12](#)):

Wonderful. As always, so inspiring and my brain is just swirling with all the ideas and I'm clear from the chat that others are as well. So as Karen mentioned, her next Changing the Odds Thought Leader conversation will be with Heidi Chang, and will be in early March, so stay tuned for those dates. And as Karen also mentioned, the Readiness Projects will be joining with the Soul Alliance on February 24, from four to 5PM for the Who Gets to Thrive? Accelerating Equity for All Learners in All Settings conversation, and we're bringing back our Making the Invisible Visible series with breakout discussions immediately following that conversation.

Katherine Plog-Martinez ([59:46](#)):

So we hope to see you all there to keep being inspired and having your brain swirl. So thank you, Karen. Thank you, Kelly. And thanks to all of you for joining us today.

Karen Pittman ([59:54](#)):

Thank you.