

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY TO RECLAIM AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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**Keynote Address:**

BOB WISE  
Former Governor (D-W.Va)  
Co-chair, Digital Learning Council

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## PROCEEDINGS

MR. WEST: Our keynote for today is Governor Bob Wise. And Bob, as many of you know, served as governor of West Virginia from 2001 to 2005. During that time he set up and funded the Promise Scholarship program, he created a character education curriculum, and he provided teacher salary bonuses for those achieving national board certification. Prior to that time he served in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1983 to 2001. Now he's the president of the Alliance for Excellent Education. And this year the Alliance set up a digital learning council co-chaired by Governor Wise and former Florida Governor Jeb Bush. The Council seeks to identify policies that will integrate current and future technology innovations into public education. He also is the author of a book, Raising the Grade: How High School Reform Can Save Our Youth and Our Nation.

So please join me in welcoming Governor Wise to Brookings. (Applause)

MR. WISE: Thank you very much. And I'm going to pick up where Marilyn left off, which is that we can't wait. And that's what the Digital Learning Council is about. I'm going to bring you the perspective of, I think as much as anything, what policy and the urgency to work on it. I felt very privileged when I got a call a number of months ago from former Governor Bush, who was, of course, extremely active with the Florida Virtual Schools and a number of other initiatives in the state of Florida improving education, asking him to co-chair with him the Digital Learning Council.

The Digital Learning Council is a group of about 100. Many of you are in this room, which I appreciate the effort that you put into it, that met for several months. Met digitally. There was not one meeting that was in person. I think there were 70 individual digital meetings as well as every member was interviewed personally, digitally. I've never seen so many people meet so many times and not one lunch was bought for anybody.

But the Digital Learning Council worked for a number of months and came out with 10 essential elements. And you have these on a card, I believe. Ten essential elements for high quality learning that we hope provides a roadmap to state policymakers, local policymakers, and federal. Now, I do just have to say roadmap because an earlier question mentioned a

manifesto that Wise and Bush had been involved with. Now, I have to admit I had a vestigial pang as one who ran for office a number of times during the Cold War, I spent my political life running from -- I never have been associated with any manifesto, and I'm pretty sure that anyone named Bush hasn't either.

So this is a roadmap for policymakers to look at as we move forward. And for many of you who are familiar with the data quality campaign which I consider to be an extremely successful effort to identify the policies that are essential to policymakers at the state level on implementing comprehensive data systems to drive decision-making in education. This is a lot like the data quality campaign. I like to call it the DQC, only on steroids because of what we were able to learn from the many lessons of the data quality campaign and to use their template.

Now, the Digital Learning Council comes at what I call the combination of the Ms -- the moment and the means. This is a time when every governor -- and remember there are 29 new state governors. This is a *Jeopardy* question, \$500 for political trivia. The largest number of new governors since 1950, covering about 80-some percent of the population. And so at a very critical time, in less than a month for some of them, going to be presenting a state of the state message. Now, they've come into office and they knew the state budget situation was bad, but now they've met with the state civil servant in the budget office who actually does know what the numbers are and it's far worse. And so they have to present -- they have a choice. They can either just hunker down, do the same thing with less, and get even less outcomes in education. Or they can decide to strike out. That is strike out in a bold way. That's the choice they have in front of them. And they have to decide because it'll be the first session of the legislature that will be their high water mark. They have to decide whether they're going to be boldly innovative or quite frankly, over the next few years, badly irrelevant. And so that's the context at which the Digital Learning Council comes about.

So let's talk for a moment about what the moment is. The moment is this, and the Alliance for Excellent Education, my organization which was joined with, in this case with Governor Bush as the Foundation for Education and Excellence, but my organization, the Alliance, issued a report last year called *The Online Learning Imperative: The Three Looming*

*Crises.* We saw three factors coming together. I'm going to quickly tick them off. State budgets. It's what I call, speaking of moments, the General Motors' moment. This is what GM faced about three years ago. We're not making a great product and now there's a lot less money to make it. And so demand for higher outcomes and yet less revenue to achieve them with.

And so that's essentially what almost every state is going to be facing. Stimulus package is now expired and while there will be some spending out, if you look at the budget projects, whether by the National Association of State Budget Officers, the Rockefeller Institute, Center for Budget Priorities, look at any of them and it's pretty bleak for the next three years at least for state budgets. So you've got less money to work with.

Teacher demographics. We have -- the state of Georgia has 440 high schools and has 88 certified physics teachers. And that's representative of the country. So how do we get high quality content into each one of those high schools across the country? Whether they're urban intercity to extreme rural?

Second, if you look at the NCTAF report from last year, something like almost 50 percent of our teachers are 50 years or older. So even if every teacher -- if you believe in the model of every teacher being the sole repository of content in the classroom, the content teachers -- the experienced ones are going. And in fact, the NCTAF Report is informative because it also shows that in 1987-88, the typical teacher had almost 15 years experience. Flash forward to this year and the typical teacher has something like two to three years' experience. So now once again the critical time to marry high quality content with the classroom.

And then the third factor, the pipeline. And the analysis that I've done, and Governor Bush worked at this extensively during his terms as governor with the Florida Virtual Schools and what not, I was involved somewhat in West Virginia but quite frankly I had my wakeup moment about three years ago when I started looking at the numbers that I've been relaying plus this next one and realized that we can't get there from here. The Obama Administration, Gates Foundation, Lumina Foundation all have set very -- have set the goal for where we need to be in postsecondary achievement and they are absolutely correct. And if you look at Tony Carnevali's work and you can see it just underscores it.

There's a problem. We can't get there from here with the same delivery model. If we keep churning out the same amount of kids who either drop out or if they do get a diploma, high school diploma, then go on to need remediation, we can't get there from here. So that's the moment -- the budget situations, the demographics of our educators, and the pipeline.

Now, so let's talk about the means. So Bob, why is this man smiling besides the fact that I'm inherently optimistic? Well, first of all, this is taking place around us anyhow. The question is whether we put any order and accelerate it. It's happening when Clayton Christiansen and Michael Horn write that 50 percent of all high school classes will be online in a decade, more recently a superintendent in Houston announced that 30 percent of classes would be online for high school within 5 years in his district. So this is going to happen. The question is whether as many children as possible have access to it. And so the means become critically important.

With the DLC, I think several things have happened. The DLC raises some critical issues. First of all, and the very first principle, all children -- all children should have access wherever they are: public school, private school, charter school, whatever. I've never been a voucher supporter. Put that out there. Yet I don't see this as a voucher -- that was a debate that was taking place about another era. The digital -- with technology you leapfrog that discussion. And now what we have, as was explained earlier by others, you have the means to bring at a low unit cost high quality content. So all children having access.

Competency-based learning. I know that we all love the seat time, a requirement. It doesn't make any sense, of course, in today's era. And so a child that needs more time ought to have more time. A child that can advance faster needs to advance faster. And actually, I would argue over time that becomes cost effective because now we're moving the child that would have been sitting in a seat for 12 years may sit there for 11 or be able to take more advanced courses and save time on the higher ed side.

Instruction needs to be individualized, which in these principles that's written throughout this. And of course, technology provides the means for that. And funding needs to be on different bases than it currently is. It needs to be -- you can take a look at their different funding models. Florida Virtual School, for instance, which is performance based. The district

pays on if that child completes that course satisfactorily, not because that child occupied a seat. And so that actually changes the dynamic by which we're compensating and forming budgets. So that's one set of the means that are there.

Second, it's been referenced several times, common core standards. I can't overstate the importance of that I think coming by coincidence at this time. State-led movement, not federal. Forty-four states have now adopted. But in English language, arts, and math it sets the standard. So now our publishers know. Now all our content generators know. Now -- but what we also have, the Herculean task of doing and every governor is going to face as well, is it's one thing to adopt the standards. It's something else to implement them because you start with assessments and the action that the U.S. Department has taken to assist states in developing with the two consortia of developing those assessments. But there's a whole other set of assessments that will need to be developed. Then you don't stop with assessments because now you've got to move to teacher preparation, recruitment, and development -- professional development. What is it that as we're asking our teachers to step up the game even more.

And then the third one, of course, is curriculum development. And so what will be, as the states have worked together, will they come together to work around common curricula as well?

And then the third one, and I can't pass up this opportunity. Actually, it was not in my original remarks but anytime I hear questions from two very senior and influential representatives in Congress -- I heard one from Senator Rockefeller's staff person and one from Congressman Waxman -- what could be an ESCA? I've got to answer that.

The first is increased research dollars to assist -- to assist, make sure no state -- almost no state can afford it. The state of West Virginia, we were supposed to be doing significant research given all the other problems that we had? No. The only one who can adequately fund that is going to be at the federal level.

Second is flexibility and Title I and other programs. Technology does not lend itself well to parameters. I mean, it's like trying to keep a thoroughbred racehorse locked up in the stall the whole time or in a very controlled paddock. You can't do it. And so -- and then

another initiative would be -- and this one I may differ from the department a little bit, but it's looking at how technology -- but I don't think so -- how technology can be successfully used as a model for transforming the lowest performing schools. How does it get applied?

Are we all right on that, Jim? Thank goodness. I don't want to be on the other side of the rock star. I'm singing -- I'm in the band.

So how can that -- and then so but this also then brings us onto some questions that need to be asked. And I don't want anyone writing down or even taking away the idea, okay, let's wait until these questions are answered. These questions actually -- I think most of you in this room have some of the answers already. We just need them compiled for the policymakers.

So here are some of the key questions. One is we need to make sure -- and that goes along with these principles -- is everybody needs to be doing a scan of his or her local policies, state policies, and federal policies to see, number one, what it is that is a disincentive to the effective application of technology in our schools now.

Second, so what is it that's holding it back? The model that somebody used earlier about California. You can have online learning; it just can't come from more than one contiguous county away. Now, I like that one. That's my -- I think you have to apply the Amazon test in this case. Does it make any -- you and I go home. We order -- how many people put off a trip to the mall this year? Why? Because I'm ordering online. So with Amazon, would you tell me that I can order a book online actually for my Kindle but I have to go stand in a physical brick and mortar store to download it. I have to go stand in my local store to download it. That to me is about the equivalent of that requirement.

And so what is it that's -- the requirement that a state -- that the teacher has to be certified within that state? No, we want high quality teachers, don't get us wrong, but there are other ways to make sure that that teacher has the content knowledge and the ability as opposed to requiring that that teacher be certified narrowly within that state.

Second, cost effectiveness. There are two levels of cost effectiveness. One is getting a greater outcome for the same expenditure of dollars. That one I think I can demonstrate pretty readily and indeed we have documentation on that already. The second one that's harder

is the cost effectiveness to a hard pressed school district to say let's make the investment now at a time when we're seeing our budgets cut. There we need the private sector to come forward and help provide that cost effective information. Now, I can make some anecdotal arguments. If I've got three high schools in a district and each one has only five students that want mandarin or want the advanced calculus course, it makes no sense for me to hire a teacher -- and I can't afford to anyway -- to hire a teacher for each one of those schools. What I can do, via digital learning, is provide one teacher. And I can do it whether asynchronous or synchronous, and do it in such a way that now those students have ready access to it. That to me is cost effectiveness. And so there are a number of other illustrations as well, but how -- but particularly, how do we bring -- will this ultimately prove to bring cost down?

Third, proof points. Here we need all -- because remember these policymakers - - you're sitting -- you're one of the 100 new members of Congress. You're sitting -- you're the President getting ready to propose and then go to the Hill to fight for a new ESCA, you're the governor either just elected or still there, and the hundreds -- literally hundreds of new state legislators, they're all meeting and having to make critical decisions within the next year. Actually, within the next few months. And so that's why the urgency to providing proof points of what it is that's working. The largest successful example probably Florida Virtual Schools provides excellent case studies. But others as well.

And then one that I have a special desire for is I think there's a real need to be able to demonstrate exactly how digital learning is working to improve outcomes for the most disadvantaged students and show me the proof points that I can then profile across the country because once again, if you're talking about in the Clayton Christensen-Michael Horn approach, the non-consumer -- the non-consumer, and it's already being used, credit recovery, dropout -- recovering dropouts, remedial work, and increasingly it's going to be used, I believe, in the lowest performing schools.

We need extensive discussion about the role of teachers. That's been talked about here. We have to first recognize that 75 percent of this is going to be in blended or hybrid situations. So the teacher is still an important -- a critically important element in education.



Arguably -- well, is. Not arguably, the most important element, but the teacher's role is going to be changing. I see this as enabling a teacher. The military talks about a force multiplier. Boy, what a luxury if I were a teacher not to have to be the sage on the stage every day but to be able to use my pedagogical skills and so that I could interact with students and meet their individual learning needs because now I've got the assistance of some of the highest quality content in the world coming in through a variety of means. And yet we have to make sure that that is understood.

And finally, the technology and explaining how technology is not some sort of snap on tool. It's not just something -- another new gadget to put on the table. It's a total learning environment. And it's not just layered on. You do have to change the total learning environment. It doesn't mean you're doing away necessarily with the brick and mortar school but that school now becomes a learning center, or the library as somebody else said or something else. And indeed, students may be taking courses a variety of ways. Two of the courses may be blended or hybrid. Some may be traditional. But you have to embrace a total change in technology.

So that's why the Digital Learning Council was created. That's what Governor Bush had in mind when he put out the call. That's what all those who contributed wanted. And so now we have the 10 principles. So the Digital Learning Council now moves to the Digital Learning Now. And there is a website, digital learning now -- this is surprising -- [digitallearningnow.com](http://digitallearningnow.com). But also it's important to work as the digital learning now works, it's also important to work through each of your means to advance technology.

Once again, critical decisions. Wherever you come from -- nonprofit, for-profit, academic -- I don't know a time when I've seen more crises and more opportunity than I do right now in education. We -- this cannot remain and will not remain a static system. And so that's why it's the moment and the means are both here.

And I do just want to close out with one final observation. I don't want to hear anybody anymore talking about technology and the classroom of the future. We've got to be talking about the classroom of the present because that's the generation that's sitting there right

now and that's the one we're going to be depending upon for our immediate future.

So thank you very, very much for your interest. I'm happy to answer questions about the Digital Learning Council and also why we need to move digital learning now.

(Applause)

MR. WEST: Okay. I have a question and then we have time for a couple questions from the audience as well.

This morning we've heard lots of good ideas about how to move forward in this area but I'd like to ask you the implementation question because several speakers this morning have mentioned the fragmentation of the U.S. education system, the local school boards, the number of local school districts. How do we overcome the political fragmentation to actually implement some of these good ideas?

MR. WISE: Well, there is a bit of a challenge. It's what I call trying -- arching principles and standards, but basically you're giving them the flexibility. That's -- given our governance system, that's the only way I see happening.

But the other one is best practices. That's what I think is so important. The common core. That was not once again a federal initiative. Our organization was involved in that from literally the very beginning. That was not -- that was an initiative by the National Governors' Association, chief state school officers, ACHIEVE, the Hunt Institute, the Alliance, and then later Naspien and a number of others. But all -- it came from the states. Because the recognition -- they needed to have a common set of standards and they needed to be able to work together. They were forerunners to that, too. NECAP and New England and others achieved some of its work. But that's what I think will probably do it. So some early examples of success I believe will drive a lot of others under the umbrella pretty quickly, or under the tent.

MR. WEST: Okay, thank you. Questions? Jim.

SPEAKER: Bob, there was an economist here earlier who had a pretty doom and gloom picture of our ability to make rapid progress on this. And I was wondering, given your political experience, how can we actually overcome the challenges laid out to make rapid progress on this front?

MR. WISE: Well, I mean, I think the factors laid out are all real except that I think that the -- I believe the confluence of events and the nature of the problems we face are going to drive change must faster than we think. And I also want to take a little more optimistic view than perhaps some of which I've heard expressed.

So let's talk about one of the elephants in the room. There are a bunch of them but one of them -- okay, what about unions? Teacher unions? Okay, I understand the reluctance and the resistance, but I also understand that every union in this country has had to make adjustments given the force of events. I grew up in the most heavily industrialized state in the nation and yet you don't find the traditional industrial contract with the machinists, the UMW -- United Mine Workers -- and a number of the others. The same thing is happening within the education unions right now.

Now, let me present something a little -- Jim, I don't think you and I have talked about it but let me present this. What about if an organization of educators -- whether it's teachers' unions, National Board of Professional Teaching Standards, TAP, you name it -- what if a group came forward and said, you know, we've got some of the highest quality content teachers in the country and we've got a fair number that don't want to stand on their feet for eight hours a day in a classroom anymore? Why don't we put together a group and go market that to online providers, whether we're coming to you as a school district superintendent and selling it directly or we're going to K-12 or any of the other online providers and offering it up. And now it's an exchange between that business division as opposed to a collective bargaining contract. Collective bargaining is still in place for the district and those that are still teaching in the district but now this assemblage of teachers can be coming online from any part of the country.

So I think -- my sense is that there will be -- there's always that initial resistance that was talked about but I also believe that some folks particularly are going to be looking at this saying technology, you can't stand in front of this thing forever. What we need to be doing is figuring out how to benefit from it. So I happen to be optimistic on it.

From policymakers' standpoint, you know, I don't know where you -- look, I've been -- I was in government 24 years. I know what it's like to try and wiggle and squirm. Maybe

next term we could deal with that. You can't duck this one anymore. I mean, the budget situation is so severe that you simply can't keep making the same decisions.

In the state of West Virginia I vetoed a budget one time -- the only budget, I think -- I vetoed a budget because they cut out the technology money. What was our final -- when you get down to the level of detail, the final compromise was that we extended the life of school buses for another year, which 12 to 13 years in a row on a school bus in a rural state is a lot. But when you get down to that level of detail what you recognize is you can't keep using the same model. And so what you have to do instead is change the model that you're working in. You have to make it more transformative. And as was pointed out earlier, the main way that every industry I've seen and it's documented as well, is increased productivity and cut costs is by effective application of technology. Folks can't duck this one anymore.

MR. WEST: Okay. We have time for one more question. Paul Peters.

MR. PETERS: So, Governor, your Digital Learning Council had a number of principles. I didn't see as much on accountability. How are you going to ensure high quality offerings in the digital space? Has your group thought about that? What do you say about that?

MR. WISE: There actually is. The main accountability item is how -- student accountability. How well do students do, which would be -- which is listed as one of the elements? But, no, the accountability, if it's not in there then we need to spell it out much more because that runs throughout. I happen to think that you actually are changing the discussion about accountability because if you're moving towards a much more performance-based system, now you've -- and you're moving away from a seat-based system to a competency-based system, that's all about raising the bar, not trying to slide under it.

MR. WEST: Okay, thank you, Governor Wise.

MR. WISE: Thank you.

MR. WEST: We really appreciate all of your leadership.

(Applause)

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