



NCTI 2009 Innovators Conference

Tuesday Keynote

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Tuesday, November 17, 2009

Transcript

Hello and good morning. As John said, I am Kwasi Asare and I work for all of you, and I serve at the pleasure of this nation's children. I really want to thank the National Center for Technology Innovation for hosting this event this morning; I want to thank John for his nice words and warm introductions for both of us. I will make sure that you guys are here for our next performance review and you can introduce us appropriately then as well.

I want to thank Tracy Gray and her team – they've been extremely cordial, nimble, and flexible in terms of working with all moving parts of the Department and allowing us to actually be here this morning with all of our schedules, but it was really important and we wanted to be here collectively to talk about our part here in shaping America.

So the President has set a course for America to again lead by 2020 and in the 21st century, and that course, I think, necessarily requires that we produce the most talented, brightest citizens on the planet, and our children need to be armed with the resources and the capabilities to be competitive in a globally, rapidly changing community. So regardless of their postsecondary ambitions, they'll need global awareness, they'll need financial literacy, they'll need digital literacy, they'll need collaboration skills, adaptability to change, ownership of their own learning, just to name a few. And whether they focus on science, technology, engineering and math, visual arts, media arts, the military, or any other vocation that satisfies their pursuit of happiness, it's imperative that we prepare all of our children to succeed.

So part of this plan includes leveraging the best ideas from all of our constituents. It means applying all of those ideas to all of our students. And just as a rising tide raises all the ships, we have to improve the outcomes for our schools and students, we need to get better teachers into these school districts that routinely fail to serve the needs of our students, and we have to follow the performance of our teachers and our students across time, across grade levels, across geography; from early education to K-12, to postsecondary, and beyond. We need fewer, clearer, higher standards and assessments. And in all of this there has to be a thread of technology and innovation, which is key to achieving those assurances as laid out in the stimulus dollars and the Race to the Top [competition].

These four assurances are at the center of the stimulus dollars that have been given to the states.



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- Firstly, we know that the dropout factories in this country, we know where they are, so that's a good thing. And we're asking all the states to take a hard look at them and do whatever's necessary to turn around those struggling schools.
- Secondly, we've got to put a premium on human capital, getting high quality teachers into our high need schools. We're going to look to embrace the most innovative approaches to get instructors to deliver world class instruction to all of our children. States and districts are being asked to do whatever it takes to remove these policy barriers, and a lot of them are moving in real time to do so ...
- Thirdly, we've asked the country to invest in data systems that follow our children's progress. We want to get data from the classroom that sheds light on how our students and teachers are performing across cohorts, and share this information within and without districts. We want data to be at the heart of data driven cultures, to make and drive decision making culture, and nurture environments of continuous improvement and innovation.
- Lastly, we need fewer, clearer, higher standards. We know the bar is too low in some places and that many of our children are not prepared to meet their postsecondary requirements for success. We need the states to come together on common standards in assessments for excellence. The administration has pushed for it, and we look forward to the states' commitment to deliver on them.

The stimulus and the Race to the Top [competition] are instruments that we can use for a number of successful outcomes. Chief in mind for many of you is innovation and technology. And though both of these things are really serious, I think, for 21st century success for American students.

So technology is one of the best ways to achieve some of these goals. We know that doing more with less is attainable with effective technology. We know that we can do and have more deeply and intimately personal relationships, sharing promising practices, collaborating with master instructors, and matching students with appropriate learning paths, and we can build communities of practice focused on improving student outcomes. So let me talk about a few of these ideas.

- **Personalization.** Technology and the Internet have given education unbelievable breakthroughs for productivity. Things today that are possible in speech recognition, text to voice, multimedia and digital content give us an incredible opportunity to transform learning for all of our nation's children. As breakthroughs in research continue to propel our understanding of how students learn and challenge assumptions about ability, aptitude, and acuity, advances in technologies allow us to fully implement solutions that allow children to learn in unique manners or learning paths. These personalized solutions will need to be built on and reside on effective vehicles for



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change. And we have to ensure that we're building the best platforms to leverage the most personal innovations.

- **Platforms.** We continue to see the emergence of powerful social networking platforms, technologies in the Web 2.0 space. Resources from the likes of Twitter, Facebook, Google Wave and more and these social collaboration platforms are appearing all over the country. All over this great nation of ours, I see great platforms popping up in the South, in the Midwest, and all over the nation, and we need and will continue to look for more communities to continue developing these platforms for the creation of, the distribution, and the use of education resources scoped for special needs and learning. And in that spirit of sharing, I actually want to challenge this community to share the practices and lessons learned with the community as a whole. Just as special needs and academic genius are not mutually exclusive, neither should the good ideas for students with IEPs and the broader student population. So we implore you to give us your best ideas both discreetly and in open forums and community engagement settings like this. So what are our thoughts?
- **Collaboration and engagement.** [Collaboration and engagement] are vital, not just between the teachers and the students, but also with existing providers and practitioners and new potential communities of practice in open and universally accessible worlds and formats. Secondly, the new world we have to be comfortable with the notion that everyone can be a creator and a consumer at the same time, it's the foundation of personalization, it's the foundation of personal learning. Third, we have to recognize there are barriers both real and manufactured, and we have to address, and in some cases collectively remove these barriers if we're going to effectively close the achievement gaps.

So let me take a minute to expound on some of these thoughts. We have to recognize that there are limits to what we can do hands on. Technology allows us to break through some of these barriers that have limited us through our existing resources, and in this climate of economic difficulty and uncertainty we need all the productivity gains that we can get to transform learning and facilitate the attainment of knowledge.

All students can demonstrate their knowledge and mastery in a number of modes via personalized education experiences. Students and teachers should not be bound to demonstrate their knowledge solely through one instrument, and again technology can give students an opportunity to demonstrate their learning in a number of avenues and objective formats and learning styles. There are students who can communicate in technology via ways they never could before, students use electronic media and are drawn in ways that are remarkable and unbelievable. There's communication and collaboration what we're pushing in exciting ways through peer relationships. Students can now mentor each other. Some of the



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most powerful relationships occur by having students come and mentor the students without ascribed social needs and with special needs and integrating learning.

And the value of such bonds is happening far too discreetly. We need to share these ideas and results as many and widely and broadly as we can to help all of our kids and propel America back to the front of the pack. This integration has not only pushed the envelope for learning, but provides a social benefit for all of our children seeing all their peers succeeding. By harnessing the capabilities of all our little digital natives, we can learn a lot about our collaborative approaches to instruction, and successful approaches for forming communities of instruction, practice, and learning. I think you all know quite well the power of understanding personalized learning approaches. The IDEA community, for example, has been leveraging incredibly talented instructors with an eye for personal instruction, whether those needs be visual, tactile, audio, and kinetic or what have you, you've always understood that all of our children can learn, it's a matter of learning which learning path is dominant and building on that piece.

I personally get pretty worked up about the rate of change that's happening today. We don't have to wait 30 years for great ideas on personalized learning to be shared, researched and scaled. We don't have to wait a decade for thoughtfully developed platforms of integration to take shape. We don't need 30 years to find out what's effective for our students. We can leverage this learning in real time, share what's going on, and scale those practices.

We can use technology to document, record, and share, and continue to push what works, developing continuous improvement in environments of innovation and customization and scale.

But again, as special education stakeholders, we can't and we shouldn't have to do it alone. We want to encourage a two-way street here, and we really need to leverage the power of solutions that develop and provide assistance in the classroom and as many places across this great country of ours as possible. Arrange our technology with professional development, online courses in innovation as well as guidance, and practical models for education. But this is a two-way street; I won't preach to you, I'm here to learn just as much from you guys as you are to share, so I'm here in this audience for you.

So from our standpoint, what's next? Well we want to continue having conversations, opening up the doors for dialogue, hopefully like the ones we'll have today. We, being the government, will definitely look to convene more of these meetings and expect the community to continue to do the same. The Department is considering some pilots exploring personalized, open programs in some of our smaller programs as well as more broadly. Our new director of the Office of Educational Technology is here, Karen Cator, is here with me and I'd be remiss if I didn't encourage you guys to get involved in the National Education Technology Plan if you haven't already. It's an awesome example I think of the transparency this government is



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committed to, and what we're trying to bring. So if you haven't been plugged in already I would absolutely encourage you to do so. And there'll be some more in the works.

So, in closing, I think we'd like to share with you again ... the challenge to share with us what works in the community as a whole. Don't minimize the important of sharing your successes and frustrations both discreetly and publicly with us.

I'm in the Office of Innovation and Improvement, I work with Jim Shelton. I'm convinced of the middle term in both cases: 'innovation'. Jim's middle name is innovation, I don't care what he tells you, so certainly take us up on that challenge.

We want the states and the districts to aggressively pursue more options around personalized content, and building these personalized communication platforms. We want these communities of practice to forge connections associated with successful outcomes, and we want to transcend the assumptions that stymie student learning.

With that I want to thank you for your time, and I'll transition over to Karen. Thanks.