



2017
Legislators' Forum
On Education and the Economy

Presented by the West Virginia Public Education Collaborative, in partnership with the Hunt Institute

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For access to full videos of the Legislators’ Forum, please visit the West Virginia Public Education Collaborative YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCOtBM1EFbei-EBB1aEl3l-Q>.

Introduction

The inaugural Legislators' Forum, centered on education and the economy, was held in January 2017 in Morgantown, WV. The forum was a nonpartisan event involving legislative leaders and members of the committees on education and finance in both lawmaking bodies, together with state and national experts in education and business, and public education practitioners. The purpose of the event was to provide nonpartisan information on relevant P-20 educational topics, as specified by legislators. The Forum was further intended to provide a protected place for legislators to have an open dialogue about educational issues, policies, challenges, funding and more.

Education and the Economy

Presenter: Brad Smith, Chairman and CEO, Intuit

As a leader in the technology industry and a native West Virginian, Brad offered his perspective on the changing needs of the workforce and the key role that education plays in ensuring economic vitality. He stressed the ever-evolving needs of students and explained the influences technology has had on younger generations, while emphasizing the importance of creative problem solving and thinking, in both Silicon Valley and the rest of the world.



“I’ll start with one very important skill- creative problem solving. It is the heart of entrepreneurialism and it is the number one skill needed as we look to the future.” –Brad Smith

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- In order to adapt to changing student populations, schools and educators will need to explore strategies to better meet the social, physical, and educational needs of today’s students.
- Education should be focused on creative problem solving and preparation for the workforce—skills that students learn should be applicable in real world job positions that they might one day hold.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- America and West Virginia both are rapidly becoming an education economy.
- It is important to focus on career readiness, accountability, assessment, and teacher recruitment in schools.

Where We Are: Public Education in West Virginia

Facilitator: Scott Rotruck, Member, West Virginia State Board of Education

Resource Experts:

Dr. Frank Devono, Superintendent, Monongalia County Schools

Chip Slaven, Counsel to the President and Senior Advocacy Advisor, The Alliance for Excellent Education

This session focused on challenges and opportunities in West Virginia's public education system: ensuring all students graduate ready for the workforce, designing assessment and accountability systems that work, and guaranteeing great teachers and leaders for all students. Legislators were given important current context of legislative policy as these issues were addressed. Emphasis was placed on ensuring education is a return on our investments, and on improving outcomes for all children.



Moving Forward Together

Presenter: Howard E. Seufer, Jr., Partner,
Bowles Rice LLP

Howard Seufer called upon his experience and deep expertise in education law to reflect on how West Virginia can build a broad coalition to advance quality education for all students. Focus was placed on the urgency of ensuring excellent education for both individuals and the economy. Topics discussed included the need for decision makers to work together in order to benefit students, and a vision of West Virginia governance that improves educational outcomes for all stakeholders.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- It is important for the Governor, the state board, legislators, district leaders, educators, and parents to work together to facilitate real change in West Virginia schools.
- One of the biggest challenges in policy is turning policy into practice.

“This is all too important to be taken without all hands on board, and we have a lot of hands that should be on board as we go forward.” –Howard Seufer

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The economy and the education system are intrinsically linked and codependent.
- There are a variety of funding models available to schools, varying in effectiveness and equity.
- Funding models should be tailored to the specific geographic regions and populations that they serve; therefore, it is difficult to determine a single “best” funding model.

How to Get Where We Want to Be: Funding Models That Work

Facilitator: Dr. James Denova, Vice President,
Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation

Resource Experts:

Dr. John Deskins, Director, Bureau of Business
and Economic Research; Assistant Dean, WVU
College of Business and Economics

Mike McKown, Director, West Virginia State
Budget Office

Mark Muchow, Deputy Secretary, West Virginia
Department of Revenue

Dan Thatcher, Program Principal, National
Conference of State Legislatures

Panelists came together to discuss different funding models for schools across America and in West Virginia. Models were examined in terms of efficiency and effectiveness in order to determine which work best in modern schools. The importance of teacher preparation and changing student populations was also taken into account.



Reflecting on Education as an Economic Driver

Facilitator: Brad Smith, Chairman and CEO, Intuit

Resource Experts:

Steve Hedrick, President and CEO, Mid-Atlantic Technology, Research, and Innovation Center

Holly Kauffman, President, West Virginia Operations and FirstEnergy

Dr. Johnny Moore, President, Pierpont Community and Technical College

This informal discussion allowed a distinguished panel of business and education leaders to reflect both on what they heard throughout the day and on what the future holds for West Virginia and our education system. It was also an opportunity to begin anticipating the discussion for Friday and topics such as why we must train students for the demands of the jobs of tomorrow, aligning education to workforce needs, and why recruiting and retaining great educators is necessary for educational success.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Our educational curriculum, delivery model, and methods of assessment must evolve to effectively prepare students for the changing workforce.
- Recruiting and retaining great educators has a powerful impact on student success.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- On-the-ground perspectives from educators provide essential information about the context and effects of educational policies.

Table Discussions: Legislators and Educators

Educators:

Karen Modzik-Collins, Principal, Mountainview Elementary School, Monongalia County

Susie Skowronski, Academic Coach, Mountainview Elementary School, Monongalia County

Melissa DeWitt, Principal, East Dale Elementary School, Monongalia County

Tracy Rogers, Second Grade Teacher, East Dale Elementary School, Marion County

Karen Finamore, Principal, Fairmont Senior High School, Marion County

Toni Poling, English Teacher, Fairmont Senior High School, Marion County, WV 2017 Teacher of the Year

Legislators and educators came together to dialogue in small groups, focusing on how policy translates into practice in classrooms around the state. Educators shared relevant information about the contextual factors shaping the landscape of education in West Virginia, as well as an understanding of the current challenges in education. Legislators had the opportunity to ask questions of some of our best teachers and educational administrators and to share the insights gleaned from these discussions with the larger group.

Building and Supporting Excellent Teachers and Education Leaders

Facilitator: Dr. Gypsy Denzine, Dean of the College of Education and Human Services, West Virginia University

Resource Experts:

Dr. Teresa Eagle, Dean, College of Education and Professional Development, Marshall University

Dr. Francesca Forzani, Associate Director, TeachingWorks, University of Michigan

Research shows that teachers and school leaders are the most important in-school factors in determining student success. This session focused on re-envisioning how teachers are trained and how West Virginia can advance excellent teaching, learning, and leading. Dr. Forzani delivered a presentation on TeachingWorks at the University of Michigan, an organization committed to ensuring that students have skillful and supportive teachers, and Dr. Eagle joined her to reflect on the TeachingWorks approach. Key challenges surrounding the hiring and preparation of teachers were addressed, including changes over time, goals for teacher candidates, the supply of teachers, and professionalizing teaching and teacher prep. Participants were left with information on what innovative teacher preparation looks like and some methods for attracting teachers to prep programs.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Teaching is a learnable skill.
- Innovative teacher preparation includes significant time for real world learning in the classroom, techniques for personalizing learning for students, and rich opportunities for teacher leadership.
- Root challenges in attracting teachers to prep programs include financial considerations and less than favorable perceptions of the profession. Teacher preparation programs must address these challenges in order to be successful.
- It is important for teaching to be professionalized and involve specialized preparation for different grade levels.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Project-based and interdisciplinary learning engages and challenges students.
- This type of learning helps to prepare students for the workforce by teaching them hands-on skills and placing emphasis on active citizenship.
- Expeditionary Learning Schools are outperforming state and district schools in standardized tests, graduation rates, and closing achievement gaps.

How Expeditionary Learning Impacts the Economy

Presenter: Ron Berger, Chief Academic Officer, Expeditionary Learning

Respondents:

Danielle Irby, Teacher, Explorer Academy

Ryan McKenzie, Principal, Explorer Academy

Expeditionary Learning Schools, based on Kurt Hahn's ideas of school reform, focus on project-based, interdisciplinary learning. More than 150 Expeditionary Learning Schools exist within the United States today, including West Virginia's Explorer Academy. In this session Ron Berger discussed how Expeditionary Learning schools develop students into citizens and prepare them for the workforce and postsecondary education.



Closing: Education and the Economy

Presenter: Governor James B. Hunt, Jr.,
Chair, The Hunt Institute Foundation
Board, Former Governor of North Carolina

Former North Carolina Governor Jim Hunt discussed his work over 16 years in office to support and advance education as a lever for economic development. Hunt expressed his hopes that the WVPEC will become an educational policy influencer like the Hunt Institute, which he founded. He stressed the positive impact of a quality education on everything from future earning potential to health. He stressed that a state's economy is only as strong as its workforce, and education is imperative to prepare future workforce members.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The Hunt Institute is a model for what the WVPEC could become moving forward.
- Governor Hunt expressed his belief that education is imperative to prepare future members of the workforce and that it affects every aspect of their lives.

Reflection

The first annual Legislators' Forum increased legislators' knowledge of educational issues with a strategically-created agenda based on what invited legislators most wanted to learn. Among these issues were school funding and teacher training and recruitment. Along with educational sessions, legislators were presented with a safe setting to engage in dialog about educational issues with those involved in the system, including teachers and principals, and with each other.

Many sessions received overwhelmingly positive reviews from those in attendance, with the opening keynote, Legislators and Educators, Where We Are: Public Education in West Virginia, and How Expeditionary Learning Impacts the Economy as the highest-rated. Legislators especially enjoyed sharing informal dialogue with teachers in principals during the Legislators and Educators session, something that will continue to be a focus for future forums.