
Introduction

Imagine School Without Clocks

Tick tock . . . tick tock . . . We easily fall into the rhythms of time in our lives. We have rhythms for sleeping, eating, working, and playing. We also have a rhythm, bound in time, to school. Most people fall into the rhythm of school from 12 to 16 years or more. For professional educators, the rhythm goes on and on. It becomes so fixed in our thinking that it is resolute, unchanging, and in an odd sense, it's academic. While the world runs on a 12-month calendar, the 10-month calendar is the atomic clock of education.

"Imagine," the signature work of John Lennon's legacy, depicts a rethinking of the world in which the limitations caused by preconceived notions of countries, boundaries, religion, and so forth are gone. Imagine if we could start all over again in our thinking about learning, without the limitations of time.

This piece of rock n' roll history is one of Fred's most prized items in his memorabilia collection. It was given to John Lennon on the release of "Imagine."



Photo by Bobby Baker Photography.

That opportunity to reimagine public education is before us today. At no other time in public education have we been so challenged by the constraints of the economy, the public outcry for changes in financing personnel and resources, and the demand for accountability through testing. In light of the reality of these pressure points, we cannot continue to fund and use our resources as we have in the industrial model of learning.

Imagine if our systems of learning were designed to move our students through achievement and not through time. Time, and not achievement, has been the primary constant of education in the United States. It has been the lynchpin holding in place the 20th century model of public schooling.

Imagine if our systems of regulating, financing, teaching, and learning were not captive to time but, instead: were allowed to occur anytime, anyplace, anyhow, and at any pace: learning in a continuum of mastery.

Our purpose in setting forth this thinking is to engage all stakeholders in the education community—educators, parents, businesses, not for profits, legislators, talented individuals, and, primarily, students—in this conversation, in the deconstruction of existing time-based structures, and in the transformation of learning to a model based on mastery of 21st century competencies.

The primary problem with public education in America is that the foundational structure, in which time is a constant and achievement is a variable, is a fatal flaw that will doom our system of public education to endless mediocrity, regardless of how much money we pour into it. And that mediocrity will translate into failure for our country to produce the educated citizenry necessary to achieve the economic goal of yet another American century.

Creating a system of learning based on mastery and not time will call upon policymakers, politicians, school leaders, educators, and community members to restructure how we can best use our resources in retooling school systems to bring students to mastery.

This book looks at a redefining of public education from two perspectives: one of the policymaker, explaining the hows and whys that caused this new vision for learning to be written into a state's education regulations; and the second perspective of a seasoned, highly skilled practitioner viewing the rulemaking process and implications from the field and, subsequently, implementing change when the vision became official state policy.

As such, the intent of the authors is to assist leaders at local, regional, state, and national levels in playing their personal roles in the transformation of America's system of public education. Importantly, the reference to leaders is not limited to traditional education leaders. While many skilled education leaders are well aware that America needs a new model of public

education and are anxious to find tools to help them move education in a new direction, we recognize that there are still too many in public education who wish to protect and defend the public system as it exists; who think that the solutions to America's education problems can be addressed by doing more of what education has asked for and received for decades. Simply stated, their solutions generally revolve around putting more money into the system. The authors recognize that the old proposed solutions of higher taxes, smaller classes, higher salaries, new buildings, more teachers' aides, and the like have been tried and, for the most part, have not succeeded in achieving the high goals of preparing virtually every student with the skills needed to succeed in this global society.

Therefore, our audience reaches beyond school leaders. This audience includes public officials at every level, businesses, community leaders, nonprofit organizations, and most important, parents and students. Even though our paid professional educators are likely to play the most active roles in this transformation, it is our goal to convince America that simply handing the job of educating our students to our educators will no longer be good enough. While our professional educators will coordinate this new process of learning, in order to make this model work, we need to accept that the education of our students will be everyone's responsibility. And yes, we understand that in order for the community at large to accept this shared responsibility, there must be shared benefits.

In this book, you will see where the two voices agree, or even in some cases, disagree. More likely, you will get a well-reasoned look at how New Hampshire has addressed obstacles to transformation, including actual on-the-ground results. Sometimes you will know when it's Fred's or Rose's voice. Sometimes you won't. Oftentimes, the voices will blend. When you are done with this book, we expect your feet to be fully planted in the school transformation camp.