



THE FUTURE OF WORK

A DEEP DIVE INTO A BRIDGE (KEY THEME) FROM THE
2025 DRIVING K-12 INNOVATION REPORT

Driving K-12 Innovation Bridges are important themes that span Top Topics for education innovation, connecting today's education challenges with tomorrow's opportunity. The 2025 Bridges are Ethical Innovation, Personalization, the Future of Work, and Critical Media Literacy. This resource focuses on the Future of Work.

THE FUTURE OF WORK

DEFINITION

The Future of Work highlights how the rapid and accelerating pace of change (in technology, society, communications, environment, and other aspects of life) is transforming the future of work and placing students in an emerging world with social-technical dynamics¹ both congruent and dis-contiguous from ours. Schools and educators have a responsibility to understand and prepare students with the foundational skills and mindsets they need to succeed in life, learning, and work — and the complex ideation and problem-solving capabilities to envision, adapt, and create the future.

¹ In short, social-technical dynamics refer to the complex interactions between society and technology. When we say that the future will involve social-technical dynamics that are both congruent and dis-contiguous from our world we mean that the future relationships between society and technology will both emerge out of our current world and be a separate, new transformation of it.

SUMMARY

Preparing students for the Future of Work starts with rethinking today's classrooms. As automation and artificial intelligence reshape the workforce, schools must prioritize creativity, learner agency, and lifelong learning over rote memorization and standardized testing. With purposeful use of technology and a renewed focus on real-world skills, K-12 education can empower students to adapt, lead, and thrive in an unpredictable future.

For leaders in K-12 educational technology, the Future of Work is not a distant concern — it's a call to action today. "The Future of Work depends on the future of school because school is the preparation for work," said Sheryl Abshire (Consultant, Texas) at the March 2025 meeting of CoSN's EdTech Innovation Committee. In a world where jobs are increasingly shaped by automation, artificial intelligence (including **generative AI**), and rapid technological change, K-12 education must evolve to ensure students are equipped not just with knowledge, but with the skills and mindset to thrive in an unpredictable workforce.

Today's classrooms are the training ground for tomorrow's innovators, problem-solvers, and lifelong learners. Yet many schools still prioritize standardized testing and rote learning over creativity, agency, and real-world skill development. While EdTech tools offer powerful opportunities to personalize learning

and engage students, without a shift in our collective mindset, technology alone won't bridge the gap between education and employability. "We can't measure success like we did 50 years ago," said EdTech Committee Co-Chair David Jarboe (D2 Harrison Schools, Colorado). "We must start making the case that we do need to change what we're doing and redefine education. We have to abandon this classical concept of what being educated means."

A critical element in preparing students for their future careers is the importance of **learner agency** — confidence in one's thinking, autonomy in decision-making, and the ability to direct one's own learning. These traits, along with digital fluency, adaptability, and a love of learning, are critical to future-ready graduates. "Many discussions about the Future of Work focus on critical thinking and problem-solving, but they often ignore the fact that agency requires a deep internalization of knowledge, autonomy in decision-making, and confidence in one's own thinking," (Doug Couture, South Windsor Public Schools, Connecticut).

¹ Top Topics from the Driving K-12 Innovation 2025 report are marked with bold, blue font

The pressure to fit students into a narrow mold — often driven by college admissions and state accountability metrics — can overshadow the real goal of education: helping young people discover who they are, what they care about, and how they can contribute. Committee member Erica Shumaker (Learn 21, Ohio), a former college and high school counselor, added that the United States needs a culture shift. “There has become a really insidious part of college-going culture where students are like ‘I need XYZ to get in and to get the scholarship; I’ll learn when I’m in college; K-12 or high school is to get into college. Then when I am in college I will actually learn ’ which is really disheartening because you should learn, no matter where you’re at in school,” said Shumaker. “A lot of the work I tried to do with students was [focused on how] to love learning wherever they were, to not just be a robot person who took every AP class that they could, who tried to get the best test scores on everything.” Several committee members also shared concern that the system discourages individuality and creativity.

When thinking about what the Future of Work looks like, EdTech Innovation Committee member Ruben Puentedura (Hippasus, Massachusetts) encouraged EdTech leaders keep in mind that AI is transformative in terms of what the Future of Work looks like, and educators need to think about the type of technology skills that students need to serve them well no matter where their career path takes them. “It’s not just the large language models (LLMs); they are obviously the darling of everybody’s eye these days. There’s a much bigger picture that has to do with things like robotics, digital twins, machine learning — in other words, it’s a very big change.”

Puentedura added that we need to ask ourselves how to strengthen the job outlook for those with varying levels of education — not just college graduates. That could include those with a high school diploma, that plus some training or professional development, and many other possibilities.

The Future of Work will continue to evolve — but the opportunity to prepare students for it starts now. K-12 EdTech leaders are uniquely positioned to lead that charge, transforming the education system into one that values student voice, fosters future-ready skills, and restores the joy of learning for all.

Today’s classrooms are the training ground for tomorrow’s innovators, problem-solvers, and lifelong learners.

TIPS & RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE EDTECH INNOVATION COMMITTEE

KEEP STUDENT ENGAGEMENT A TOP PRIORITY

EdTech Innovation Committee Member Dr. Taylor Wrye, CETL (Nauset Public Schools, Massachusetts) shared that teachers in his district are focused on how to keep students engaged, including how to best utilize EdTech tools to support workforce preparation. “For us, why does a kid have to sit in a classroom at 8:00 a.m. for math when, in reality, there are so many other approaches? We have virtual courses that we’re offering this year, and we have close to 100% attendance.”

TEACHER TRAINING FOR FUTURE-READY SKILLS IS ESSENTIAL

Educators need to receive professional development that is not hinged on one skill or tool, but rather flexibility to learn new things, adapt, and work with others. This will also support **attracting and retaining educators**, while **building the human capacity of leaders**.

SHIFT THE NARRATIVE/EXPECTATION AROUND LIFELONG LEARNING VS. SCHOOL BEING “DONE”

We must shift the narrative that learning ends at graduation and instead cultivate a culture where lifelong learning is the expectation — not the exception. Preparing students for the Future of Work means helping them see education as a continuous, evolving process, not something that’s ever truly “done.”

RESOURCES

[“Essential Skills Guidance”](#), Colorado Department of Education

[“Do Adults Have the Skills They Need to Thrive in a Changing World?”](#), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

Alternative schooling example: [“Learning & Living at Stanford: An exploration of undergraduate experiences in the future”](#), Stanford University

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