



INTRO

Three scenarios are interspersed throughout the *NextEd: Next Steps* report. The purpose of the scenarios is to provide an image of what might be possible in a transformed school. There is no one formula for transforming education. Each school or school district will develop its Myown roadmap to transformation. These scenarios are but one possibility.

The scenarios are based on interviews with Connecticut staff and students. The vision of these staff and students about what learning could be in a transformed school forms the substance of the scenarios. The individual and school names are fictitious in order to protect the privacy of those interviewed.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SCENARIO

Students lead learning at Nathan Hale Elementary School by working with teachers to develop individual learning plans, identify personal learning targets and demonstrate they have met their goals. In the upper grades, student-led meetings have transformed parent-teacher conferences. Here is one child's story.

My name is Lucas and I'm in fourth grade. I've never been so good at math, but because of how my school works I feel like I am finally OK with it. At my school, kids get to attend the parent and teacher conferences. I even get to be the leader at the meeting when my parents and my teacher, Ms. Cameron, all sit down together. We figure out what I need to learn and the best way I can learn it. I can say what I like in school and what gives me trouble.

But Ms. Cameron helps because she is always thinking of ways that she can help me learn more easily. Like one day, when the music room was empty, I started playing a tune on the piano and Ms. Cameron heard me. She was surprised to learn that I have been taking lessons for three years. Now she works math into my piano lessons. It almost fools me into thinking I am doing music – not math! Maybe that is why I can do fractions so easily now when they used to be so hard.

Before my mom and dad and I met with Ms. Cameron, I put some work in the computer. I told my mom and Dad, "This is how I show what I have learned and how I learned it." They were surprised at how much I am learning, but Ms. Cameron helped a lot.

I might have some trouble with math, but I am a really good reader, so Ms. Cameron lets me help my friends with their reading. My parents were proud to hear that I do that.

My parents asked me at the meeting why fourth grade was so different. It made me laugh. I said, "Because now I am the boss of me!"

MIDDLE SCHOOL SCENARIO

Hi, I am Lily Takai, and I love robots. But I didn't learn about them here. I had to go thousands of miles to do that.

Here is what happened. When I was 9, my family flew to Japan because my obaasan, my grandma, got very sick. I was amazed to see what robots were doing at my obaasan's nursing home. They used a robot called PARO that looks and acts just like a baby seal to make the people smile. When I patted PARO, he wiggled around, just like a real animal!

When I got back home to Connecticut I wanted to know all about robots, so I started building toy ones from kits. When I got to middle school, I was so lucky that it had a robotics club. I joined right away.

The club meets after school at a cool space for technology that my town and my school made. It's called an "incubator" and it's a meeting place for kids and adults interested in these subjects – what grownups call STEM for science, math, engineering and technology. The adults who work there help us with our projects. They coach our team for the national FIRST Robotics competition.

Building robots isn't just for fun. We get to work on how to use robots for real problems, like how to get rid of trash. Last year we built robots of recyclable parts. We programmed them to move trash that we made out of LEGO pieces, moving garbage in all the ways you can get rid of trash in a good way – recycling, throwing it in a landfill, or putting it in a compost bin. Our robots competed in regional and national trials of the first LEGO Trash Trek game.

Besides learning, being in the club gives me credits for computer science, engineering, problem solving and environmental science, even though a lot of the work takes place after school. My homeroom teacher in school helps me figure out how to learn with robots in all my class work because I like them so much. It makes me want to do well in other subjects.

Ms. Farley gives me lists of science books to read to improve my reading skills. That makes reading a lot more interesting for me. We meet every other week to talk about how to make my reading better. Every morning when I log on to my school account, I get reading with math and science themes that I like and other things I enjoy, too, like dancing. I can put a thumbs up or a thumbs down on the reading, which is so cool.

My robotics competition takes a lot of time, so the school helps me with that. I love dancing and take lessons on the weekends. My school lets me count dance towards my physical education credits, but not just the lessons. I made a portfolio of my dance work that has a video of my recital and all the training I did for it to show my phys ed teacher. It all counts for my grades. Funny thing, though – it doesn't even feel like schoolwork.

HIGH SCHOOL SCENARIO

I'm a junior at Westfield High School and my name is Devon. My friend Nina and I are getting what teachers call "mastery based" diplomas. It means we get to skip a lot of classroom schoolwork, but we still learn. Instead of having to stay inside a class, we can do projects and internships that have an impact in the real world and we get credit for the work we do.

My mother is a lawyer and professor. Because I am African-American, I am very interested in civil rights. I even had an internship at the Legal Aid Society, which gave me a whole new interest: Environmental justice. I never even heard of that term before my internship, but now I want to help urban neighborhoods improve their health and standard of living by addressing environmental issues. As part of my work, I wrote a report on differences in environmental policy across the New England states. It earned me credit for social studies and writing, but I am even more excited that Legal Aid read my report and promised to act on my research. To get credit for it, I put all my work in an electronic portfolio that is shared with my high school academic advisor and my mom. I know for sure now that I want to be a lawyer specializing in environmental law and policy.

Hi, I'm also a junior at Westfield. My parents came to Connecticut from Poland. I am interested in nature and am working with Devon on our community-based civics project graduation requirement. I am also working on a mastery-based diploma that I mapped out with my advisor when I came to Westfield as a freshman.

I had an internship last year at the Westfield water reservoir and purification plant. I just really wanted to do that because I love nature, not because I thought I was good at science. Guess what? All of a sudden my chemistry and biology classes started making more sense when I saw how the water plant works. Now my science teachers are helping me study on my own so I can take the Advanced Placement biology test for college credit without having to take AP bio!

Devon and I are doing this cool project for civics. We get to pick a community organization we would like to work with. Devon and I decided to develop a website for an environmental justice coalition that helps poor and minority communities get information on health and safety issues. It will help them know their legal rights. We will get graduation credits for writing and computer science as well as civics. Our teachers, our parents and the community can all see our work as it progresses on our electronic academic portfolios. My parents are happy. I tell them that sometimes I learn better outside the class than I do inside.

I'm learning a lot about environmental policy, but with Devon as my partner, I'm learning even more. He has been coding since elementary school, so he is helping me learn that as we put together the website. So by the time we are done, I'll know more about computers and coding, not just the environment – without having to sit in a classroom.