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 Institute for Alternative Futures

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Elementary School Principals Identify Digital Learning Technologies as a Top Trend

National distinguished elementary and middle school principals anticipate that digital learning technologies will significantly shape schools and their jobs in the next fifteen years, according to their evaluation of key trends and issues at a recent event in Washington, D.C.

The National Elementary School Principals has commissioned the Institute for Alternative Futures to study the future of the principalship as part of its Vision 2021 project. IAF Senior Futurist Marsha Rhea introduced futures methodologies and a first impression of key trends to the NAESP Board of Directors Oct. 25 and the 65 National Distinguished Principals Oct. 27.

In an initial survey of trends and issues, these school leaders reported that digital learning technologies will continue to change the way teachers teach and students learn. They find it challenging to keep up with today's digital natives, young people who have grown up with computers. Yet these technologies are spurring learning innovations that are transforming schools and leading some principals to wonder whether brick-and-mortar schools will be edged out by virtual schools.

Rhea observed that social institutions are much slower to change and for good reason. Social institutions have many attributes that people value. Parents may value safe and caring environments where young children can learn, or they may be unable to teach their children because they must work. For these reasons, virtual schools are unlikely to completely replace site-based schools any time soon.

The elementary and middle school principals were intrigued by the need to globalize the curriculum to prepare students to be global citizens. They also identified the educational needs of an increasingly multicultural society as a top priority. The nation's "minority-majority" society will be evident in younger generations first and schools are already on the frontlines of this societal transition. By 2021, 44.7% of children will be ethnic or racial minorities.

The principals also agreed on one current trend that will continue into the future, that education is not an economic priority. In the next 15 years, the nation must address Medicare, social security and rising health costs as well as mitigate long postponed infrastructure needs such as transportation and utilities. This is a particularly troubling outlook because these principals are already concerned about the persistent reality of uneven per pupil funding across school districts and states.

IAF will provide NAESP a futures report with an overview of trends and issues and research on a set of provocative forecasts. Next spring IAF futurists will work with selected leaders to frame 2021 scenarios for the profession. Next summer IAF and NAESP will build on this research about the future of the principal ship to set the future direction for the association as it responds to anticipated opportunities and challenges.

Forest Service Celebrates Inspiring New Vision in Leadership Summit

To align its culture and spread awareness of its new vision of "Courageous Conservation", the U.S.D.A. Forest Service Eastern Region held a summit with 100 regional, forest and district leaders in November. IAF Senior Futurist Marsha Rhea recounted the inspiring story of how the region shaped this shared vision through a collaborative and courageous process.

In a lunch address, she reconnected the leaders to the future possibilities that IAF identified through its futures research in 2005. IAF looked at the next quarter century of changes for the forest service during its year long futures research project for the Eastern Region of the Forest Service. Rhea concluded her lunch address with a powerful story of the outcomes the Eastern Region is anticipating through its five audacious goals: protecting large ecosystems across boundaries, connecting citizens to the land, walking the talk of sustainability, revolutionizing effectiveness and efficiency, and becoming an employer of choice.

"If these goals are audacious, a real stretch, they are because people had the courage to speak up for what they care most about doing in their career," Rhea said. She said IAF was proud to have been midwives to the participatory process that created the vision and goals. "The outcomes I described came from the people who worked on the strategic framework. I've simply told you the story you have chosen for yourself. It may sound truly amazing but that is how courage works."

The Eastern Region of the Forest Service has been courageous in their implementation of their goals. Personnel evaluations, at the highest level, now include a component based on the goals of courageous conservation. The goals are also being integrated into the upcoming budget in a systematic way and the Region's annual honors award program now speaks directly to the 5 audacious goals.

The vision of courageous conservation is also paying early dividends. Their vision has attracted top talent from other regions of the Forest Service and from outside of the government. The vision has also been a successful part of their outreach to stakeholders in the local communities around the forest.

After the leaders worked in small groups the first afternoon, one person described the vision and goals as an "inescapable conclusion" about the forest service's future. While the vision and goals were an "inescapable conclusion, it is not until they have been articulated that people can rally behind them as one organization.

As someone quipped on the first day, many visions only last as long as it takes to print the brochures. Through this leadership summit and its activities to incorporate that vision into their organization, the Eastern Region signaled a serious commitment to make the vision a living and inspiring message of unity for the organization.

DRA Project Selects a Portfolio of Efforts

The Disparities Reducing Advances (DRA) Project has created a portfolio of activities for reducing health disparities. The portfolio was developed from the actions and recommendations of the September meeting of the DRA Project Partners.

The DRA Project has assembled eight working groups based around the portfolio of activities. The first group of eight will be focused on **Community Based Prevention** while the second will focus on **Continuous, Appropriate Healthcare**.

The Prevention Institute will play a key role in the first working group, which will develop a "Marshall Plan" for preventing health disparities. This plan will focus on the **social determinants of health**, often overlooked elements of our lives, communities and environment that have a profound impact on our health.

Two other working groups will look to extend the positive lessons from two national programs. One will focus on lessons from the **National Healthy Eating and Active Living (HEAL)** programs. IAF will work closely with Active Living by Design and five other national programs to share their lessons on how healthy eating and active living can prevent health disparities. The other working group will work closely with the Centers for Disease Control and their **Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) 2010** program. IAF will also work with the Detroit City Year Project to help them in their efforts to **reduce obesity in public schools**.

To help provide continuous, appropriate care to underserved populations, the DRA Project will work closely with the Bureau of Primary Health Care at the Health Resources and Services Administration to develop a **planned care model** that provides quality health care integrated with preventative services. The DRA Project will also work with the Samueli Institute, HRSA and other Project Partners in developing an **integrated primary care model** that incorporates complementary and alternative methods of care into primary care for low income and minority populations.

The DRA Project will also work with its network of partners in expanding and promoting the use of **continuous, passive biomonitoring** and improving **consumer-patient navigation** of the healthcare system. The DRA Project will work with its partners BodyMedia, Inc. and Medical Automation Research Center (MARC) in extending biomonitoring technology to the care of low income and minority populations.

The DRA Project will also work with the many DRA Partners and others currently running consumer-patient navigation projects to focus on ways to advance the evidence base, share best practices and consider how emerging information technology can assist patients and navigators to be more effective. These partners include the National Cancer Institute, the American Cancer Society, the Intercultural Cancer Council, the Clinical Directors Network and Florida Hospital.

In addition to the eight working groups listed above, the DRA Project will continue to monitor and promote other disparity reducing advances including tobacco control, advances in modeling and tests for early stage cancer or pre-cancerous conditions.

Individuals or organizations interested in working with or support any of these efforts should contact the DRA Project at futurist@altfutures.com. For more information check the DRA Project website at www.altfutures.com/dra.

Biomonitoring Futures Project Releases Final Report

IAF has just published its final report from the Biomonitoring Futures Project. The report provides a wealth of information on current technology as well as providing forecasts for their future development and use to reduce health disparities.


Some of the most exciting advances in healthcare are occurring in biomonitoring. Advances in home and personal monitoring devices are providing new ways for patients and their healthcare providers to monitor health. Examples include personal monitoring systems already on the market that allow consumers to monitor caloric expenditure in real time and use automated software tools to track their health. Home monitoring devices are also available to prevent accidents and help the elderly and mentally ill lead independent lives.

Rapid advances in our understanding of molecular biology are creating new tests to screen for deadly diseases such as cancer. Many of these new technologies are creating digital data that can be stored and transmitted in our electronic health records. The Biomonitoring Futures Project, with local partners and patients, considered these potential advances and made recommendations for developing effective and affordable use of these emerging technologies in various underserved populations.

Biomonitoring enhancements, by themselves, will not reduce health disparities. However, biomonitoring can assist in the earlier detection of diseases, improve the treatment and reinforce healthy living for low income and marginalized populations.

The final report for the Biomonitoring Futures Project is available [here](#). If you are interested about learning more on biomonitoring or the DRA Project, contact Craig Bettles at cbettles@altfutures.com.

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