



2016 Personalized Learning & Student Success Summit

Summary from the NMC



Photo by Laura Adviento, Young Invincibles



#imagineif

The 2016 Personalized Learning & Student Success Summit at SXSWedu

Imagine if...

Imagine if hundreds of people attending a major national education event committed to making one change when they got back home, to trying one new idea, to adopting one new model.

That was the premise.

Imagine if, through the impact of hundreds of small new efforts, we could spark a national commitment to student success, and marshal the essence of innovation to effect progress on campuses all over the country. In the next ten years, the US is going to need to grow the number of college graduates to 40 million, but at our current success rates and capacity, the nation's postsecondary institutions will fall short of that need by some 11 million graduates. At the same time, we lose nearly half of students who most aspire to filling that need — students disproportionately from low income, minority, immigrant, or single parent families, and other disadvantaged groups.



Imagine if, through the efforts of educators all over the nation, we could more fully realize the promise that higher education holds for every American.

Imagine if we moved from losing all these students — all too often dashing their dreams in the process — to helping them succeed. That is the only way that a decade from now, we'll have a hope of meeting the need for those 11 million new graduates every year. We have to raise graduation rates all over the nation, and significantly.

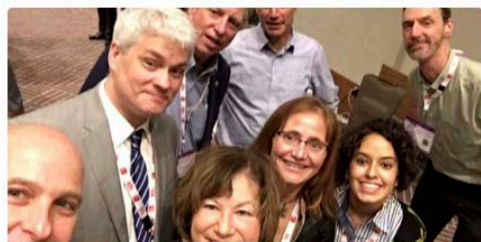
The [Personalized Learning & Student Success Summit](#), convened by the New Media Consortium and made possible through a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, as part of the 2016 SXSWedu conference in Austin, Texas, was designed to provoke thinking and dialog about how to do that. Working within an ambitious 90-day planning timeframe, more than 100 organizations committed to expanding student success, 177 individuals

representing those organizations, and 79 outstanding presenters came together for three days of conversations and workshops in the middle of one of the fastest growing educational events in the country. All of them were devoted to exploring innovative and proven ideas and engaged in crafting solutions for widespread implementation. More than 1,600 people — almost a quarter of the entire SXSWedu audience — joined them by taking part in one or more of the eleven sessions that were part of this event.

The summit kicked off with a hands-on search for answers to common problems. Some 65 institutions spent the morning working together to identify common challenges to scaling new ideas in higher education, and how to solve them. That afternoon, the innovative ideas

of 19 organizations and institutions creating new, evidence-driven approaches and tools to support personalized learning and student success were highlighted in *ImagineCon*. This conference-within-a-conference used an exhibition-style showcase to catalyze deep one-on-one individual discussions with people working hard on new ideas and solutions. A Town Hall gave attendees the chance to comment on the overall strategies behind the foundation's Postsecondary Success initiative. Over the three days, breakout sessions gave SXSWedu attendees the chance to learn from the experiences of 35 different campuses and organizations working to advance student success.

 **mariana @matitot** 3/8/16
Table 1 after solving a question of sustainability & innovation
@YoungInvincible #SXSWedu #imagineif

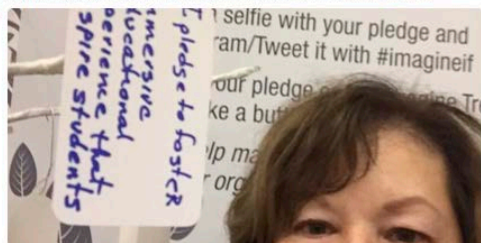


← 2 3

 **Young Invincibles @YoungInvincible** 3/8/16
Imagine Tree - "I pledge to work on policies that will affect in a positive way, all communities." - Juan tumblr.co/ZLMUoh232gL62
#imagineif

← 2 2

 **Wendy Shapiro @wshapiro** 3/8/16
I'm pledging to make a positive change in edu! #imagineif



← 2 6

The sense of promise and imagination in action was everywhere. The symbol of the event was the *Imagine Tree*, prominently placed at each major session. By adding a tag to it, people brought it to life, and documented their commitment to go back to their institutions and try a new idea, learn a new skill, or implement a new model. The tree symbolized all these commitments, our collective hopes, and the promise of making a difference, no matter how small.

In every one of the eleven summit sessions — most of which were standing-room-only — people leaned in to explore new ideas, the experiences of early adopters, and most importantly, how to begin to solve the challenges of access and equity. The discussions were rich. Solutions-focused. Presenters shared their real-world experiences, their challenges, and their successes; attendees responded with thoughtful questions and comments, and spilled out of sessions engaged and continuing the discussions with each other.

Each day of the summit overflowed with ideas. The NMC synthesized these discussions in daily eblasts sent to the entire network of grantees and partners, and shared more broadly on social media. Around the country and beyond, more than 350,000 people followed the excitement taking place at the Personalized Learning & Student Success Summit in Austin. In

Twitter and other social media, the dialog extended outward via more than 500 tweets, collectively seen 2.3 million times.

Themes and memes abounded online and in the hallways. *#imagineif we could help a million more students graduate ... solve challenges of sustainability and innovation ... take data seriously ... accommodate all scales of learners ... personalize advising.*

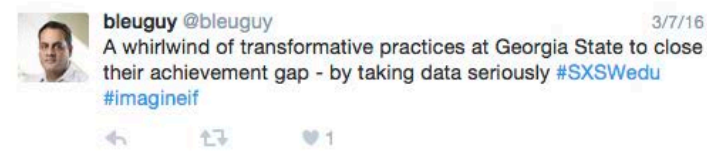
These were themes that seven higher education leaders also addressed in the opening breakout session on the first day of the event. Timothy Renick of Georgia State University, for example, gave an inspiring overview of his institution's use of student data and targeted interventions that have eliminated the gap in graduation rates between low-income and

minority students and the rest of its student body. Zakiya Smith, of the Lumina Foundation, provided an enlightening account of her organization's research into college affordability and the utility of an affordability benchmark in creating alignment among policymakers and institutions. These messages resonated: 100% of respondents to the session evaluations rated the session as highly relevant to their work.

The voices of college students, young leaders pulled from campuses across Texas, provided a sense of urgency and a dose of reality in sessions throughout the summit. Organized by the [Young Invincibles](#) youth advocacy group, these articulate young men and women challenged the common wisdom in session after session, and asked pressing questions. Especially in the Innovating Higher Education problem-solving workshop, they were essential in keeping the student perspective in the foreground of the discussions at every table. Several evaluation respondents praised the diverse perspectives and discussion of real examples and strategies, eliciting comments like this one: *"The group of notable participants was impressive. Having the opportunity to interact and listen to discussions rich with real examples of struggles and successes was*

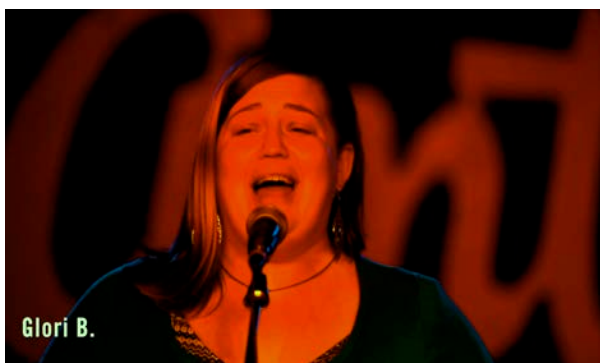
invaluable."

[Four young poets](#) were part of the Celebration of Student Success reception, and brought a very personal narrative to what it means to be young today. Glori B., a middle school teacher,



is a recent college graduate whose students are just beginning to think about their chances at the American Dream:

I can tell you about my classroom. About consistency and boundaries, about consequences and phone calls home. I can tell you which kids ask for food, which kids ask for hugs, which kids take the blades out of the pencil sharpeners, which kids you do not give scissors to. I can tell you how much I love my job and that some days, I don't. I can tell you how important it feels to be with them while I am but this is not your truth to hold. I change their names when I write them into poems....



I've been given these children this year. They arrive in my classroom and doesn't that mean something. Maybe a miracle is anything that seems simultaneously impossible and true. I look at my one life. See a single thread. One yarn in a great tapestry, see it bend and curve, see it knot and twist into these new brightly colored threads. They will go on weaving into the material long after I have folded away. But I'm afraid that some of them will be cut short if they fray out of the pattern.

The excitement of the Personalized Learning & Student Success Summit was palpable, but the event was a point in time. The work behind the summit, and the ideas it promoted, are part of a much larger picture that has been developing for more than two years. What is important is not so much what happened at the summit, but what will happen because of the summit, and the ideas it may catalyze because it took place.

So what comes next?

As Rahim Rajan noted in the [documentary video](#) Bill Frakes made about the summit, "Imagine if is a great starting question to help us think about a future that we all want." The success of the summit will be measured by how it continues the key conversations that took place in Austin. For attendees, the next steps are as simple and straightforward as the commitments they hung on the *Imagine Tree*, and bringing the solutions identified for common challenges in the Innovating Higher Education workshop back to their campuses. The discussions around the 15 common challenges to scaling innovation in higher education are being expanded into a white paper that will take those discussions back to the field, and expand the insights gained when 135 campus leaders, edtech companies, and students came together.



SXSWedu Day 2 | March 8, 2016



Conversations and commitments were flowing at the inaugural ImagineCon today where attendees pledged to make positive changes in higher education at the Imagine Tree. The Young Invincible student Juan S., pictured above, pledged "to work on policies that will affect all communities in a positive way." Special thanks to all of the exhibitors who transported their projects from all over the country to share them at ImagineCon. [See photos, insights & more at #ImagineIf]

For the grantees and campuses that were part of the program, the key is to continue to share their stories, and to continue to refine their skills at sharing them. We need more data around what success looks like, and a much more nuanced sense of the challenges that impede that success.

For the NMC, as organizers of the summit, several important steps lie ahead. Throughout the event, the impressions of attendees, of participants, and of the presenters and thought leaders who were on the program were captured in social media, in images and notes, in visual recordings, and in video. These are being analyzed and reviewed for insights, and will soon be available in an online archive. The documentary video produced by Bill Frakes has been shared with all who participated. All of these are opportunities to continue the vital conversations that happened as part of the summit.

All of us are working hard to find the right messages, and learning how to effectively carry them forward. We're trying new, evidence-driven ideas and approaches, to see which are effective and which offer the potential and promise of bringing the work to a much broader audience.



The Personalized Learning & Student Success Summit was one of the first of those efforts, and the goal is to make 2017 the year when we truly make awareness happen — awareness not only of the big issues, but also of the many efforts that are underway to address them.

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2016 Personalized Learning & Student Success Summit

at SXSWedu
March 7-9, 2016, Austin, TX

3
Days
11
Events

7,218

**SXSWedu
Participants**

1,616 Summit attendees
177 community members
100 organizations
45 ImagineCon exhibitors
34 Presenters and facilitators

2.3 million

**Twitter
impressions**

imagineif

500 Tweets
149 accounts
351,853 unique impressions

27%

from Higher Ed

top 4 attendee affiliations
corporations
college / university admin
not-for-profits
college / university staff

*I pledge to flip
my class.*

*I pledge to keep fighting to
give faculty a stronger voice
in the innovation decision-
making process.*

*I pledge to include
student voices in
higher ed decisions!*

*I pledge to continue
to advocate for
students & families.*

*I pledge to break
the one-size-fits-
all approach.*

*I pledge to help teachers
successfully integrate fun,
engaging curriculum into
their class.*

*I pledge to
always keep the
student in mind.*

“Fantastic way to bring leaders in a room and share ideas, solutions, and challenges.”