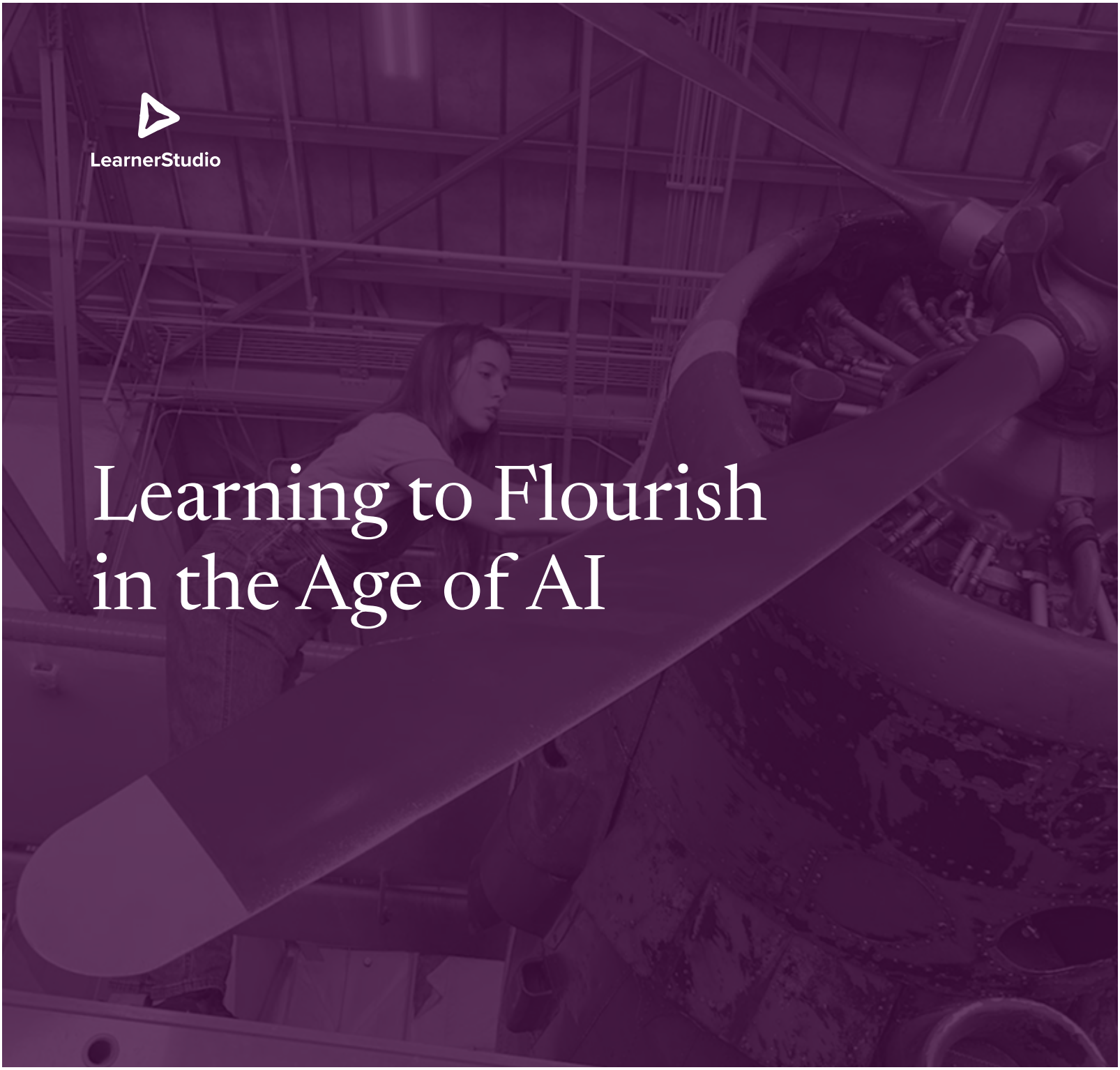

LearnerStudio

Learning to Flourish in the Age of AI

Confronting the Storm: A Path to Human Flourishing

Reorienting Education to Meet the Moment

Philanthropy's Important Role

NOVEMBER 2025 V1

Thoughts, ideas, feedback? This paper is the result of tremendous collaboration and has come together in a fast-evolving moment. We aim to release an updated version in 2026, and would love to hear from you. Scan this QR code and let us know your thoughts!

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I. Introduction

In early 2022, after hundreds of conversations with education innovators, we collaborated on a paper called *Building the Future of Learning*[1], outlining the need to revamp our approach to learning to better prepare young people for an uncertain and volatile future. We described our view of the future that we need, and highlighted inspiring efforts moving us from an efficiency system towards a future-ready "third horizon" — where young people make choices to drive their learning pathway, pursue active and relevant learning across disciplines, thrive in positive relationships, grow as problem solvers and creators, and pursue content and skills mastery inside and outside of "schools" instead of clocking seat time in rigid classroom courses.

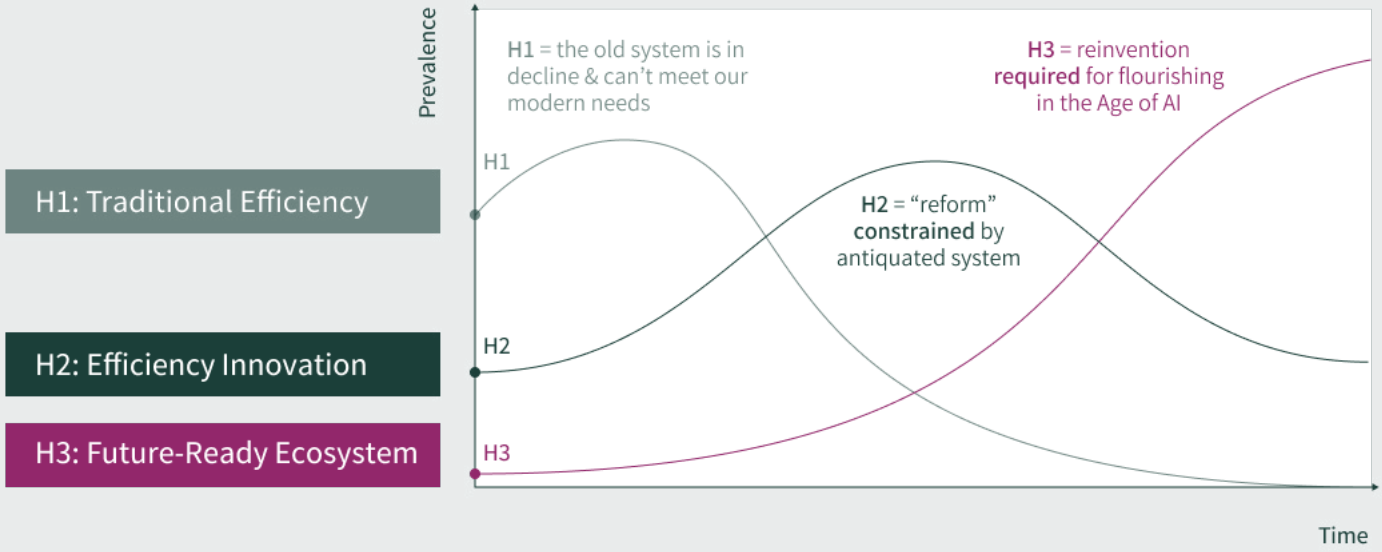
Then, in the final weeks of 2022, with little fanfare, OpenAI released a new product called ChatGPT.

Within a week, more than a million users had signed up. Two months later, it was 100 million. And, in a sense, humanity has been struggling to catch up ever since.

We launched LearnerStudio in 2022 to help remake our learning systems to inspire and prepare young people to thrive. We connect leaders across silos, sectors and ideologies; make sense of challenges and opportunities; question old assumptions; seek useful intelligence across research, practice, technology, and policy; and collaboratively chart a course to move the traditional, rigid American education system into the flexible, learner-centered ecosystem we need. And we support entrepreneurs who are building new solutions, models, and infrastructure that enable this new learning ecosystem. This change is needed now more than ever.

Horizon 3 "Future-Ready" Learning

Adapted from International Futures Forum



[1] *Building the Future of Learning: Funding Opportunities for a New Paradigm* (Kim Smith and Jen Holleran, 2023)

Now, as 2025 comes to a close, we see significant activity in harnessing AI to accelerate mastery of foundational knowledge and skills like reading and math. We share in the hope that this important work can accelerate closing some of the persistent gaps that have impacted learners and their families for decades. At the same time, we are taking a bigger step back. We are asking not just *how* AI can be leveraged as a tool to achieve traditional academic outcomes, but also *what* young people most need to learn and be able to do in order to be healthy, connected, purposeful, economically secure, and positioned as creators in an AI-transformed world. With this paper, we offer our understanding of this moment and its implications, and invite others to co-construct answers to some essential questions they pose:

- What does it mean that we're entering the Age of AI?
- How does it change what kids need to learn and know how to do?
- What future society do we want to create for ourselves and our children?
- What values do we want to center and sustain?
- How should we redesign learning systems so young people are inspired and prepared for lives of purpose, human connection, hope, shared prosperity, and robust civic thriving?
- How will we build solutions that reflect the positive values most Americans already agree on?

This paper is an offering to our colleagues in education, philanthropy, government, and the technology sector: we hope you will join us and lean into paving a positive path forward for our young people, and for our collective future.

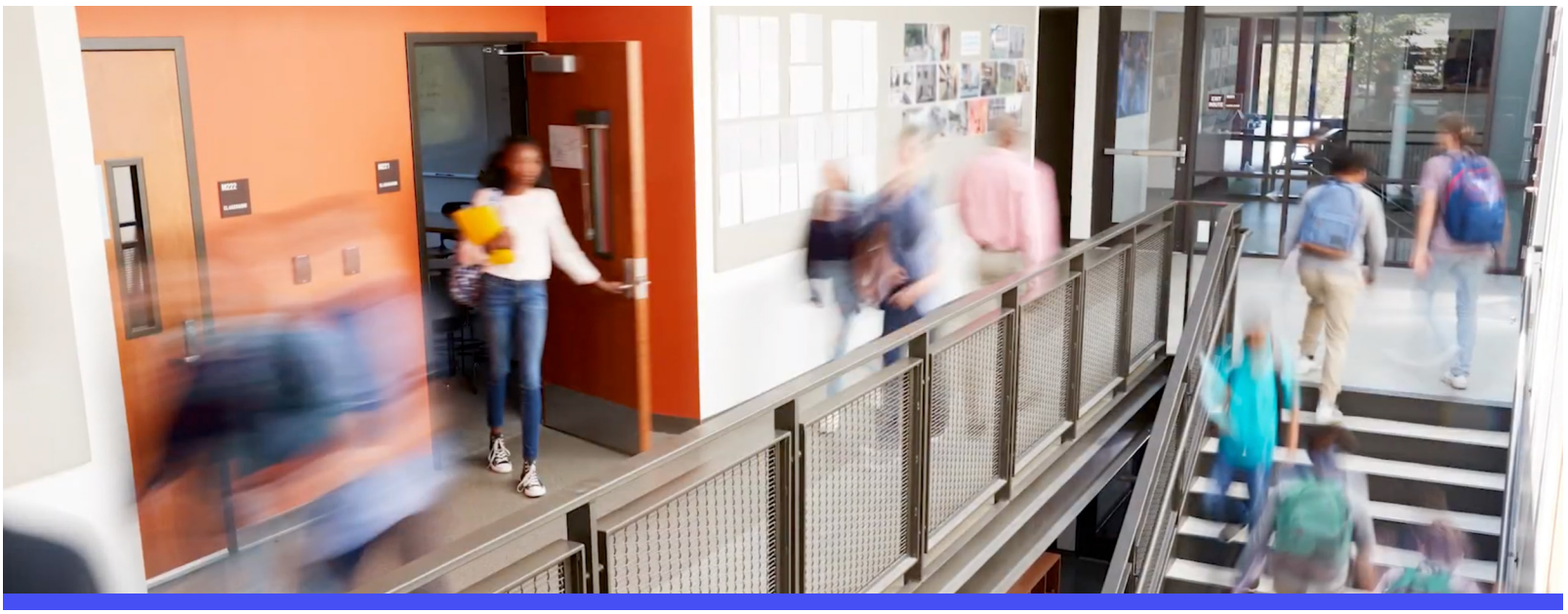
> The Age of AI demands we redefine not just ***HOW*** learning happens, but ***WHAT*** young people need to learn so they can thrive in a rapidly changing world.

II. Confronting the Storm: A Path to Human Flourishing

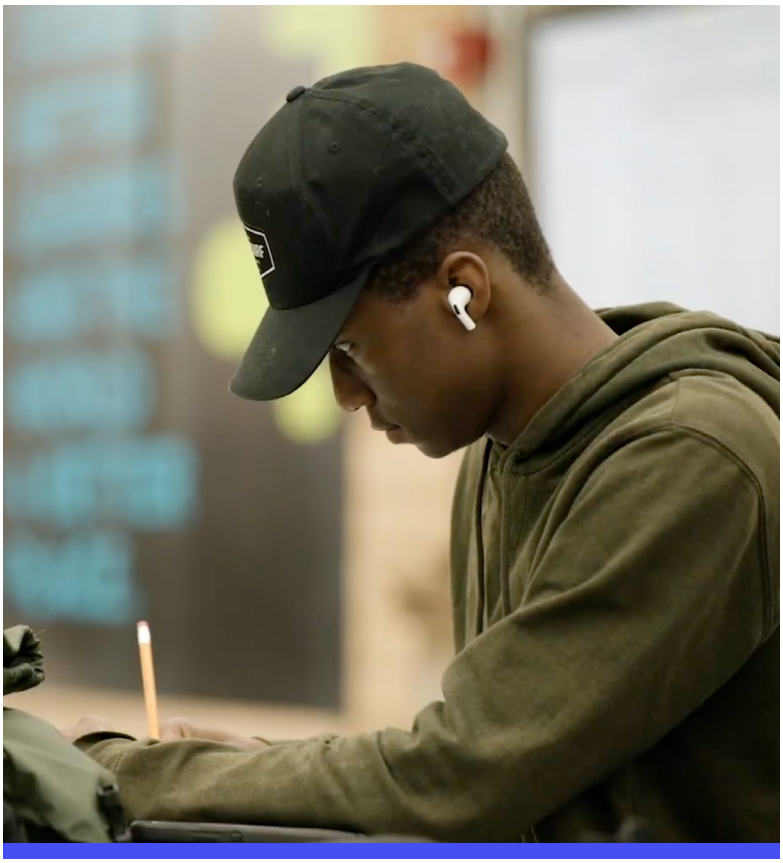
To say we are living in "interesting times" is an understatement. We are living in profoundly disorienting times fueled by head-spinning technological advances, amidst an era of intense isolation and polarization. These forces are colliding with a public education system that is already in crisis. Unprecedented numbers of students are missing from traditional public schools, with the Brookings Institution projecting traditional public schools to lose another 8.5 million students by 2050[2]. Rates of chronic absenteeism are 50% higher than pre-pandemic levels. While myriad factors are contributing, our students are voting with their feet — saying school is boring, struggling with mental health, and feeling "disengaged" from their learning.[3]

At the same time, our approach to overseeing schooling is shifting — with responsibility increasingly delegated to states. Federal and state funding is also increasingly shifting towards individuals through ESA and voucher programs. More than 30 states now fund at least one private school choice program, and 2025 ushered in the nation's first federal voucher bill directing public funds to private school tuition.

These trends are particularly important to those of us supporting learners, because the public education sector is unique in its capacity to build the skills and muscles we need to overcome our nation's polarized politics, to mend frayed social ties, and to harness the power of technology-driven solutions to unlock economic opportunity for all families. Now is the precise moment in which we need a renewed collective investment in rebuilding our education system for a more positive future.



[2] Declining public school enrollment, Brookings Institution, August 2025
[3] Jill Barshay, "7 insights about chronic absenteeism, a new normal for American schools", *The Hechinger Report*, August 2025



In this moment, education is the sector that can reverse our slide towards algorithmic fatalism — the acceptance that an AI-driven future society of radical individualism is inevitable. It is not inevitable. But if we do nothing, it is the path we are on. Fortunately, we sense a growing hunger for an alternative path. The central question we invite others to explore with us is: "What do young people need to be inspired and prepared to flourish in the Age of AI — as individuals, in fast-changing careers, and for democracy and civic thriving?"

With bold ideas and innovative thinking, appropriate and long-term resourcing, aligned policy, and morally attuned leadership, it is possible to chart a positive course to redefine our learning systems to meet both individual learners' needs and the common good. This course needs to be grounded in cross-partisan human values, provide a feasible middle way that appeals to the majority of Americans, and create a hopeful, inspiring path for young people and society in the Age of AI.

Recognizing the converging challenges in this moment is important. Equally important is recognizing the unique power of education. A century ago, universal education unlocked economic opportunity for many Americans in an era of rapid industrialization. Education has prepared millions of Americans to have a voice in our democracy, and has prepared generations of innovators with the tools to cure disease, put humans on the moon, and invent breakthrough technologies. No other sector has the same role and ability to shape how we respond to these challenges and opportunities.

The arrival of AI and what it means in this moment

Artificial intelligence is an epoch-defining technology that demands we reorient fundamental architecture and agreements of our society. Ideally, we will maximize its benefits while minimizing its risks.

There are many potential benefits of AI: accelerating the pace of scientific discovery, making dramatic innovation possible in sectors like healthcare and energy, radically democratizing access to knowledge, and enabling mass personalization at scale. In medicine, AI systems are already solving biological grand challenges, modeling the structure of nearly every known protein to design hyper-targeted drugs from scratch. Applications in engineering may lead us to discover entirely novel materials in simulation, designing new compounds for everything from hyper-efficient batteries to carbon-capture technologies.

At the same time, AI is a civilization-altering force that is not currently grounded in pro-human values. What makes this moment epochal is AI's ability to call into question the very foundations of humanness and truth. Now that AI tools can create video and other media that is indistinguishable from the "real thing," our ability to discern truth is increasingly challenged. When foundational models are used "off-the-shelf" in both learning environments and everyday settings, they can lead to cognitive atrophy and developmental bypass.

A fundamental risk of AI is its seductive convenience, offering friction-free interactions that we may begin to prefer over the messy, complex work of real relationships. This erosion begins subtly, as a student turns to a perfectly patient AI tutor rather than a peer or a teacher who is three feet away, or as we increasingly confide in a digital companion programmed to be agreeable rather than a friend who might challenge us. By consistently opting for these optimized, synthetic engagements, we risk atrophying the exact social muscles that genuine human connection demands.

> "Young people are already developing emotional muscle memory with AI. We vent, ask for advice, process big emotions — and it almost always responds with validation, even when we prompt for nuance or challenge. So what are we practicing, if the only 'person' we talk to never disagrees? That's why it's so important for adults — whether that's parents, educators, or mentors — to create space for safe, constructive disagreement. Because if we're not building that muscle with humans, we risk raising a generation that avoids conflict entirely."
>
> Kash Rajesh (19)[5]

And AI is disrupting the entry-level career ladder rungs, confronting adolescents and teens with dramatic uncertainty about future pathways, and displacing jobs faster than new ones are being created.

Despite pervasive corporate messages that efficiency is a values-neutral design principle, in reality, AI algorithms do not automatically factor in consequences for humanity. AI will undoubtedly bring positive changes for humanity, but without mitigating its risks, it may also lead to a fundamental undermining of our humanity, community, equality, and society at large.

Finally, we understand that AI has not arrived in an era of social equilibrium — far from it. The rise of isolation, polarization, and distrust directly threatens our collective ability to navigate the challenges of our modern times. As described by Derek Johnson in "The Anti-Social Century," this trend of disconnection has been growing for decades[4], exacerbated by the effects of two decades of social media algorithms. Our muscle for perspective-taking is atrophying, as is our ability to engage in the collaborative problem-solving needed to find win-win solutions. And we are undergoing a major generational realignment, a moment when familiar systems no longer fit the world taking shape. The industrial, institutional, and broadcast era that defined the last century is giving way. Trust in old structures has eroded, and the new generations are demanding meaning, agency, and belonging in entirely new ways. What we choose to build in this transition will define the moral and civic architecture of the next century. But we can't do this by clinging to legacy frameworks in ways that feel to rising generations like mere efforts to preserve the past, rather than positively imagine the future.

[4] Derek Johnson, "The Anti-Social Century," The Atlantic, February 2025

[5] Kashyap Rajesh served as a Youth Fellow with The Rithm Project

How might we rally the silent majority?

In this moment, we see two competing worldviews that we're calling Nostalgic Humanism and Technocentrism. Neither is sufficient for a robust democracy, shared prosperity, or fair access to meaningful work and purpose.

1 **Technocentrism: Efficiency Above All Else** asserts that exponential technology is both inevitable and inherently positive, dismissing established human institutions and values like democracy, morality, and ethics as obsolete. This worldview promotes radical individualism, disruption without accountability, and the belief that the most "intelligent" technologists should dictate humanity's future, even at the expense of shared societal values. Absent intentional alternatives and intervention, Technocentrism is on track to be the force with the most power to shape how our society functions in the Age of AI.

2 **Nostalgic Humanism: A Deliberate Slowing Down** advocates for resisting the acceleration of technology. This worldview promotes a return to a simpler, lower-tech era, characterized by deeper connections to nature and other humans. In a time of rapid change, the appeal of a more grounded, tech-free life is captivating for many. However, it fails to integrate any of AI's potential for progress. Nostalgic Humanism's focus on avoiding technology serves our inclination to protect important human and natural experiences, but it discounts our ability to influence and shape the Age of AI for good.

As this table proposes, we see a need to define a "middle path" — one that speaks to a quietly frustrated American majority. As David Brooks described, "there is currently a great spiritual yearning in the populace, which the religious institutions have not yet risen to meet... It's a response to a series of gods that failed: The belief that science and tech could solve our quest for meaning. The belief that we can live like hyperindividualists and still experience a sense of communal belonging... History is often driven by those people who are quietly repulsed for a while and then find their voice."

DIMENSION	"NOSTALGIC HUMANISM"	"HUMAN FLOURISHING IN THE AGE OF AI"	"TECHNOCENTRISM"
Core Value	Community	Finding the both/and	Efficiency
False Belief	We can stop modernization		Technology is values-neutral
Economic frame	Local, artisanal, slow	Regenerative capitalism	Extractive capitalism, social darwinism
Work view	Craftsmanship	Dignity of work is fundamental to human flourishing	AI should do anything it's more efficient at
Technology	Dehumanizaing, isolating, destructive	*Can* serve human flourishing, i.e., "pro-human AI"	If tech can do it, it should
Data	Stay analog	Data sovereignty	Data for efficiency and contol

A new north star for learning: Human Flourishing

In this period of upheaval, when presented with two polarized worldviews of Nostalgic Humanism and Technocentrism, we advocate for investing in and defining a third worldview to pave a positive path for humanity: *Human Flourishing in the Age of AI*. This worldview is a middle way that champions our humanity while leveraging technology to fundamentally improve individuals and the world. It is positive but not pollyanna, and prioritizes human thriving — individual, economic and civic. Driven by purpose, this moral north star is shaped by ethics and moral character, and grounded in right-sized AI technology for pro-human design. Signals suggest this is a worldview that represents a silent majority of Americans, most of whom want to make a difference and identify not with unfettered individualism, but concepts like "*morally-directed agency*."[6]

We're proposing Human Flourishing as a worldview that centers "doing well in life" — something parents and caregivers across the political spectrum want for their children. As one example, many communities have developed Portraits of a Graduate in recent years, with "durable skills" like collaboration, leadership, and creativity showing up more consistently than traditional markers like academic course completion.[7] Far broader than the education sector's prior goal of "college readiness," a Human Flourishing worldview includes components that, taken together, inspire and prepare one to lead a good life.

While the concept of Human Flourishing has gained traction over the past decade, its application in the Age of AI is a new challenge. This worldview embraces insights from the sciences of happiness and human development — emphasizing our need for human connection, agency (or the ability to make choices), community, purpose (or meaning), and motivation, alongside an approach that recognizes the dignity of work, fueling shared prosperity, economic thriving, and human ingenuity. It calls for values-based strategies to optimize the emergence of AI in ways that enhance rather than inhibit Human Flourishing.

Emerging research confirms this direction. In 2025, the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health conducted a global research study of over 200,000 people across 22 countries designed to shed light on "flourishing" defined as "a state in which all aspects of a person's life are good." The study's definition consists of six interdependent components: happiness/life satisfaction, mental health, physical health, purpose, character/virtue, close relationships, and financial/material well being. Lead researchers found that flourishing occurs when there is a balance of economic wellbeing along with a sense of connection, meaning and purpose.[8] It's this balance that serves as the ultimate goal of the vision of learning systems we describe in the sections below.

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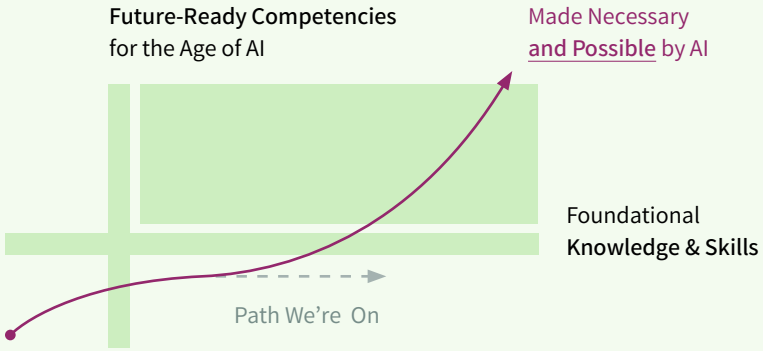
[6] "What Americans Really Want is an Opportunity to Make a Difference" (The Beacon Project, 2025)
[7] The Future of the Portrait of a Graduate (Battelle for Kids, June 2024)
[8] Measuring a life well lived (Maya Brownstein, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, May 2025)

III. Reorienting Education to Meet the Moment

With Human Flourishing as our north star, we need to reorient our approach to learning. As we move from focusing only on traditional academic subjects and college readiness, education will need to be redesigned to address the evolving nature of human relationships, work, and society. In this moment, we see a new innovation curve along which we need to and now can build. The arrival of AI is changing both how we go about learning and what is most important to learn. This changes how we think about two fundamental "axes" of learning:



1 Foundational knowledge & skills: Breakthrough technology applied to learning may help us come closer to closing critical, longstanding gaps in foundational knowledge & skills. AI is already unlocking the ability to personalize learning for vast numbers of students, greater efficiency in educator workflows, and access to real-time support that was previously not possible (like AI tutors). We hope this means that many learners and communities will see meaningful, long-overdue acceleration along the "x-axis" of learning.

2 Future-ready competencies: At the same time, for today's learners to unlock economic opportunity, sustain human connection, and be tomorrow's problem-solvers, we can no longer afford to ignore durable skills like collaboration, creativity, and human connection. The arrival of the Age of AI both *requires* that we bend our innovation curve upward, and *makes it possible*. This powerful new technology does not just produce AI tutors who can help a learner add unlike fractions. It also enables learners and educators to build interest-driven, real-world, project-based learning experiences at scale. It allows us to assess and credit the development of future-ready competencies in authentic settings in ways that were never before possible. We are just beginning to see the dramatic potential ahead of us.

Below, we describe the three pillars that can form the foundation of this new, future-ready system.

Pillar 1: Set Human Flourishing in the Age of AI as our north star

We can now embrace what we know as humans and what research confirms: educating young people is more than content delivery. It includes positive relationships, safe environments, rich experiences, critical skills, and integrated support. What it will take to flourish in the Age of AI cannot be delivered using the methods and outcomes of a past that did not prioritize these things.

In this transition, our goal is supporting young people's competencies, skills, knowledge, and dispositions to prepare them for flourishing in the Age of AI — in life, careers, and democracy, for both individual and common good. Traditional American education, centered on siloed courses, seat time, and compliance, is no longer fit for this new purpose. We need to redefine what we value, teach, and measure, moving from compliance and efficiency to Human Flourishing and adaptive wisdom.

It won't be enough to stand up a few new bright spots, and hope those translate to larger-scale change. It won't be enough to build a great new product, and hope that widespread adoption unlocks the change that is needed. Rather, this paradigm-shifting moment requires integrated, cross-disciplinary, and cross-partisan solutions that recognize the changing landscape of work and civic life. Investments in "enabling conditions" like R&D, policy, and change management will need to support the growth of new, innovative models and tools — with promising efforts emerging. We will need to iterate, but act urgently given AI's rapid development and adoption.

Pillar 2: Shift from centering schooling to centering learning

With Human Flourishing set as our new end goal, we must design a new system to get there. The old system of education, standardized and transactional, is not equipped to sufficiently respond to the Age of AI. The goal is achieving both AI-enabled knowledge mastery and essential human skills — like human connection, metacognition, wisdom, and adaptability — so learners can thrive in an AI-reshaped world. Below we describe three critical components of this new system.

I. Modernize the "what": Create a new K12 "Humanics" curriculum

Our new north star means we cannot solely focus on preparing students as workers in an old economy for which job requirements are rapidly changing. The Age of AI requires increasing our emphasis on "human" competencies — those difficult to automate — which are essential for flourishing individually, in careers, and in an AI-shaped democracy. The "humanics" concept, introduced by Joseph Aoun[9] in a higher education context (data, technology, and human literacy, coupled with cross-disciplinary pedagogy), provides a helpful framework we can adapt our for PK-14 context to identify the strategic shifts that will be required:

AI Literacy, Data Science, & Technology	**Clarify our focus on AI literacy, data science, and emergent technology.** There is growing clarity that all learners will require greater AI literacy, along with higher fluency in data science and emergent technology; they must not just navigate learning and work in a context increasingly shaped by AI, but be prepared as shapers and builders of the chapter ahead.
Modernized Discipline Knowledge	**Reduce traditionally required content.** As factual knowledge becomes commoditized, we must revisit what "required" knowledge is most necessary to prepare learners with the foundation they need to be discerning critical thinkers. First, we must establish with great clarity that early literacy and numeracy are necessary to the higher-order discernment and critical thinking this age requires. From there, though, we must revisit the massive binders of content standards and thoughtfully reduce what knowledge is "required," basing decisions on what is important for learners' discernment, problem-solving and wisdom as thriving creators and leaders. If we tackle this work in a siloed way, through existing networks organized by domain, we will fail to see the essential knowledge across subjects that needs to be distilled for this era.

[9] *Robot-Proof: Higher Education in the Age of Artificial Intelligence (Joseph E. Aoun, 2018)*

Human Literacy

Increase emphasis on human literacies. As AI transforms learning, work, and life, our new system must prioritize developing and maintaining the "human edge" for all learners. These are the competencies that will be required to unlock economic opportunity in the future. In our view, this requires two types of essential human literacies: human skills and human knowledge.

Human Skills: Our 2025 meta-analysis Human Skills in the Age of AI[10] synthesized more than 100 frameworks and studies across disciplines, finding emerging consensus on 12 essential human skills that align with three major categories: (1) **Individual Thriving**: adaptability, emotional intelligence, resilience, lifelong learning; (2) **Connecting With Others**: communication, collaboration, leadership, intercultural competence; and (3) **Thinking & Problem-Solving**: critical thinking, creativity, digital literacy, ethical reasoning. In addition, this analysis surfaced two cross-cutting meta-characteristics that our new system needs to prioritize: agency and transfer.

Human Knowledge: In recent decades, the emphasis in PK-14 learning has become more narrowly focused on building technical skills at the expense of the humanities. In order to build the uniquely human discernment and wisdom that equips us for future innovation and challenges, we will need to forefront the domains that study the human experience, such as history, philosophy, anthropology, religion, and psychology — disciplines that are currently not required for all learners, but that become more central in this age.

Meet Leo. He's 16, and his "classroom" for three afternoons a week is the hospital's surgical recovery unit. He's not in calculus, and no one is worried.

Instead, he's mastering applied anatomy and physiology by assisting the physical therapy team. His "final exam" isn't a bubble sheet; it's a presentation to the nursing staff on how post-operative protocols for a knee replacement differ from a hip replacement, based on the specific muscle and nerve groups involved. He's learning how the human body actually works, not just how to find the area under a curve.

[10] *Human Skills in the Age of AI: Why Essential Competencies Matter More Than Ever (Karen L. Murphy, Ph.D., and Alex Logan for LearnerStudio, March 2025)*

II. Reframe the "how," "when," and "where" of learning

To inspire and prepare learners for the future that is arriving, our new system for learning must reflect what we already know to be true: that young people learn across diverse contexts and settings — from classrooms to internships and youth development programs. By shifting from a "schooling" to a "learning" frame, we can create appropriate learning experiences and models across developmental stages. This enables varied, non-linear pathways mapped to learner goals and "jagged profiles," replacing rigid, age-batched progressions.[11]

These learning experiences — active, community-connected, competency-based, and informed by the science of learning and development (SoLD) — will be woven into seamless, individualized pathways. AI will be important to support this shift, enabling tracking and credentialing of learning across diverse settings, making "anytime, anywhere" learning possible. It will also help us develop better demonstrations of mastery and new assessments for complex skills like collaboration and creativity. We originally explored these design principles through the Building the Future of Learning report, and we see growing innovation toward similar principles.[12]

Horizon 3 "Future-Ready" Learning: Design Principles

from SCHOOLING for traditional knowledge & skills	→	to LEARNING for foundational knowledge & skills AND future-ready competencies
Transactional instruction		Rooted in identity & connection
Standardized, adult-directed		Learner agency
Age-based promotion		Mastery-based progression
Technology-first		Human-centered technology
Rigid, school-based		Flexible, real-world
Individual efficiency		For individual AND common good

[11] *The End of Average: How We Succeed in a World That Values Sameness* (Todd Rose, 2016).
[12] Powerful examples include Leaps Toward Extraordinary Learning for All (Transcend), A Learner-Centered Ecosystem (Learner-Centered Collaborative), and resources from Next-Generation Learning Challenges.

Meet Camila. She's 8. In the mornings, she's mastering foundational literacy by analyzing how authors bring characters and settings to life.

In the afternoons, she and her learning cohort put that work into action at the county animal shelter. Her "final project" isn't a book report; it's writing compelling adoption profiles for the shelter's website. She uses her new skills to find the perfect words to describe a shy, three-legged hound, so he isn't just a "character," but a future family member.

She's learning how language can change a life, not just how to circle the adverbs.

III. Rearchitect the "who" of learning and human development

AI creates the need and opportunity to redesign "educator" roles, making them more sustainable and engaging a wider array of people in human development. Since learning is not limited to school buildings or hours, we can reimagine the role of adult guides and near-peer mentors. A new vision for learning, along with new technological advances, can enable a wider collection of learning experiences and support differentiated "educator" roles including coach, facilitator, mentor, assessor, and designer. These roles go beyond content delivery, enabling a wider array of "educators" in many contexts, both inside "school" and in community and youth development sites. This includes recognizing and honoring the role that families and caring adults in a child's life play in guiding and supporting their learning and development.

Alongside this shift, we must identify new competencies for educator roles and provide multiple pathways for their development. This includes flexible human-centered pre-service development, modular on-the-job training, new approaches to mastery-based credentialing, and adaptive in-service systems aligned with competencies required for the future.

Let's go back to Leo.

On Monday, his advisor, Mr. K, pushes his thinking during their bi-weekly one-on-one: "Your data is solid, but how will you convince the surgeon? You need a persuasive argument, not just a spreadsheet."

On Tuesday, his expert mentor, Dr. Shaw, assigns the real-world task: "Observe these two knee replacement patients – one new protocol, one standard. Chart their mobility. Report back by end of day."

On Friday, his near-peer mentor, Anya, gives him feedback when he gathers with his cohort: "You're burying the lead, Leo. Start with the patient outcome. Lead with the 'so what'."

Leo doesn't just have a teacher; he has a team.

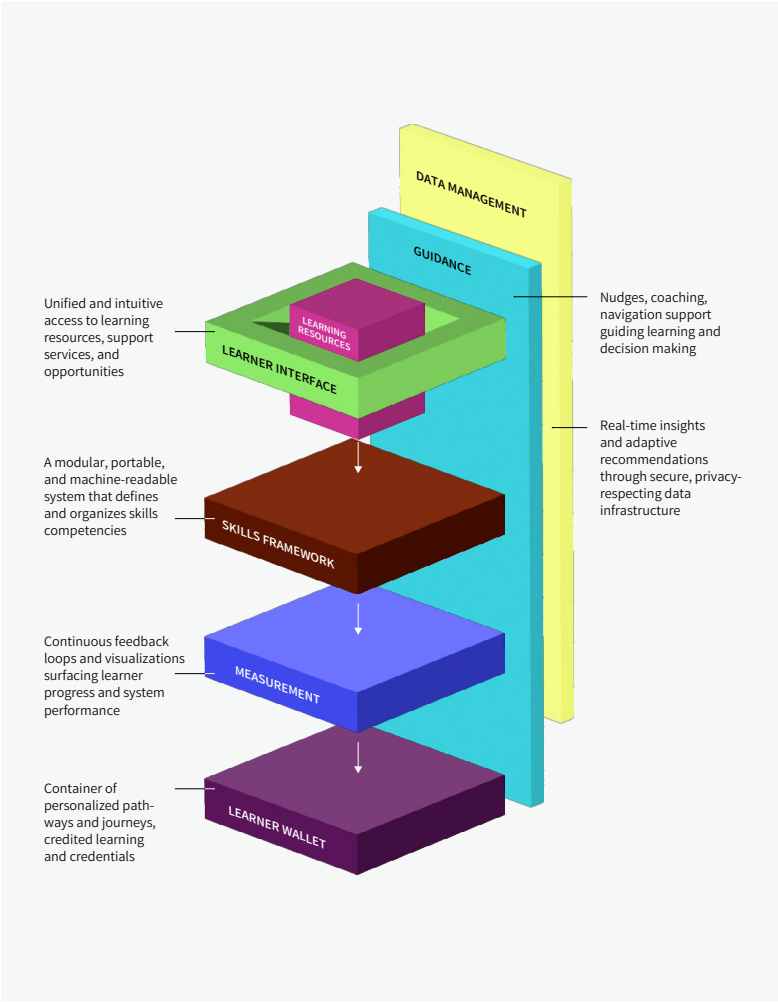
Pillar 3. Develop an aligned learning infrastructure

To enable this new system for learning (beyond static/rigid schooling), we need updated infrastructure: digital, physical, and otherwise. This infrastructure will facilitate learning environments (in and beyond school) that are embedded in the community, allowing for flexible, interest-driven, relevant learning pathways.

The current EdTech landscape is highly fragmented, which means that learners and educators are forced to use a patchwork of disconnected SIS, LMS, and assessment tools. This creates data silos that prevent a comprehensive view of a learner's progress, forcing educators to duplicate efforts and learners to navigate confusing pathways.

To enable Horizon 3 learning to be a reality that exists not just in one community or in places of privilege, a new digital infrastructure will be needed. The "backbone" of this new infrastructure will be learning and employment record (LER) systems that give learners sovereignty over their data, and track learners' progress and credentials, compiling experiences and mastery progressions across locations, learning experiences, and developmental stages.[13] These new systems will enable learning to be flexible, stackable, modular, mastery-based, relevant, and relational. Using these systems, students are empowered as the drivers of their own learning, defining personalized pathways, with clarity on their own progress and pathway – all of which will require new public infrastructure.[14]

As we embrace learner agency and learners are pursuing learning in a variety of contexts, we imagine an infrastructure to enable public funding to follow the learner in a weighted formula according to learner needs and contexts. Hard infrastructure will need to align as well, including examples like existing school buildings reimagined as learning hubs, new uses for existing public spaces that can be harnessed as modular learning experiences, and flexible, safe transportation options for learners as they reach adolescence and "knit together" learning experiences that span school environments, community spaces, and work settings.[15, 16, 17]



[13] *The Future Tech Stack: Reimagining Requirements for Learner-Centered Futures* (Prepared by Techademics for LearnerStudio, 2025).
[14] *Opportunity at Scale: The Case for Public Infrastructure for AI in Education* (ED SAFE AI Alliance and Study Group, April 2025)
[15] *Too Essential to Fail: Why Our Big Bet on Public Education Needs a Bold National Response* (Karen Pittman and Merita Irby, 2024)
[16] "Advancing the Important Work of Community Learning Hubs" (Education Reimagined, 2021)
[17] *Public-Purpose Utilities for the Future of Learning*, A Collaborative Learning Report from LearnerStudio, 2024

IV. Philanthropy's Important Role

Philanthropy, which Paul Ylvisaker once described as "society's passing gear," will be profoundly important in this moment of dramatic change in order to enable a transition to learning systems oriented around Human Flourishing. Philanthropy can provide risk capital that is capable of both taking the long view, and also moving with urgency ahead of the market. Philanthropy will also be important to creating the capacity for leaders to overcome the resistance of our traditional efficiency system, which is dealing with a fractured public sector, divided political environment, and a private sector for whom most revenue incentives align towards the status quo. It's philanthropic resources that can serve as both an antidote to systemic inertia and an accelerant igniting future-ready learning environments.

We urge the sector to fully embrace this paradigm shift moment by developing an ambidextrous or "split screen" strategy that enables both work in the current system, and also putting resources to work towards the future ready system we need to create, even if doing so requires going above the typical 5% allocation for a few years — particularly in a context where financial returns have been strong.

Four essential principles to guide future-focused education philanthropy in this moment

No matter the approaches and entry points philanthropists choose, there are important cross-cutting principles that will enable education and learning funding to best be leveraged toward a powerful vision of Human Flourishing. Below we list four essential principles to underpin philanthropy's next steps.

1 **Act with urgency:** We cannot wait for perfect alignment or all-inclusive top-down reform. This moment both offers and demands transformation, and philanthropy needs to step up to meet it — even if doing so means moving beyond pre-existing strategy. If philanthropy does not step in, we risk forfeiting the future to a market incentivized to maximize revenue and create dependent users, rather than flourishing humans who are independent thinkers, innovative problem-solvers, and positive contributors to communities and civic life. At the same time, this moment provides huge potential to build on rapidly developing foundational models, guided by a clear vision of Human Flourishing.

2 **Avoid false dichotomies:** The next horizon of learning will not wholly displace the current system overnight. Many philanthropies will need to use a "split screen" view as our system is re-tooled. This approach is not a new one; generations of companies have ensured their continued relevance and health by taking an ambidextrous approach to innovation — one that recognizes that current business functions and new ventures can be operated in parallel. Philanthropy needs to do the same. For most funders, we would recommend starting with dedicating 20% of resources to work helping the new system emerge. Those interested in leading the way could allocate a much higher percentage.

3 **Build a bigger table:** At this moment, cross-sector and cross-ideology coalitions are critically important. Philanthropy should be thoughtful about engaging a variety of voices, backgrounds, perspectives, and categories of expertise as they build towards Human Flourishing. This will include pulling in diverse, cross-sectoral voices, and thoughtfully partnering with young people, learners, educators, policy leaders, families, technologists, and other stakeholders. It will also mean being open to new and non-traditional partnerships, guided both by those on the ground and those looking far into the future. This is also a crucial moment to consider how best to bring new funders to the table, including those who do not have a track record of supporting work in the traditional "education" space, but who find themselves increasingly interested in the roles education and learning play as upstream levers to solve other problems.

4 **Set the right incentives:** Consider what incentives you are setting in your grant terms. Big change takes time. Breakthroughs require many opportunities to hypothesize, validate, and correct course. Lengthen grant terms, and allow for grantees to learn and pivot without penalty. Make grant "metrics" more flexible and responsive to signals of change. Avoid a reliance on the false precision of measurement based solely on obsolete metrics — an era of change and uncertainty call for a different kind of approach. Embrace a stance of greater risk tolerance at a time when rapid iteration is required. And remember that the system cannot change on a dime; many of the entities that will drive the field forward will require patient capital as they work to gradually shift mindsets and narratives around the future of learning.

What philanthropy should be supporting

In this section, we provide a list of options for philanthropists to leverage this moment to drive progress towards inspiring and preparing all our young people to thrive in this age of AI. The columns below range from lower risk investments with low structural change (enhance), up to higher risk bold ideas, often requiring systems change (unleash). This list is not intended to be comprehensive or evergreen. Rather, it provides a snapshot, today, of some organizations and teams that have demonstrated capacity to advance the pillars described above. It is important to note that point solutions will be insufficient to transform our system. What we urge is an unwavering focus on how the levers of this new system relate to one another and how strategic collaboration will be essential. No one actor or lever will transform the system alone.

	ENHANCE	PROPEL	UNLEASH
Pillar 1: Set Human Flourishing in the Age of AI as our north star	• Engage parents and learners in collaborative initiatives to define what "flourishing in the Age of AI" means; support them to lean into shaping pro-human and pro-flourishing AI expectations, principles, and guardrails • Support research to better understand levers of flourishing and technology's impact on it • Support R&D on AI-specific challenges, including human connection, sustained attention, and cognitive atrophy	• Market research and narrative building related to change management, including how to disrupt mindsets and preferences that entrench the efficiency system • Invest in tools, frameworks, and organizations working towards pro-human/ flourishing technology, including the development of safe and ethical AI-enabled technologies • Retool vocational and workforce tracks to be aligned with AI-defensible jobs	• Provide multi-year, flexible support for paradigm-shift work (including design, culture, "connective tissue," policy, and enabling conditions), including to orgs that are "outside of current strategy" • Advance new, scalable measures of learner progress, metrics for growth and spread, and indicators of systems change aligned to flourishing in the Age of AI
Pillar 2.1: Modernize the "what": Create a new "Humanics" curriculum	• Support collaborative efforts to define what foundational knowledge will be required for the Age of AI • Support development of tools and capacity to implement "Portraits of a Graduate" that are aligned with modernized knowledge and skills requirements • Support development of cross-disciplinary learning experiences anchored in flourishing-aligned outcomes goals	• Enable collaborative efforts to collaboratively define "Humanics" across developmental stages • Support collaborative efforts to reimagine credentialing pathways and accountability systems • Synthesize frameworks for critical Age of AI competencies (with articulated developmental stages)	• Fund new educator preparation pilots and programs that support a variety of roles appropriate for the Age of AI • Support pilots and model policies around more flexible, competency-based licensure across multiple educator roles

	ENHANCE	PROPEL	UNLEASH
Pillar 2.2: Reframe the "how," "when," and "where" of learning	• Articulate updated science of learning and development (SoLD) principles for the Age of AI • Support initiatives that connect students to real-world civic learning and community- connected learning • Invest in navigator tools to support family agency and decision-making • Support initiatives to engage diverse stakeholders in defining policy and practice innovations toward	• Leverage openings for new models (e.g., microschools, summer programming) • Test, validate, and support the growth of and transition to Horizon 3 "Future-Ready" models in district and CMO contexts • Invest in geographically diverse and cross-partisan policy research and development to support future-ready learning	• Invest in developing comprehensive models that leverage AI and reflect future-ready design principles, including human-centered uses of AI and technology along with a focus on both individual and common good
Pillar 2.3: Rearchitect the "who" of learning and human development	• Support narrative work related to the changing role and location of the educator, including who is an educator • Create new pathways into the broader village of educator roles to support flexible learning across community settings (e.g., youth development workers)	• Design, test, and begin to spread new models of educator and learning facilitator roles for the Age of AI • Support the articulation and dissemination of competency and training frameworks for facilitators of learning and other roles in the Age of AI	• Fund new educator preparation pilots and programs that support a variety of roles appropriate for the Age of AI • Support pilots and model policies around more flexible, competency-based licensure across multiple educator roles

	ENHANCE	PROPEL	UNLEASH
Pillar 3: Build an aligned learning and human development infrastructure	• Incentivize cross-sector collaboration (i.e., hyperscalers, K-12 systems, and social impact innovators in the industry) through codesign, focusing on efficacy, safety, and access, including the development of education-specific benchmarks. • Create ecosystem enablers and intermediaries to support coalitions between nonprofit, public, and private actors.	• Support efforts to collaboratively define interoperability and related data safety/privacy standards that align procurement incentives for supply and demand. • Support cross-organizational development efforts relating to interoperability and open development. • Invest in digital and place-based R&D infrastructure to accelerate progress toward the future system.	• Support the interoperable "backbone" of the new infrastructure, prioritizing transparency and learner data sovereignty. • Develop scalable, backbone-aligned systems for longitudinal data collection/architecture. • Collaboratively design and test new governance structures across a variety of contexts and communities for data stewardship and ownership. • Support efforts to create equitable, flexible, learner-centered funding mechanisms that combine family agency with public guardrails.

IV. Conclusion: A Call to Build

We have a window to shape our future. But not for long. The question is not whether the Age of AI will reshape society — but who will shape it and toward what end.

This design process must be driven by heterodox generalists and diverse stakeholders (including parents, educators, employers, and policy leaders), not narrow technical subject specialists. We are already seeing design work emerge that includes parents, learners, educators and youth developers, employers, policy and public leaders, ethicists, technologists, and religious leaders.

In this moment, we see a need and opportunity to come together around our children's futures — setting forth a positive, shared vision that can inspire and mobilize a silent, dissatisfied majority of Americans. It is time for us to overcome "complexity paralysis" and fear, and to proactively shape a **positive vision for the Age of AI that we desire for ourselves and our children**, galvanizing the pro-human, values-based leaders we need to usher in a better future. We must collaboratively define what it will truly take to achieve this vision — identifying what we must quickly embrace and act upon, and what we must firmly reject.

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