



Panelist Biographies

Online Discussion: School Choice a la Carte

Courtney Bell is an associate research scientist in Educational Testing Services' (ETS) Understanding Teaching Quality Center. She completed her doctorate at Michigan State University in curriculum, teaching, and educational policy after earning her bachelor's degree in chemistry at Dartmouth College. Bell's dissertation study, funded through a Spencer Foundation Dissertation Fellowship, won the AERA Division L Dissertation of the Year Award in 2005. That longitudinal interview study investigated urban parents' selection of schools for their middle and high school children. A former high school science teacher, Bell's work focuses on looking across actors in the educational system to better understand the intersections of policy and practice. Her current studies use mixed-methods to analyze the effects of racially desegregated schools on student learning, teacher learning, the measurement of teaching, and the effects of state policy. Bell has published in scholarly journals including *Equity and Excellence in Education*, *Peabody Journal of Education*, *The Urban Review*, *Journal of Education Policy*, and *Teachers College Record*.

Erin Dillon oversees Education Sector's school choice work and is responsible for designing, implementing, and assisting with a variety of research and analysis projects, with a focus on school choice and higher education financial aid.

Prior to joining Education Sector, Dillon was a research associate with the Beginning with Children Foundation in New York. At the foundation, she managed a research project examining the academic achievement of charter school students and assisted with a college preparatory program for high school students. Dillon received her master's degree in social sciences in education at Stanford University in 2004, where she focused on education research and policy, and received a bachelor's in psychology at the College of William and Mary. Previously, she gained extensive experience with quantitative research and analysis as a study coordinator at Johns Hopkins University.

Brian Dixon is the director of High Tech High Flex, an online project-based learning program across all High Tech High Schools. Dixon completed his doctoral degree in educational technology at San Diego State and the University of San Diego. His dissertation focused on using reflective video journals (such as YouTube) as a tool for enhancing adolescent students' metacognition and reflective practice. He received a master's of arts degree in teaching from Columbia International University. Dixon received his bachelor's of fine and performing arts degree from a small liberal arts college in Manitoba, Canada.

Brian started his educational career as a seventh-grade English teacher in a South Carolina public school where he led a one-to-one computing technology pilot program for struggling readers. After moving to California, Brian became the instructional technology specialist for a K–12 private school in Solana Beach. Brian has conducted many conference presentations on current technologies and educational issues including podcasting, video blogging, social networking, Internet safety, and technology integration.

Julie Evans is chief executive officer of Project Tomorrow, a national education nonprofit organization whose mission is to ensure today's students are well prepared to be tomorrow's innovators, leaders, and engaged citizens of the world. Formed from the merger of NetDay with a California-based science education nonprofit, Project Tomorrow has made its biggest impact through a series of annual surveys, called "Speak Up." These surveys aim to collect students', teachers', and parents' views on science, math, and technology, and how to improve education for the 21st century. Since 2003, more than 850,000 K–12 students and their teachers and parents have participated in the annual online Speak Up surveys, and the surveys' findings have helped shape ed-tech policy at the federal, state, and local levels.

Curtis (Curt) Johnson is managing partner of Education|Evolving, a Minnesota-based group of thought leaders in education reform that has been instrumental in innovations such as open enrollment and school choice, the nation's first charter school law, and teachers as owners of professional partnerships. Education|Evolving works to convince those who make and influence policy that America's success depends on creating radically different and better ways for young people to learn and for teachers to work.

A former teacher and community college president, Johnson co-authored, with Harvard Business School professor Clayton Christensen and Michael Horn, the provocative 2008 book *Disrupting Class*. This book explains why even the best managed schools will be disrupted by changing learning models and how both school districts and the chartered sector can respond. The authors make a vigorous argument for the effectiveness and economics of personalized learning.

He is also the co-author of three books about public policy issues in urban regions, most recently *Century of the City*, published in late 2008 by the Rockefeller Foundation. As a longtime writer with the Citistates Group, Johnson, along with columnist Neal Peirce, has written more than a hundred feature-length articles on a wide range of public policy issues which have appeared in more than 50 newspapers over the past 20 years.

He's also been the head of a citizen think tank, a policy adviser and chief of staff to a Minnesota governor, and the chairman of the board of one of America's only two regional governments.

Johnson has a bachelor's degree in history from Baylor University and a PhD from the College of Education at the University of Texas. He was born in the Atlanta, Georgia region, grew up in Texas, and has lived in Minnesota since 1972.

Bill Tucker is managing director of Education Sector. He is responsible for managing the day-to-day operations of Education Sector, including oversight for all administrative, human resources, financial, legal, communications, strategic planning, and program functions. In his policy work for Education Sector, he focuses on technology and innovation—specifically virtual schooling, assessments, and data systems. Most recently he authored the Education Sector report *Beyond the Bubble: Technology and the Future of Student Assessment*.

Tom Vander Ark is a founding partner of Vander Ark/Ratcliff Partners and devotes his time to the most complex and visible VA/R projects, helping clients to create high impact strategies and make high-level connections.

Vander Ark is also a partner in Revolution Learning, a Seattle and Austin-based private equity investor concentrating on improving formal and informal learning globally. He served as president of the X PRIZE Foundation and executive director of education for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation where he developed and implemented more than \$3.5 billion in scholarship and grant programs to improve education throughout the United States. In December 2006, *Newsweek* readers voted Vander Ark the most influential baby boomer in education. Prior to his role with the Gates Foundation, Vander Ark was the first business executive to serve as a public school superintendent for one of Washington State's larger school districts that has been recognized for narrowing achievement gaps and reducing administrative costs.

Vander Ark also has extensive experience in the private sector serving as a senior executive for retail start up, PACE Membership Warehouse, which achieved \$5 billion in revenue and was sold to K-Mart. Tom advises Communities In Schools, ConnCan, Democrats for Education Reform, National Association of Charter School Authorizers, MLA Partner Schools, and X PRIZE Foundation. Vander Ark has a bachelor's of science degree from the Colorado School of Mines and an MBA in energy finance from the University of Denver.