In our Thought Leadership roundtable, leaders at Eleven Fifty Academy and St. Richard’s Episcopal School find common ground in how they’re preparing students for fulfilling, productive lives.

Q: The pandemic has highlighted the interconnected nature of our world. How can schools develop global readiness in their students?

LESLIE HOSEY: Experiential learning, project-based learning, developing civic responsibility, and instilling reverence for the divine are some of the ways that we foster competencies in students to think beyond the self in the service of the greater good. As our world has become more connected through technology, the educated and compassionate mind is no longer able to see their own community in isolation from the world around us. I am proud of the many opportunities that our St. Richard’s students have to engage across disciplines to solve real world problems and to work collaboratively across differences to build stronger coalitions.

SCOTT JONES: Digital connectivity dominated the news worldwide once virtual working and learning became a necessity. For many underserved rural and urban areas, this was a massive challenge, especially for students. Creating an infrastructure where students can experience distance education without concern for WiFi or Internet access is a mandate now for all communities. Classrooms need not be limited to a school building, as students engage with other parts of the world from anywhere. At Eleven Fifty Academy, we are actively building the future of relevant, education-enhancing solutions. We prepare our students with the essential building blocks of technology, so they too have the tools to help create the future vs. react to it. Digital literacy is already a primary ingredient of literacy today.

Q: Which skills and aptitudes should schools intentionally develop in students to prepare for a quickly evolving economy?

SCOTT JONES: Digital literacy and resiliency are baselines for our modern workforce. Approaching education with an entrepreneurial, “fast fail” mindset helps build students’ resiliency and helps individuals and groups more rapidly converge on solutions to problems. Coders learn what doesn’t work while they figure out paths to success. Adapting to challenges and making necessary pivots when faced with hurdles helps students become agile, applying their problem-solving skills to achieve success and confidence in many areas of their life, not just for a school project or a job.

LESLIE HOSEY: It’s critical that students learn to try new things with the confidence that failure is often only the beginning of success, not the end of it. From our earliest grades, students develop the capacity to take on increasingly challenging content, while being supported in developing the stamina and habits of mind to persist through difficulty and complexity. While St. Richard’s schooling model is built upon decades of tradition—including a classic curriculum, uniforms, and a connection to the values of the Episcopal Church—our focus is on ensuring our learners embrace flexibility, problem-solving, and empathy. They might wind up in traditional careers, but we have to remember that our students are digital natives who grew up with technology and may well wind up in jobs we’ve never heard of, delivering services or products we can only imagine.

Q: Indiana is working to attract, retain, and grow high quality jobs of the future. How do you see educators supporting this strategy?

LESLIE HOSEY: Economists and thought leaders now refer to this time as the Fourth Industrial Revolution. While we do not yet know what many of our future jobs will be, there are essential competencies that students must gain in order to engage as strategists and problem solvers in the workforce. Solutions to some of our most intractable world problems—for example, war, inequitable distribution of resources, poverty, and pollution—will require transdisciplinary thinking, rather than a singular focus on developing domain-specific expertise. Our students are expected not only to demonstrate mastery of material in core disciplines but also an ability to consider multiple points of view and work collaboratively across differences. Developing such habits of the mind in early years will position them well both for the workforce and for roles as civic leaders pursuing the greater good.

SCOTT JONES: A holistic economic development strategy incorporates quality of place. Quality of education falls into this plan. For K-12 “talent funnels,” similar to what exists in sports, is a concept that education must embrace much earlier in the cycle. Forecasting which careers will be available when a student is primed to graduate and preparing that student with skillsets that lead to opportunities in high-growth, high-value, high-impact sectors, attracting more businesses, and encouraging entrepreneurship all facilitate growth. Eleven Fifty Academy’s North Star mission is to skill up a tech workforce that can meet the demands of thousands of tech companies (and companies that leverage tech) across Indiana.

Q: There are many great educational opportunities in Indianapolis, but ultimately outcomes are what matter. How do you measure the success of your graduates?

SCOTT JONES: At Eleven Fifty Academy, we are uniquely transparent about our outcomes, and we measure success based upon whether our graduates achieve employment with high rates of pay in their field of study. We continue to hear positive feedback from our thousands of graduates about how our virtual learning experience

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prepared them exceptionally well for their career in tech, since many coders are now working virtually. Likewise, employers are providing feedback that our graduates are particularly well-adapted to the new normal.

LESLIE HOSEY: We see evidence of our students’ success through their acceptance at top high schools, the many leadership roles they assume at school and throughout the community, in their respectful engagement with others, and in their reverence for the divine. The latter is instilled through attendance at weekly chapel services, exposure to world religions, and our advisory program. St. Richard’s alumni are known for making a positive impact on the world through their work, their service, and their compassion for humanity.

Q: How are we using equity as a lens as we rethink schools?

LESLIE HOSEY: Practices and the ethos of many independent schools have shifted since their founding—from preserving privilege to growing private schools to have a public mission. St. Richard’s has remained an intentional community committed to providing access to all qualified and mission-aligned students. Our annual operating budget includes a significant allocation to financial aid. We are also continuously evaluating our program to provide opportunities to close opportunity gaps in a student’s prior learning experience. Since 1996, St. Richard’s has been deeply committed to being a host school for Horizons at St. Richard’s. During the summer, Horizons provides exceptional educational and enrichment opportunities for children from under-resourced communities to prevent summer learning loss, provide nutrition education, swimming lessons, and social emotional learning.

SCOTT JONES: Ensuring opportunities for students are the same, regardless of which school, is a daunting but necessary task for our ecosystem. Underserved schools need more resources. We, as a state, are only as good as our lowest performing student. The jobs for America’s Graduates program, for instance, is a fabulous program at the high school level, but we must funnel resources to all schools and provide a well-rounded, holistic experience for all students. Eleven Fifty Academy’s Digital Literacy programs, which are offered statewide, can rapidly bridge the equity gap. Pathways can be identified for all students to participate in upward mobility opportunities very early (and late) in the education ecosystem of each community.

Q: How do we remove barriers to facilitate better educational outcomes for underserved communities?

SCOTT JONES: Tech has the potential to be the great equalizer and can shrink the wealth gap. Nationally ranked Eleven Fifty programs provide upward mobility by producing outcomes equivalent to nationally ranked, 4-year tech degree programs, except 16 times faster and at a mere fraction of the cost. Eleven Fifty is creating a 0% interest educational funding tool, called the Career Accelerator Fund, for students of any age to rapidly accelerate, either part-time or full-time, into a successful career in tech. Indiana has invested $25 million into a similar fund that Eleven Fifty spearheaded with legislators. That fund will be self-sustaining going forward.

LESLIE HOSEY: We begin by recognizing that there are structural inequities built into our system of funding schools. We all have a role to play in dismantling those systems, because we are harmed as a society by the loss of potential and talent that we suffer when we fail to provide excellent educational opportunities to all children. St. Richard’s Episcopal School is an intentionally diverse school, founded to address stark educational inequity in the heart of Indianapolis. At the most basic level, respecting the inherent dignity and worth of every child helps us foster the genius that resides within every zip code.