

10 THINGS

# Dennis Littky

Education innovator Dennis Littky – co-founder of The Met school in Rhode Island, Big Picture Learning and College Unbound – knows that we can't afford to fail our future. His ten steps to smarter schools:

**1) Create individual learning plans.** The basics of reading, writing, math and scientific thinking apply to any discipline, so let's build lessons around each student's interests and goals. When students are motivated and engaged, they stick with school.

**2) Involve families.** Parents are a child's first teacher and know their student best. Schools need to do all they can to get parents involved – and not just when something is wrong. Parents *will* make it a priority. They just haven't been asked.

**3) Focus on real-world learning.** Memorizing facts is the lowest level of learning, yet it's what we ask our students to do most. Working on purposeful projects and

internships under the guidance of advisers, parents and mentors allows students to develop knowledge and skills in an integrated way.

**4) Foster questions, not answers.** Curiosity is a powerful motivator. Instead of giving students the questions, we need to teach them to frame important questions and seek out answers for themselves.

**5) Evaluate skills.** Answering a, b, c, d, or e on a standardized multiple-choice test doesn't reflect a student's ability to put knowledge into action. We need a broad spectrum of assessments: oral presentations, portfolios of written work and projects, and detailed written evaluations by teachers.



Littky in his office and below with students at The Met.

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**6) Use technology wisely.** Students are mostly using computers in schools as word processors and online encyclopedias. They need to learn to use computers for collecting and analyzing data, networking and solving problems.

**7) Support great teachers.** We must work hard to have only the very best teachers in our schools. Teacher training colleges need to get future teachers thinking innovatively about what school should be, not preparing teachers for the schools of yesterday.

**8) Focus on college completion.** For the first time in U.S. history, today's college-age generation will be less educated than their parents because they're just not finishing their degrees. We can't keep encouraging students to go to college while

forgetting to help them make it through once they're there. We talk about students being college-ready, but colleges need to be student-ready as well. Colleges have to move beyond text books and lectures to prepare students for work and life in the twenty-first century.

**9) Make schools, not districts, accountable.** Teachers, principals, parents and students know their school the best. They should have enough control to design some of the measures to show how their students are succeeding on the broad district, state and federal goals.

**10) Do everything at once.** Tweaking around the edges hasn't created noticeable change or narrowed the achievement gap in our country. We must reinvent.

