



K12 Team Wins Thomas B. Fordham Institute's 2018 Wonkathon

March 26, 2018

Team Reimagines High School, Beats Out Record Number of Entries

WASHINGTON--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Mar. 26, 2018-- Members of the K12 Academic Policy and Public Affairs team won the Thomas B. Fordham Institute's fifth annual Wonkathon, a contest designed to generate substantive conversation around key issues in education reform. The results of the month-long nationwide vote were announced on March 21.

In light of diploma scandals in Washington, D.C., Maryland and elsewhere, the Fordham Institute asked 2018 Wonkathon contributors to address the questions, "Do our graduation requirements need to change?"

Newcomers to the competition, Jessica Shopoff, M.Ed., and Chase Eskelsen, M.Ed., finished atop a field that included a Wonkathon-record number of entries from thought leaders around the nation to win the 2018 contest with their essay entitled, "[High school reimagined \(and we truly mean reimagined\)](#)."

"I'd like to congratulate Jessica and Chase on winning the Wonkathon by recommending a new way to look at high school achievement," said K12 President of Academics, Policy and Schools Kevin P. Chavous. "Focusing on personalized learning and competency-based mastery instead of existing graduation requirements would help ensure that students graduate from high school prepared to be productive members of society."

The purpose of high school in America, Shopoff and Eskelsen say, is to train students to be responsible and productive citizens. However, despite a graduation rate that is at an all-time high, most graduates leave high school unprepared to lead successful lives, which leads to 5.5 million young people not in school or working despite one in three American companies with openings for which they can't fill due to a lack of qualified workers.

"We wrote about making sure we're measuring what matters – not just did we get the students across the stage in four years, but after they graduate are they moving toward success?" Shopoff said.

"Much of our focus was on figuring out how to support unique students in unique ways with inclusion of career and college options for students," Eskelsen added.

In their essay, Shopoff and Eskelsen argue that our current approach to high school is so flawed and ineffective that it can't be fixed with mere tweaks. Instead, they urge policymakers to revamp it by building a personalized learning model that effectively graduates students prepared to successfully contribute to society. This requires three steps:

- Embracing cross-curricular competency-based learning – A high school graduation plan should be a checklist of knowledge and skills that students need to master in order to graduate.
- Personalizing graduation paths – Every student should be able to "create a path toward graduation that uses his/her interests and future plans as a foundation" upon which to add coursework and skills training.
- Realigning learning across the preschool-to-higher-education-or-career continuum: Students should not move in primary grades with their age cohorts, but rather advance when they have mastered the subject matter, with the expectation that "students may master all of the competencies required in anywhere from three to seven years."

Shopoff and Eskelsen were featured on the Fordham Institute's [Education Gadfly Show podcast](#) to discuss their winning essay, which can be read [here](#). A follow-up piece by Shopoff and Eskelsen that outlines more specifically potential implementation at a school level can be read [here](#).

About K12 Inc.

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