

Creating Schools for the Future

Keynote speaker **Dr. Bill Daggett** says public education needs to move forward

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In the race to prepare students for the future, Wisconsin schools — and almost all public schools in the country — are falling farther and farther behind.

Educational consultant Dr. Bill Daggett broke that bad news to a full house during his keynote address.

“I’m fearful that we’re in a race to return to the past rather than prepare kids for the future,” Daggett said. “Our schools have become museums and we are so deep into it we can’t see it.”

Daggett is the founder and chairman of the International Center for Leadership in Education. During an engaging and interactive keynote address, he outlined the challenges facing schools today and the ways they need to change in order to better prepare students for their futures.

He began by complimenting Wisconsin on its “long history of good schools” and called its technical college system the best in the country. Then he noted that the state has “the least amount of significant educational reform” in the nation.

“Your schools look more like 2005 than unlike 2005 because ‘we’re good so why change?’”

And schools must change to meet the demands of what Daggett called the fourth Industrial Revolution that the world is now entering.

Constant rapid advances in technology — in particular, robotics, bio-medical systems and nanotechnology — are making jobs and whole occupations obsolete.

Researchers predict that 65 percent of current jobs will no longer exist in seven to eight years. Construction workers will be replaced by 3D printers, delivery drivers will be replaced by drones and autoworkers and farm workers will be replaced by robots.

“Technology is advancing so quickly that if you can write an algorithm for a task, the job is gone,” Daggett said. “It is transforming the American workplace.”

He believes the winners in this race will be small organizations that can multi-task and adapt quickly. Developing nations that do not have the economic systems and infrastructures that industrialized nations do will be able to change and compete more successfully in a global economy because they “don’t need to be freed from the structures of the past.”

Schools now prepare students to enter specific fields and take specific jobs and test them on memorized knowledge and data. Because technology is changing the workplace so quickly and will continue to do so, Daggett said the better approach is to emphasize non-cognitive skills like

critical thinking, creativity and problem solving over teaching and testing students on facts and figures.

“The Wisconsin state test doesn’t prepare kids to deal with skills they will need to succeed,” he said, adding that he was not opposed to testing. “They need to have knowledge, but they need to learn how to apply it.”

Emphasis on test scores has caused states to lower their academic standards, he added. There should be an emphasis on academic rigor, but it must be balanced with emphasis on applying knowledge and fostering non-cognitive skills over cognitive.

Daggett pointed to the example set by the 25 most rapidly improving schools in the country as recognized by national organizations.

“They understand that the non-cognitive skills are ultimately what leads to success in academics and life,” he said, encouraging his audience to follow their lead. “Start with non-cognitive skills, figure out what is relevant to students, let rigor take care of itself.”

And finally, don’t forget the crucial element of great teachers and their connections with students.

“It’s rigor, relevance and relationships. It doesn’t matter how you put them together,” he said. ■

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