Higher
Performance
Group

PEER-TO-PEER
LEADERS ROUNDTABLE

December 3, 2025 | Synthesis Document with Enhanced Data & Citations

ROUNDTABLE DEBRIEF & STRATEGIC INSIGHTS

EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

On December 3, 2025, district superintendents and college presidents convened virtually for a strategic dialogue that transcended institutional boundaries and sector divisions. These leaders—hand-selected for their demonstrated capacity to move critical metrics despite unprecedented headwinds—gathered not to defend existing xmodels, but to reimagine what educational systems must become.

Geographic Representation: Arizona to Texas, Wisconsin to California, Illinois to Arkansas
Institutional Diversity: K-12 and higher education; public institutions; rural, suburban, and urban contexts

The Central Challenge: American education confronts a convergence of demographic, technological, and market forces that will fundamentally reshape how we serve learners over the next decade. The data is unambiguous: 1.7 million students lost in higher education since 2014. 1.2 million departed K-12 since 2019. Combined, this represents a student population equivalent to New Mexico—students who have not disappeared but rather opted for alternative pathways.

The Strategic Context: Dr. Joe Hill, President of Higher Performance Group and roundtable convener, framed the urgency: "We have approximately 16 months to transform proactively—or be compelled to transform reactively in survival mode."

This is not hyperbole. Twenty-eight colleges closed in the first nine months of 2024 alone—each closure eliminating an average of 265 jobs and $14 million in local economic impact. The Federal Reserve projects up to 80 additional higher education closures by 2029. Concurrently, K-12 systems nationwide face their first sustained multi-year enrollment decline since the 1970s.

The Fundamental Question: Are we designing systems to defend institutional structures we've inherited, or building pathways to serve the students and communities who depend upon us?

The leaders in this roundtable have chosen the latter. This brief synthesizes their insights, challenges, and emerging strategies for navigating disruption while strengthening educational opportunity.

THE STRATEGIC URGENCY: DEMOGRAPHIC AND MARKET REALITIES

The Enrollment Crisis: Quantifying the Challenge

Higher Education Context:

- 1.7 million students lost since 2014 peak enrollment (20.6 million, fall 2010)

- 8.3% overall decline from peak; community colleges experiencing disproportionate impact (37% decline since 2010)

- *Source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2024*

K-12 Context:

- 1.2 million students lost since 2019

- First sustained multi-year decline in public school enrollment since the 1970s

- Driven by declining birth rates and migration to alternative education models

- *Source: National Center for Education Statistics, 2024*

Institutional Viability:

- 28 college closures in first nine months of 2024

- Average closure impact: 265 jobs eliminated, $14 million in local economic activity lost

- Federal Reserve projection: 80 additional higher education closures by 2029

- *Sources: Inside Higher Ed College Closure Tracker; Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, 2024*

Demographic Projections: Regional Variation Demands Differentiated Strategy

Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) 2024 Projections:

National High School Graduate Trends:

- Peak graduation: 3.9 million students (2025)

- Projected decline 2025-2030: -7.4% (287,000 fewer graduates)

- Projected decline 2030-2039: Additional -9% (330,000 fewer graduates)

Regional Disparities:

- **Northeast:** -20% by 2039 (most severe impact)

- **Midwest:** -8% by 2039

- **West:** -17% by 2039

- **South:** +3% by 2039 (sole growth region)

Strategic Implication: Institutions in the Northeast and Western regions face existential enrollment pressure requiring fundamental business model transformation. Southern institutions face intensified competition for limited growth. Geographic context must inform institutional strategy; universal approaches will prove inadequate to regional realities.

The Alternative Education Ecosystem: Market Validation of Unmet Needs

E-Learning Market Growth:

- 2025 global market valuation: $248.84 billion

- Projected compound annual growth rate (CAGR) 2025-2030: 14.2%

- *Source: Mordor Intelligence, 2025*

School Choice Expansion:

- Students utilizing choice options: 1+ million across 34 states (2024-25 academic year)

- Year-over-year growth rate: 23%

- *Source: EdChoice, 2025*

Homeschool Growth:

- Current enrollment: 3.7 million students (6.7% of K-12 population)

- Growth since 2019-20: 51%

- *Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, 2024*

Market Interpretation: Students and families are not rejecting education—they are rejecting traditional educational delivery models that no longer align with their needs, values, or economic realities. The proliferation of alternatives represents market validation that institutional education has failed to adapt at the pace required by changing demographics, technology, and economic conditions.

Traditional institutions face a fundamental choice: evolve delivery models to meet demonstrated market demand or continue defending structures the market has already rejected.

FIVE STRATEGIC THEMES: INSIGHTS FROM PRACTIONER DIALOGUE

THEME 1: The Performance Formula—Distinguishing Potential from Interference

Dr. Hill introduced a diagnostic framework that reoriented leadership focus from resource acquisition to systemic efficiency:

P = p - I

Performance = Potential - Interference

Framework Explanation:

- **Performance (P):** Non-negotiable institutional outcomes upon which leadership credibility and institutional viability depend

- **Potential (p):** Aggregate capacity within the organization—talent, resources, expertise, engagement

- **Interference (I):** Systemic obstacles that prevent potential from translating into performance—legacy processes, cultural dysfunction, structural misalignment

The Strategic Question: Most leaders default to increasing potential (hiring additional personnel, adopting new programs, expanding infrastructure) when performance falls short. However, if

interference remains constant or increases, added potential yields diminishing returns.

The more effective—and more difficult—intervention addresses interference: eliminating legacy patterns that no longer serve mission, redesigning processes that create friction, confronting cultural norms that inhibit excellence.

Practitioner Insight: Michael Johnson (Superintendent, Eau Claire Area School District, Wisconsin)

Context: Sixth year in role; district enrollment declined from 11,800 pre-pandemic to 10,800 current—representing $10 million revenue loss

"The factor that most significantly impacts our performance is interference—legacy patterns embedded in phrases like 'this is how we've always operated' or 'this approach has been adequate.' When I assumed this role in 2020, our middle school and elementary literacy performance was unacceptable. We had to acknowledge that reality without equivocation.

The temptation when confronting performance gaps is to add resources—more personnel, more programs. However, given our enrollment trajectory, that approach is financially unsustainable. **Our imperative is systemic redesign first, then strategic talent deployment aligned to that redesigned system.**"

Leadership Principle: Adding capacity to a dysfunctional system simply scales dysfunction. System transformation must precede—not follow—capacity expansion.

Practitioner Insight: Nathan Schilling (Superintendent, Lansing School District 158, Illinois)

Context: Recently completed $26 million primary learning center emphasizing play-based, low-screen early childhood education

Schilling introduced an analogy from the film *Ford versus Ferrari* that resonated across the cohort:

"There is a pivotal scene where the driver receives authorization to push the vehicle to 7,000 RPM—a threshold that risks engine failure if the vehicle cannot sustain that performance level. However, the driver possesses intimate knowledge of the vehicle's engineering and capacity. He

understands precisely how far the system can be pushed to optimize performance without catastrophic failure.

As organizational leaders, we bear responsibility for equivalent understanding of our institutional systems. We must know our organizations with sufficient depth to identify optimal performance thresholds—pushing hard enough to maximize outcomes, but not so aggressively that we damage the system's capacity for sustained excellence."

Schilling acknowledged current challenges: "Unfortunately, we are experiencing significant personnel challenges this year—a pattern my Illinois colleagues report as well. The human capital dimension—recruitment, retention, development, support—demands substantial leadership attention currently. My focus is sustaining our district's operational performance at that optimal threshold while navigating unprecedented personnel complexity."

Leadership Principle: Optimal performance requires intimate institutional knowledge—understanding not just what must be accomplished, but the system's capacity to sustain high performance without fracturing.

Synthesis: Performance Optimization Requires System-Level Diagnosis

Dr. Gordon Amerson (Superintendent, Alvord Unified School District, California; roundtable moderator) synthesized the theme:

"The metaphor is instructive: if you continuously introduce contaminated fuel into the engine, or install substandard components, you cannot push the system to 7,000 RPM regardless of leadership intention. This principle applies directly to talent management—hiring practices, onboarding protocols, professional development systems, retention strategies. **These represent the 'components under the hood' that determine whether the organization can sustain excellence or merely performs adequately.**"

Strategic Implication: Before expanding organizational capacity, leaders must conduct rigorous system audits to identify interference preventing current capacity from generating expected performance. Interference reduction often yields greater performance gains than capacity expansion—and typically requires fewer financial resources.

THEME 2: Organizational Culture as Performance Theater—The Snapchat Filter Effect

Jason Morrison (President, Trinity Valley Community College, Texas) introduced a metaphor that crystallized a phenomenon many leaders recognize but rarely name publicly:

"We have become habituated to viewing educational leadership through filters—analogous to social media platforms where individuals present curated identities disconnected from reality. Institutions project excellence through carefully managed communications while operational reality tells a different story. Trinity Valley was profoundly guilty of this pattern—appearing to external audiences as an institution meeting mission while internally delivering bare minimum performance."

The Bare Minimum Culture: Morrison's Institutional Diagnosis

Context: Morrison assumed presidency with explicit intent to transform institutional culture

"I inherited an organization where bare minimum performance had become the accepted standard. During my first-year convocation, I issued a public acknowledgment: **previous leadership had failed this institution by establishing and tolerating a culture where minimal effort was deemed acceptable.** That failure belonged to leadership, not to the dedicated professionals working within a dysfunctional system.

This was not a fifth-year reflection after establishing relational capital. This was January of year two—after the initial listening period, but early enough to establish non-negotiable expectations before patterns calcified further."

Morrison's Strategic Rationale:

"I conduct comprehensive institutional research before assuming any presidency. I understand the organization's performance trajectory, cultural dynamics, and systemic challenges before arrival. I develop a transformation plan and identify potential culture carriers—high-capacity professionals who have witnessed institutional excellence and decline, who hunger for renewed mission clarity.

Then I establish new cultural standards publicly and unequivocally. Some might consider this approach precipitous. I view it as necessary. When transformation timelines extend indefi-

nitely, high-capacity professionals lose hope and disengage. Conversely, when leadership establishes clear expectations and demonstrates commitment to enforcing those standards, high-capacity professionals become energized. They cease accommodating mediocrity and begin holding peers accountable to elevated expectations."

The Funding Formula Context:

Trinity Valley had operated under Texas contact-hour funding—a model that rewarded enrollment regardless of student completion. When Texas transitioned to performance-based funding tied to completion rates, institutional dysfunction became financially untenable.

"We were compelled to examine ourselves without filters and pose fundamental questions: What is our core purpose? What constitutes our actual role? That inquiry drives you toward a builder identity—**you cannot facilitate student completion without building institutional capacity, developing students holistically, cultivating robust programming, and strengthening community partnerships.**"

The "Championship Mindset" Framework

Rather than imposing rigid requirements, Morrison established a cultural aspiration:

"We did not mandate specific behaviors or demand predetermined outcomes. We established a culture of expectations and invited the community to define those expectations collaboratively. We termed this the 'championship mindset'—leveraging our athletic success as a cultural metaphor applicable across the institution."

Leadership Principle: Culture change requires both clarity and co-creation. Leaders must establish non-negotiable standards while creating space for the organization to define how those standards manifest operationally.

Roundtable Reflection: The Personal Cost of Culture Building

Dr. Amerson offered a vulnerable reflection that elevated the dialogue:

"When I served as principal in a turnaround context, I likely operated as a 'climber' in Dr. Hill's framework—driven by urgency to transform performance metrics rapidly. I successfully turned around that campus. **However, I remain cognizant of the relational damage I created in that**

process. The human cost of aggressive transformation is real and lasting."

This candor shifted the conversation from theoretical frameworks to embodied leadership challenges—acknowledging that even necessary transformation carries costs that leaders must recognize and, where possible, mitigate.

THEME 3: Talent Acquisition as Culture Strategy—The Hiring Dilemma

Amy Diaz (President, Gateway Community College, Phoenix—Maricopa Community Colleges) reframed talent management as the primary culture-building lever:

"I assumed leadership of an already high-performing institution. My challenge differs from Jason's context—I am not correcting systemic dysfunction but rather sustaining excellence while pursuing continuous improvement.

However, I have concluded that our most significant leverage point is talent acquisition. **We need to hire individuals who already embody an entrepreneurial mindset—professionals who are natural builders, not projects requiring transformation.**

The fundamental challenge: identifying those characteristics in compressed finalist interview processes."

The Coaster Conversion Question

Diaz posed the question many leaders avoid articulating:

"Should I invest substantial leadership energy attempting to convert coasters into builders? I question whether such transformation is achievable in most cases. **Perhaps a coaster can become marginally less passive, but fundamental identity transformation from coaster to builder may be unrealistic.**

My preferred strategy focuses on hiring practices that identify and attract builders from the outset—individuals whose values, work ethic, and orientation toward innovation already align with our institutional culture."

The Systemic Challenge: "Our hiring practices remain excessively sterile. Candidates who excel in structured interview environments may perform entirely differently in operational contexts.

We require more robust assessment methodologies that reveal authentic professional orientation rather than interview proficiency."

The Community Reputation Effect

Wade Stanford (Superintendent, Westwood ISD, Palestine, Texas) articulated the external consequences of internal culture:

"Every organization employs some combination of coasters, climbers, and dreamers alongside builders. While these individuals may contribute value in specific contexts, they demand disproportionate leadership energy—constant redirection, extension, and refocusing.

The more insidious challenge: community perception. External stakeholders often experience our institutions through these individuals. We inherit the reputation associated with their performance patterns—and community perception becomes institutional reality regardless of broader excellence."

The downstream impact on students: "These dynamics negatively impact student outcomes because leadership energy consumed managing adult dysfunction is energy unavailable for student-focused work."

The Talented Terror Phenomenon

Wade Stanford introduced research from Mark Murphy's *Hundred Percenters* identifying a particularly complex talent archetype:

"The 'Talented Terror' produces exceptional individual results while creating organizational damage that requires substantial leadership repair. **You value their productivity while simultaneously managing the relational and cultural aftermath their approach generates.**"

Dr. Amerson's Personal Application:

"Reflecting on my principalship during turnaround, I likely embodied the Talented Terror profile. I achieved the performance transformation required, but I can still identify the relational damage my approach created. That awareness should inform how we think about leadership development and organizational culture."

Leadership Principle: Exceptional individual performance does not justify cultural damage.

Leaders must evaluate talent not solely on individual metrics but on net contribution to organizational health—productivity minus organizational cost.

THEME 4: The Paradox of Excellence—Strategic Questions for High-Performing Institutions

Stacey Boyd (Superintendent, Gateway Community College Charter High Schools, operating campuses at Gateway and Phoenix College) introduced a tension rarely discussed in educational leadership literature:

"I lead two high-performing early college high schools: 100% graduation rates, A-rated performance, comprehensive pathway programming integrated with college systems, documented contribution to college enrollment and retention. By conventional metrics, we are succeeding. Every checkbox is marked.

This raises an uncomfortable question: How do you pursue continuous improvement when the organization perceives itself as already excellent? More pointedly: Do I function as superintendent to facilitate growth—or do I represent interference preventing an already-excellent system from maintaining its performance?"

The A-to-A+ Challenge

"Previously serving as principal of one school and interim principal of the other before assuming the superintendent role created unique dynamics. The schools had established excellence under distributed leadership. **My challenge involves helping high-performing teams envision a level of excellence they have not yet experienced**—transitioning from A-level performance to A+ performance.

This requires strategic infrastructure development that simplifies operational complexity for teachers and support staff, creating capacity for higher-order educational work. However, I consistently struggle with the question of whether my intervention represents value addition or systemic interference."

Roundtable Synthesis: The Drift Toward Complacency

Dr. Amerson synthesized Boyd's dilemma:

"Stacey articulated a challenge distinct from turnaround leadership but equally significant: How do high-performing organizations avoid drift toward complacency? When performance metrics validate current practice, the natural organizational tendency is to conclude, 'We have identified optimal practice; our work is maintenance, not transformation.'

That represents profoundly dangerous thinking. Excellence is not a destination but a trajectory. Pursuit of excellence remains constant regardless of current performance level—whether you are far from excellence or operating at its current threshold."

Leadership Principle: High performance creates organizational conditions that inhibit continued improvement—confidence morphs into complacency, success validates existing practice, critique feels like ingratitude. Leaders of excellent organizations must cultivate perpetual productive dissatisfaction—appreciation for current accomplishment coupled with relentless pursuit of unrealized potential.

THEME 5: Ecosystem Thinking—Building What Students Need, Not Defending What Institutions Want

The roundtable's most significant strategic insight emerged from examining models that transcend traditional institutional boundaries to serve students and communities systemically.

Model 1: The Para-Professional Pipeline—Addressing Teacher Shortage Through Unconventional Pathways

Matthew Flippen (President, Gracelyn University) described a model that should not be innovative but is:

"We identified a straightforward problem: massive qualified teacher shortage nationwide, disproportionately impacting vulnerable student populations who most require excellent instruction.

Simultaneously, we recognized that 1.2 million teacher assistants, para-professionals, and instructional aides work daily in school buildings—individuals who demonstrably care about education, given their willingness to perform demanding work for $8-12 hourly compensation. Many aspire to teacher certification but face insurmountable barriers: they are often single parents, economically vulnerable, unable to access traditional higher education pathways requiring

full-time enrollment and unaffordable tuition.

Our strategic intervention: Can we design a pathway for a single mother earning $12 hourly who can invest $100 monthly in education?"

The Economic Model:

$100 monthly tuition translates to $44 per credit hour—a price point achievable through radical cost structure redesign focused exclusively on this population's needs.

Five-Year Outcomes:

- Full accreditation achieved

- Exclusive focus on currently-employed para-professionals

- **100% placement rate** (students are upskilling in existing positions)

- **92% retention rate** (compared to typical higher education completion rates)

- Recently exceeded 1,000 students

- Projected growth: 1,000-2,000 additional students annually

"We constructed our entire business model to operate sustainably at $44 per credit hour. This creates scalability potential to address the estimated 300,000-600,000 teacher shortage nationally."

Ecosystem Implications: The Round-Trip Ticket Strategy

Dr. Amerson immediately recognized partnership opportunities:

"Matthew's model creates immediate possibilities for K-12 districts. We should be approaching community colleges and specialized institutions serving our para-professional workforce. **Districts possess vested interest in reducing cost burdens for employees pursuing certification because we derive enormous benefit from placing fully-certified teachers who already know our students, culture, and community.**

We are developing what we term the 'round trip ticket'—if you graduate from Alvord Unified, matriculate through our partner community college, we can employ you in our district. As you pursue continued education and credential advancement, we supplement tuition costs because

your professional growth directly benefits our organization and students."

Jason Morrison (Trinity Valley Community College) reported implementing parallel strategy:

"This fall we launched our Bachelor of Applied Science in Early Childhood Education specifically targeting para-professionals. Many school districts in our region struggle with teacher retention. Multiple districts now fund tuition for their para-professionals completing bachelor's degrees through our program.

We enrolled 40 students in our inaugural cohort; approximately 25% were para-professionals already employed in regional school districts."

Strategic Insight: "This population already demonstrates commitment to education through their willingness to perform demanding work for inadequate compensation. **When you invest in their professional development, you are cultivating teachers with proven dedication who will establish long tenure in your system.**"

Leadership Principle: The most effective talent pipelines may not originate from traditional certification programs. Identifying populations with demonstrated commitment and creating accessible pathways represents superior strategy to competing for graduates from traditional programs.

Model 2: Early College High Schools—Eliminating the Gap Between Secondary and Post-Secondary

Amy Diaz and Stacey Boyd described Gateway Community College Charter High Schools—a model that eliminates traditional boundaries between high school and college:

Performance Outcomes:

- 100% high school graduation rate

- 100% college-going rate

- Millions of dollars in scholarships earned by graduating seniors

- Every graduate completes high school with college transcript showing minimum 9 credits; many complete 60+ credits

Stacey Boyd's Framework:

"We provide dual enrollment and concurrent enrollment courses enabling at-risk students to graduate with associate degrees—dramatically reducing subsequent college costs. We integrate vocational training and industry certifications enabling graduates to transition directly into employment.

The structural integration is critical—these are not high school students taking occasional college courses. They are fully integrated into the college environment, experiencing college culture and expectations while completing secondary requirements."

Leadership Principle: The most effective pathways eliminate artificial institutional boundaries that create friction in student progression. When high school and college operate as integrated ecosystem rather than sequential silos, student success rates dramatically improve.

LEADERSHIP IMPERATIVES: TRANSLATING INSIGHT INTO ACTION

1. Conduct Rigorous Performance-Potential-Interference Audits

Before expanding organizational capacity, diagnose systemic interference:

- Identify legacy processes that consume disproportionate time relative to value generated

- Document cultural norms that inhibit innovation or accountability

- Map structural misalignments between strategy and resource allocation

- Assess talent management systems (hiring, onboarding, development, retention) for effectiveness

Key Question: If you added 20% more talent or resources to current systems without addressing interference, would performance improve proportionally—or would additional capacity simply scale existing dysfunction?

2. Establish Clear Cultural Standards While Enabling Co-Creation

Define non-negotiable performance expectations:

- Articulate what "excellent performance" requires in behavioral terms

- Identify practices that will no longer be tolerated regardless of historical precedent

- Communicate standards publicly with clarity and conviction

Simultaneously create space for organizational ownership:

- Invite teams to define how standards manifest in their specific contexts

- Enable high-capacity professionals to establish peer accountability systems

- Recognize that culture change succeeds when the organization owns the vision, not just leadership

Key Question: Have you established a "championship mindset" equivalent for your context—a cultural aspiration compelling enough to energize high-capacity professionals while providing clear accountability for those operating at bare minimum?

3. Redesign Hiring Practices to Assess Culture Alignment

Move beyond interview proficiency to authentic professional assessment:

- Develop performance tasks revealing actual capability rather than interview skill

- Create opportunities for candidates to interact with teams in operational contexts

- Assess entrepreneurial mindset, builder orientation, and resilience explicitly

- Recognize that hiring builders is exponentially more effective than converting coasters

Key Question: Can your current hiring process distinguish between candidates who interview exceptionally and candidates who perform exceptionally? If not, what assessment enhancements would reveal authentic professional capacity?

4. Pursue Excellence from Excellence—Avoid Complacency in High Performance

For leaders of currently high-performing organizations:

- Institute systematic processes for identifying unrealized potential

- Create safe channels for constructive critique of successful practices

- Expose your organization to external benchmarks and alternative models

- Frame continuous improvement as pursuit of excellence, not critique of current performance

Key Question: If your organization is already performing at A-level by conventional metrics, what represents A+ performance? Who has articulated that vision, and how are you pursuing it systematically?

5. Think Ecosystems, Not Institutions—Build Regional Pathways

Shift from institutional optimization to ecosystem design:

- Identify natural partners across educational sectors (K-12, community colleges, universities)

- Map current student pathways to identify friction points and gaps

- Design systematic transitions rather than transactional partnerships

- Measure collective impact on regional student success, not just institutional enrollment

Examples of ecosystem thinking:

- Round-trip tickets: K-12 to community college to K-12 employment with progressive tuition support

- Para-professional pipelines: Identifying adult learners already in educational environments and creating accessible certification pathways

- Integrated early college: High school students fully immersed in college environments, eliminating transition barriers

Key Question: What would become possible if you stopped optimizing your institution's enrollment and started optimizing your region's student success? What partnerships would you pursue? What territorial boundaries would you transcend?

CONCLUSION: THE CHOICE BETWEEN DEFENDING AND BUILDING

The leaders convened in this roundtable represent the spectrum of American educational leadership—different sectors, different contexts, different challenges. What unites them is a fundamental orientation: **they have chosen to build what students need rather than defend what institutions want.**

This distinction is neither semantic nor superficial. It represents divergent strategic postures with profound implications:

Defending What Institutions Want:

- Optimizing for institutional preservation

- Competing for declining student populations

- Resisting alternative delivery models as threats

- Measuring success through institutional metrics (enrollment, revenue, prestige)

- Viewing other educational providers as competitors

Building What Students Need:

- Optimizing for student success and community impact

- Collaborating to create seamless pathways across institutional boundaries

- Learning from alternative models to enhance traditional delivery

- Measuring success through student outcomes (completion, employment, community contribution)

- Viewing other educational providers as potential ecosystem partners

The demographic and market data is unambiguous: Traditional educational institutions face sustained enrollment pressure for at least the next fifteen years. Regional variation will create winners and losers, but no institution—regardless of sector, geography, or current performance—can assume immunity from disruption.

The strategic choice is equally clear: Leaders can spend the next eighteen months defending institutional structures, processes, and cultural norms established for a world that no longer exists. Or they can spend that time building systems, partnerships, and pathways that serve the students and communities who depend upon educational access and excellence.

The leaders in this roundtable have made their choice. They are removing Snapchat filters and naming reality without equivocation. They are conducting interference audits and redesigning systems rather than adding capacity to dysfunction. They are hiring builders and establishing cultures of excellence. They are pursuing A+ performance even from A-level baselines. They are transcending institutional boundaries to create ecosystem-level impact.

Most significantly: they are doing this work together. Not as competitors protecting market share, but as colleagues united by mission—ensuring every learner has pathways to opportunity and success.

The question for every educational leader: Will you join them in building—or continue defending?

Students have already cast their votes. The market has delivered its verdict.

The only remaining question is whether educational leaders will respond with the courage, humility, and urgency this moment demands.

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ABOUT THE PEER-TO-PEER LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE

The Peer-to-Peer Leadership Roundtable convenes educational executives—superintendents and college presidents —for strategic dialogue on the most pressing challenges confronting American education. Participants are selected based on demonstrated execution capacity and commitment to innovation in service of student success.

Roundtable Principles:

- Practitioner-to-practitioner dialogue among equals

- Focus on implementation, not theory

- Confidential exchange enabling vulnerable truth-telling

- Cross-sector learning (K-12 and higher education)

- Ecosystem thinking rather than institutional optimization

Next Roundtable: February 4, 2026 | 10:30 AM - 11:30 AM CST

Application Information:
Email: info@higherperformancegroup.com
Subject: February 4, 2026 Roundtable Application

Include in Application:

1. Your name, title, and institution

2. One strategic question you cannot solve in isolation—a challenge requiring ecosystem-level thinking

Selection Criteria:

- Superintendent, College/University President title required

- Demonstrated execution capacity (not just strategic planning)

- Commitment to cross-sector learning and collaboration

- Willingness to engage vulnerably in peer dialogue

- Geographic and institutional diversity across cohort

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This executive brief synthesizes insights from the December 3, 2025 Peer-to-Peer Leadership Roundtable. We express deep gratitude to the participating leaders who invested time during one of the most demanding periods of the academic year to engage in substantive strategic dialogue.

Their willingness to share candidly—acknowledging challenges, questioning assumptions, and learning from colleagues across traditional sector boundaries—exemplifies the leadership orientation American education requires to navigate the decade ahead.

For additional resources, including the October 1, 2025 roundtable synthesis with comprehensive data and citations, contact:

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"In times of change, learners inherit the earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists."
— Eric Hoffer