

Active Learning Symposium Connects Educators

At the first Active Learning Symposium Steelcase Education partnered with educators to share research, foster community and advance active learning.

“The reality is we’re preparing students for jobs that don’t exist yet.”

JULIE JILEK | Asst. Superintendent of Business Services at Northwest Suburban Special Education Organization

Julie Jilek joined teachers, administrators and other educators from around the country last week (Nov. 2017) at the first Active Learning Symposium geared toward both 6-12 and higher education. Hosted by Steelcase Education in Grand Rapids, Michigan, leading educators in active learning techniques gathered to share educational research, build a community and learn more about how educational space, when paired with pedagogy and technology, can be used as a tool to advance active learning .

The keynote speaker, Jeff Selingo, *New York Times* bestselling author and former top editor for the Chronicle of Higher Education, said many educators he talks to feel like they’re in a hurricane. But, he said, they can’t wait for the storm to pass.

“We are facing a revolution much like we did during the Industrial Revolution and we need to prepare for it,” noted Selingo. Repeatedly, studies chronicle the tremendous change taking place.

- 85% of jobs that will exist in 2030 haven’t been invented yet (Dell Technologies)
- 47% of US jobs will be lost to automation in the next few decades (Oxford University)

ACTIVE LEARNING CENTER GRANT

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THREE CHALLENGES

The symposium’s educators cited uncertainty, automation and the challenge of figuring out what success looks like for today’s students as three of their biggest challenges. By employing active learning techniques and creating an active learning environment, they hope to help students take ownership over their learning, igniting a passion within to create lifelong learners ready to handle an accelerated pace of change.

ACTIVE LEARNING COMMITMENT

Julie Jilek, Brian Weems, Maggie Johanson and Pam Guio (R to L) from the Northwest Suburban Special Education Organization presented research findings after implementing their active learning classroom.

For principal Brian Weems and teacher Maggie Johanson at Timber Ridge School in Arlington Heights, Illinois, an active learning pedagogy, a classroom designed to help students move between activities and a commitment to helping teachers take advantage of both have made a big difference.

“Giving flexibility to our students, helped give them success,” said Weems. Timber Ridge serves students with special needs. After implementing an active learning classroom, their research measured results — an increase in on-task and respectful behavior, a decrease in students having to leave the classroom and higher test scores.

POSITIVE CHANGE

Dr. Tricia Shepherd brought her years of experience with active learning to St. Edward’s University in Austin, Texas. She sees a positive change in attitudes and behavior and since implementing an active learning classroom has seen a drop in DFW rates (grades of D, F or withdrawals) from 29 percent to 22 percent.

“Students are very thoughtful in thinking about what works for their learning within the space,” said Dr. Shepherd.

Gwen Landever, Dean from the University of Saint Mary in Leavenworth, Kansas said kids and parents are seeking a recipe for success. Students have been taught that if they do what they’re asked, they’ll succeed. But, the future is more uncertain than it’s ever been. Landever said we have to untrain our students. They have to learn how to direct themselves.

Educators at Timber Ridge told the symposium attendees their active learning classroom has led to a significant shift from a teacher-centered classroom to a student-centered classroom. “It’s bigger than technology or curriculum or space. It’s the whole environment that’s made a difference,” said Jilek.

The active learning community continues to grow and share knowledge about what works and what doesn’t. Steelcase Education is nearing the start of its fourth cycle of the Active Learning Center Grant. Each year, education spaces throughout North America are awarded an Active Learning Classroom from Steelcase Education. In turn, those educators conduct research. Recently, Steelcase Education published the [results](#) from 12 institutions to share with educators everywhere. The application period for Cycle 4 of the [ALC Grant](#) begins on Friday, December 1, 2017 and will remain open until Friday, February 2, 2018.

Steelcase hosted the first Active Learning Symposium November 9-10, 2017.

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