CHRISTINE: The future is unpredictable.

Most importantly we need to empower innovative learners.

It is now my honor to introduce the US secretary of education,

Betsy Devos who will provide opening remarks

for one of these empowered groups.

(AUDIENCE APPLAUDS)

BETSY DEVOS: You're not nervous, are you?

No.

Well, thank you so much, Christine for that kind introduction

and thank you, all of you, for what you do to bring technology

to the students you serve.

Our young students use technology every day.

They simply can't imagine a world without it

and neither can more mature folks like some of us in this room.

I recall a few years ago when my oldest granddaughter

was not yet two and she was lying on her parents' bed

with her brand new baby sister taking her arm and unfolding

her finger to try to have her swipe her iPad.

(AUDIENCE LAUGHS)

That was quite a picture for me.

It's engraved in my mind.

Technology has facilitated tremendous break throughs

in nearly every sector of our society.

Telecommunications, medicine, transportation, you name it.

With a device the size of our hands

I can video chat with any of my eight darling grandchildren

from anywhere in the world or have dinner with my husband

when we are in different places for our work.

With a couple of swipes and taps on the same device

I can access more current information than what's contained

in the Library of Congress.

Yet through all these changes in our homes, in our workplaces

and in our communities how we do education in America

has all too often largely remained the same.

Does this sound familiar to anyone?

Students lined up in rows, a teacher up in front,

in front of a blackboard with the expectations

to sit down, don't talk, keep your eyes up front,

listen, respond if called upon, wait for the bell,

walk to the next class and repeat.

Students were trained for the assembly line then

and too many still are today.

Right now there are over seven million job openings

in the United States as the blue collar jobs of yesterday

morph into the blue tech jobs of today.

Coding is a more needed skill than riveting or stamping was

a few decades ago, but too many employers report they can't find

enough qualified people to employ because in too many cases

there is a disconnect between learning and the having.

And right now somewhere there's a student bored in class,

probably more than one.

Another student that can't study a topic for her dream job

because the school doesn't have the technology or the teacher.

Still another student feels like he needs more time

than his class mates in the subject while another can't wait

for things to speed up.

And sadly each one of those students is often told there's nothing

he or she can do about it.

And then there's this, our office recently found that only 24%

of eighth grade students are enrolling in the

STEM Gateway course algebra one, but that might have something

to do with this datapoint.

About 30% of school districts across the nation

don't have a single school that offered algebra one

in eighth grade.

Students deserve better and America can and must

do better.

So, I want to encourage all of us to challenge ourselves

to rethink school.

Rethink means everyone question everything to ensure

nothing limits students from being prepared for what comes next.

You gather at this Leadership Summit each year to do just that.

To look at everything with fresh eyes and forward thinking

and that's very inspiring and it's necessary across

the educational world.

I'm happy to congratulate St. Albans City School

in Vermont, winning the Student Voices award.

As you know, this honor recognizes school teachers

who have leveraged technology to enhance learning

and ultimately to improve student achievement.

St. Albans embraces digital learning daily.

Each student has an electronic personalized learning plan

to which they can contribute not only written work,

but audio files, video files and photos.

St. Albans latest project gave pre-K to eighth grade

students the chance to become entrepreneurs.

Teams of students were charged with starting their our businesses

using digital tools and strategies.

They developed products and designed logos

and built websites using technology to help them launch their start ups.

The school then hosted a community night where families

could visit a market place and purchase student made products.

St. Albans' principal, Joan Cavallo, its innovation specialist,

Grace Forrest and some of the St. Albans students

are here with us today to receive their well-earned award.

It was a joy to meet them just a few moments ago

and to learn a little bit about each of their projects.

I know that you're going to enjoy learning about them, as well.

Every student in America should have these kinds

of personalized learning opportunities.

There's some great examples in this main and I'm pleased

to highlight just a couple of them.

I think about Georgia's Gwinnett County public schools.

There the snow day has been made obsolete.

I just have to say parenthetically that Georgia doesn't really know

what a snow day is.

I'm from Michigan, so.

(AUDIENCE LAUGHS)

But it's been made obsolete with what they call,

the Digital Learning Day.

When inclement weather closes the building's physical doors,

teachers post assignments to an online portal for students

to access and complete by the next school day.

One could raise the question about why it takes a snow day to do this.

Or consider the creative approach for students in AP physics.

I recently observed in Holmes County, Mississippi.

Students enrolled in areas like the Mississippi Delta don't always have

access to all the subjects and all the expertise

that students in more populated areas have.

So, Holmes County partners with Mississippi State University

and a Yale astrophysicist who teaches students directly

through asynchronous video.

The students are also then tutored and mentored through regular video

conferences with college physics majors at universities and colleges

across the country.

Our office of Educational Technology recently hosted a reimagining

higher education ecosystem challenge which encouraged

entrepreneurs to embrace technology and partner with

educators new creative learning opportunities for students

and employees alike.

One participant in the challenge, Google, launched an IT for everyone

partnership with COSARA.

It allows anyone anywhere to earn an IT support professional

certificate in only eight months.

And there's JetBlue's great program for its employees.

It helps them inventory credits they may have already earned

somewhere and then guides them on paths to degrees

or certifications with access to free, digital courses

which they're encouraged to pursue while they're on breaks

or on layovers.

Now, these ideas may seem revolutionary to some

in Washington, DC, but they're just common sense.

In places like St. Albans Gwinnett or Holmes County.

And it begs a few questions.

Why isn't technology more widely embraced?

Why limit what a student can learn based upon the faculties

and the facilities available?

Why do students have to go to a school building

in the first place?

Students don't absorb information only within the barriers

of a school building and only during school hours.

Learning is really dynamic and spontaneous.

A wider use of technology can make classrooms

more nimble and active and empower students

to take more control of their learning pathways.

Technology is a tool, an important one.

A student applying his or her ingenuity is what gives life

to the devices and the machines.

Ultimately every student deserves learning environments

that are agile, relevant and exciting for a challenging

lifelong learning journey.

As you know, the, Every Student Succeeds Act

offers a lot of flexibilities to states and local districts

especially when it comes to utilizing technology.

Whether it be personalized computer testing

or Title IV funding, the flexibilities are there.

It was the intention of Congress to encourage states and communities

to try new things for students.

So, the flexibilities are there and the freedom is there.

I urge you and your fellow educators to embrace it further.

Lead the changes that will unlock student's passion for learning.

The kinds of changes that the leaders and students

from St. Albans are being recognized more today.

Now, to the students here, I want to let you in on a little secret.

I sometimes found school boring, but it doesn't have to be that way.

Learning is fun.

It's interesting and it can be exciting.

School should be too.

We want to empower you to make it so.

You represent 100% of our future.

You deserve 100% of our effort.

So, thank you and thank you all for what you do

and I encourage you and urge you to continue doing it.

Thanks very much.

(AUDIENCE APPLAUDS)

CHRISTINE: Thank you, Madam Secretary.