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PERSPECTIVES FROM THE 2022

# TEACHERS

# OF THE YEAR



**Ravi Hutheesing**

Opening Keynote Speaker  
Wednesday, Jan. 19  
2022 Wisconsin State Education Convention

# PIVOT

An excerpt from  
**“PIVOT: Empowering  
Students Today  
to Succeed in an  
Unpredictable Tomorrow”**  
by Ravi Hutheesing



**W**hen I began thinking about this book, the world was relatively calm, with strong economies and no major conflicts. With technology rapidly evolving and impacting the future of jobs, the education industry was deeply engaged in debates about how to best prepare students for an unpredictable future. As a keynote speaker

**The Wisconsin State Education Convention is proud to bring back Ravi Hutheesing as the opening keynote on Jan. 19.**

Ravi's journey as a rock star, aviator and U.S. State Department cultural diplomat is an inspiring example of how to pivot and succeed in an ever-changing world.

He is the first American-born descendant of India's first family (which includes prime ministers Nehru and Gandhi), but his worldwide visibility skyrocketed in 1997 as the guitarist of triple Grammy nominee, Hanson. The group performed at the White House and Madison Square Garden as well as on "Saturday Night

Live," the "Today" show and more.

Ravi later became a pilot and aviation speaker, helping the industry attract new student pilots. In 2015, the U.S. State Department began sponsoring his cultural programs in Russia, Indonesia, Iraq and Lebanon. □

who has delivered speeches to thousands of education leaders at conferences, including the International Baccalaureate Global Conference and AASA's National Conference on Education, answering this question has been a cornerstone of my message. Creating cultural competence and equity in education (fairness, regardless of differing values and beliefs), and implementing technology and personalized learning, are common themes because, while the future may be unpredictable, educators help shape the future by how they prepare students.

Then the unthinkable happened. COVID-19 shattered global economies, flipped education upside-down, and caused all of humanity to make the most significant pivot in a lifetime. For much of 2020, 90% of the global population lived in countries with some degree of travel restriction, 1.7 billion people were ordered to stay at home, and the rest either found their everyday lives severely curtailed given the mandated closures of non-essential businesses or were encouraged to self-quarantine while working and learning from home.

Classrooms and conference rooms pivoted immediately from physical to virtual. Wedding receptions, birthday celebrations, and funerals soon followed. The global shutdown accelerated the implementation of technology into education, the workforce, and social interac-

tions practically overnight.

The absence of traditional schooling for at least one semester was probably the most significant disruption for most families. Ninety percent of the world's students found schools closed or were sent home from colleges and universities, sometimes without even the time to pack their belongings. Educators went into a panic as they attempted to bridge a gap that turned into a chasm. School systems everywhere involuntarily accelerated the adaptation to online learning with varying degrees of success. While digital learning had already been increasing in classrooms, it quickly became apparent how much disparity it creates without structure and guaranteed access to computers and high-speed internet. Moreover, since

Minnesota, suspected of committing a minor offense by using a counterfeit twenty-dollar bill, was killed by the excessive force of the arresting white police officer. While the virus had, in some ways, united the globe in the effort to contain a common enemy, people were also reaching psychological breaking points from being kept in figurative cages. Riots quickly erupted in cities across the United States, often evolving from peaceful protests into violent clashes with police. Then, like the coronavirus, the protests transcended borders, spreading to Europe and beyond as the world's attention pivoted from overcoming a health crisis to demanding social justice.

The time had come for me to complete this book, which is for all educators, including school adminis-



The global shutdown **accelerated the implementation of technology** into education, the workforce and social interactions practically overnight.

many families depend on free school lunches, creating a system to distribute box lunches often took precedence over solving the challenges of delivering education to the home.

Just as the world was beginning to find its rhythm, a second event stopped us in our tracks. George Floyd, a black man in Minneapolis,

trators, teachers, counselors, parents and students. I believe education is the solution to all the world's problems, but to educate the "whole child" and create "lifelong learners," it must begin as a partnership between parents and teachers and then pivot to one between students and mentors. While it need not

always be an active collaboration, each must take ownership of his or her role because education is much more than just going to school. By giving all students the skills to pivot in the face of constant changes, we empower them to succeed in an unpredictable future.

My pivots — from a family of

direction while maintaining the fundamental principles and strengths on which one operates — the distance between thought and action is reduced considerably. Whether it is an individual or an entire industry, the ability to pivot is the difference between staying relevant and becoming redundant.

been slow to come, possibly because, despite this negative narrative, statistics tell a different story. In the U.S., the number of high school graduates, college enrollments and employees (other than in recession years) have consistently risen. While the latest PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) scores indicate that American students are average compared to other countries, once you dissect these scores further and isolate schools with fewer than 25% of students receiving FRLP (free and reduced-priced lunch program) — those eligible for Title 1 funding — the U.S. is close to the top of the list. In this regard, one can argue that there is not a public education problem as much as there is a poverty problem, and much like everywhere in the world, the disparity can often be linked to socioeconomic and racial divides.

While disparity has been accentuated during the pandemic due to the lack of equal access to technology, which would likely perpetuate classism and racism, young people around the world are now taking a firm stance on social justice issues. Even during the months before COVID-19 and George Floyd, millennials have started marching on the streets to fight for equality, from Hong Kong to Chile to France to Lebanon. While previous generations have done the same, it is the multicultural nature of millennials and their successors, Gen Z, that could produce a change unlike anything we have seen before.

To prepare students for an unpredictable future, the most important thing they need to master is how to learn. The world will always have more to teach than the classroom; therefore, the primary focus of education must be to create lifelong learners. COVID-19 and George Floyd's death are excellent examples of world events that yield lifelong lessons, and both history and the future will provide a plethora of others.

The task for all educators is simple to understand but perhaps more complicated to implement. It

politicians and bankers to the guitarist of a world-famous band to a “flying musician” in the aviation industry to a cultural diplomat for the U.S. Department of State to an arts and education advocate as a keynote speaker — have created an exciting and fulfilling journey made possible by owning my education.

My goal has always been to push the education industry to pivot toward a hybrid of traditional and real-world schooling. As a concept, “change” can be daunting, and it can lead to procrastination. If one makes a pivot instead — a shift in

In education, the call for reform is nothing new. It is part of every political platform worldwide. For over four decades in the U.S., politicians have campaigned that education must get “back to basics” because we are “A Nation at Risk” and there must be “No Child Left Behind.” More recently, parents have been taking matters into their own hands by getting vouchers to use public money to enroll their children in charter schools (some of which are for-profit), giving them “school choice.”

Yet, a significant change has

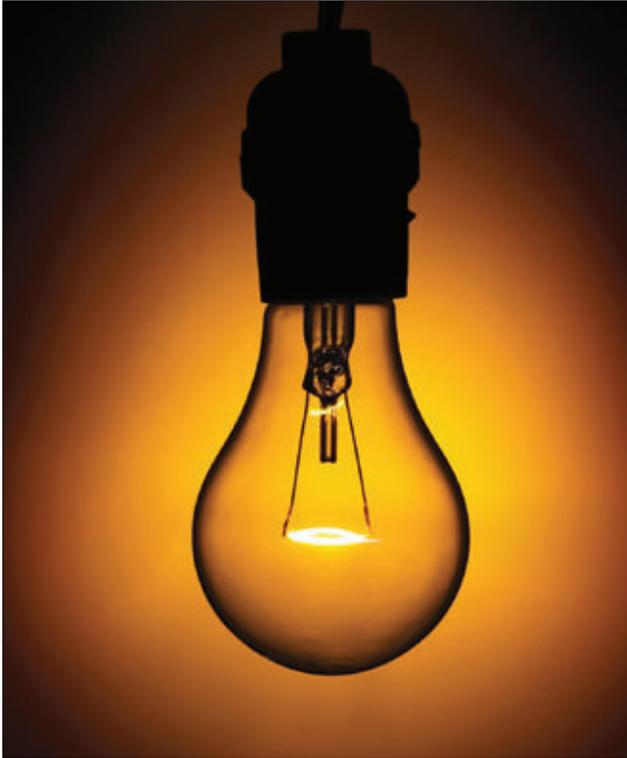


**It comes down to four concentrations:** inspire curiosity, recognize and nurture talent, provoke critical thinking and foster communication.

comes down to four concentrations: inspire curiosity, recognize and nurture talent, provoke critical thinking, and foster communication. If educators focus on these four, we need not reimagine education. Instead, we can redefine schooling to make education impervious to however unpredictable the future may be. In other words, the classroom must empower every student to perpetually absorb and act upon the lessons of an ever-changing world. PricewaterhouseCoopers reports that nearly 40% of jobs will be automated in the next decade. No matter when you read this, the rate of change is a startling reference. Those

who argue that jobs will return are speculating at best. There is no telling whether there will be new jobs created or if our jobs will cease to be the primary focus of our lives. The “ice-breaker” question of the future may no longer be “what do you do?” but rather, “how do you feel about...?” Outsourcing of labor is nothing new, and less expensive options will always be sought. However, jobs that used to be outsourced to humans in third-world countries will now go to first-world technology. The benefit to companies that employ robots over people will become increasingly apparent — no need for payroll,

healthcare provisions, pensions, workman’s compensation, etc. Moreover, artificial intelligence will likely evolve faster than job creation, and at some point, predominantly create jobs for other robots. Technological deflation — the diminishing price of technology — will have a significant impact on future economies and job markets, and if that is combined with the ability to provide equal access to high-speed broadband internet, the impact on humanity should ultimately be positive. Nevertheless, to stay relevant, one must be able to pivot. ■ *Reprinted with permission.*



# Policy Resource Guide

Made in Wisconsin for Wisconsin school districts, the **WASB Policy Resource Guide** is a convenient, up-to-date, web-based policy tool providing sample policies and the resources needed to customize local policies.

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