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Voiceover:	*A Deeper Look. Exploring what works and what doesn't in development, and the changes we can make together to turn ideas into action.*

Patrick Fine: Hi. I'm Patrick Fine, CEO of FHI 360 and host of *A Deeper Look* podcast. This season, we're taking a look at the trends that are shaping the future of development, and in this episode we're talking about what's influencing the future of education. I'm joined by Dr. Warren Simmons, Senior Policy Advisor at the National Education Policy Center at the University of Colorado Boulder. Warren, can you say a little bit more about your background?

Warren Simmons: Yes. Well, I've been in education reform for 40 years of my career. I've seen a lot occur over that time. I've been parts of several movements that have not been successful, and I hope to share the lessons of that experience to the listeners in this podcast. But, I've worked as a deputy superintendent of school systems, Prince George's County, right outside of Washington, DC. I have been in the philanthropic world, the Annie E. Casey Foundation. I've been in Washington think tanks at the National Center on Education and the Economy. And, I've led the Annenberg Institute for School Reform for 18 years out of Brown University. And so, I've participated in education reform from the various vantage points inside schools and school districts, from the philanthropic community side, reform support organizations.

Patrick Fine: And, did you work at the Department of Education at one point?

Warren Simmons: Yes, I guess I did. I left that out. In fact, I first started my career – after I left Cornell University, I joined the National Institute of Education in 1980 and pursued positions at the Army Research Institute in the Office of Education Research and Improvement for the earliest part of my career. So, yes, I have a Washington, DC-based experience as well.

Patrick Fine: So, you've committed your entire life to school reform and education reform in the United States.

Warren Simmons: Primarily in the United States.

Patrick Fine:	Which is one of the reasons I think it's important to have you on the *Deeper Look* podcast. Many of our episodes target international development – so, human development challenges in poor countries. One of the important components of the sustainable development goals, or the SDGs, was the notion of universality, that human development challenges are not confined to poor countries, that they are common to all countries. So, it will be great to have your perspective on the human development challenges around education reform in the United States, as well as where you see things going.
	So, to start the conversation, when I read about the trends in education in the United States, I read about the same topics I've been reading about for 30 years. And, it makes me wonder: Is the shape of things to come in education just like the shape of the way things have been for the last 30 years? Or, are there actually new trends that are going to transform or change the way we approach education reform?
Warren Simmons:	Well, there are new trends that should change the way we approach education reform. It's interesting that you said that in human development you've been looking at education development in poor countries. In the United States, the Southern Education Foundation released a report a few years ago that basically identified that 50 percent of the 50 million children who attend public schools in the United States come from low-income families and communities. And so, we are essentially talking about an education system that is now serving the vast majority of kids who live in poverty. And so, we have an education system that is servicing a poor country within the United States.
Patrick Fine:	Right. But the difference would be that the education system we have has much more resources than the education systems in sub-Saharan Africa or parts of Southeast Asia on a per capita basis.
Warren Simmons:	So, yes. And – but you're thinking about that in a relative sense. Yes. It's also the case that in our education system we have built-in school funding inequities. The education formulas in most states raise most monies for local education systems out of property taxes. The value of homes, you know, varies widely with the value of property, and so, poor communities have schools that are historically and chronically underfunded. And so, the schools that serve the students who have the greatest need often get the fewest amount of resources given the basis for the funding for them as being in property taxes.

Patrick Fine: So, that would be one area of education reform, is the financing of education?

Warren Simmons: A major area. But, there have been school finance lawsuits going on in most states since I started in education reform. Many of them, even when they get one, remain unresolved. I mean, there are a few positive stories – in New Jersey, the Abbot case; in Kentucky, during the early days of standard space reform; in Massachusetts more money was devoted. But, you're talking about more money being raised over a brief period of time that is seeking to overcome the fact that urban districts in particular and districts in poor communities – urban and rural – have chronically underfunded over 40, 50, 100 years or so. In other words, the facilities are antiquated. The districts have been downsizing in terms of population as more affluent families have moved out, which leads to a concentration of poor students, particularly in urban communities but also in rural communities.

Patrick Fine: So, do you see a trend in the next ten years that addresses that disparity?

Warren Simmons: The organization that I am working with now, the Partnership for the Future of Learning, it has four strands of work. One is called shared policy. One is called key places. One, which I lead, is called shared systems. And, another strand is shared story. In the shared policy work we are going to be focusing lots of attention on school finance equity. But school finance equity is not a technical battle solely. There's lots of evidence of inequities in school funding and school funding disparities.

Patrick Fine: It's a political battle.

Warren Simmons: It's a political battle. So, in essence the future trend we see is a shift to build up the voice of youth-adult organizing groups to become part of reform. I think in the early part of my career, much of the reform conversation was left in the hands of experts who debated each other, who were called on in court cases. And, and now increasingly, while those experts continue to play an important role, the political clout needed to change policy at the local, state and increasingly national levels is going to have to come from grassroots organizing. And, they have to become partners in this endeavor along with researchers and policymakers.

Patrick Fine: I remember working for the Boston school system in the mid-'80s. And, at the time we were very conscious of the importance of grassroots organizing to influence education policy, policies we wanted adopted that would benefit our school. So, that recognition of the importance of grassroots organizing and political movement is not new. But, do you see something different now in terms of the potential for grassroots organizing?

Warren Simmons: So, grassroots organizing fueled the civil rights movement.

Patrick Fine: Right.

Warren Simmons: Right? Given our ages, we're very familiar with the power of that activity. But, when you think about education reform and policy in this country since the 1980s and *A Nation at Risk*, most of the policymaking has occurred at the national level. Commissions that include business leadership and political leadership have driven reform conversations. And commissions funded by philanthropy. In fact, many of the grassroots organizing efforts were slowly strangled of resources. And so, they declined in the power of their voice and in their capacity to inform the debate, as policymaking shifted from local levels to national levels. And, you also have to remember there's always been a tension in this country between the role of national, state and local policies. Right?

So, if you think about the South, many civil rights activists would argue that you don't want local policymaking, because local policymaking led to segregation in the South. Right?

Patrick Fine: Right. Right. Yeah. In international development, one of the things that we recognize is that local communities can own some pretty bad things.

Warren Simmons: Right. Exactly. And so, there was a shift away from local policymaking as a result of the standards movement. But also, some of the distrust fostered in the implementation of Brown v. Board, a national policy that desegregated our schools and enhanced equity that faced barriers at the local and state levels. So, in this country, we have always had this tension. And, I think that one of the trends that we will see going forward is a rebalancing of advocacy. In the '80s and the '90s, advocacy was dominated at the local and state levels by elite organizations and groups – the Council of Great City Schools, the National Governors Association, the Council of Chief State School Officers, Achieve. There were lots of think tanks and organizations that operated to

inform Congress and the president around education policy, which led to things like standard space reform, No Child Left Behind, Every Student Succeeds Act, and things of that sort.

We are now seeing a rebalancing effort to strengthen local voices, particularly the youth voice and parents and community voice, fundamentally because the population in urban communities has now shifted. Most urban districts are – the vast majority of students are students of color. And, what's interesting is we have antiquated levels that we need to unpack. I mean, so we typically, we describe students as black and white, right? But the black students in Boston today are very different from the black students who were in Boston when you were teaching in Boston.

Patrick Fine: Right.

Warren Simmons: Right?

Patrick Fine: Right.

Warren Simmons: The black students in New York City today or in Philadelphia or in Los Angeles or the brown students are very different than that label was used to describe 30 years ago. And so, there are increasing numbers of African immigrants. There are increasing numbers of students from the Caribbean. There are increasing numbers of students from Central and South America and from the Middle East.

Patrick Fine: From South Asia.

Warren Simmons: And South Asia, right? And so, saying "black" and "white" is less informative and less instructive. And, many communities now have to delve more deeply to unpack what's underneath race, which is a social construct, cultural construct anyway. Has to be given more attention. And, many communities now have advocacy groups of Southeast Asian students – I'm from Providence and we have a wonderful group called "ARISE" that represents the Southeast Asian community – are now taking stands to say that "We are here. We are citizens of the United States. And, our schools need to adapt to us."

So, another trend going forward is not simply thinking about how to better serve low-income communities and low-income families but also how to make our education system far more culturally

	responsive and adaptive than it has been and was designed to be in the 20th century.
Patrick Fine:	How big a factor do you think demographics is in driving that? Just by the weight of numbers, do you see that tipping the political balance?
Warren Simmons:	*[Laughs]* Well – and, I'm only chuckling because unfortunately numbers alone will not tip the political balance. Political power and activism will. In fact, it's –
Patrick Fine:	Yes. But numbers can fuel political power.
Warren Simmons:	They can. But I mean, it's remarkable how demographics have shifted, and the people in power are continuing to hold onto their power and make all kinds of policy changes to suppress voting rights, to decrease the power of elected officials when they come from a party that is inconsistent with their own. I'm befuddled and flummoxed by the extent to which our democracy can be manipulated to actually stave off the demographics. And so, I think another reason why community organizing is important and partnership is important is because in order to get the demographic shifts attended to, people are going to have to organize and achieve political power. Demographics alone will not tip the scales.
Patrick Fine:	So, you just explained that the power elite are very adept at adapting.
Warren Simmons:	Well, and we see that internationally, where you can have minorities controlling countries for decades.
Patrick Fine:	Right.
Warren Simmons:	So, we have the same phenomenon taking place in our urban communities and nationally and in various regions of the country. So, these shifts are not going to occur naturally. They will be shifts that occur because people organize to do that and form important partnerships, which is one of the reasons why the Partnership for the Future of Learning is so important and unique. It's a partnership that includes 18 foundations but also 100 other organizations that range from youth and adult organizing groups to policy think tanks to researchers to the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association. So, it's a cross-sector partnership because the members of the organization and the partnership understand that we have to form alliances in order to

create change that will reflect the growing needs but also the important aspirations. I mean, we often think of poverty as something that generates needs but it also generates new inspiration, new talent, and new aspiration and new ideas.

Patrick Fine: Absolutely. Potential.

Warren Simmons: One of the things that I think is important to understand in the United States is that as a country we're going to be increasingly reliant on being able to be globally competitive. And, the people who are best positioned to help us remain globally competitive in the future are recent immigrants who understand the language, culture and habits of other countries much better than most of us who were born and raised in the United States do because we've been isolated and we don't travel internationally and we don't even travel much from state to state or city to city or region to region.

Patrick Fine: Right.

Warren Simmons: And so, I think how we look at the emerging populations that exist in the United States without using a deficit lens but instead using an asset lens – they bring multiple languages, they bring rich cultural experiences, they bring international social and professional networks that American citizens in the traditional sense who are born and raised and often don't leave their states and communities don't have access to.

Patrick Fine: I want to ask you a little bit more about that. But, before I do, I want to go back to this notion of cross-sector alliances and partnerships. Looking in the future and thinking about the kind of partnerships that you envision over the next ten years, during the 2020s, do you see a material difference in how we go about it or the kinds of partnerships that come together compared to the past? Because, again, we've talked about partnership for a long time.

Warren Simmons: Yeah. But we've, in the United States, I think, talked about partnership within sectors. So, how can we get the higher education people to partner with the K-12 people? And, how do you get educational researchers to partner with higher ed and K-12? So, we've talked about partnership within sectors. Increasingly, we're talking about cross-sector partnerships. There's a growing understanding, which is long overdue, that intellectual performance, cognitive performance, is not simply cognitive: It's social and cultural, that you speak, you think, you learn and you perform not just in some objective cognitive realm but in a social,

cultural environment. Right? And, a way to learn how to do that well is to have exposure to the range of contexts in which you're going to have to be literate in, you're going to have do science in. And, that comes from young people at a very early age being exposed to how learning and intellectual performance occurs in settings outside of school.

Patrick Fine: So, do you see that as a trend in the future?

Warren Simmons: That's a trend that's been around for a while; it's just now being publicly accepted and acknowledged. So, if you think about the work of Geoffrey Canada and the Harlem Children's Zone, which has occurred over 30 years or so –

Patrick Fine: And has been copied in many cities, including in Durham, North Carolina, where FHI 360 has its headquarters.

Warren Simmons: Right. Yeah. I think the U.S. government called it "The Promise Zones" or something. But that was a cross-sector development. He paid attention to strengthening housing in the Harlem community, strengthening education, strengthening recreation and arts programs. And, that model is now being taken up and instituted nationally. Unfortunately, it's hard to implement a homegrown model using a national framework.

Patrick Fine: Well, it kind of gets back to your earlier point about rebalancing between national –

Warren Simmons: Exactly.

Patrick Fine: – designs and then –

Warren Simmons: You have to build local capacity in order to get that done. And, Geoffrey built local capacity. I know him personally; we're colleagues, so I call him Geoffrey. Geoff built that capacity over a 30-year period of time. It's hard to recreate that in a five-year grant period.

Patrick Fine: Right.

Warren Simmons: Right?

Patrick Fine: Right.

Warren Simmons: And so, I think we have to take – one of the growing trends is philanthropy, and national policy has to think in the longer run, beyond these three-year or four-year cycles and talk about how you support and build capacity and partnerships over ten years. The other trend that I think is important: day care programs, preschool programs, adult education programs, not only cross sector but intergenerational.

Patrick Fine: Right.

Warren Simmons: And so, increasingly, when you look at education reforms that start in the community and move to schools, if you think of DreamYard, which is a community-based arts organization in the Bronx, or the Lower East Side Girls Club, or if you think about the work in Tower Hamlets in London in the U.K., you know, what you see is the understanding that some of the best resources we have to promote cross-sector development, they don't start in the school. They start in community-based organizations that already have close relationships with adults and families and children, that already understand and are making contributions to rebuild communities, not something we build as individuals.

Patrick Fine: So, is that recognition that many of the elements of cross-sector alliances needed to transform learning are going to be found outside of the school, is that well recognized by educators?

Warren Simmons: It's beginning to be recognized.

Patrick Fine: So, do you see that as a potential trend?

Warren Simmons: So, the community schools movement, for instance, led out of the Institute for Educational Leadership, is burgeoning and growing. And, it's being taken up primarily in a bottom-up way. Local cities – Hartford; Philadelphia; Newark, New Jersey; even New York City – have begun to adopt the community schools model as an important component of reform. The community schools model at this point starts from the school and tries to build out into agencies. Some of the more successful and longstanding models that I've seen, like the Harlem Children's Zone, like DreamYard, started in the community and built towards the school.

Patrick Fine: Right.

Warren Simmons: Now, I think we will obviously have to do it in both directions, but the ones that start in communities have an advantage over the ones

that start with schools. People in community know the community. They are following the needs and aspirations of the community. They are making cultural adaptations. They do it easily because of their familiarity over a long period of time. People in schools are challenged to do that. Most of the teachers in many of our districts are a majority white. They don't live in the communities. And so, trying to build from the schools to make culturally adaptive responses to communities with educators who don't live and don't know that community well is problematic. And, I think that's why we will see that community schools movement and integrated development movement occurring in both directions, which is why these cross-sector partnerships is important.

Patrick Fine: Right. And the convergence there.

Warren Simmons: Right.

Patrick Fine: I just want to make one comment about your example of Harlem Children's Zone about the difficulty of replicating that. And, that is something that we see, I think, across human development sectors, the challenge of scalability, that often the elements that are responsible for something that can be quite successful are tied up with the context and often tied up with some specific individuals who have a unique set of skills to be able to both conceive and then carry out the transformation or the reform that is very difficult to replicate. How do we deal with the issue of scalability over the next ten years?

Warren Simmons: Well, we have to have a conversation about what we're attempting to scale. In the United States we've attempted to scale programs and schools. Rarely do you hear the language of systems and systems building in the United States. I think in other countries – as a matter of fact, that's one of the advantages we can learn from other countries – because of the weakness of the community-based sector it requires systems, interventions and resources devoted from national governments, to think about capacity building and building up the capacities of NGOs to participate. Here we have a rich set of NGOs that operate without systems.

Patrick Fine: Right.

Warren Simmons: Right? And, it's the weakness of our systems that make replication and scale difficult. And so, that's why I'm leading the shared system strand of work in the Partnership for the Future of Learning so that we don't fall back into our very familiar stance, that the

thing that we're trying to change in the United States is the school, as though they can exist and be expanded and adapted and replicated without regard to the system that they operate in. And so, if you think about national policy, trying to drive change down to the individual school without thinking about the redesign of state agencies and the redesign of local school districts, it explains the sort of 40-year history of failure of comprehensive school reform designs. We keep putting our hands up and saying, "These things work. Why is it they're never taken to scale?" Because we've never thought about, or not until recently intensively thought about, redesigning systems.

And in fact, what we've attempted to do is redesign schools around systems, and the charter school movement is a perfect example of that. But even before charter schools there's an attempt to think about creating special reform pockets. Boston Public Schools had the Boston Pilot Schools. And, what were the Boston Pilot Schools? Oh, they were given waivers from district policies.

Patrick Fine:　　Right. They were trying to hack the system.

Warren Simmons:　　Right. And, they do hack it successfully but only for a small number of schools, which then gives credence to the rest of the system to continue doing its business without being fundamentally redesigned.

Patrick Fine:　　I want to ask about the role of technology in the future. We see that reshaping all aspects of our lives. How do you see it fitting into these trends? You've talked about a trend around rebalancing of advocacy and political mobilization more towards local voices – youth and communities – and away from a national centralized planning model. You've talked about education systems having to become more culturally adaptable. We've talked about harnessing the international talent and potential in the immigrant populations that we're not taking full advantage of right now in terms of powering innovation. And, you've talked about cross-sector alliances. Does technology come into play in any of those?

Warren Simmons:　　Yes and no.

　　[Laughter]

　　Well, the reason why it's a mixed answer is because it depends on how you think about the purposes of technology. So, we've introduced technology in U.S. education in the latter part of the

20th century, and it was used basically to provide an electronic way of delivering outdated, outmoded curriculum.

Patrick Fine: It was just to replicate the existing –

Warren Simmons: Exactly. So, to replicate the existing system, the existing theories and understandings of learning and to basically take tracking, take it out of the school and put it into a computer program. Right?

Patrick Fine: Right.

Warren Simmons: Technology can be a tool that leads to fundamental change or it can be a tool that sort of reinforces, reifies existing the understandings of teaching and learning. What I see happening in the use of technology in communities is that it's being used more adaptively because communities are not bound by traditional understandings of teaching and learning in the same way that educators are. And, they aren't driven by the influence in education of large textbook publishing and testing companies. They want the schools to be innovative, but the measures they're going to use to measure the success of the innovation is whether PSAT scores increase, SAT scores increase, students take more advanced courses.

Patrick Fine: Right. Student achievement. It's all about student achievement, right?

Warren Simmons: But traditional measures of student achievement.

Patrick Fine: Right. Right. Right.

Warren Simmons: Which reinforce the old curriculum and instruction approaches.

Patrick Fine: Absolutely.

Warren Simmons: Right? So, it's very difficult to be innovative when you're being measured against traditional measures that imply an old core curriculum and a procedure through basic higher level skills devoid of any social or cultural relevance and context. Right? And so, we need to design technologies that reflect new understandings of learning.

Patrick Fine: I think most people still think of basic education as providing a set of standard competencies around literacy, numeracy, knowledge of the world that you live in. That sort of thing.

Warren Simmons: So, the definition of basic education that most schools still operate is the definition of basic education for the Industrial Age.

Patrick Fine: Right. I agree with that. Yeah.

Warren Simmons: Right? What we need to do is redefine what basic education looks like in a creative economy, and in an information age. And, what that looks like is problem solving, collaboration, using a variety of resources and materials found in schools and in workplace settings, integrated learning and development. That's today's form of basic education, which differs fundamentally from the old 20th century Industrial Age notion of basic education, which is you needed basic literacy, basic numeracy. You needed to know how to show up on time and work hard and tolerate a lot of boredom and monotony. Right? So, the creative economy requires a redefinition of basic education.

Patrick Fine: Is there a trend in the next ten years that is going to cause that to happen?

Warren Simmons: Well, you know, the standards movement, which I was an advocate of in the '90s, was a beginning effort to do that. Unfortunately, we were more ambitious and adaptive in the development of the standards themselves than we were in the assessments and curriculum tools that were supposed to represent those standards. And so, since you can define what students need to know and be able to do and you connect that to what their everyday lives are like, unless textbook publishing companies follow that and unless the assessments follow that, then you'll be using old materials to try to teach –

Patrick Fine: New stuff.

Warren Simmons: – new stuff, as you so elegantly put it. And so, we've been caught and trapped in using old materials – old assessments, old measures, old indicators – to teach new innovative stuff. We have to rethink what those measures are, but there are a lot of powerful entities and organizations that make millions of dollars off of the old stuff and they're slow to adapt and change.

Patrick Fine: Warren, thank you for this conversation. I want to ask a couple of final questions. One is as you look out into the future, looking over the next ten years, we've talked about a number of trends here – is

there a single one that you think is going to be predominant or that is going to capture public attention?

Warren Simmons: So, I am very excited about the reemergence, and partly due to technology and social media, of the importance of arts in learning. Arts is a wonderful vehicle for fostering cultural adaptivity and mutual respect across a variety of different kinds of genres. And so, I think the arts are something that can bring communities together, that causes communities to examine differences as complementary and enriching rather than differences as reflecting some kind of hierarchy.

I'm also impressed with the growing understanding of the importance of education occurring within the context of family and community development. You know, I grew up in the era where the idea was to save the child – educate the child so they could leave their families and communities. And, that creates tensions. I think what we've learned in international development is how you both educate children to be a resource to their families and their communities, even if they don't live in the same community. They're still connected. They still invest. They still provide resources. We've lost that in the United States, which is why families and communities get threatened by change and see change as something that can in fact undermine communities rather than enhance and build them.

Patrick Fine: Right. And, that might come back to your earlier point about harnessing the potential in immigrant populations …

Warren Simmons: Exactly.

Patrick Fine: … because they're closer to what you're talking about.

Warren Simmons: They are closer. They are closer to that. And, it's more of a natural occurrence to those communities.

Patrick Fine: So, looking at the future, do you think of yourself as an optimist about seeing continued progress and seeing real reforms gaining traction? Or are you more of a pessimist?

Warren Simmons: I would say I'm more of a realist now, that I in my youth thought progress would be linear, monotonic increasing function, and now I understand that it can be curvilinear. And, what gets us back on track is when communities organize and when cross-sector partnerships push against the forces of resistance. And so, I am

optimistic to the extent that we rebuild, refurbish, re-renovate families and communities and systems in a way that allows them to co-construct their endeavors. And, that will create and sustain the kind of changes that we need, but it's not going to be a linear movement. There will always be forces of resistance from different quarters.

Patrick Fine: Warren, thank you very much for this conversation. As a person who grew up in the community school movement, it warms my heard to hear your optimism about the role of communities, the renewed and rediscovered role of communities and this convergence between schools and communities in creating the kind of adaptive education system we need for the future. Thanks so much.

Warren Simmons: Couldn't have said it better myself.

Patrick Fine: Listeners, thank you for tuning in for this new season. I'd love to hear from you. What do you see in your communities with respect to the development of schools and the roles schools are playing? What are the trends that you see shaping education in the future? Share your comments and share this episode with your colleagues and your communities. Tune in next month for another discussion. Subscribe now so that you don't miss it.

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