

Future Drivers of Change and their Implications for Education:

Scouting the River through Foresight

Mott Foundation Grantees Convening
Navigating Future Horizons: Shaping Opportunities
for Thriving Youth

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Education is still the main institutional framework that keeps societies together.

Andreas Schleicher, OECD, Presentation to global ministers of education (2023)



[W]e are living through one of the most revolutionary ages in history.

Fareed Zakaria, Age of Revolutions (2024)

Imagine the Shape of the River



Our Charge

Identify potential drivers of change over the next decade and their implications for education and youth development – including opportunities, risks, and needs

Our Goal – Fuel “Foresight”

Provide space and structure for future-thinking to help make better decisions and build a better future such that every young person, particularly those most marginalized, are able to thrive

Our Process

- **Review of research, literature, and data**
- **Interviews and conversations with diverse group of visionary leaders**
- **Mott Foundation grantees conference**

Sample Interviews and Conversations

- **Andreas Schleicher**
Director for Education and Skills, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
- **Bobby Braun**
Director, Applied Physics Laboratory (APL), Johns Hopkins University
- **Chris Murphy**
US Senator (D-CT)
- **Harry Holzer**
Professor, Georgetown University; Senior Fellow, Brookings
- **Erin Mote**
President, InnovateEDU and ED SAFE AI Alliance
- **John King**
Chancellor, SUNY; Former US Secretary of Education
- **Margaret Spellings**
President, Bipartisan Policy Center; Former US Secretary of Education
- **Josh Edelman**
Head of Network, Transcend
- **Jean-Claude Brizard**
President, Digital Promise
- **Tom Toch**
Director, FutureEd
- **Leon Panetta**
Former US Secretary of Defense
- **Maria Echaveste**
Former President, Opportunity Institute
- **Linda Darling Hammond**
President, Learning Policy Institute
- **Tim Knowles**
President, Carnegie Foundation
- **Katherine Prince**
VP of Foresight, KnowledgeWorks Foundation
- **Denise Forte**
President and CEO, The Education Trust
- **John Bailey**
Fellow, American Enterprise Institute

Contextual Findings

Large overlap in what experts identify as future drivers

Many significant drivers in play, including many risks and some opportunities

Biggest challenge is interdependence and potential exponential impact!

Education is at a longstanding tipping point

All drivers have implications for education and youth development – whether risks, opportunities, or needs

And education is a driver itself!

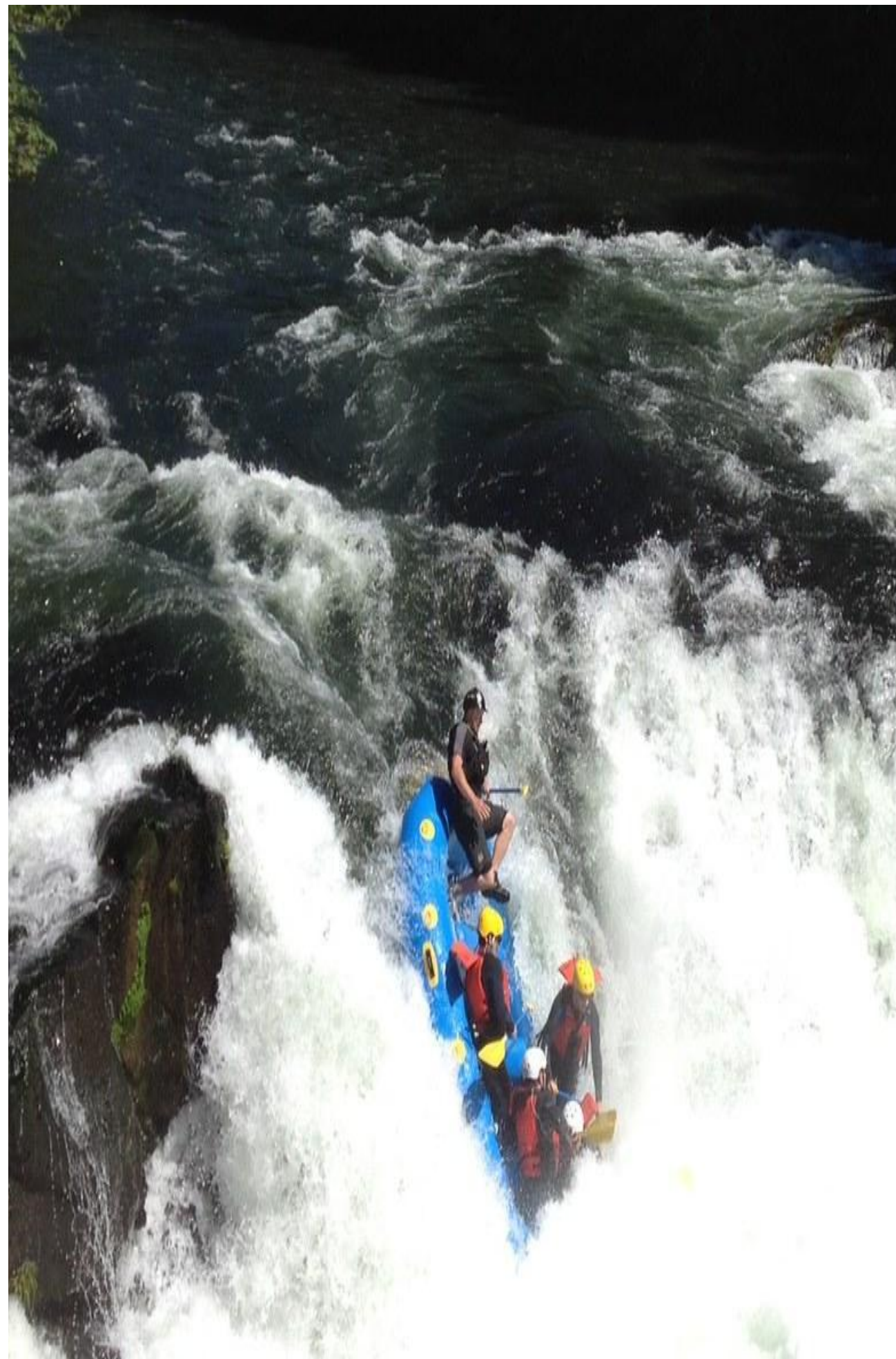
We are looking at “far off signals,” but there are important turns just ahead

Pending federal election is possible accelerant

Key Lesson:
“The fox knows many things; the hedgehog one great thing.”
– Archilochus.

Foxes are more successful at foresight.

Forecast: A “Revolutionary” Period (or *Class Six Rapids Ahead*)



A critical and challenging moment

- Polycrisis
- Rapid Pace of Change
- Great Volatility
- Arc vs Cycle of Change
- History is informative but also “around the curve”

What people are saying:

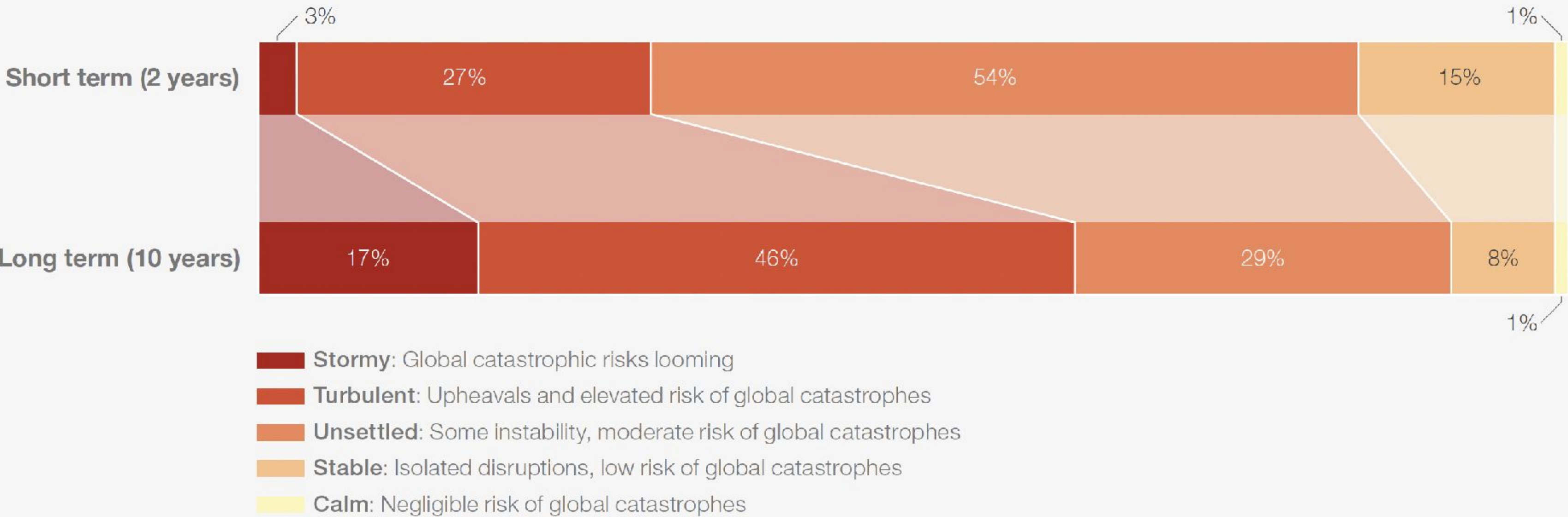
- Fourth Industrial Revolution
- 1939 Moment or New Cold War
- Rise of the Anthropocene Epoch
- Homo Deus
- Third Wave Civil Rights Movement and Backlash
- Political Realignment and Repolarization

Key Lesson:
The next decade will be “the future of something.”

This requires leading with commitment and nimbleness.

Forecast: A Period of Volatility

FIGURE A **Short and long-term global outlook**
"Which of the following best characterizes your outlook for the world over the following time periods?"



Source
World Economic Forum Global Risks
Perception Survey 2023-2024.

Note
The percentages in the graph may not add up to 100% because figures have been rounded up/down.

Key Lesson:
Every action has an opposite reaction!
Disruption yields progress and dislocation/backlash.

This is often a major, underappreciated but predictable force.

Key Drivers

All drivers are **deeply integrated** – like overlapping circles in a Venn diagram – creating complex *web* and potential exponential impact

Fundamental Question: Are our systems – governmental, political, social, educational, etc. – up to the task?

CSIS Seven Revolutions

Economics
Globalization, Inequality, Dislocation, Innovation

Technology
Robotics, 3d Printing, IOT, AI, Biotechnology

Governance
Political Awakening, Democratic Decline, Trust

Population
Growth, Aging, Urbanization, Migration

Security
Multipolarity, Gray Zone, Other Threats

Resources
Climate, Energy, Food, Water

Information
Privacy, Data, Social Media, Fake News, Learning

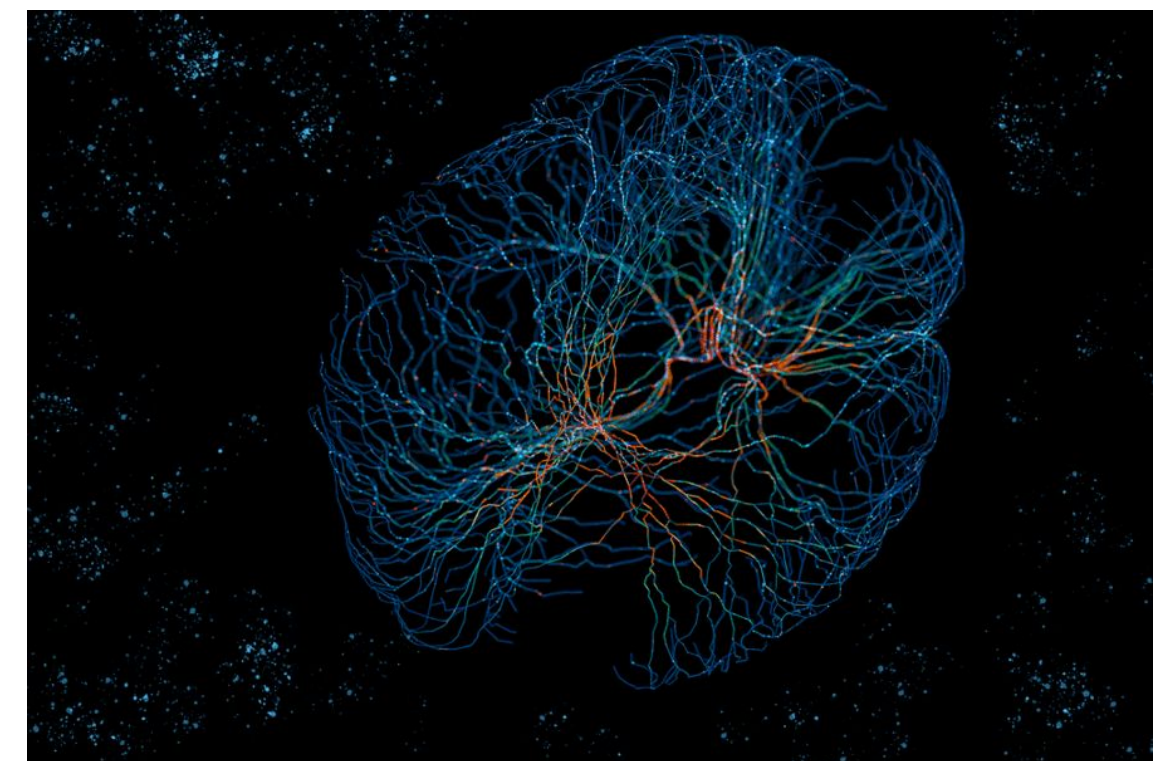


Image: Christine Daniloff, MIT, Stock Image

Economics (and next recession as trigger)
Growth v Inequality, Dislocation, Globalization v Protectionism, Low Barriers to Entry, Shrinking Labor Force, Commercial Real Estate Crisis, Public Debt

Technology (historically the most disruptive force)
AI, Biotechnology, Material Sciences, Rise of Hybrid, Data Processing, Social Media, Robotics

Governance (the new normal?)
Low Trust in Systems, Rise of Populism/MAGA Party, Conservative Courts, Democracy v Authoritarianism

Population (often underappreciated force)
Generational Change, Racial and Ethnic Diversity, Aging Population, Low Birth Rates, Urbanization, Migration

Civil and World Order (or back to the future)
Civil Conflict, New Cold War, Warm Wars, Rise of Global South, WMDs, Terrorism, Cyberattacks

Climate (some flagged as biggest driver)
Global Warming, Loss of Biodiversity, Extreme Weather, Resource Shortages, Supply Chain, Ice and Water

Energy (risk and opportunity)
Fossil Fuel/Electricity Demand, Rise of Renewables, Fission

Culture (some flagged as biggest near-term risks)
Division, Woke v Antiwoke, Mis/disinformation, Loneliness/Extremism, Gender Roles, Religious Nationalism

Health (which we just lived through)
Pandemics, Mental Health, Cures, Longevity

Exploration (provides risk and hope)
Moon, Sun, Kessler Syndrome, New Worlds, The Seas, Innovation

Education (at the centerpoint of many other drivers)
Role of Equity, Privatization v Public System, Thriving, Personalization, SoLD, Ecosystems, Learning Systems, Childcare, HEd Reform, Workforce/Pathways, Lifelong Learning, Diminished Fed Role

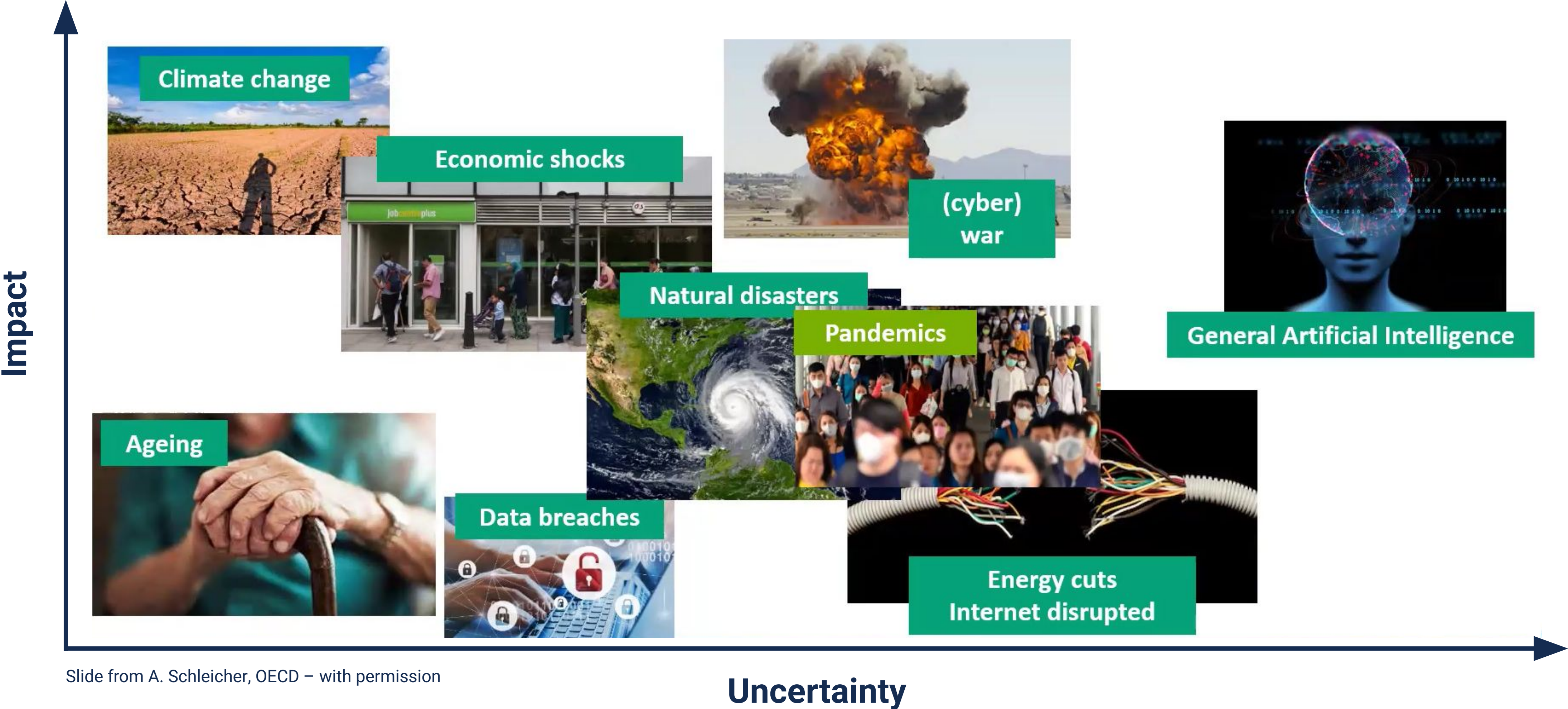
Key Drivers

Four categories by F. Zakaria



What about Education?

Key Lesson: Estimated Value Calculations Can Help with Foresight



Implications for Education/Youth Development: Two Possible Approaches

Premortem Analysis

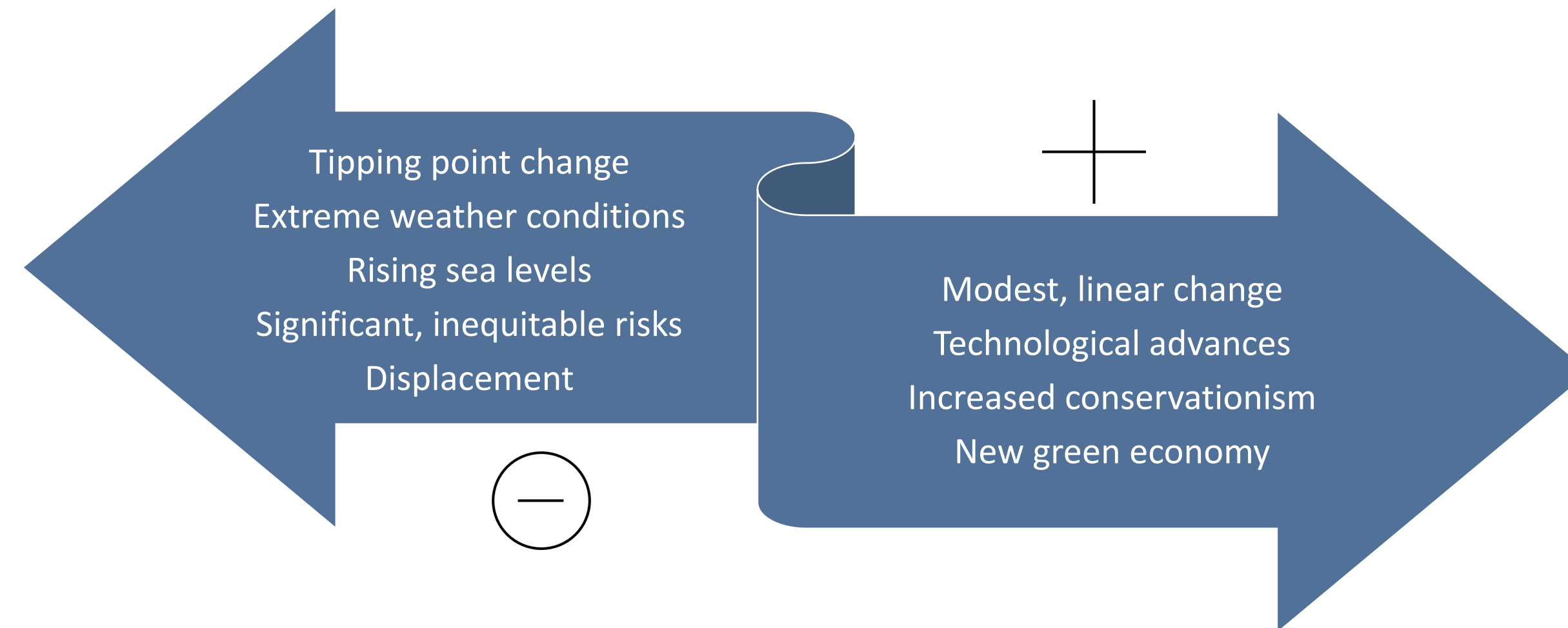
1. Imagine ten years from now the world (and a given driver) has improved greatly. What does that look like? Why did it happen? What are the implications for education/youth development?
2. Now, imagine the opposite. Same questions.

Intersectional Analysis

1. Consider an equation for the intersectional impact of several overlapping drivers
2. How does that help us identify major opportunities, risks, and needs for education/youth development?

Premortem Analysis: EXAMPLE: Climate Driver – Global Warming

What we heard: As conditions change, children face as much risk in missing school because of climate as they did from COVID

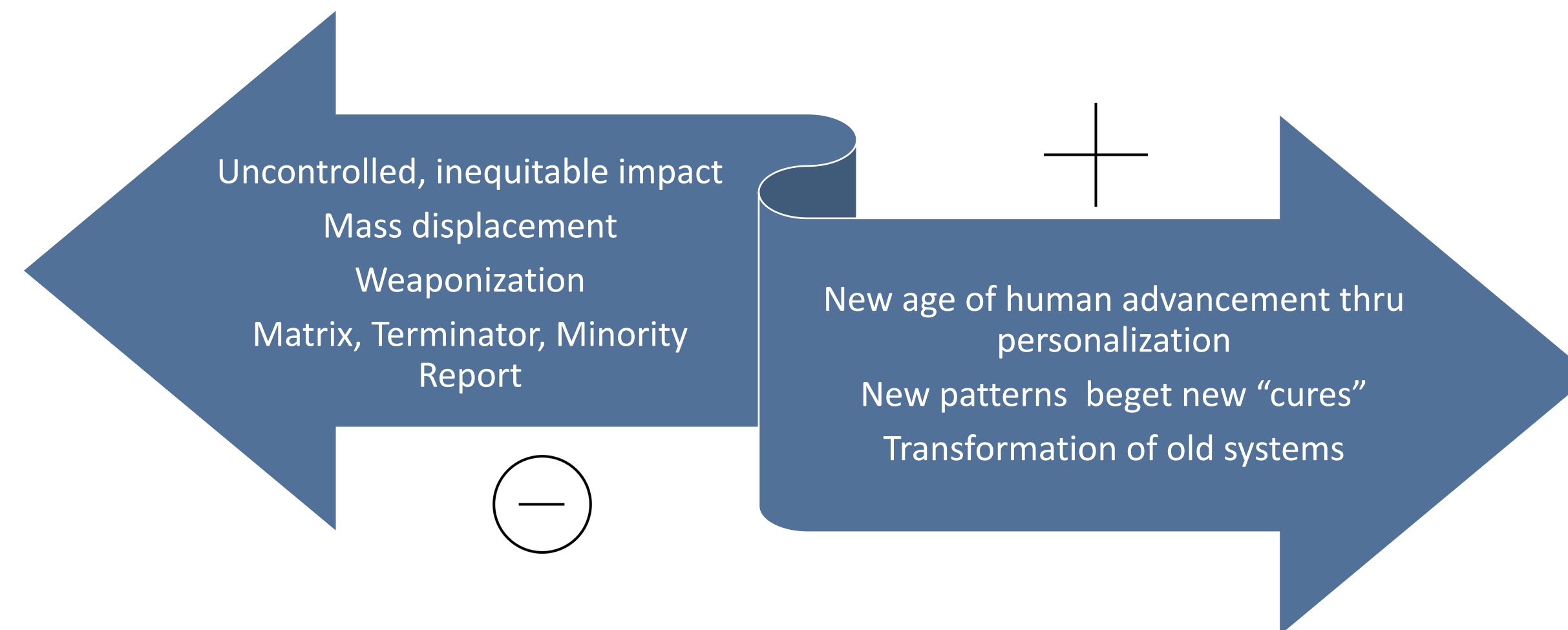


Education Implications/Actions

- Improve facilities
 - Enhance digital learning infrastructures
 - Strengthen mechanisms for student/family supports
- Improve STEM education and workforce training

Premortem Analysis: EXAMPLE: Technology Driver – Rise of AI

What we heard: AI will fundamentally affect how we work and live.



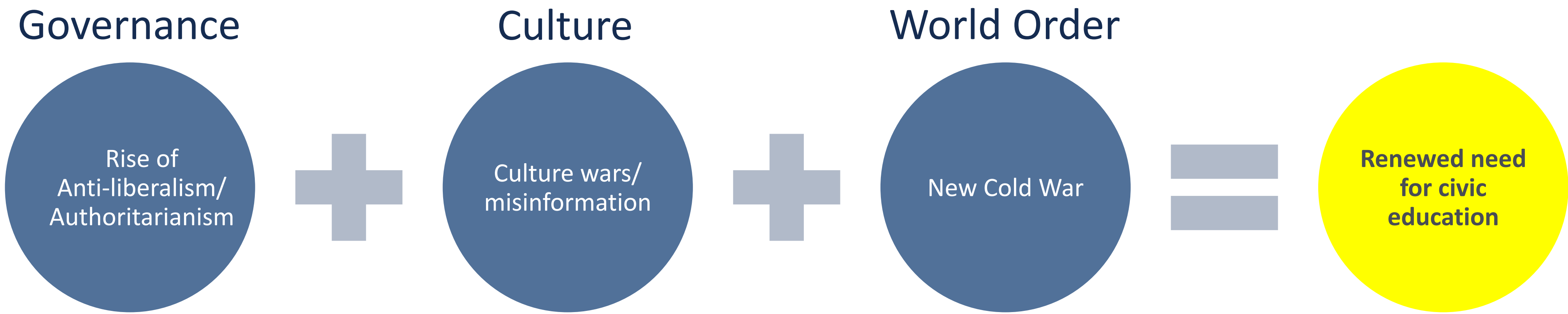
Education Implications/Actions

- Ensure regulatory action and controls
 - Realign systems toward human advantage
 - Establish systems of lifelong learning
- Focus on AI literacy/readiness
 - Focus on education "use cases"

Intersectional Analysis/Implications:
EXAMPLE: Need for College, Career, and *Civic* Readiness

What we heard: Democracy is complicated; education is essential to democracy; young people are not learning the why, what, and how of democratic governance

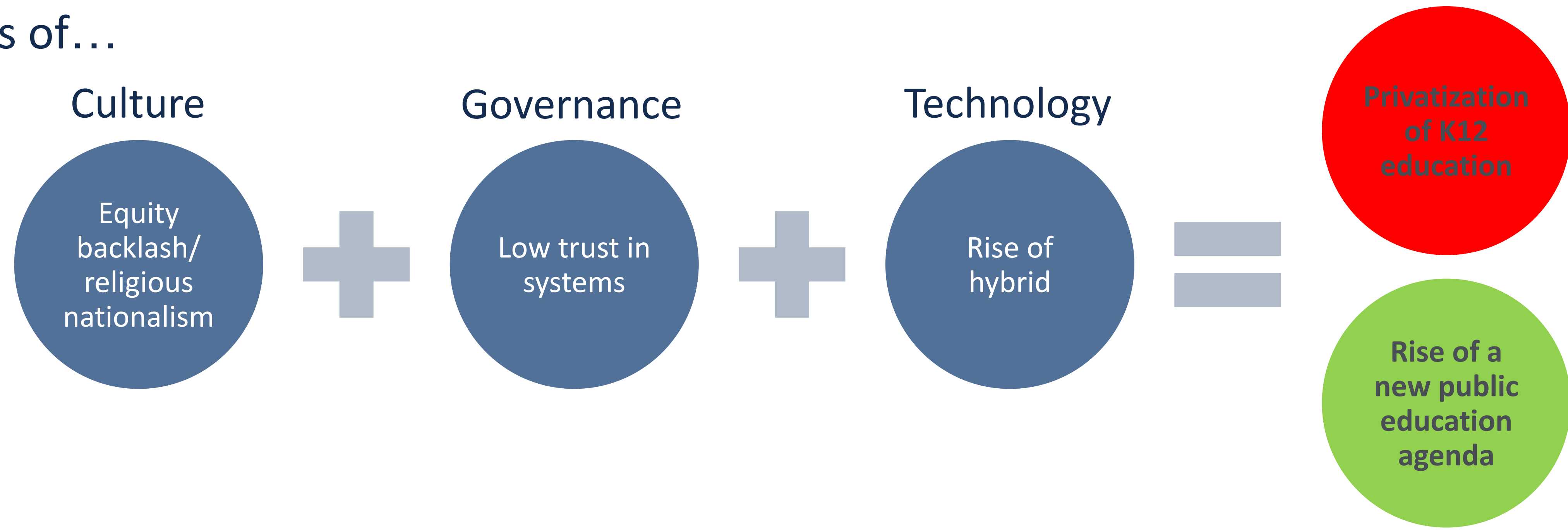
Drivers of...



Intersectional Analysis/Implications: EXAMPLE: Fall or Rebirth of Public Education

What we heard: In the coming decade, public education likely faces great challenges

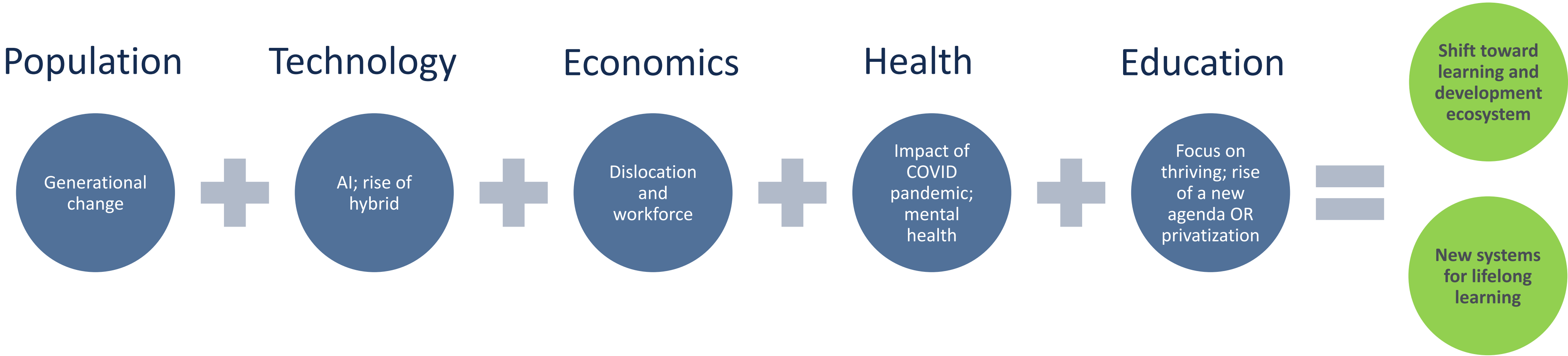
Drivers of...



Intersectional Analysis/Implications: EXAMPLE: Shift Toward Ecosystem

What we heard: There is a growing call for broader learning and development opportunities and pathways

Drivers of...



Implications for Education: Examples of Possible Future Headlines

State Constitutional Amendments Remove Right to Public School Systems

Renewed Vision and Movement for Public Education Unifies Field in Support of Public Education

Rise of AI Transforms Industrial Education Systems, Creates New Goals and Lifelong Pathways to Credentials

Growing, Diverse Coalitions Convince Courts to Protect Government Actions to Advance Equity and Diversity

Series of Court Decisions Led by Interest Groups Make Pursuing Racial Equity and Diversity Effectively Unlawful, Eliminate Immigrant Rights to Education

New Vision of Schools as “Hubs” Galvanizes Communities and Redefines Choice

AI Displacement of “White Collar” Workers Leads to Pushback and Pressure on Secondary and Postsecondary Education

Climate Change and Extreme Weather Result in Ongoing Disruptions in Education

Congress Eliminates US Department of Education; Funds Block Grants to States

Navigating the River: Initial Observations and Takeaways

There are big rapids ahead (and we are likely at the “top” of the rapids)

- This is a moment for action

All future drivers have big, *interconnected* implications for education and youth development

- Risks, opportunities, and/or needs

Foresight can help us navigate the river, individually and collectively

- Can use it both deductively and inductively

Key Actions

- Know where you want to go *directionally* – including goals, values, etc.
- Consider the forces ahead – in the current, emerging, or around the corner. See the big picture.
- Choose your path and be committed but nimble – play offense and defense
- Look for ways to turn challenges into opportunities
- Work together as a crew

Thank You



Photo from Unsplash by Megan Nixon

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