Transcription results:

Intro	Welcome to The Next Frontier, where we examine what the role of the financial advisor will be in a world that's being disrupted by artificial intelligence and algorithms. Our mission is to spark new conversations that create stronger connections and build greater client confidence. Join us as we look at our industry and others through a new lens and explore the opportunities emerging at the intersection of high-tech and high-touch. It's time for a new conversation. Are you ready?
BILL COPPEL	Hi, this is Bill Coppel, and welcome to The Next Frontier. Today, we're living in a world anchored by two realities; perpetual uncertainty and accelerating change. In fact, we've experienced more change, and I'd say profound change in the past 75 years than in any other time in human history. All this change has been brought about by rapid technological advancement. Right now, we're in the midst of a tsunami of digital disruptions that's shaking the very foundations of established institutions, industries, and service-based businesses, and the field of education is no exception. Most authorities on the topic suggests that our educational system hasn't kept up with society's need for a skilled workforce and for the type of informed society that's critical for democracy and innovation. This is an issue that affects all of us whether you're a student, a parent, or at a point where you need to prepare for another stage of your life. So with this as a backdrop, is our educational system preparing us to be the type of lifelong learners that we all need to become for our individual and collective futures? I couldn't think of a better person to help answer this question than Alexis Wright. Alexis is the head of New City School, an independent school in St. Louis that helps students discover a love of learning that leads to success not only in school but in life as well. He has more than 20 years experience in education and is an active member of the National Association of Independent Schools. Alexis has written, consulted, and spoken at professional development workshops on science topics, as well as on diversity within the leadership ranks of independent schools. He earned his bachelor's degree in human ecology from Rutgers University and a master's degree in marine affairs and policy from the University of Miami. I recently visited New City School where I had an opportunity to speak with Alexis about the state of education. So let's listen in to our conversation.
BILL COPPEL	Alexis, welcome to The Next Frontier.
ALEXIS WRIGHT	Thank you, Bill. Thanks for having me.
BILL COPPEL	So for the benefit of our listeners, describe the environment we're in here because we actually are having this conversation at New City School.
ALEXIS WRIGHT	Sure. So we are in New City School in our Multiple Intelligences Library that is the first multiple intelligences library of its kind. I'm sure we'll get into the discussion a little bit later, but the theory of multiple intelligences as put forward by Howard Gardner at Harvard has been sort of our beacon, our mission for about 20 years or so here at New City School, and we have found it to be an excellent frame for teaching and learning and development and working with children. But we're in this beautiful space, lined with windows on the north and west side, and filled with books, filled with murals, plants, the fish tanks, the exploratorium over to the side, the

amphitheater up above. One of the things I love about this space is during the school year when the building is filled with kids, and you can come in here at any time during the day and kids are curled up in the different nooks, reading, looking at the picture books, working on their homework, interacting with our librarian, our multiple intelligences specialist whose office is upstairs. This is just a real multipurpose space that is really one of the most attractive spaces in the building. And we have our board of trustee meetings in here. We have advisories that meet in here. We have class meetings that meet in here-- our faculty meetings. It's a real focal point for the school.

BILL COPPEL	And what's interesting about this space is there's very few chairs.
ALEXIS WRIGHT	Yes. Well--
BILL COPPEL	When you mentioned it with the kids-- I guess they're kind of lounging on the stairs--
ALEXIS WRIGHT	Right. So we've got these risers that circle around most of the space. And for the adults, sometimes, they're a little hard [laughter] on the back. But for [laughter] the kids, they're a perfect space.
BILL COPPEL	So what's unique-- and this is really what I want to point out to our listeners-- is this is a very different library than you would typically see in a school or a typical library in its design and its layout. A lot of open space.
ALEXIS WRIGHT	Open space for gathering. I love that-- and it's open, right? So it's two stories, but it is completely open. So you can work upstairs, you work downstairs. You can look down on folks who are down here. You can check out books. You can use the computers. You can be writing on the wall in the exploratorium and using that space. There's a smaller conference room, and lined with these quotes from sort of classic books that children read and classic authors. And for children who aren't aware of what they are, they look at the words and then try and figure out. So the lucky finder of this golden ticket, "What book is that from?" It's just all about curiosity. And to me, a good school takes advantage of kids' natural, innate curiosity. And this is just one place in our school that helps to stimulate that.
BILL COPPEL	Let me start with this question [laughter], Alexis because, as I look at your background, how did you transition from earning a bachelor's degree in human ecology and a master's in marine affairs and policies to becoming an educator?
ALEXIS WRIGHT	So I've spent a lot of time thinking about that myself. And I think in some ways, it's really all about passion. And at different stages in your life, you, perhaps, are passionate about different things. And I feel lucky that I sort of fell into this area of human ecology in college, partially because of the teacher I had. And I got lucky, she was my advisor. Her expertise was in coastal cultures and marine anthropology. And she made the material come alive, and it was fascinating for me. And I confess to graduating with my undergraduate degree not really knowing what I wanted to do. I knew that I enjoyed the marine environment, scuba diving. So I opted to go to the University of Miami [laughter], which is a good place to be near the ocean.
BILL COPPEL	Especially for scuba diving.
ALEXIS WRIGHT	Especially for scuba diving [laughter]. I spend a fair amount of time in the Bahamas, Cat Island, Bimini doing research, studying lobster fisherman. And to me, that was one of the best times of my life. It was fun. It was interesting. You were outside. It was dynamic. And I remember, in graduate school, a bunch of us students had the opportunity to do some work with some students from a Miami public school, and sort of a nature walk on the beach and sort of pointing things out. And I really enjoyed that. That was fun. And, at the same time, I had also been working as a

summer camp counselor during the summer. And my mother was a teacher, and again, about to graduate with my master's degree, not really knowing what I wanted to do. Do I want to sit in an office and work on policy? That wasn't really that interesting to me. And she suggested I try teaching. And, to me, one of the beauties of independent schools is there's a little greater leeway and latitude in terms of-- we hire excellent teachers, but they don't necessarily need to have that state certification. The experience is very important. And I just remember being hired as a 23-year-old to teach fifth-grade science, which I was lucky that it was-- oceanography was the content. So I knew that. What I didn't know was a 10-year-old [laughter] and child development. But I was in a really supportive school with some great mentors. I had some great professional development. And it all sort of came together. And honestly, since then, I have not looked back. This has been the passion for me; being in education, working with children, and now running a school, which, in retrospect, is-- a school is a system. A school is an ecosystem, an environment, much like-- take it back to the marine affairs work, whether it's a community of fisherman [laughter] in the Bahamas utilizing a resource or a coral reef; everybody has a role. One action impacts something else. Issues come up, and you've got to solve them. You've got to be creative. You've got to use limited resources. There are a lot of sort of parallels between, I'd say, anthropology and running a school with kids, teachers, parents, people with different interests all coalescing around a common goal, common vision.

BILL COPPEL   Yeah. Well, I think you pointed out some very interesting facts about the parallels between what your education and the experience around that education, how it formed you to move into this role, which is interesting because, if I can say anything so far based on what I've learned about New City through my research is it is not your typical school. In fact, you mentioned something earlier in our conversation about this notion of multiple intelligence, something that was pioneered by Howard Gardner at Harvard. How does this differ from the traditional approach to teaching and learning?

ALEXIS WRIGHT   I think the more traditional approach to teaching and learning is some rote memorization-- perhaps, you're sitting in rows, perhaps, you're not up and necessarily active, the material is not necessarily relevant so you're not necessarily making real-life connections to it. And, again, I think back to how I experienced school. I had three years, seventh through ninth grade, where I was in a progressive school in New York City that was actually somewhat similar to this school just in terms of how we think about children and development. I left that school. My family moved to Western Pennsylvania, and I went to this sort of typical suburban public school. And, it's funny, one of my best friends-- last name started with a Y-- well, we became best friends because he sat behind me because alphabetically, for about half of our classes for most of high school. But he's a great guy, but your sort of social relationship should not be dictated by--

BILL COPPEL   By the alphabet [laughter]?

ALEXIS WRIGHT   By the alphabet.

BILL COPPEL   Gotcha.

ALEXIS WRIGHT   Right, right. So that's-- I don't know, that's not creative, that's not inspirational. And I think, here, everything from-- again, like the physical layout of this library and how we want to take advantage of children's innate curiosity and the different stages of development to our philosophy around how we present material to children and then how we also think about their social and emotional development that's so intertwined and so paramount. And I say to this to our current families and prospective families that social-emotional growth, a lot of those skills, are sometimes a little bit more important than the math [facts?], for example. And that social-

	emotional piece is so important to kids' development. And when we think about trying to solve those future problems-- you can use technology as a tool to look things up. You can't look how to necessarily relate to the business partner from the other side of the world and different culture that you need to relate to and solve problems with.
BILL COPPEL	Well, that's a great point because, certainly, in the world we live today and the social media platform we live on, it's really changing that dynamic. But I want to kind of go back to the multiple intelligence for a moment because I want to make sure our listeners understand what we mean. Can you break them down? So when we talk about learning styles and the multiple intelligence, share with us what exactly we're talking about.
ALEXIS WRIGHT	Yeah. So the philosophy is-- the theory is around, there are eight different intelligences that humans have. And everything from linguistic, to logical/mathematical, to bodily-kinesthetic and sort of how you move your body, science, naturalist. So these eight different intelligences, and our faculty firmly believe that children have strengths in all those areas. And when we design curriculum, when we design these learning experiences that we want children to move through and make meaning from, we're going to try to appeal to as many as those intelligences as we can. Now, it doesn't mean that, in a 45-minute class, you're going to get material that stimulates all eight. That's harder to do. But certainly, over the course of the day, the week, the year, the grade, those eight intelligences are going to be nurtured in creative ways. And we're going to recognize that some of those strengths are really strong or really highly-developed already in some kids, and that we need to spend some extra time developing the others in other children. And in a school where children are really known by their teachers, by the adults, that lets us understand each child's sort of developmental profile and how we can individually devote attention to kids to bring out those strengths. And so you can think of it as-- again, whatever that unit may be that a teacher's presenting to children, there's sort of multiple ways to move into it. So whether it's math or whether it's writing or whether it's music, and then at the end, there are multiple ways to show what you know, to show what you've learned. So yes, sometimes you're going to write the essay, sometimes you're going to take the test, sometimes you're going to write the play, sometimes you're going to write a song and perform it. So there are just different ways in which you get to show your knowledge as opposed to the pen and paper test or, "Write an essay for me on this."
BILL COPPEL	So as I see it and what I hear you saying to me is that we're each a unique blueprint if you will with different strengths. And as opposed to doing it sort of the vertical, old-fashioned way of you sit through an hour of math, an hour of English, an hour of social studies, whatever the subject matter is, you're identifying how children absorb and learn through these various skills that they have, these multiple intelligences, as we call them. And by understanding the dynamic between those multiple intelligences in a child, you can present the same material across each of those intelligences, over a period of time, of course, giving them an opportunity to absorb the information in a context that really excites them.
ALEXIS WRIGHT	Correct. Correct. This idea of the sort of one-size-fits-all educational model it just doesn't work here. I mean, I don't think that's what-- it's not what children deserve and it's not what children need in order to grow and develop.
BILL COPPEL	So broadly speaking, Alexis, is our educational system preparing students for success in a digital age?

ALEXIS WRIGHT	I think larger educational systems are more challenging to navigate through and more challenging to teach, sometimes, specific skills. And then when you relate it back to the digital age-- that changes so quickly-- part of the challenge is trying to figure out what we're teaching for in the future.
BILL COPPEL	Right. So when I think about the conventional educational system-- I think about the public school system, for a moment-- and it's built to be scaled.
ALEXIS WRIGHT	True.
BILL COPPEL	And when we build things to be scaled, often we build them to the lowest common denominator because that's how we achieve scale.
ALEXIS WRIGHT	The one-size-fits-all.
BILL COPPEL	Exactly. And so that's historically, I think that-- at least, the experiences I had growing up through the educational system were fairly consistent with that model. And depending on where you fell in the spectrum of capability, let's call it, it either served you well or, perhaps, didn't serve you that well, but things didn't change that often. In fact, some of the folks in education today suggest that, in college, as an example, what you learn in your freshmen year is likely to be obsolete by the time you graduate. Yet, we don't see a lot of change, as you've pointed out earlier in our conversation around this notion of maintaining the status quo that seems to be the case. When we think about the educational system, preparing students for the digital age, what do you see in terms of things that probably need to be changed? And, not overnight, but what are the steps that you see as opportunities to begin to prepare for-- to your point earlier-- an uncertain future?
ALEXIS WRIGHT	Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. I do feel like the constant is sort of, "How do you--" this idea of problem-solving. So we're always going to need to solve problems, "How are we going to do that?" I think technology, the digital age, tools are going to help us. But I still firmly maintain that 25 years from now, 50 years from now, you're still not going to have siloed individuals solving problems. Teamwork is important. Cooperation is important. Understanding others. So I feel like that idea of what needs to change, I think there needs to be a greater emphasis on the human side of things. And, again, it's, "How do you solve problems creatively in a group? How do you recognize the sort of tools you're going to need to use?" But I'd say, most important, are those sort of interpersonal relationships, knowledge around other people, emotions, diversity. I think that's a huge part, being able to work with people who are different than you and sort of having an understanding and appreciation of some of those things. So I would say that's what needs to change. That's a big piece of what I think needs to change vis-a-vis the educational system.
BILL COPPEL	Great.
ALEXIS WRIGHT	Again, I will still-- it's interesting, you can-- smartphones, technology, computers, those are great tools to look things up. My daughters-- we have Alexas-- the Alexas--
BILL COPPEL	The voice-activated--?
ALEXIS WRIGHT	The voice-activated system. And when they need to spell something-- this morning, my six-year-old comes in and shows me page one of her poem book that she's making. And love is beautiful, love is life-- she had a bunch of bigger words in there. And I heard her asking Alexa, "How do I spell these words?" She spelled them all properly. And so that was one way in which she was learning. But what is she going to do with that? So, to me, that's-- you can use the tools to get the answers, but what are you going to do once you get that poetry book together? Are you going to publish

it? How are you going to use it for the greater good? How are you going to interact with other human-- how are you going to feel comfortable interacting with other human beings over that? So that's the work, I think, that needs to happen.

BILL COPPEL   Alexis, teaching has tended to be backward-looking. Applying precedences to future decision-making. How do we make the process more forward-looking to equip students to address the unknown future problems?

ALEXIS WRIGHT   I think helping to reframe the process, I think, is helpful. So, again, I mentioned the idea of problem-solving before and creativity. So, again, we don't know what the future problems are. I think you do need to know what's happened in the past. You do need to have a good sense of sort of history, as you think about future decision-making. But you said it really well before, it's-- I think so much comes from questioning. And I think to our teachers here who-- when a child is presenting something to the teacher, a piece of work, often what you will hear from the teacher is a question, and you can use the questions to provoke greater insight, greater depth, spark creativity. So in some senses, the product, the finished product is never really finished. And how do you extend it? How do you go deeper? So this idea of equipping students, I think you need a greater emphasis on creativity. You need a greater emphasis on the fact that very few times is a situation black and white. Very few times do you just arrive on, "The answer is two." It's much more nuanced. It's much more layered. It's much deeper, particularly when you think about, "What are the big issues of climate change, global climate change?"

ALEXIS WRIGHT   The answer is not simple. It's intertwined. It's global. It's cultural. It's about resources. There's no way you're going to hit on-- there's not one silver bullet that is going to solve that. And I think reframing children's minds and educators' minds around-- again, when you are talking about deep, challenging, complex problems, how do you stimulate kids to go even further? How do you ask the next question? In the series of questions, what's the next question? And then you, as the teacher, not only need to be asking but how do you get the kids, the children, the students to ask those exact same questions? And how do you build in, in people, this-- we call it "grit" here, resiliency-- nothing comes easily. The answer's just not-- you need to put some sweat equity into it. You need to struggle. You're going to get it wrong, but you need to pick yourself up, dust yourself off. And, "Okay, you tried route A, now you're going to try route B." So it's a reframing piece, and I think it's that creativity, the problem-solving. It's, again, building on the innate curiosity-- we firmly believe all children are curious. All children want to know more. You, as the educator, need to be in a position to stimulate that. And everything from the classroom, to the environment, to the interactions with the teacher.

BILL COPPEL   There's a lot of talk and emphasis today on STEM programs; science, technology, engineering, and math, okay? Let's have this conversation about STEM juxtaposed to the arts because one of the things that we've all seen happen over time is the emphasis has shifted away from things that we had traditionally seen woven into the educational process; music, arts, dance, a variety of different "non-technical," if you will, or science-based or technology-based curriculum. How do you approach that at New City? How do you think about that balance between these two?

ALEXIS WRIGHT   Yeah. It's all there, and it's all-important. And so a lot of the work we do is interdisciplinary. And so this idea that you can do things-- again, you can't do things in isolation.

BILL COPPEL   So when you pull music out of a program, what does that do?

ALEXIS WRIGHT	You deprive students, children of, in one case, an opportunity-- that may be the particular strength for some of those children. That may be the way that they get to shine. If you take that away, what does that do to you emotionally? What does that do to your psyche? You're suppressed. You don't have a place to shine. And I think about different pieces we have here. So we have this phenomenally successful drama club that one of our teachers runs and runs with probably, I don't know, a quarter of the kids in the school. So 80 to 90 children, second through sixth-grade, but there's a role for everybody. Not everybody's going to be singing on stage. There are going to be some kids with the scenery, with the set, with the tech, with the computers. There are just different ways for kids to shine, and it's not all about standing on stage and singing that song. So the arts are vital. They're important. But so is math. So is science. So is reading. And I think a well-balanced program is able to offer opportunities in all those areas for children to grow and develop.
BILL COPPEL	What does the role of community, defined as diverse and inclusive, what role does that play in the learning process?
ALEXIS WRIGHT	Well, that's an interesting question because, as I think about my school, New City School, this coming school year is our 50th anniversary and reflecting back on our school and our founders and how our school came to be, it was really all about community and diversity. And so this part of the central west-end of St. Louis, my understanding of it is it was not, 50 years ago, the kind of environment that it is today. St. Louis, at that time, families were leaving the city. There were not-- the school options were different and our founders wanted to build a place that was a focal point in the community, a school that would support the community and the neighborhood, but then a school that was not just for one kind of family or one kind of student. And so 50-plus years ago, our founders were talking about diversity and what that meant. And I think diversity, at that time, really sort of meant black and white, African-Americans/whites. And I can talk about this a little bit later, but diversity today, 50 years later, for us, is a much greater definition, and everything from ethnicity, race, religion, gender, family structure, sexual orientation. It has expanded tremendously. But 50 years ago, I think, and credit to our founders who, actually, literally went door-to-door-- as I've gotten to know some of the founders who are still involved with the school, went door-to-door asking families to give a percentage of the value of their home to start this school and to build this school. And we actually started off in the basement of the Unitarian church on the corner of Waterman Boulevard and King's Highway. And I've talked to a couple of the teachers who were there [laughter], and sort of reflected on-- school started, and they had these kids. They didn't sort of have all the materials. They didn't quite know what they were going to do and how they're going to do it, and I just think that the story of this school and its evolution is tremendous and a tremendous rallying point for our community.
ALEXIS WRIGHT	And, again, like, "You can't do things in isolation," this idea of community and diversity and how we support each other and, "What's a real community mean? What does that look like?" the goal of striving to get to that sort of diverse and inclusive community is something we have consistently worked on for 50 years and will continue to work on. And, again, that firm belief that-- that progressive belief that John Dewey talked about that schools should truly reflect the environment/the community around them. And so we strive to sort of have a community that looks like the Greater St. Louis area. And that's been a nice evolution of the school over time, but we don't do anything without truly thinking about the implications for community and diversity and inclusion because, again, part of what we consider very important for children, as they go through the school is to have a real understanding of what

diversity is and what it means, and an understanding of social justice, and an understanding of difference and being able to have comfort when they get invited to a play date of a family who-- or the birthday party where the student is a different religion, lives in a different part of the city, different social-economic strata because that happens. And there are good lessons, and you learn from that, but we want people, at the heart of it, to embrace that and be comfortable with it.

BILL COPPEL   Which is very powerful, given the fact that any of your students could take their smartphone and be talking to or communicating with [laughter] someone anywhere in the world.

ALEXIS WRIGHT   That's very true [laughter].

BILL COPPEL   So the notion of community is no longer defined by geography.

ALEXIS WRIGHT   That's right. That's right. And there are different communities. There's the school community. There's the larger St. Louis community. There's the community beyond, and again, getting back to the multiple intelligences and our educational philosophy, that idea of sort of knowing yourself as a student, but then knowing your community and how you fit into that community and how you are going to make change in that community whether it be your neighborhood, your school, or when you go to secondary school or college or beyond, that is something that we work very hard to instill in children.

BILL COPPEL   What are the implications of learning online versus in a classroom?

ALEXIS WRIGHT   Well, I think, obviously, you lose some things in an online-- I've thought a lot about this because I've tried to think, "Is there an online opportunity for young children?" I don't think I've hit on that answer yet. I've seen it work with older students, and I think, in fact, online education, in terms of accessibility and if you're not physically near or-- and, certainly, economically, there's some benefits for people to take advantage of that. But at the same time, there is just something that you cannot-- there's a piece of being in a classroom and having a lively exchange with your classmates and your instructor, handling materials, whether they be Legos or some sort of manipulative or you're building a model, or you're building a model to explain something, there's just-- there's a social component to it all that I think gets lost, whether you're taking an online course in high school or whether you're getting a master's degree.

BILL COPPEL   Given that most elementary students are digital natives, how much learning content should be delivered via some kind of device?

ALEXIS WRIGHT   I think devices are important. They're here to stay. You need to learn how to use them responsibly and what for. But I just-- I don't feel like-- I guess I don't feel like they necessarily need to be a major component of delivering education. I mean, again, I think through the program here, we have enough laptops for students to use. The classrooms have their individual sets, and they're hugely important for word processing, writing, accessing the internet, and those are all skills that you need to learn and that we teach and how you do responsibly, but it can't be the only way in which we do it. I always laugh when I sort of visit schools, and sometimes they have the iPads outside the classroom door and you can-- sort of showing what's going on or you can touch it and get things, and the students are supposed to carry their computers with them at all times. I think you lose something if kids have their heads in their laptops all the time. They are good tools, for sure, but they cannot be the sole deliverer of interaction or the sole way in which kids interact with material. And the textbooks, I'd say, textbooks are easily-- particularly, in this day and age, easily outdated. We actually don't use a lot of textbooks here, and teachers-- it's harder. It's

	a harder job for a teacher. It's easier to have a textbook and rely on it, and, "Oh, on Monday, we're going to be on chapter three. And next Monday, we're going to start chapter four." But that is also not a very creative way to necessarily do it. And it's harder for teachers, but that idea of designing their own curriculum and ensuring that it is relevant, interactive, and hands-on, that, to me, is excellent teaching.
BILL COPPEL	So it's a balance, is what you're saying? That there's pluses-- online gives you access. Online gives you updated information, but it does not replace that human interaction that's so vital to learning.
ALEXIS WRIGHT	That is correct. And you can ask-- again, I do think part of the onus of schools is to teach children how to use that technology responsibly. And there are certainly enough examples of children-- whether it's cyber-bullying or accessing websites you shouldn't access, there are certainly ways in which that technology can get you into trouble. But children also need to learn how to use it responsibly. So that, I'd say, has been an added responsibility on the part of schools, that schools have had to absorb.
BILL COPPEL	What are the implications of personal technology like smartphones in the classroom? Is it a plus or a minus?
ALEXIS WRIGHT	I think it's a tool, and I think it's a tool to help you solve a problem, find the answer, come to a solution. But it's not, again, the sort of end-all. And so I don't know if I would want our students to whip out their smartphones. I think they're too young, first of all. We're in elementary school. We end in sixth grade. And I, certainly, again, see applications for them as children get older, but I don't think a smartphone as a tool is something that children need to have readily out and available for them during class time. The access to technology, the smartphones, the ways in which they are re-wiring kids' brains is truly frightening, actually. And in some ways, you see this sort of dependence on them for-- whether it's gaming, YouTube videos-- trying to figure out who the next YouTube star is. Our dependence upon them is scary, and I do think the next-- people are studying this, and we'll have some firmer conclusions for the next generation, but I do believe the time that children are spending in front of screens is ultimately detrimental and sort of impacting brain science in a way that we don't really know yet.
BILL COPPEL	Do you think it's the responsibility of your school or schools in general to teach, what I would consider to be, technology hygiene? Or how do you best use these-- how do you deal with children-- elementary school children? It seems that most have a smartphone today [laughter], and in many cases, for good reason. They stay in--
ALEXIS WRIGHT	Correct, yep.
BILL COPPEL	--contact with their parents and scheduling. Gosh knows that we're all living in a 24-by-7 world today.
ALEXIS WRIGHT	Mm-hmm.
BILL COPPEL	Where does your responsibility as an educator begin and end as it relates to that?
ALEXIS WRIGHT	That's a great question. I think we do have a responsibility to help because, oftentimes, we're-- in a school, we're using those tools ourselves with kids to-- and using them as a tool to help with the education, to kind of further that process. But I do think that schools have a responsibility to sort of help children navigate and to help parents navigate. I think we've always-- particularly in elementary school, we've always had the responsibility of helping parents be better parents. I mean, I think good schools do that, and this is just another way in which we're-- and we struggle with parents, too, to-- "Is it okay for one hour? Is it two hours a week? How do you put the filter on? What sites are okay and what are not? Is it okay for my kid to sit in

his room and play that game with the door closed or do you have the family computer in an open area in your house where everybody can see? What's the right age to get the phone? What's the right age for the laptop? But yet, my kid's going off to secondary school, and they require him or her to have an iPad or some sort of device?" A lot of it comes down to family preference, but I also think the school has a responsibility to at least give some information to families to help them make good decisions. But where does it end? Should schools police things that happen on the weekend that are related to technology? So cyber-bullying? "Well, the message wasn't sent during school, but it was sent on the weekend. But school starts on Monday, and the kids come in, and they've been affected by whatever that message is." So the line is blurry, at best [laughter].

BILL COPPEL   Blurry and moving constantly.

ALEXIS WRIGHT   Blurry and moving constantly.

BILL COPPEL   Right. Let me change gears; books-on-tape, now no longer books-on-tape [laughter] but books-streaming.

ALEXIS WRIGHT   Right.

BILL COPPEL   The technology today has made it convenient for us to read, not literally from a book but listening to books. Is it okay for students, young students at this age, elementary school students to listen to books as opposed to reading them?

ALEXIS WRIGHT   I think it is okay. There are some children who, for whatever reason, it may be easier for them to absorb the material by listening than reading. So if students can absorb the material in the best way for them and can, still, in the classroom or through pen and paper or writing, interact with the material, ask good questions, pick up the themes, participate in those class discussions and their classmates, yeah, I think it is okay. And my oldest daughter, she has her podcast time at the end of every night, almost. So before she goes off to sleep, she will listen to her podcast. And I know she's absorbing the information because, in the mornings, she'll ask me questions. She's listening to these science podcasts for children, and then we'll have conversations about it. So she's absorbing the material, and it doesn't mean that she's not-- doesn't have a physical book. I think the physical books are usually important, and I say that as we're sitting in the library, surrounded by books. I mean, those are important. It's important to have a book in your hand. But I also think it's important to acknowledge that sometimes children learn in lots of different ways and absorb material in lots of different ways. And for some children, whether it's a learning difference or not, it's harder to read.

BILL COPPEL   I very much enjoyed our conversation, and I want to wrap it up with one final question, Alexis. Our educational system doesn't address the fact that we're living longer, and that we need different skill sets as we move through specific life stages. What are some of the ways we can address this gap for ourselves through our educational system?

ALEXIS WRIGHT   One of the things we talk about, and lots of schools talk about it, is this idea of lifelong learning for children and instilling that. And I think, at New City, we view what we do here with children as really foundational, and it sets the stage for everything that comes next. And, absolutely, that idea of lifelong learning is a goal of ours. And so empathy, grit, resiliency, bouncing back from failure, connection, curiosity, all those things, I think, are deeply important to just your mindset, to you, as an individual, asking questions, not being complacent. But at the heart of it, we want children to be comfortable with being pushed, comfortable with pushing themselves. I mean, that sort of intrinsic motivation to achieve is hugely important and, again, getting back to

that-- everybody's going to fail, and it's okay to do that, "What are the lessons that you learn? How do you pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and move forward? How do you continue to ask those questions? I think that is what we want in children, and that is what, I think, helps to push people as grown-ups. And so this idea of longer life, I do think there will be multiple times for people to reinvent themselves. And so I think the model of you go to school, you get a job, and then you retire from that job-- just that one job, I just don't think-- I don't see that anymore.

ALEXIS WRIGHT   And so whether it's you're retiring from something, and you've got another 40 or 50 years to go, what's your next career going to be? What's your next phase going to be? I don't know, we started by talking about my fascination with marine ecology. And I still have that, to an extent. I don't dive as much as-- or snorkel as much I'd like to. I don't think about that because I found my next passion. But I don't-- I love what I do. I love working in schools, but I don't see myself doing this when I'm 75. What's the next-- what is the next thing? And it's all about cultivating the passion. It's about asking the questions. I am sort of personally fascinated by flying and the mechanics of flying. I'm one of the few people, I think, who actually enjoys getting on a plane. I don't enjoy the cramped seats, but I enjoy getting on a plane, having a window seat, and looking out the window at the wing and how it moves at different points in flight. And I finally-- my wife, for Father's Day, got me flying lessons. I've been sort of begging her to allow me to do that for a long time. So who knows? I may be-- the next stage for me may be flying. But where have I been learning about flight and the mechanics of flight? Well, yeah, I've been googling things, but I also have several books-- the physical books I pick up, and I have questions, and I know how to find the answers, but I sit down and I'm curious. And I think that's the kind of model we want for children. And I actually think, again, going back to the multiple intelligences' philosophy; strengths in lots of different areas, being able to shine, understanding that, at one phase in your life, "Yeah, this intelligence may take precedence. But 25 years later, you may draw on some of the other ones." I think those are good ways to think about children and development and what life, 50-plus years from now is going to be about.

BILL COPPEL   So your experiences as both as an educator, administrator, and as a student is actually shaping your perspective on how you feel we need to be educating our children today?

ALEXIS WRIGHT   Absolutely. I mean, I think every-- most of us can talk about the teacher that had the impact on them. I mean, I can talk about Shelly. I can talk about Marian. I can talk about Mister Schroffe in high school. I mean, I can-- all of those people shaped me and shaped my educational philosophy, shaped me into working in this kind of school. I mean, this is a unique environment in terms of working with elementary school students, in terms of not teaching to the test, in terms of a place that, yes, values academics, but also values those inter and intrapersonal skills and the social-emotional development of children, as well. So all those things have influenced who I am and where I work and how I interact with my teachers, how I interact with parents, how I interact with children, for sure.

BILL COPPEL   Alexis, I want to thank you for your time today. This has been very enlightening. And I hope our listeners take away from this a very simple message, which is that the future really is something that we all have an opportunity to participate in, regardless of what our age is, and it starts with a love of education, a love of learning. And I thank you for reminding us [laughter] of that very point.

ALEXIS WRIGHT   Well, thanks for having me, Bill. I really appreciate it.

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