



A Letter from Our Founder

Twenty-five years ago, The EdVenture Group was founded on a desire to teach beyond four walls in a “bigger classroom.” The bigger classroom concept has grown to include WV, the surrounding region and the nation impacting students, educators, schools, families and communities. On June 1, 2001, The EdVenture Group began with a mission to expand opportunities for learning, strengthen communities, and empower people through education.

Looking back over the past 25 years, I am humbled by what that vision has become. Together with an extraordinary team, dedicated board members, trusted partners, and countless educators, families, and community leaders, we have impacted thousands of lives. Every program we’ve created, every partnership we’ve built, and every challenge we’ve embraced has been rooted in a commitment to service and the belief that education has the power to transform lives.

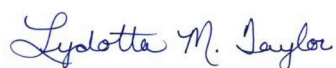
This anniversary is not only a celebration of our organization—it’s a celebration of the people who have made this journey possible. It belongs to every staff member, partner, educator, student, family, volunteer, board member, and friend who believed in our mission and helped bring it to life.

As I transition into the role of President Emeritus/Board Member, I do so with gratitude and confidence in the future. Kayla Benson and our exceptional team are well positioned to lead The EdVenture Group into its next chapter of innovation and impact. While my role is changing, my belief in this organization and its mission remains stronger than ever.

As you read through these pages, I hope you see more than our accomplishments. I hope you see the relationships, the shared purpose, and the countless people whose passion has made all of this possible. The classroom is much bigger today than I imagined years ago, but the reason for the work has never changed—to serve others, inspire learning, and create opportunities that help people reach their fullest potential.

Thank you for being part of our story and for helping write the chapters still to come.

With gratitude,



Lydotta M. Taylor, Ed.D.
Founder & President Emeritus
The EdVenture Group





Lydotia Taylor shows off the EdVenture Group's new lobby and third floors of the old Hills Furniture warehouse and EdVenture took over 8,000 square feet on the second and third floors of the old Hills Furniture warehouse and remodeled the space to suit.



The outside of the EdVenture Group's office area is decorated with framed pictures, exposed ductwork, and painted steel beams are incorporated into the decor.

Dreamer fulfills vision of tech education

70 LYDOTIA TAYLOR

MARGARET LEAHY
The Dominion Post

Appropriately, Lydotia Taylor's name came to her father in a dream, she said.

And as her life progressed, she proved to be a dreamer — not as a painter or playwright, but as an educator and an enabler of education.

And Taylor's dreams did not go stale over time. She pursued them tenaciously, she said.

"I think that I'm the kind of person who likes a challenge."

Taylor, who began her work in education as a high school math and science teacher, is now executive director of EdVenture, a nonprofit technological education center.

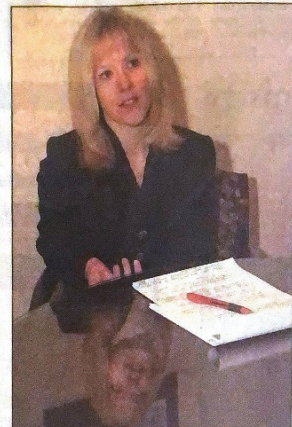
While working as a high school teacher, Taylor recognized the need for computer literacy and basic technological education, but understood the high price tag that comes with up-to-date technology.

So she decided to alter her career path from teacher to enabler of technological education by taking a position as vice president of West Virginia High Tech Consortium.

For six years Taylor managed high-tech education programs through the consortium.

"It was an opportunity to help a bigger classroom," Taylor said.

But then early last summer, the consortium made a move to end its



When the West Virginia High Tech Consortium ended its education focus, Lydotia Taylor and her colleagues founded EdVenture, based in the Wharf District. EdVenture provides computer education for college, high school and elementary school students, teachers and administrators, or any adult who wants improved job prospects.

Bill Day/
The Dominion Post

Wharf District.

EdVenture provides computer education for college, high school and elementary school students, teachers and administrators, or any adult who wants improved job prospects, Taylor said.

So far, EdVenture has successfully advocated for 21 computer labs for schools throughout the state, and followed this up by training teachers.

"We hope to become a national organization," Taylor said, "because we think many of these things we're doing can be replicated in other places."

"We create opportunities by building partnerships," Taylor said, noting her work with WVU and Fairmont State, as well as numerous Monongalia County Schools.

"The greatest return is that we really figured out how to build partnerships," Taylor said.

But Taylor is still dreaming about the future.

"We hope to become a national organization," Taylor said, "because we think many of these things we're doing can be replicated in other places."

EdVenture bringing a little science to summer

Organization offering students computer classes

By ANDREW SUTTON
MORGANTOWN TIMES

MORGANTOWN — While many students often spend the summer without something to do, The EdVenture Group is seeking to provide youths with some engaging, and entertaining, activities that will also serve to educate.

Starting this month, EdVenture will kick off its summer computer classes for students that will cover an array of technology topics from digital photography to improving test scores.

EdVenture is a nonprofit organization assisting educators, communities and businesses through technology training, education and business programs and specialized courses for personal and professional development.

Headquartered in Morgantown in the Wharf District, EdVenture seeks to provide technology training to educators, as well as students. For example, the group was able through a federal grant to



Members of The EdVenture Group discuss some of the computer classes that the nonprofit organization is starting this month. Pictured from left are Todd Ensign, technology initiatives lead; David Sentner, technology; Donna Casto, Phase 9 lead; Lydotia Taylor, president; Donna Hoylman-Peduto, assistant director and Meredith Alexander, COO.

continue to provide the centers.

"Partnerships are key to bringing in additional resources," she said, be it partnering with schools, businesses, higher-educational

or surfing the Internet.

"Most of today's students are already tech-savvy," she said. "They're ready to go beyond the basics."

From learning to research sources from the Internet and correctly using digital

"This will be totally hands-on. The students will be working the whole time. There will be little teacher-preaching," Hoylman-Peduto said, adding that activities range from taking digital photographs to making a mock game show. "It will really capture their attention."

held cameras create a portfolio projects the including biology. The c 16-19 f third, th

utilize Adobe Photoshop Elements to edit them. The classes will run June 16 from noon to 3 p.m. for third through sixth-graders, a July 21-24 from noon to 3 p.m. for seventh- through ninth-graders. The cost is \$125.

• **Double Jeopardy** Introduction to Flash and HTML, which will teach students about Flash animation and web design by creating their own interactive game show. The basics of Macromedia Flash will be given, as well as how to c

Lydotia Taylor

Position: executive director of EdVenture

Residence: Suncrest

Family: husband, Larry; two children

Education: received bachelor's and master's degree in education from WVU

Career: Serves on board of directors for Monongalia Health Systems, Morgantown Chamber of Commerce and Fairmont State College Foundation.

Hobbies: spending time with family and running

24 The EdVenture Group



The staff of The EdVenture Group gathers in the office. Pictured in the back row from left is Chrys Dean, Donna Casto, Virginia Dobref, Gloria Patterson. Pictured in the front row from left is Todd Ensign, Chief Operating Officer Meredith Alexander, Director of K-12 Initiatives Donna Peduto and President Lydotia Taylor. Jason Thomas is not pictured.

EdVenture teaches technology

By EVELYN RYAN
The Dominion Post

EdVenture is venturing farther afield, developing ways to expand its focus from technology training for kindergarten to 12th-grade educators.

Lydotia Taylor, a former Morgantown High School teacher who developed EdVenture, credits a lot of the progress during the past years to two staff members — Donna Peduto, director of K-12 Initiatives, and Meredith Alexander, chief operating officer.

Peduto, she said, travels the state training and assisting school administrators, teachers and students. Peduto also handled hundreds of hours of training for superintendents and principals in every county.

Alexander manages the Technology Opportunity Center project for the organization, Taylor said. This project has opened 17 new centers in southern West Virginia during the last two years.

In addition, she coordinated the Nautilus Middle School Leadership program for middle-school participants in Monongalia County. This program helps develop young leaders through a variety of activities.

Adding to the transition is the newest staff member — Jason Thomas. His role is to help EdVenture translate all of the experience

and techniques developed in educational training to use in a broader range of businesses.

"In K-12, we're building on what Lydotia started," Peduto said. "It's not just for West Virginia, but we're working in other states as well. We try to enable schools as to what to do with the 21st century curriculum."

This includes new and improved computer technology. That's not all they do. Last year, EdVenture started a preparation class for the SAT/ACT tests students must take to enter college. The class has proven to be very successful, Taylor said, attracting students from several areas.

Alexander, with a background in administration and finance, came to EdVenture to run the operation, she said. But because the operation is so small, she's had an opportunity to do consulting and education in other areas. Last year, she worked as a consultant applying EdVenture techniques to a Pittsburgh after-school program.

"We are very specialized with what we do," she noted. "Not many agencies focus on education from the point of view of educators."

"EdVenture at its heart is a knowledge company," Thomas said. "They're about delivering knowledge, taking their skills and moving them to other

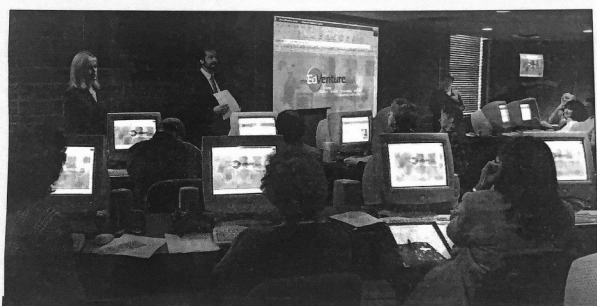
environments. They apply the models they've developed to other areas. EdVenture has been recognized nationally for what it does."

Tiny EdVenture just underwent a strategic planning process to see how it can expand its services and service area. "One part was to translate what we do to other markets," Alexander said. "The other is to expand what we've done that works in West Virginia. If it works here, it can work elsewhere."

An example is a recent contract EdVenture won from NASA in a competitive bid. Todd Ensign served as a principal investigator at a special workshop in Atlanta. The session brought together 30 people from several states in February to discuss what kind of information NASA could provide these people. Ensign said those attending were part of the "informal education community," a term used to describe nature centers, science centers, planetariums, museums and other learning centers.

The EdVenture Group, based in Morgantown's Wharf District, is a nonprofit organization specializing in creating customized curriculum development and delivering training programs, and providing consulting to address educational needs of businesses, education and communities. The group began in 2001.

Get a tech edge at EdVenture



EdVenture Executive Lydotia Taylor (left), John Merritt, of the W.Va. Department of Education, and EdVenture Program Manager Laura Tinney lead a class.

A return on investment: Oxley rejoins The EdVenture Group as a board member

BY CANDACE WOLF

A chief investment officer knows more than a little about investment – and his early lessons came from Lydotta Taylor.

Nick Oxley met Taylor when he was an intern at the West Virginia High-Tech Consortium back in 2001, and, when she launched The EdVenture Group that same year, Oxley was “along for the ride.”

“I chose the route with Lydotta,” he recounted. “She was an easy leader to follow.”

Oxley, with his undergrad degree in corporate finance, watched The EdVenture Group grow “from the ground up,” as he did a little of everything from data drops for their new office space to grant writing to working with contractors on their warehouse-turned-office building.

He was in awe of the way Taylor led the organization, giving each of her teammates the autonomy to make decisions and the encouragement to bring ideas to the table.

His commitment was reciprocated by the “very loyal and dedicated leader” that Taylor was. He said she led by example as the group was bootstrapping the organization.

“Lydotta knew what we had to do to make it work,” Oxley recalled. “She made you feel like you were born for this.”

His time with The EdVenture Group was “all about the experience and who I get to do it with.”

When the opportunity to pursue his dream career in wealth management arose, Oxley went in that direction, equipped with a wealth of knowledge and experience that didn’t just come from earning an MBA at West Virginia University.

The Charleston man learned from Taylor that “leadership isn’t a position.” He said taking on a role of obligation and opportunity to make a difference in someone’s life was a lesson that made a big impact on him as he grew personally and professionally.

In his now 20+-year career in finance and investments, Oxley looks back on the opportunities he was given to work, grow, build and lead across multiple organizations and boards, such as Leadership West Virginia and the Fairmont State Foundation.

Over the past few years, Oxley divested himself of all membership, but then he received the call from Taylor, in a full-circle moment.

“She was the only person I would say yes to,” he said of accepting a board position at The EdVenture Group in 2026.

He learned from Taylor to “always follow things that bring me joy,” and reconnecting with Taylor and the team is doing just that.

“The EdVenture Group is a gem of West Virginia,” he said of its “monumental influence.”

Over 25 years, in trying to quantify every life EdVenture has touched, he said it would be a “big, big number,” and although the leadership has changed, the mission and passion are holding steady.

He remembers Kayla Benson, the newly appointed CEO of The EdVenture Group, as a child and is now impressed with her as a professional.

“No one can second-guess Kayla as CEO,” Oxley said. “The results will speak for themselves.”





BORN, RAISED AND GROWING IN WEST VIRGINIA

As West Virginia's Bank, we're honored to have been serving the people and communities of our beautiful state for more than 185 years, and we are proud of the deep local roots and personal relationships we've built throughout the Mountain State. We've been here, and we'll continue to be here, because to us, this is home.

Congratulations Lydotta Taylor and The EdVenture Group Team!



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Twenty-five years of EdVenture entrepreneurship

Submitted by Amber Ravenscroft
Former Director of Innovation, The EdVenture Group
President, Bridging Innovation Institute

Twenty-five years ago, an education entrepreneur founded The EdVenture Group, bringing the same instincts that build businesses – identifying needs, taking risks, and iterating by design – into the world of education. That entrepreneurial mindset naturally became core to the organization, and still defines EdVenture today: innovation in education. Over its 25 years, entrepreneurship has developed into a natural focus, passing on to the next generation the very instincts the organization was built on. Early programs like Young Entrepreneurs in Action put that idea into practice, treating entrepreneurship as a pipeline that should begin the moment a child could dream up an idea worth pursuing.

As the need to build Appalachia's entrepreneurial talent pipeline grew, EdVenture was tapped for a multi-state initiative with the National Consortium for Entrepreneurship Education

(EntreEd), the National Association for Community College Entrepreneurship (NACCE), and the National Center for Resource Development (NCRD), bringing America's Entrepreneurial Schools to the region and reaching more than 50,000 students across seven states. That same need led EdVenture to help design West Virginia's Entrepreneurship and Innovation Pathway within Career Technical Education, the first of its kind in the nation, built alongside the West Virginia Department of Education, Marshall University, and West Virginia University. Today, this pathway extends its reach downward into elementary and middle school classrooms and outward into higher education partnerships, stitching together a K-16 pipeline where only disparate efforts had previously existed.

More than 2,500 West Virginia students have completed entrepreneurship programming during their academic experience, turning early exposure into real, sustained skill-building. SparkWV, the state's middle and high school pitch competition, became a natural next chapter, putting more than \$15,000



directly into students' hands over the past two years and giving young people a stage for the ideas EdVenture has spent two decades teaching them to develop.

That same entrepreneurial DNA is what has allowed EdVenture to support something larger than any single program: an entire ecosystem. As the West Virginia Entrepreneurship Ecosystem took root as a grassroots movement, EdVenture stepped in as its fiscal agent, nurturing it through its most fragile and formative years. True to its founding instinct to build things that last, EdVenture helped launch Bridging Innovation Institute, Inc. as the ecosystem's dedicated nonprofit backbone, ensuring the work would outlast any one organization. Today, the ecosystem engages 200+ entrepreneurial support organizations statewide in collective impact, with EdVenture playing a core role in supporting the talent pipeline that builds West Virginia's emerging entrepreneurs.

Twenty-five years in, EdVenture's greatest innovation may be this: proving that an organization that teaches entrepreneurship must also practice it, adapting again and again to remain not just relevant, but essential. That same spirit was recognized this year when the Morgantown Area Partnership named The EdVenture Group's Founder, Dr. Lydotta Taylor, its 2026 Milan Puskar Entrepreneur of the Year – proof that innovation in education, at its best, looks exactly like entrepreneurship.





“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizen



as can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

----- Margaret Mead

RESILIENCE & PREVENTION

Reducing Barriers. Increasing Opportunity. Strengthening Well-Being.

Every child deserves the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive.

At The EdVenture Group, that opportunity has always been about more than what happens inside a classroom. It is shaped by the conditions surrounding every child—the strength of their relationships, the support of their family, the connection of their school, and the opportunities available within their community. When those conditions are strong, children are better positioned to learn, develop, and reach their full potential.

As The EdVenture Group's work alongside schools, families, and communities continued to grow, so did the organization's understanding of what children need to succeed. Through listening, learning, and collaborating with educators, caregivers, youth, and community partners, one question continued to emerge:

How can the conditions that help children thrive be strengthened?

Through years of working alongside schools, families, and communities, and informed by experience in child advocacy, prevention, and education, the organization increasingly recognized that some of the greatest opportunities to improve outcomes exist in the space between thriving and crisis. By strengthening protective factors before challenges become crises, schools, families, and communities can create healthier conditions for learning and growth. That realization didn't change The EdVenture Group's philosophy; it expanded how the organization put it into practice.

Those conversations also revealed something else. Educators, families, and community leaders shared growing concern that many young people were struggling to see what was possible for their future. One school-community partner offered a simple but powerful observation: "Some kids don't dream anymore." For The EdVenture Group, that became another reminder that resilience is about more than helping children overcome barriers. It is about creating the relationships, opportunities, and supports that help young people rediscover possibility.

The EdVenture Group believes resilience is not something children are expected to carry alone. It is strengthened when schools, families, and communities work together to create the conditions that help children thrive.

While this work extends across families and communities, K-12 schools remain at the heart of the organization's approach. The EdVenture Group recognizes that schools are strongest when they are supported by engaged families, trusted community partners, and coordinated systems of support. The organization works alongside schools, helping strengthen the partnerships, relationships, and supports that enable educators, families, and communities to create the conditions every child needs to thrive.



What began with Breaking the Cycle grew into something bigger.

As the program grew, The EdVenture Group discovered this work was about more than prevention alone. It was about creating the conditions that allow children, families, schools, and communities to thrive. Today, that philosophy is reflected through initiatives including Breaking the Cycle, Empowered to Prevent, Calhoun RISE, youth leadership, school-based prevention partnerships, and community collaborations that strengthen protective factors, reduce barriers, and expand opportunities for children and families.

Recognizing that families come in many forms, The EdVenture Group also expanded its work to support grandparents, relatives, and kinship caregivers raising children. Through school-based supports, the Our Appalachian Youth Initiative, partnerships with SRI International, leadership of the REL Appalachia Community of Practice for Grandfamilies and Kinship Caregivers, and the National Summit on Supporting Students, Grandfamilies, and Kinship Caregivers, the organization helped elevate promising practices while strengthening support for these families across West Virginia and beyond.

Grounded in research, informed by community voice, and shaped by the strengths of West Virginia's schools and communities, The EdVenture Group continues exploring innovative approaches that strengthen protective factors, elevate youth voice, improve conditions for learning, and help inform growing state and national conversations about resilience, prevention, and student well-being.



When barriers are reduced, opportunities expand. When opportunities expand, children are better positioned to thrive.

As The EdVenture Group looks toward the future, its commitment remains clear. The organization will continue reducing barriers, increasing opportunities, strengthening well-being, and working alongside schools, families, and communities to create the conditions every child deserves.

Because when we strengthen the conditions surrounding children, we expand what's possible for their future.



Building Trust. Strengthening Relationships. Supporting Student Success.

Before there were initiatives, there were people.

There were teachers who stayed after school to encourage a struggling student. Bus drivers who noticed when a child had a difficult morning. Parents and caregivers who never stopped advocating for their children. Coaches who built confidence. Neighbors who stepped in when families needed support. Community members who believed every child deserved the opportunity to succeed.

Twenty-five years ago, those everyday acts of connection inspired the founding of The EdVenture Group, and they continue to inspire its work today.

Founded by a high school math teacher from rural Preston County, The EdVenture Group was built on a simple but enduring belief: lasting change happens when people come together around a shared purpose. Growing up and working in Appalachia reinforced what EdVenture continues to see today: communities possess incredible strengths, relationships matter, trust is earned, and meaningful solutions are built alongside the people they are intended to serve, not for them.

At The EdVenture Group, engagement is more than participation. It is about helping every person who touches a child's life recognize the important role they already play and creating meaningful opportunities to contribute. EdVenture believes engagement includes students, families, educators, school staff, community organizations, businesses, faith communities, neighbors, and everyone who helps shape a child's journey. When those relationships become connected, children are surrounded by a stronger network of opportunity, support, and belonging.

Family engagement remains at the heart of that work, and over the past 25 years EdVenture has learned that helping children thrive requires entire communities to see themselves as part of the solution. EdVenture's approach is asset-based, rooted in relationships, and grounded in the belief that the people closest to a community are also closest to its strengths and its solutions.

That philosophy shapes EdVenture's work every day. The EdVenture Group convenes voices, develops leaders, translates research into practice, and helps schools, organizations, and communities build the capacity to create lasting change. Through strategic planning, coaching, technical assistance, professional learning, facilitation, innovative engagement experiences, and customized resource development, EdVenture helps partners strengthen relationships, build trust, and turn ideas into action. Whether supporting a local school, a statewide initiative, or a cross-sector collaborative, EdVenture's role is the same: bringing people together to create opportunities and build stronger communities.

Listening has always been central to EdVenture's approach. Rather than assuming school-communities needed answers, The EdVenture Group created systems for listening. Through statewide listening sessions, family leader conversations, focus groups, school and community partnerships, Rural Voice Listening Tours, and ongoing collaboration with educators, families, students, and community leaders, EdVenture built a culture of listening that continues to shape its work. Those conversations challenged assumptions, revealed community strengths, and ensured EdVenture's work reflects the voices and lived experiences of the people it serves. They continually remind EdVenture that meaningful engagement begins by listening before leading.

What EdVenture heard didn't just shape its work. It continues to shape what's next.

Over time, The EdVenture Group discovered this work was about

something larger than family engagement alone. It was about strengthening the network of relationships that surrounds every child.



Through the West Virginia Family Engagement Center and other engagement initiatives, The EdVenture Group has partnered with the West Virginia Department of Education, schools, districts, families, community organizations, businesses, higher education, and countless local partners to strengthen authentic school-family-community partnerships across the state. Since 2018 alone, more than 6,877 school and district representatives and 14,997 families and caregivers have participated in learning opportunities and services across the state of West Virginia.

Developed in direct response to what educators shared they needed, the Leaders Investing in Family Engagement (L.I.F.E.) Program has become one of The EdVenture Group's signature leadership initiatives. Across five cohorts, 334 participants representing 54 schools across 42 unduplicated West Virginia counties have strengthened their leadership and ability to build authentic family-school-community partnerships. Now preparing to launch its sixth cohort, L.I.F.E. continues to evolve while expanding to serve new audiences and strengthen engagement across the state.



Today, The EdVenture Group continues to innovate in engagement through partnerships with Carnegie Mellon University, Play Included, Care for Education, and others. Through EngagEd: Connect. Create. Belong., EdVenture is exploring how play, creativity, and experiential learning can strengthen relational trust, deepen belonging, and create more authentic school-family-community partnerships. Grounded in research, community voice, and the strengths of West Virginia's schools and communities, these approaches are designed to support local partners while helping inform national conversations about the future of authentic family and community engagement. The EdVenture Group is proud to contribute to that growing body of work while continuing to learn alongside partners across the country.



When relationships are strong, schools become more welcoming, families become more engaged, communities become more connected, and students are better positioned to thrive.

Throughout this journey, one lesson has remained constant: meaningful engagement is built on relational trust. When families feel welcomed, educators feel supported, community partners feel valued, and every stakeholder understands the important role they play, collaboration becomes stronger and children benefit. That belief continues to shape everything EdVenture does, from leadership development and statewide convenings to collaborative learning experiences that help people discover that, while their roles may differ, the values that build trust are remarkably shared.

As The EdVenture Group looks toward the next 25 years, its work will continue to evolve, but its commitment will remain the same. EdVenture will continue bringing people together, listening with intention, strengthening relationships, and creating opportunities for schools, families, organizations, businesses, and communities to work together on behalf of children.

Because every child's future is shaped by the people who choose to show up.

An ideal match: The EdVenture Group partners with CMU in Family Engagement

BY CANDACE WOLF

It wasn't exactly matchmaking, but it was close.

At an 80th anniversary party for the Benedum Foundation almost two years ago, Jim Denova, former vice president of the foundation, strategically introduced John Balash to Lydotta Taylor. Keenly aware of their aligned missions, maybe Denova thought it would be a good mingling conversation or a casual exchange of business cards or maybe he sensed the possibilities.

The connection was nothing short of transformational.

As Taylor was seeking ways to grow The EdVenture Group's family engagement initiatives, the timing of this meeting between these two former classroom teachers was ideal.

Balash, who represents the Entertainment Technology Center at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh as the Director of Academic Outreach, Extension, and Engagement, was impressed by Taylor's "open and welcoming" attitude, her ease in making person-to-person connections and her genuineness.

Balash was quick to realize "we were all on the same page" and couldn't wait for "surprisingly joyful things to take root."

Together with the help of funding from the Benedum Foundation and a \$4.4 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Balash, Taylor and international partners, Play Included C.I.C. and Care for Education, launched their "shared vision" with hands-on Lego-based activities in school communities across West Virginia as part of an EngagEd Summer Pop-Up Tour.

The objective for these student-targeted activities includes building communication skills, enhancing social and emotional learning and developing a sense of belonging.

"I see the promise," Balash said, in their cofacilitating success, as they pilot new learning ecosystem initiatives and work hand-in-hand, creating training modules for educators. With a crisis around educators' role, capacity and changing technology, these tools are meant to lower barriers and advance positive classroom impact.

Thrilled with the direction of this special project, Balash sees "room to grow" after working with this "amazing team," who values real impact, commitment and intentionality.

"It feels like I'm part of their team," the inspired playful learning expert said, referring to the "very human aspect" of Taylor's group.

"We are truly partnering in every single way. We can do something really special," Balash said, hoping for a continuum of ideation and co-design with The EdVenture Group. "Stay tuned."

Jaxon Sáez stacks Lego blocks.



John Balash of the Carnegie Mellon University Entertainment Technology Center.



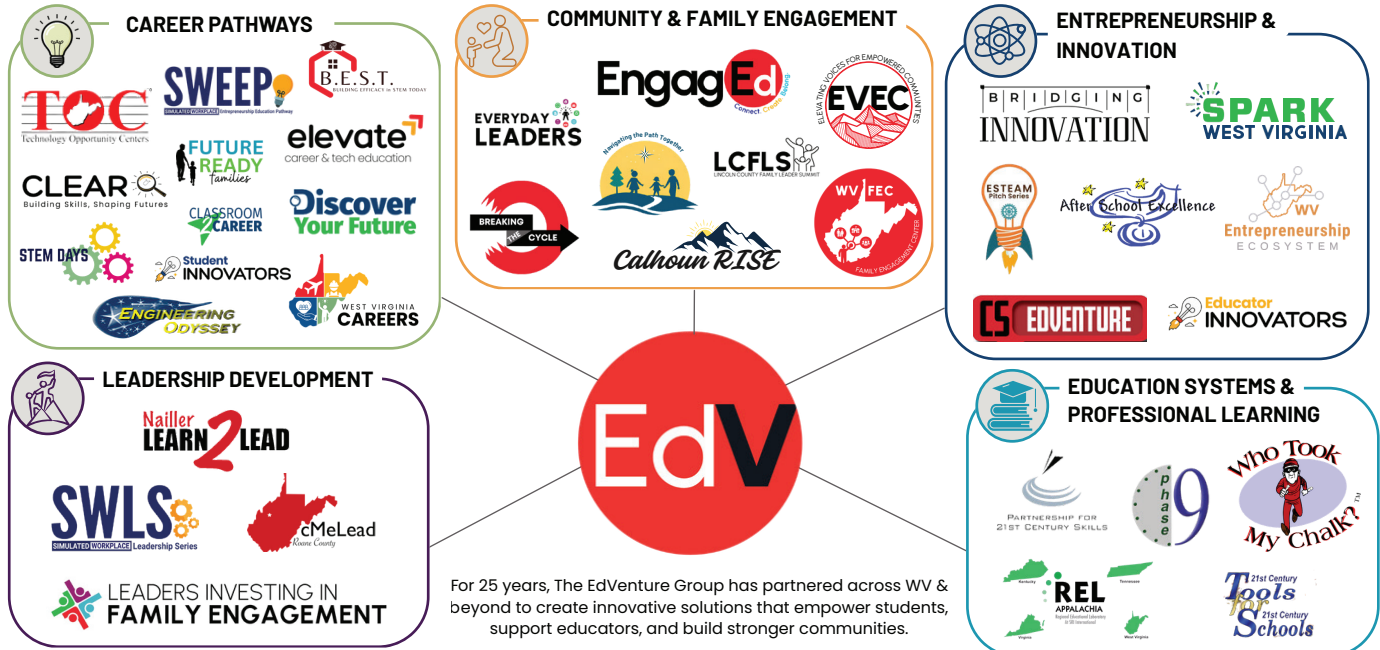
Fen Dennison and grandmother Donna Haynes work an activity with Angie Neal.





25 Years of Relationships, Impact, & Possibility

Connecting people, ideas, and opportunities to inspire learning, leadership, and brighter futures



FOUNDING YEARS

Built on a leap of faith, The EdVenture Group set out to build a bigger classroom, one that reached into homes, schools, and communities across WV through technology integration and expanded access.

GROWTH & EVOLUTION

Centered on the needs of students, families, educators, and communities, The EdVenture Group developed programs that invested in leadership, entrepreneurship, school culture, and real-world learning.

TODAY & FORWARD

Grounded in relationships, innovation, and a belief in expanding what education can be, the EdVenture classroom continues to grow and empower the next generation.

Here's to the next 25 years!

'Wow - we did this': Lydotta Taylor looks back on 25 years of The EdVenture Group (and the next 25 to come)

BY JIM BISSETT

MORGANTOWN – The classroom just got bigger, that's all.

When Lydotta Taylor looks back on her math teacher days at Morgantown High School, she readily admits that she was somewhat of an anomaly.

Sure, she loved the undeniable order and logic of her area of expertise.

The sequencing.

The protocols and numerical hierarchy of it.

She loved that you either had a correct answer – or a not-quite correct answer, requiring more reason and more deduction.

For her, that was the fun.

Lydotta loved (all teachers do) seeing the shock of recognition crossing the faces of her students when they got it. When they finally figured out what to carry over and what to do with the decimal point.

What she really, really loved, however – was telling the kids in her classes to not focus so much on the formulae.

You have other classes besides mine, she'd say.

You're a student, she'd say, and students are supposed to be learning things. Well, that's how you learn.

"And that's The Edventure Group," Lydotta said recently. "That's what we do every day."

Every day for the past 25 years.

KNOWING WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW

Growing up in Masontown, Preston County, she always knew she wanted to be a teacher.

"From the time I was a little girl," she said, "I don't think I considered anything else."

She wasn't suffering from teacher burnout when she stepped away from her classroom at MHS.

A new posting in educational development at the West Virginia High Technology Consortium meant a wider field, to reach more students.

Like the students in her math classes realizing they could achieve, Lydotta's new role sparked her synapses to do some existential number-crunching, as it were.

She was more educator than ever, but she began to realize she had entrepreneurial tendencies, too.

"Lydotta really stepped out," said her daughter, Kayla Benson – yes, she refers to her mom professionally by her first name, which we'll get to.

"It was in 2001," Kayla said. "I was a teenager, and I was realizing just how important this was."

As for Lydotta, she was realizing what she didn't know. Then, just like a math teacher, she multiplied it: in a good way.

"I didn't really know anything about starting a business," she said.

"But I knew how to surround myself with good people."

ADVENTURES IN EDVENTURE

Today, The Edventure Group is a vibrant non-profit doing national work from its headquarters in Morgantown.

Under her leadership, the organization has implemented more than 10,000 workshops, positively impacted over 40,000 students, educators, families, and community members, and she has managed more than \$35 million in federal, state, and private funding since leaving the classroom.

"I wanted to reach more students," Lydotta said. "I wanted bigger classrooms."

She credits all the contacts she made along all the mileposts in the journey: A solid board of directors, for one.

And, of course, a team made of people with diverse resumes.

Before EdVenture, they were kindergarten teachers and college professors.

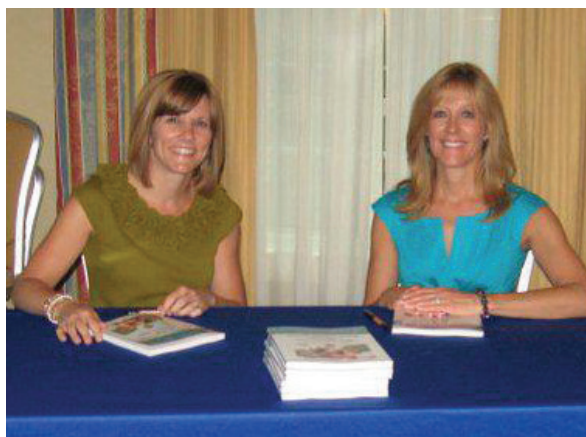
Small business owners and advocates of kids in foster care.

Valued professionals with college degrees range from English and secondary education to criminal justice and women's studies.

Moms and dads and Mountain State denizens who worked all across the country – and then came back home.

OF MOTHERS, DAUGHTERS ... AND MARGARET MEAD

Kayla, meanwhile, arrived at EdVenture to work on K-12 programming



Board of Directors:

Chair Marilyn McClure-Demers
Chair Emeritus Patrick A. Templeton
Mindy Walls
Ken Gray
Nick Oxley
Yemi O. Akinkugbe

Founding Board Members:

Patrick A. Templeton, Chair
Marilyn McClure-Demers
Mark Nesselroad
Bill Hutchens
Gary Stoops
Dick Johnston

from her previous post as executive director of CASA for Kids, which does its work across Monongalia and Preston counties.

CASAs are those court-appointed special advocates who plant their feet for society's most vulnerable: children and teens in neglected circumstances.

"It's been a privilege working with Mom," Kayla said, "though I don't call her mom at EdVenture. It's always 'Lydotta.' We're colleagues."

The board of directors saw it that way, also. As Lydotta formalized her transition plan out of EdVenture's day-to-day, the search for a new president and CEO was on.

Kayla, with her experience in child advocacy and her master's in public administration from West Virginia University, was considered a viable candidate.

Lydotta, meanwhile, wasn't part of that process. On purpose.

"It was all the board," she said. "I know Kayla's going to do a good job. I'm impressed by her, and not because she's my daughter. She cares about what she does."

What did Kayla learn from Lydotta – when Lydotta didn't necessarily realize she was "teaching" her kid?

"Just that ability to build authentic relationships with like-minded people because you care," she said. "The fact that she's always listening and

learning and always ready to challenge herself."

Whether she's Mom or Lydotta given the moment, Kayla always draws back to a favorite quote from a math teacher who told her kids to read books and go outside.

It's from Margaret Mead, the celebrated cultural anthropologist: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed – it's the only thing that ever has."

No need to switch it up now, the second president and CEO in the history of The EdVenture Group said.

"That's what the people here have done for 25 years," Kayla said. "That's what we're going to do for the next 25. I'm honored to be part of it."

The EdVenture Group is celebrating its anniversary and Lydotta, too. The old math teacher chuckled and said she wouldn't mind subtracting that part from the proceedings.

"EdVenture isn't just one person," she said. "It's a lot of kindred spirits. I've just been looking around and saying, 'Wow – we did this.' We."



For educating, for inspiring, for caring...

Thank you.

Congratulations to the EdVenture Group for 25 years of excellence. Thank you for being a trusted partner in our community.

Congratulations

to

The EdVenture Group



STRENGTHEN.

EMPOWER.

IMPACT.

The EdVenture Group has been making Morgantown and West Virginia proud for a quarter century with their visionary education programs. Recognizing a need for change, The EdVenture Group has provided innovative solutions to reduce obstacles in K-12 education to the benefit of students, educators and communities.

**Thank you, Lydotta Taylor and your team,
for your commitment, innovation and resilience.**

Here's to another 25 years of shaping the future!

PATRICIA A. BUNNER

Candidate for House of Delegates District 77

Current Member Monongalia County Democratic Executive Committee



Paid for by the Candidate, Patricia A. Bunner