

Welcoming Address: Education Next Conference 2026

Delivered by Mrs. Christie Dasaro, President, TEN3/Valorctnet

Good morning, everyone.

To our erudite speakers, invited guests, educators, headmasters, principals, university administrators, curriculum designers, policymakers, and perhaps most importantly the parents and lifelong learners who found their way into this room: welcome. Whether you traveled across the city or across an ocean to be here, I am genuinely glad you came. I want to begin this conference with the way every honest conversation about the future should begin: with a question that may make some of us a little uncomfortable.

What Is a School For?

Not what it *used* to be for. Not what we *wish* it still were. What is it for, today, in the world our students are going to grow up into?

For generations, the answer to that question was simple, and it worked. A child began in primary school. They passed an exam and moved to secondary school. They passed another exam and moved to university. They graduated, certificate in hand, and that piece of paper opened doors. It told employers: *this person can be trusted. This person has been vetted. This person belongs.*

That staircase primary school, secondary school, tertiary education, then career was the backbone of education for more than a century. Many of us in this room built our careers, our institutions, and our life's work on that staircase. I certainly did. But I want to be honest with you this morning: **that staircase is being quietly dismantled, one step at a time and many institutions have not noticed yet.**

The Shift Beneath Our Feet

Here is what is happening: around the world, industries are no longer asking only, "Did you graduate?" They are asking, **"Can you prove you know how to do the job?"**

Today, a young person can earn a globally recognized technical certification such as an A+ credential in IT without ever enrolling in a university. In parts of the United States, professional bodies now accept the equivalent of a college education for certain certifications, not necessarily the college education itself. And this is not entirely new: not so long ago, doctors and lawyers often earned their standing through rigorous examination and apprenticeship, not exclusively through formal schooling.

The internet has accelerated this shift. A determined, curious student whether in a rural village or a capital city can now access many of the same textbooks, courses, and practice exams as a student in the most expensive university on earth. Knowledge has been set free. And when knowledge is free, the *institution* must justify its value.

So let me say the uncomfortable part plainly: **we are moving from a world where the school is the gatekeeper to a world where practical skills and credible certification are the gatekeepers.** If we, as institutions, do not adapt to that reality, we

do not stay neutral, we become obsolete. History has a name for organizations that keep producing something the market has stopped needing. We do not want that name attached to our schools.

So, What Do We Do? We Add Real Value.

I did not come here this morning to alarm you. I came to say that this shift is not a threat to good education; it is a threat only to *hollow* education. For every serious institution in this room, it also presents an extraordinary opportunity.

If the practical skills and global certification is now the finish line, then the question for every school becomes simple and urgent: **how much better do we make our students at reaching it and at mastering everything that finish line represents?**

That is what “value-added” means. It is not a beautiful building or a prestigious name. It is real, measurable improvement in a student’s ability to think, comprehend, perform on a certification, and apply learning in the actual work of life.

Too many of our students can read a passage and repeat it back to us word for word and still have no idea what it *means*. They can pass a vocabulary quiz and fail to apply a single idea from it to real life. We have, in far too many cases, taught our children to decode language without teaching them to *think* about it.

Research has shown that a significant percentage of college graduates struggle to read complex material and draw sound conclusions from it. We are not just competing with self-study and online certifications. We are also confronting a *comprehension crisis*. If we do not solve it, no amount of exam-prep curriculum will save our students or our institutions.

So here is my challenge to every primary school leader in this room: build comprehension and reasoning *first*. Let language, stories, and genuine understanding of the world be the foundation everything else stands on. The formulas can come a little later. The reasoning must come first.

And here is my challenge to every secondary and tertiary leader: stop thinking of your institution as a building students simply pass through. Start thinking of it as a *value-added service*—one that takes a student’s raw comprehension and reasoning and sharpens them into practical, exam-ready, career-ready capability. Specialize. Choose the niche where you can prove you make the biggest difference. Build portfolios of real student work, not just transcripts. Show; do not merely tell.

Equipping Ourselves, Not Just Our Students

There's one more piece of this puzzle I want to name directly, because you cannot teach students to thrive in a technological age using only the tools of the last one.

If comprehension is the foundation and certification is the destination, then **technology is the vehicle**—and too many of us were never handed the keys. This conference is not

only about rethinking *what* we teach. It is also about upgrading *how* we teach and ensuring that those who teach are equipped for the age our students are entering.

Over these two days, you will find hands-on sessions designed to leave you with practical, usable technology skills—not vague inspiration, but real capability you can carry back to your classrooms and schools:

- **Digital and online-learning platforms:** how to build or select tools that help students study, practice, and receive feedback beyond the four walls of a classroom.
- **AI-assisted teaching and tutoring tools:** how to use them responsibly to personalize instruction, identify comprehension gaps early, and free time for the human parts of teaching that no tool can replace.
- **Google Workspace for Education**
- **Social Media for Education.**

The institutions that will thrive in the years ahead will not necessarily be those with the fanciest buildings. They will be the ones whose teachers and administrators are genuinely fluent in the tools of this era—comfortable enough to bend technology toward comprehension and reasoning, instead of allowing shortcuts to quietly replace real thinking.

So, my challenge to you is simple: don't just attend these sessions. Leave with something installed, something practiced, something you can open on your own laptop next week and use.

You will leave here not just inspired, but *equipped*: with practical technology skills, and a network of people asking the same hard questions you are.

I'll leave you with this. Every business, and yes, school is a business that has a product life cycle. Every product grows, matures, and eventually declines, unless someone within that business has the courage to build what comes next before the old model runs out of road.

The degree and certificate have been our product for a very long time. That doesn't mean they're finished. But it does mean that the future belongs to the institutions willing to stand up right now, today, in this room, and start building alongside them before the world builds it without us.

Welcome to Education Next 2026. Let's get started.