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Remarks by
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Thank you so much for inviting me to be one of the panelists today to discuss this important policy report from the Gordon Commission. I appreciate Eva Baker’s personal invitation and Marcelo’s generosity in hosting this symposium. As others have stated, there is much of substance to be discussed and little time to do it justice today. Given that, I will do as the others have done and carve out one of the recommendations as the focus of my remarks.

Recommendation #6, to paraphrase, encourages the broadening of assessment to include more than narrow standardized tests, recognizing that digital technologies offer multiple opportunities to assess how students learn as well as what they learn.

Currently the USC Rossier School faculty, staff and students have two programs that involve use of powerful learning management systems (LMSs), an example of a technology that promotes learning. The first program is the MAT online. This teacher preparation program is four years old and our LMS was developed by our ed tech partner, 2U. Among other features, we have 100s of graduates whose development as novice teachers has been recorded via video and the use of asynchronous materials. Every course in this teacher preparation program is taught live via the LMS, using applications like Adobe Connect so that each course instructor and his or her students see and hear each other in real time for two hours each week. These sessions are video recorded and archived. The sessions are available as part of the asynchronous materials that students have access to 24/7.

We received funding from the Gates Foundation to investigate how student teachers use feedback to change their practices during their 20 weeks of student teaching. During student teaching, our teacher candidates submit at least eight teaching “episodes” to their faculty leader. An “episode” includes several elements: a written lesson plan, video of the student teacher planning the lesson with his or her cooperating teacher, video of the delivery of the lesson, video of the debrief with the cooperating teacher. We also have artifacts of the assignments of the pupils in the student teachers’ classrooms and formative and summative tests.

Feedback is giving at all points during this episode and again during the faculty review of the episode. This pilot study allows us to observe how feedback is delivered and then incorporated, and the results will
provide valuable information about the pedagogy and practice of our faculty. This pilot looks at students who completed the program a year ago, and we will follow up with using video to record them in their own classes, noting their use of feedback with their students. We are aiming for the point of the real time use of the technology to assist our instructors so they can adjust their teaching as well as assisting our teacher candidates during their own student teaching assignments. We believe refining this technology driven feedback loop leads to stronger teachers and better learning outcomes for students.

It’s fair to say that the core concept of analysis of teaching practice is not new to educators and various examples of using pen and paper and even videos do exist. What is new is that digital technology enables us to record and include all examples of teaching and learning. By using the LMS as an assessment tool, our students can review their learning progress and our instructors can personalize the student teaching experience to meet the individual needs of novices.

The other program is our LAUSD charter school, USC Hybrid High School, which we opened last September with 125 9th graders. Our goal is to create at least 5 high performing high schools in Los Angeles by 2017, ready to serve over 3000 students. Our target population is students who have been traditionally underserved by public schools – low income, ELL, first generation-bound. The mission of each school is that 100% of our graduates will be accepted into a 4-year university with a 90% persistence rate after their freshman year of college. The core pillars of this school and those that follow are: 1) culture of high expectations for staff and students, 2) college prep curriculum and experiences, 3) self-paced learning, 4) relentless pursuit of high performing team members, and 5) financially sustainable model.

Teachers, the curriculum, digital tools like tablets and laptops and the LMS are organized into an assessment system that is critical to the attainment of the goal, mission and individual success of each student at Hybrid High. We already have made changes to how the personalized learning plans and the APEX curriculum need to be modified based on student assessments and teacher observations this first year. For example, the LMS gives immediate results on each student’s progress as measured by the MWEA’s diagnostic assessments and each student has an individualized dashboard that is updated daily.

So we know that broadening the range of students’ abilities that we can assess is possible with the use of technology. The Gordon Commission is right on in this recommendation. With more widespread implementation of digital tools and systems, teachers will wear multiple hats – instructor, facilitator and analyst. But we in teacher preparation programs will need to learn to use the same tools in our own practice in order for us to prepare our graduates to be effective teachers and learners in their classrooms and schools. And that is just one of the barriers to achieving Recommendation #6.

Thank you.