



### **The Future of Education Panel abstract:**

At a moment when Alberta sits at the intersection of technological acceleration, educational transformation, and demographic pressure, this panel explores what it means to learn—and to lead—through disruption. From **Phil McRae**'s examination of how the Fourth Industrial Revolution is reshaping young people's lives and public education, to **Karsten Mundel**'s call to reclaim productive struggle as the foundation of deep learning and ethical agency in an age of generative AI, to **Alex Usher**'s analysis of the structural and demographic pressures confronting Alberta's postsecondary system, a common thread emerges: the future will not be navigated through efficiency or innovation alone. It will require institutions and individuals capable of thoughtful adaptation, relational depth, and sustained relevance in a world defined by complexity and continuous change.

### **Individual abstracts:**

#### **Dr. Phil McRae**

Alberta is on the front edge of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, where rapid advances in artificial intelligence, robotics, biotechnology, and digital technologies are reshaping far more than the just the future of work. These shifts are changing how young people learn, connect, struggle, and thrive, and they are showing up as new opportunities, increased pressures, and growing complexity for us all. In this address, Dr. McRae will unpack what is changing across our society and why it matters for public education in Alberta right now.

#### **Dr. Karsten Mundel**

In an era where generative AI can create a seductive "illusion of learning," we must reclaim productive struggle, taking on challenging tasks at or beyond our current comfort zone, as the essential engine of both cognitive growth and human agency. By expanding our definition of struggle to include the vital socio-political labour of, for example, honouring treaty obligations, building community, and listening to our more-than-human relatives, we can understand the world not just as it is but also as the world we can realize together. This approach ensures we graduate students who possess the intellectual and relational depth required for thoughtful and ethical engagement, and to realize our collective potential.

#### **Alex Usher**

In the near term, higher education institutions in Canada are likely to focus inward—seeking greater efficiency, flexibility, and institutional resilience. In Alberta, this imperative is driven not only by sustained provincial spending restraint, but also by new restrictions on international student enrolment. At the same time, the province faces a significant demographic surge of domestic students approaching postsecondary age, without corresponding expansion in system capacity. The resulting pressures may intensify competition for spaces, contribute to overcrowding, and prompt increased out-of-province mobility among students.

Over the longer term, the central challenge will be maintaining disciplinary relevance amid rapid technological and economic change. This will require integrating skill development more intentionally into curricula—not only in emerging technologies (including but not limited to AI), but also in areas such as teamwork and collaborative problem-solving that remain underemphasized in some fields. Beyond institutional reform, broader questions loom regarding employers' willingness to invest in workforce upskilling and individuals' capacity to sustain career relevance in an era of continuous disruption.