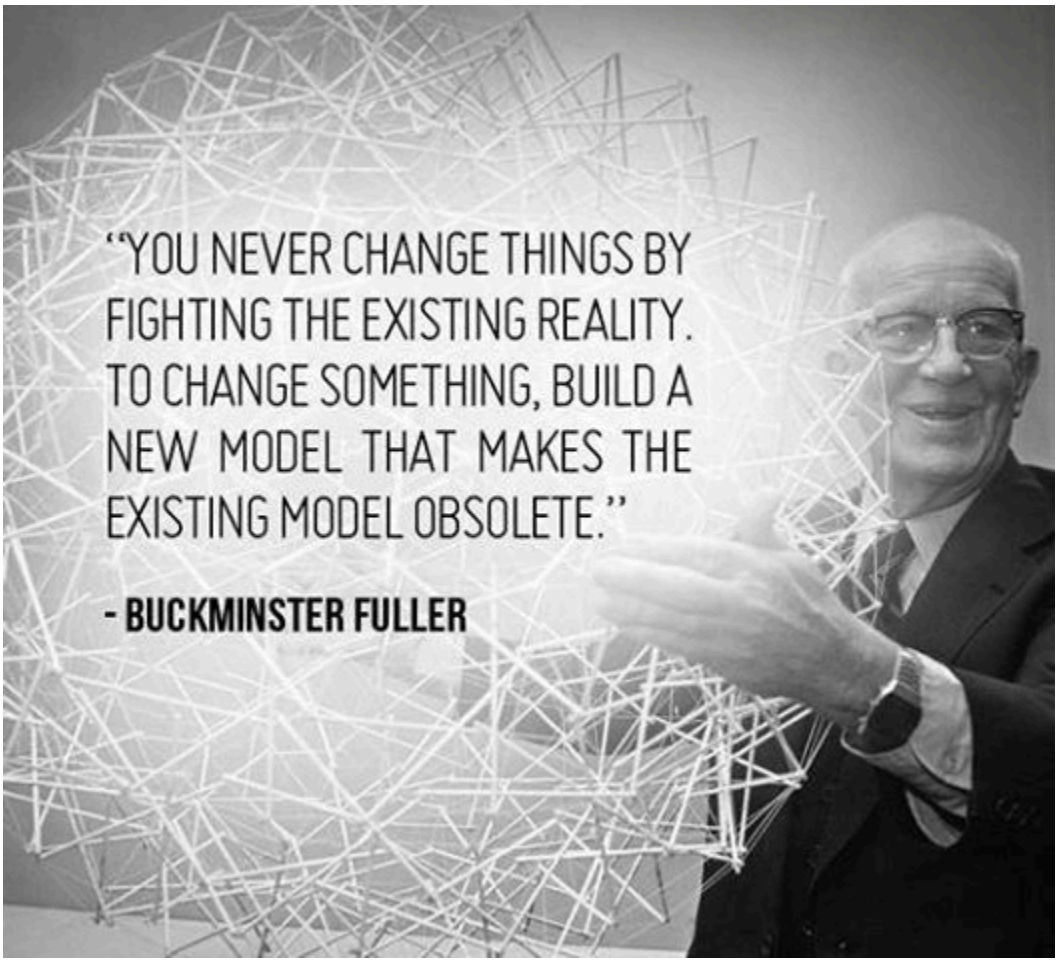
An Education System That Makes the Old One Obsolete



"You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete." – R. Buckminster Fuller

A Wake-Up Call from the Wealthy

Recently, I listened to a Thoughtful Money podcast where seasoned financial commentators lamented today's widening wealth inequality. These investors – millionaires by all accounts – dissected the "K-shaped" economic recovery (where the rich keep climbing while others fall

behind) and worried about a future where Main Street gets left in the dust[1]. They traded stories of past bubbles, even recalling Isaac Newton's ill-fated stock speculation centuries ago, and noted how heavily central banks intervene in markets today.

Yet despite all their market savvy, when the conversation turned to solutions, their ideas felt surprisingly limited. One moment they bemoaned social media's harm to children's attention spans; the next, they half-jokingly suggested banning platforms or telling kids to "go touch grass" – before immediately hedging that they "don't like censorship." It was striking: some of the financially savviest people alive grappling with societal challenges, yet uncertain how to address them meaningfully. On one hand, these are tough problems and what do we expect from two finance guys? On the other, to the extent that money is power, they are the ones with their hands firmly on the levers of power. They tacitly acknowledged this fact in their discussion. Wealth inequality. AI displacing jobs. Communities being "left behind." The podcast hosts listed these grand challenges, but their best prescription was essentially less TikTok.

From my perspective as an educator and entrepreneur, they've given up on education. It doesn't even come up or barely. Education – not education as usual, but education reimagined as the engine of economic and social revitalization has been forgotten. As I listened, I wanted to jump right into the podcast myself and tell them about the work we are doing at HScred. We see a solution that increases the odds that we make positive progress. We have young people cative - it's time we stop wasting so many hours of the best years of their lives.

The key is to empower our students in unprecedented ways. It doesn't involve censoring the internet. It involves building a new form of capital – Academic Capital. Starting in our high schools and working backward, we can make the old model of education obsolete through superior incentive design. Sounds farfetched, I know, but read on and you may reconsider.

Academic Capital: The Design Behind the Vision

The incentive that drives education practice, just as earnings might do for business, is academic data. We want to measure how students are doing so that we can make administrative decisions. Currently we use standardized testing for that, which is barbaric pedagogy. Soon we will look back at the times when we did speed essays and filled in punch cards to be assessed with shock and horror. If we are to embrace AI and build it into the arch of student learning, we would demand that students be content creators. Academic content creators. Show us how you think in your own voice or by editing together interviews of other people. Show us how you are engaging the world around you as a scientist or mathematician.

Our HScred whitepaper focused on the pedagogical foundations of our approach. But there's a deeper layer to our design that bridges education with emerging technologies such that we

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[1] Liam Gibson, "Widening Rich-Poor Gap Makes Millennials a K-Shaped Generation," Daily Press, June 2024, https://www.dailypress.net/life/features/2024/06/widening-rich-poor-gap-makes-millennials-a-k-shaped-generation/.

could include dollar value in units of Academic Capital? For those interested in the intersection of education and innovation, let me share how we're reimagining the value of student work.

Consider how we currently "value" learning. Today's high school transcript is mostly a list of course names, grades, and test scores – abstractions that reveal little about actual skills or effort. Many credits and A's are easily earned, sometimes watered down by grade inflation. They're like "fiat" currency in education – issued abundantly and trusted only through agreement, not because they're backed by real substance. No wonder colleges and employers struggle to discern what transcripts truly represent.

Academic Capital transforms this by making each credit hard-earned and backed by proof-of-work. We are taking the power to award credits away from government and putting it in the hands of content-specific department experts at universities. Under this model, students produce at most one major piece of work per month – perhaps a polished documentary, podcast, or research presentation. Each represents a substantial project, refined through multiple rounds of feedback with teacher guidance. Every credit a student earns must be "minted" through actual effort and learning, not just accumulated through seat time or test cramming. Think of it as bringing a gold standard to high school credentials: real academic content backs every credit. Read the HScred whitepaper for details.

Crucially, these student work products aren't filed away after grading. They're published on a public academic platform (hscred.app) where they can be verified by anyone. Imagine a college admissions officer or potential employer scanning a QR code on a student's paper transcript and instantly viewing their capstone video or listening to their self-produced podcast. While this sounds futuristic, it's entirely achievable with today's technology. Just as we trust digital records in finance, Academic Capital applies similar transparency to education – every credit links to evidence of the student's work.

This model doesn't just ensure rigor; it transforms motivation. Students become content creators, not passive consumers. They know their work has a real audience beyond the teacher – a powerful incentive far more compelling than letter grades. When students have an authentic audience, they rise to the occasion. I've witnessed this firsthand: when we began holding public exhibitions of student projects, previously disengaged students lit up with pride and effort. After one documentary expo, our school custodian remarked he had "never seen students so motivated toward academic pursuits." Why? Because humans, teenagers included, care deeply about how their work appears to others. Give them a platform and purpose, and they focus, refine, and strive to excel.

Academic Capital harnesses the energy of social media while channeling it into learning. Today's digital natives already create content for TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram. Instead of competing for their attention with worksheets, this model embraces their creative instinct. Each academic credit becomes a personal masterpiece – something worth sharing, something they'll remember for decades. We limit production to one per month (maximum 20 per transcript) to ensure quality over quantity. These become a portfolio of unique digital artifacts representing their best work, owned by the student as NFTs and sharable as proof of skills and passions.

By making credits scarce, meaningful, and verifiable, we create a new currency of learning: Academic Capital. Its value is evident in the work itself, not just numbers on report cards. This approach renders old educational habits obsolete not through fighting, but through superior design. We no longer teach students about how tests work, we teach them how to public quality academic content.

Bridging ZIP Codes: Incentivizing Collaboration for Equity

If Academic Capital only created validated portfolios, it would already represent significant progress in academic data. If you have ever worked with 11th and 12th grade students, you know that we can do even more when youth are motivated. To confront the reality that a child's ZIP code still too often determines their educational destiny,[2] for example, offers opportunities for learning. Wealthy districts offer abundant resources while nearby schools struggle with overcrowding and outdated materials. Where you grow up strongly shapes life outcomes – the data is undeniable. At HScred, we think it’s about time students did something about this.

Here's our solution: we define Academic Capital operationally as a reward token, with real financial value, and awarded to students who share resources. A student first must earn their own credits on HScred, and to compete for the Academic Capital tokens, they must then collaborate with peers in different zip codes to gather multiple angles on the topic at hand.

Students don't just earn credits in isolation. They can form "academic blocks" – diverse teams spanning different schools, neighborhoods, even states. When a student in a well-funded suburban school produces an excellent history documentary while a student in an under-resourced school creates another outstanding piece, each earns their individual academic credit. But when they team up virtually – across ZIP codes – and package their work together with each others’ contributions, they create a collaborative block of Academic Capital resulting in token payouts.

The system specially rewards these collaborative, cross-community blocks. Every quarter, a committee identifies the most substantial blocks submitted. Students in top blocks earn Academic Capital coins – digital recognition giving them a tangible stake in this ecosystem. It's designed as a long-term reward: an ongoing stream of tokens distributed as recognition of achievement and, importantly, collaboration. Unlike one-time trophies or scholarships, it's an ongoing incentive that says: keep contributing, keep collaborating, you're a stakeholder in the value of Academic Capital.

What makes these tokens have financial value? Over time more and more top students will have these accumulated in a wallet. As their numbers grow, they will learn to advocate for the value of the coins and offer them on exchanges.

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[2] Jay Wamsted, "ZIP Code May Not Be Destiny, But It's as Hard to Fight as Gravity," EdPost, accessed September 2025, https://www.edpost.com/stories/zip-code-may-not-be-destiny-but-its-as-hard-to-fight-as-gravity.

We often praise teamwork and equity in education, but our systems still largely reward individual accomplishment because standardized tests are known for sorting us by income much more than by who will be able to finish university. Academic Capital Coins flip this narrative. They reward students not for climbing alone, but for lifting others with them. To earn the coin, students must ensure peers in other ZIP codes also succeed. A wealthy parent can't simply purchase a better tutor – without kids in every community meeting the bar, no block forms and no extra reward is granted. The only way to "game" this system is by investing in helping more students from disadvantaged areas succeed. It creates a built-in equity mechanism: talent in elite schools is incentivized to partner with talent in underserved schools, breaking down traditional barriers and deepening everyone’s learning experience.

For the technologically inclined: yes, this draws inspiration from blockchain structures – a ledger of academic credits with programmed reward rules. It's essentially proof-of-work where the "work" isn't solving math puzzles but mentoring classmates, sharing resources, and co-creating stories of acquired knowledge. Unlike competitive mining systems, academic mining channels human attention into academic study and lifting each other up. The most diverse blocks yield the greatest rewards – building trust and value through education itself.

The beauty lies in making the solution to inequality naturally rewarding. Instead of endless exhortations to share resources, we create a system where students voluntarily collaborate because it benefits them as scholars. Imagine future students – one from an affluent suburb, another from a struggling inner-city school – discovering that by teaming up and both achieving excellence, they unlock ongoing support for themselves, both earning tokens together. Peer networking and cross-cultural collaboration become part of the social fabric. Helping others becomes the path to success, not an anomaly.

From Vision to Reality: A Call to Action

What we need is graduate students to post credits with the support of their professors and then students coming to meet the challenges of a posted credit. HScred is today where Airbnb was in 2009 when they started inviting their first homeowners to populate the platform. Before universities start using HScred to post credits, no student has any credit to achieve.

This is a bold vision – some might call it ambitious. But remember Fuller's wisdom: don't fight the old system, build one that makes it obsolete. Academic Capital is exactly that new model. Rather than battling over test score gaps or social media restrictions, it creates an engaging alternative for students – one that's meaningful and rewarding in ways that matter. It shifts the center of gravity from outdated battles to this new ecosystem of verified work and collaborative achievement.

To educators and school leaders: Imagine transcripts your students control, showcasing their best work instead of reducing them to numbers. Imagine motivating students with the chance not just to enter college, but to build legacy projects and networks across different walks of life – while earning credentials that could help fund their futures. This builds on proven practices (project-based learning, authentic audiences, mentorship) with modern, digital implementation.

All we need from a college is three graduate students in one department and the ok from their professor to publish a credit on HScred.

To technologists, investors, and innovators: I've funded the build of the platform discussed in the HScred white paper. Where I have not yet invested is into the crypto side of the design of Academic Capital. I seek not funding but collaboration and expertise. Let's do this as open source. The academic coin and credit ledger can be implemented by a community of engineers. It needs brilliant minds ensuring security, scalability, and alignment with privacy and policy. We would welcome a partner like Coinbase who has the expertise.

If education becomes a frontier for innovation, it grounds technology in the most socially beneficial foundation – our future generations. We believe that the foundation of the digital economy will be in education.

To superintendents, principals, tech leaders, and visionaries reading this: I'm not asking you to fund another program. I'm inviting you to help forge a new paradigm. Let's make academic capital the next movement in crypto. Let's take power from school districts to award gold standard credits, and put it in the hands of postdocs and professors.

If you think this vision is impossible, I welcome your perspective. Get in touch. Let us know what you see. Challenge us, or join us in proving this can work. Either way, our students and our future stand to win.