

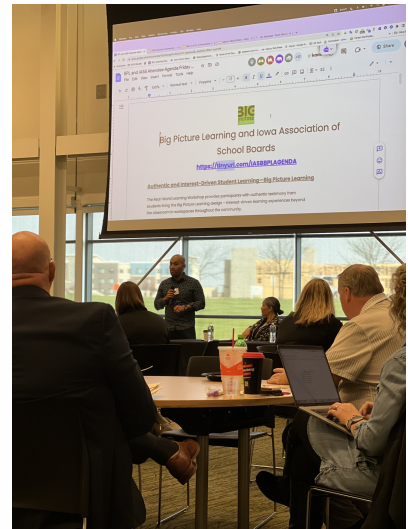


## Big Picture Learning Workshop: Where Students are the Curriculum

IASB was thrilled to welcome Sonn Sam with Big Picture Learning (BPL) to host a workshop on April 28 at the Summit on Student Success. Upon walking into the room, participating board members were asked to step outside the building and take a picture of something that interested them. This activity was used to exemplify that the power of real-world learning can happen anywhere, not just in the classroom, which is what Big Picture Learning is all about: Teachers igniting the curiosity and passions of students to help them reach their full potential.

Sonn was joined by a current BPL student, Owen Purcell and recent graduate Mercy Ruiz who now serves as a BPL mentor herself. Owen, a BPL senior with a love for videography and film, stood behind the camera filming the session. Upon introduction, Owen shared how BPL prepared him for a future in film, as he will attend DePaul University in Chicago to pursue a degree in video production this upcoming fall. Mercy had the opportunity to provide a full presentation for board members, sharing how the BPL model transformed her life for the better. Before BPL, Mercy struggled in and out of the classroom, lacking motivation and a support system at her previous school. However, through encouraging BPL mentors and the freedom to pursue her personal interests, Mercy was able to discover her purpose and set tangible long-term goals.

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) is an organization that fights to end violence against Indigenous women in Native American communities. As a young Indigenous woman herself, this is a cause deeply personal to Mercy. In partnering with MMIW, Mercy was able to spearhead a project to create a mural honoring a woman close to her that had recently gone missing. The mural spread awareness across Northern California and beyond, serving as a constant reminder of MMIW everywhere. Having this project woven into her school curriculum inspired and motivated Mercy to achieve her goals, further sparking her love for social work and advocacy. Mercy



*Sonn Sam shares the BPL vision with attendees.*



*IASB Executive Director, Lisa Bartusek, participates in photo activity with board members.*

serves as a prime example of how meaningful work that aligns with a student’s passions results in deeper learning.

## Key Takeaway: OARIA

Following Mercy’s presentation, Sonn presented sharing a major takeaway from the BPL design. The concept of OARIA was explained, an acronym that breaks down the overarching idea of BPL that students are the curriculum, and the school is the community.

- **O: One student at a time**—Focusing 1:1 with each student to get a feel for their unique interests and talents.
- **A: Advisory**—Creating small learning communities.
- **R: Real world learning**—Learning is not limited to time in the classroom or a standardized test. Providing students with hands-on, real-world experiences not only prepares them for college, but gives them a feel for the type of work they hope to pursue post-graduation.
- **I: Interest driven project-based learning**—A one-size-fits-all education structure will inevitably exclude certain students and their natural abilities. Working on projects with caring adults that address real-world problems and connect to students’ interests results in meaningful, student-relevant learning.
- **A: Authentic assessments such as exhibitions**—Traditional testing does not always reflect a student’s true understanding of the subject or their capabilities. Exhibitions, such as Mercy’s mural, demonstrated her artistic ability and encouraged her interest in social work and activism within her community.



*Board members listen to Mercy's presentation sharing her BPL journey.*

Following Sonn’s presentation, board members had the opportunity to Zoom with current BPL students based in Nashville, TN and Providence, RI. These students shared how they began attending a BPL school, the projects they are currently working on and their hopes for the future. Board members were also encouraged to ask any outstanding questions they had about BPL and how elements from the framework could be applied here in Iowa.

## Bring These Questions to the Board Table:

- **How does your district foster high-quality relationships between students and adults?** A caring and encouraging mentor that offers honest and open communication can be transformative in a student’s life. Mentors like these don’t just work to support students in

terms of academics or developing a career path. They help provide a safe, supportive culture where students feel a sense of belonging. How is your district working to ensure that students feel heard, understood and supported? What sort of mentor programs does your district offer and what does the staffing look like in terms of counselors or advisors? Sometimes, a nudge in the right direction from a trusted adult is all a student needs for a lifetime of success.

- ***How does your district support and promote interest-driven student learning?*** When students engage in meaningful work that is aligned with their passions, while developing critical thinking skills, it's called deeper learning. Allowing students to weave their interests and talents into their course curriculum provides a source of motivation by igniting student voice and choice in their own learning. What structures do you have in place that allow students to work on interest-based projects both inside and outside of the classroom? Interest-based learning also allows students to map out plans for the future and build their own career path prior to even attending college. How does your district promote real-world learning? What types of internship or apprenticeship programs are currently in place? Consider what connections your district can build with local businesses or organizations to further provide these opportunities for students.

The Big Picture Learning Workshop took place on April 28, 2023, on the second day of the inaugural Summit on Student Success at the FFA Enrichment Center in Ankeny, Iowa. A special thank you to Sonn Sam and the Big Picture Learning team for providing a powerful and engaging workshop for our members. Thank you also to the amazing BPL student volunteers who shared their stories with board members: Mercy Ruiz, Owen Purcell, Angel Meneese, MacKenzie Lewis, James Beck, Tiana Williams, Nabou Thiam, Jamillie Smith, Reuben Tillman and Renier Cruz.