Examples:

• In Houston, a private Montessori high school is turning the whole museum district into a classroom.

• The nonprofit Khan Academy offers more than 2,400 online instructional videos and 150 practice exercises. Backed by mega-funders such as Bill Gates and Google, the academy is beginning to mainstream into schools, integrating its material into a hands-on, blended-learning experience. The academy recently merged with Smarthistory to incorporate art history into its content.

• MakeShop at the Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh pushes the envelope of informal learning via the integration of old and new technologies into DIY, project-based activities in a hands-on workshop environment that connects kids to indie crafters, hackers and inventors. Created in partnership with Carnegie Mellon University’s Entertainment Technology Center (ETC) and the University of Pittsburgh Center for Learning in Out-of-School Environments (UPCLOSE), MakeShop is linked to “maker spaces” across the country that are exploring and evaluating the impact of making on learning for early and middle childhood.

• ArtLab+ at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Gallery in Washington, D.C., is a digital media studio that gives local teens the opportunity to become integral members of a design team. Team-based learning is increasingly valued in the workplace, but poorly taught and assessed in the schools.

What does this mean for society?

Educators, employers and government need to rethink and rebuild the educational infrastructure, and parents, community groups and a wide range of civic organizations, including museums, need to be involved. By acting now we may avoid creating a “lost generation” of students who fall between the cracks as affluent/savvy/engaged parents jump on new educational formats and old, underfunded, underperforming systems crumble.

What does this mean for museums?

The contributions that museums already make to public education are usually seen as peripheral—nice, not necessary. Policymakers, reformers and practitioners need to understand the crucial role that museums can play in the new educational infrastructure. The U.S. needs to scale up the educational resources and skills provided by its museums via online access, better indexing of online resources, physically incorporating museums into schools and schools into museums, and making museums central points for teacher training. This will ensure that museums provide equitable access to their unique resources and fulfill their potential in the new educational landscape. Even as they help pioneer the new era, museums need to stay engaged with the current educational system, both to serve today’s students and to ensure their own financial health. Museums will be offering field trips for a long time to come.