A Policy Framework for Tomorrow's Learning

Partnership for the Future of Learning

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Foreword

We are at a contended, yet much needed, inflection point in American education. It is almost universally acknowledged that we must renovate our nation's public education system so that all students graduate with the knowledge, higher-order thinking skills, and social and emotional dispositions that position them for success in our pluralistic democracy and evolving economy. However, policymakers, advocates, educators, and families are presented with conflicting views of how we must get there. We believe that we must step away from quick-fix soundbites and unproven solutions and lift our heads up to ask what kind of education our children need today for tomorrow—and how to deliver it equitably and effectively.

The context could not be more ripe for major change: Shifts in authority from Washington, D.C., to states, driven by the new Every Student Succeeds Act, are opening space for innovation. A new administration that will likely devolve even more authority to communities; the emergence of powerful, diverse, and innovative models of learning in schools and communities across the country; and, more broadly, the deeply felt sense of powerful demographic shifts alongside impacts of a global economy all add urgency to a moment for public education renewal and renovation.

A cross-sector group of foundations, researchers, nonprofits, associations, and networks have come together to discuss how to best seize this moment. We call our voluntary band of collegial organizations the Partnership for the Future of Learning and have collectively generated a frame that recognizes that our nation's greatness is grounded in public education that serves both the individual and—importantly—the collective public good.[1]

Education that serves the public good means that it needs to be publicly governed and sufficiently supported so that it can fulfill its essential, longstanding role as a strong pillar of communities. It is the surest pathway to deeper, more engaged learning for every child and for equity by race, gender, and zip code. In so doing, it will enable each and every child to have true freedom to participate in a diverse democracy and successfully navigate a future economy that we can hardly imagine.

This driving value of public education as serving the public good can best be realized when we pursue five other mutually reinforcing values that animate our vision for the future of learning:

- Deeper learning that cultivates academic competence, higher-order thinking skills, and commitment to learning and that readies young people personally and socially for responsible adulthood;
- Student-centered approaches to learning that enable educators and learners to work together to ensure that all learners become deeper learners through personalized, experiential learning;
- Resources, conditions, opportunities, and measures of accomplishment that ensure equitable and inclusive education for all of the nation's diverse young people;
- Schools that reflect and reinforce the centrality of public education to a healthy and vibrant democracy and promote the practice of democratic skills; and
- Systems in which knowledgeable professionals work together with parents, local community members, and policymakers with trust, respect, shared responsibility, and mutual accountability to create and sustain schools where ongoing professional learning brings continuous improvement and to construct standards, curriculum, and assessments that reinforce collaborative learning environments.

We have expressed our shared vision and values[1] in order to jumpstart a more positive, inclusive discussion around the future of our nation's education system, and how we can act on those values in order to realize this larger vision of returning public education to its animating, public purpose. One key path forward is through policy improvement. Hence this paper, which derives compelling and pointed policy suggestions from our values and integrates them into a comprehensive policy framework to advance a shift from the system of today to the system of the future.

We deeply thank the many and expert advisors to the process of developing the framework and offer special thanks to the principal authors (listed on the inside cover). We hope you will find our ideas helpful, and we invite you to join the discussion—we see this as a living document, a shared policy framework among an expanding network in the education field. We welcome your action, if you are so moved, to further promote these ideas nationally and, most important, in your state and local community.

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Acknowledgments

Executive Summary

The Partnership for the Future of Learning aims to create schools that will enable all children to succeed in our fast-changing world. Its work is organized around five principles:

1. **Deeper learning:** Students learn to master and apply critical content knowledge by using higher-order skills, such as critical thinking, problem solving, communication, and collaboration. They become resourceful, resilient, and able to guide their own learning.

2. **Student-centered teaching:** Teaching and learning opportunities are anchored in the science of learning and research on youth development; educators value and respond to the needs of diverse students, and they have tools to ensure that all students learn well.

3. **Equity:** Resources and supports that enable deeper learning outcomes are provided to all students, with particular attention given to the needs of those who must overcome historical disadvantage.

4. **Democracy:** Schools prepare young people to be active and engaged citizens in an increasingly diverse and complex democracy. They function as democratic institutions that engage parents and communities as central participants in decisions.

5. **Trust, judgment, and responsibility:** Knowledgeable professionals work together with engaged parents, community members, and policymakers in a process of continuous improvement characterized by trust, respect, shared responsibility, and mutual accountability.

A system built on these pillars engages children and adults in rich, purposeful learning experiences that enable them to become increasingly competent in the work they undertake individually and in collaboration with others. It is designed to support capacity building, continuous improvement, and meaningful connections between school systems and communities.

Pillars of a Transformed Education System

Continuous Improvement

Focus on Meaningful Learning

Connected Communities

Adequate, Wisely Used Resources

Professional Capacity

Transformed System

Student-Centered Practices | Deeper Learning | Equity | Democracy | Shared Responsibility
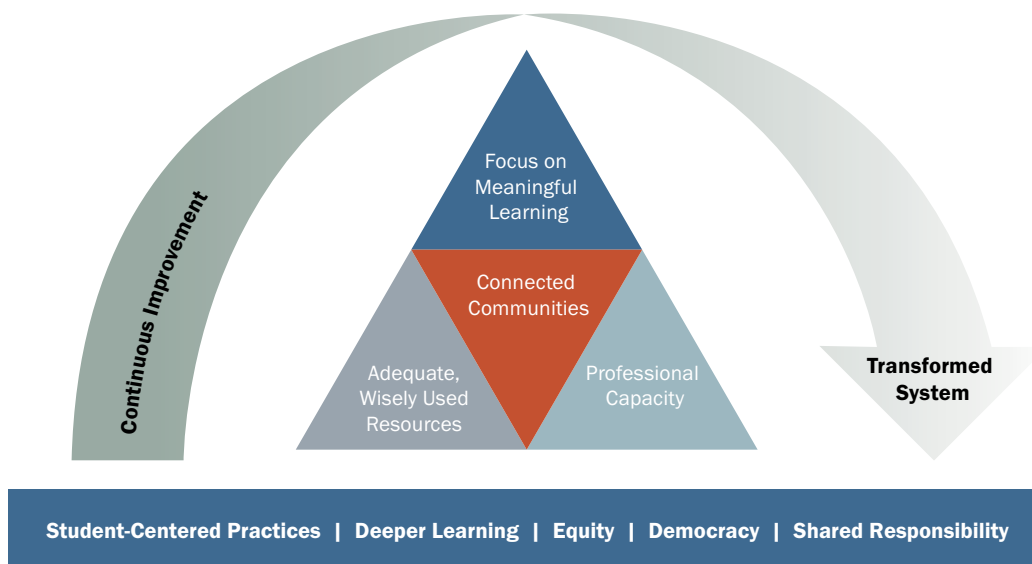
Policies supportive of the Partnership's vision require:

- **A focus on meaningful learning**—Learning that is exciting and engaging and that prepares students effectively for the world they are entering, including
  - curriculum and assessments that focus on deep understanding of content applied to real-world problems and
  - accountability that measures the things that matter most for student success and provide useful data, incentives, and supports for school improvement.

- **Professional capacity**—A system built to ensure knowledgeable and skillful professionals committed to all students and their learning, who work in contexts that support meaningful, equitable learning and individual children's needs, including
  - educator preparation, licensure, accreditation, and professional development policies that ensure teachers and leaders can teach rich and relevant content to diverse learners in culturally and individually responsive ways;
  - schools designed to support strong relationships, in-depth experiential learning for students, and collaborative learning and practice for adults; and
  - system learning strategies that improve decisions by educators, schools, and government agencies by documenting and disseminating successful practices and by supporting schools and districts in learning from each other.

- **Sufficient resources, wisely used**—An adequate and equitable funding system that enables communities to allocate resources so that they effectively promote learning, including
  - healthy beginnings for all children in high-quality early learning settings and
  - resources based on student needs that support high-quality instruction to meet state standards and wraparound services as needed.

- **Connected communities**—Shared responsibility that taps parent and community knowledge and fosters public participation in schools as democratic institutions, including
  - schools as hubs for their community services,
  - community engagement in the educational process, and
  - home–school partnerships that foster parent involvement in their children's education.

A Policy Framework for Tomorrow's Learning

If we teach today's students as we taught yesterday's, we rob them of tomorrow.

John Dewey, *Schools of Tomorrow*, 1915

Introduction

Today, the American education system is at a critical juncture, much as it was when Dewey and his daughter, Evelyn, wrote *Schools of Tomorrow* a century ago.[2] Today, as then, yesterday's system of schooling is insufficient for tomorrow.

Tomorrow's education system must prepare students for a rapidly changing society in a globalized world where people, cultures, and economies are not contained by traditional borders. As ever-expanding knowledge and information must be applied in changing and unanticipated contexts, we must prepare students for a world and careers that require them to be constantly learning and adapting to new challenges and possibilities.

These knowledge and skill demands of the future cannot be met by simply improving the schools we have now. Ultimately, today's factory-like system of batch processing children and youth through standardized structures and practices must give way to far more flexible and adaptive settings driven by advances in the learning sciences and our increased understanding of youth development. In short, it will require redesigning our bureaucratic school systems into learning systems.

America's national well-being depends on an education system that supports all young people to become competent and caring citizens who can contribute their talents to society, advance community life, foster a strong democracy, and together become a public willing and able to solve the pressing problems we currently face and those yet to come. They will need to be prepared to be active participants, contributors, and builders of community in their neighborhoods, states, nation, and the world.

Equally important, tomorrow's education system must correct our historical failure to educate all children well. Today, 50 million U.S. children attend 100,000 schools, in 13,500 school districts, where they are taught by more than 3 million teachers.[3] More than half are from families poor enough to be eligible for free and reduced price meals; more than half are children of color; and a quarter come from immigrant families. Widening economic inequality has created unequal childhoods, with some communities solidly plugged into in-school and out-of-school resources and supports for children's learning and development, while others have weak, patchy, or missing connections.

For our nation to maintain and expand its prosperity, we need the talents and skills of all young people to be available to our communities, our workforce, and our democracy. To achieve this, we must make a concrete commitment to providing all learners with robust educational opportunities, no matter where they live, who they arrived there, and who their parents are.

As the industrial age has given way to the information age, it is no longer adequate to deliver low-level skills to most, while selecting just a few to engage in higher-order thinking and problem

solving. A schooling system designed to sort and select only a few for the thinking curriculum needed for knowledge work is remarkably unsuited for what we need today, at a time when our economy requires a workforce with complex skill sets. The view that quality education and high attainment are primarily private goods, available only to those who manage to acquire them through the affluence of their parents or the luck of the draw, is outmoded. Other modernized countries with strong economies recognize that human potential is a national resource not to be wasted; thus they establish policies and programs that foster it.

To address the demands of this moment, there is significant work to be done. As we revamp and renew one of the most important institutions in American life, we need a vision grounded in longstanding, widely shared values. As a nation, we need our schools to cultivate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for young Americans to craft meaningful lives, build a strong economy, steward a vibrant democracy, and foster equity and justice. Practically, we need more young people well-prepared for responsible adulthood, becoming engaged and contributing members of communities, the economy, and political life. Socially, we need greater cohesion, which requires reducing disparities in opportunities that fuel debilitating social divisions.

Such system transformation is a long-term proposition that asks the public and policymakers to make fundamental shifts in their conceptions of education, as well as to make dramatic changes in educational policies, structures, and practices to transform the daily learning experiences of students, teachers, and communities. Accomplishing such a transformation will require authentic public engagement, as well as expert approaches to policy and system change. Only with engagement and reciprocity between stakeholders, state and federal policymakers, and knowledgeable educators will we be able to meet people respectfully where they are today and collectively push toward longer-term transformation.

Figure 1
Near-Term Improvement and Longer-Term Transformation

TRANSFORMING OUR EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

PFL'S APPROACH

IMPROVING OUR CURRENT SCHOOLS
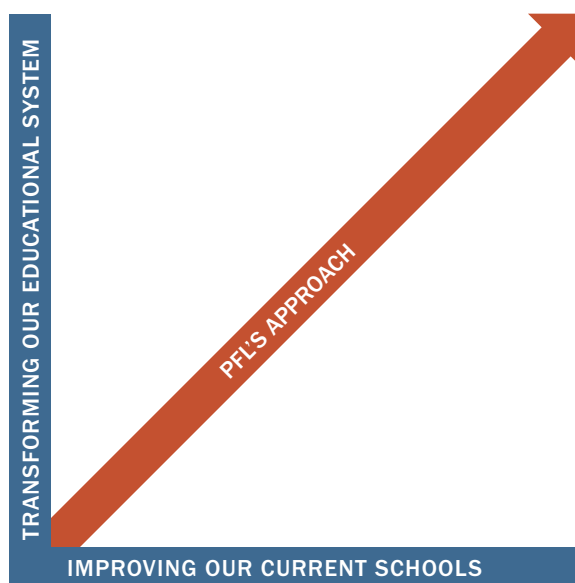
To achieve this goal, we must set the stage and drive toward a forward-looking system through work that operates simultaneously to accomplish near-term improvements within existing systems and longer-term transformations of the system itself, as suggested in Figure 1. This work must be undertaken at all levels of education policymaking. As we take advantage of immediate opportunities to improve the system we have today, we can simultaneously create opportunities and encourage front-runners to lead and test the changes the future requires.

The recent passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides one such near-term opportunity. Given the new law's shift of considerable responsibility for education systems to state and local government, it offers both challenges and possibilities to those seeking system renewal. The immediate challenge is to implement the law strategically, so that, as we advance state, local, and federal policies for today's system, we are also helping to set the stage and drive that system toward these important goals.

Accordingly, in what follows, we chart a course of near-term policy actions that can improve education today and, at the same time, take us in the new directions we need to meet our future needs. We begin with five foundational principles, or pillars, that should undergird a forward-looking system and guide decisions about how to achieve it: a focus on deeper learning, pursued through **student-centered practices, in ways that advance both equity and democracy through processes grounded in trust, judgment, and responsibility**.

We then propose a framework organized around four key elements of tomorrow's system that can be advanced with high-leverage policies:

1. Meaningful learning
2. Professional capacity
3. Sufficient resources, wisely used
4. Connected communities

Within the discussion of each element, we offer concrete suggestions for such policies at the federal, state, and local levels. Some illustrate how to respond in a forward-looking way to the opportunities in ESSA; others demonstrate ways to support states and local districts eager to lead toward an entirely new approach that is responsive to the rapidly changing context in which our children will grow and live. Although our focus, with few exceptions, is on p–12 policy, the pillars and policy framework could be equally applied through higher education.

Foundational Pillars

Tomorrow's transformed education system will look very different from today's. However, it must also be deeply rooted in enduring values that define American cultural and political democracy. These enduring values are the starting and end points of system transformation; they are also the guideposts for the steps to be taken along the way. Toward this end, the Partnership for the Future of Learning has set forth the following five pillars as a foundation for the policies that will characterize tomorrow's education system:

1. **Deeper learning:** Students learn to master and apply critical content knowledge by using higher-order skills, such as critical thinking, problem solving, communication, and collaboration. They also develop self-directed approaches to learning, resourcefulness and resilience, a growth mindset, and other social-emotional skills critical to success.

2. **Student-centered pedagogy and structures:** Teaching and learning opportunities are anchored in the science of learning and research on youth development; educators value and respond to the needs of diverse students, and they have tools to ensure that, while students learn differently and have different interests, all can learn well.

3. **Equity:** Resources and supports that enable deeper learning outcomes are provided to all students, with particular attention to the learning needs of those who must overcome historical and concentrated disadvantage. Equity also demands inclusiveness (e.g., connecting curriculum and instruction to diverse students' histories, cultures, and communities) and agency (empowering underserved students, families, and communities to become equal partners in education).

4. **Democracy:** Schools structure learning activities and relationships that prepare our young people to be active and engaged citizens in an increasingly diverse and complex democracy. Both school practices and social policies acknowledge parents and communities as central participants in public schools as key democratic institutions.

5. **Trust, judgment, and responsibility:** Knowledgeable professionals work together with engaged parents, local community members, and policymakers toward democratic, equitable schools focused on deeper learning in a process of continuous improvement characterized by trust, respect, shared responsibility, and mutual accountability.

These foundational pillars are mutually reinforcing and supportive. All five must be considered in selecting the policies that are best positioned to advance a system that ensures our national well-being in the years ahead.

What Would a System Designed Around These Pillars Look Like?

A system built on these pillars would engage children and adults in rich, purposeful learning experiences that enable them to become increasingly competent in the work they undertake individually and in collaboration with others. Adaptive problem-solving and cross-disciplinary applications of knowledge to novel situations would be major goals for learning, which would take place both in and outside of schools. Resources and supports would be differentiated to meet the learning needs and life circumstances of all students.

Rather than focusing primarily on compliance and sanctions, a system based on these pillars would be designed to support capacity building, continuous improvement, and meaningful connections between school systems and communities. An active culture of professionalism, responsibility, and respect would support child-centered accountability—that is, the capacity and commitment to understand and meet the needs of each and every child. The system would be built on shared responsibility between schools and community with educators, parents, policymakers, and community members learning together and holding one another accountable. It would be designed to identify and address needs, problems, and challenges at each level—from the individual student to the classroom, school, district, state, and federal government. Such a system's strong commitment to equity would be expressed both in its goal of universal attainment of deeper learning outcomes and its commitment to ensuring equitable schooling resources and investments regardless of income, background, or zip code.

A Policy Framework:
Practical Changes to Build a Transformed System

Toward that end, this paper sets forth a policy framework and specific policy recommendations to create the forward-looking system the Partnership envisions.[4]

Policies supportive of the Partnership vision can be organized into a framework that consists of four key elements, each of which is essential to a redesigned educational system:

1. A focus on **meaningful learning**—that is, learning that is exciting, engaging, and prepares students effectively for the world they are entering.

2. **Professional capacity**—that is, a system built to ensure knowledgeable and skillful professionals committed to all students and their learning, who work in contexts that support meaningful, equitable learning and individual children's needs.

3. **Sufficient resources, wisely used**—that is, an adequate and equitable funding system that allows communities to allocate resources so that they effectively promote learning for all students while meeting the needs of each local school.

4. **Connected communities**—that is, shared responsibility based on relationships between educators and communities that enable the use of local knowledge in the educational process and that foster democratic, public participation in schools as democratic institutions.[5]

Figure 2 depicts this framework and its connection to the five pillars the Partnership has identified as foundational.

Figure 2
Pillars of a Transformed Education System
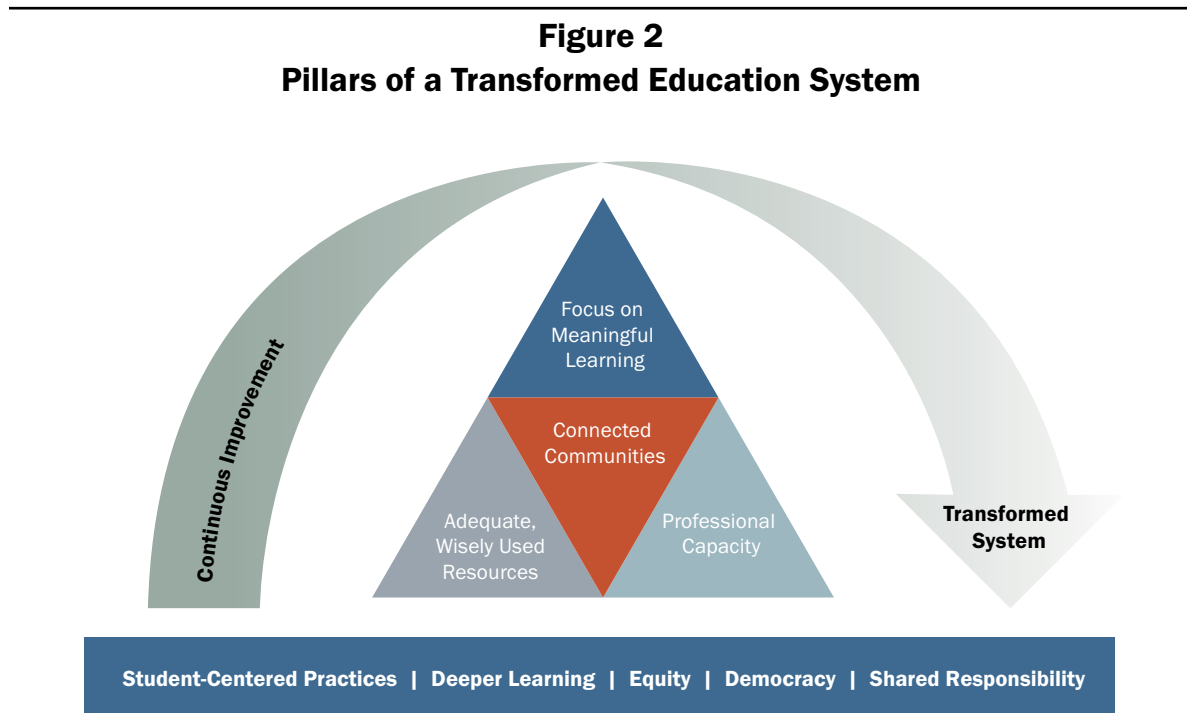
In the sections that follow, we discuss the high-leverage policy areas related to each element and suggest potential roles and actions of federal, state, and local policymakers. We offer policy recommendations of two types. One type specifies core changes that should be adopted universally in order to make significant improvements to today's system and to anticipate the system of tomorrow. The second type (noted in italics) outlines ways that leaders at the state and local levels can create, pilot, and test strategies that can be used to guide more fundamental system transformation. These two types of policy actions can inform and drive system transformation immediately and in the longer term.

I. Focus on Meaningful Learning

Meaningful learning develops the knowledge, intellectual and social skills, emotional capabilities, and mindsets that young people can bring to bear to craft their own lives and ongoing learning and to contribute to the collective good. Meaningful learning built on a principle of equity embraces diverse students' histories, cultures, and communities; it also capitalizes on the benefits of diversity for *all* students' development of deeper learning competencies and preparation for work and democratic participation in our multicultural society. Meaningful learning in the service of democracy engages students with the knowledge and skills active citizens need to address increasingly complex social, economic, and political challenges and opportunities.
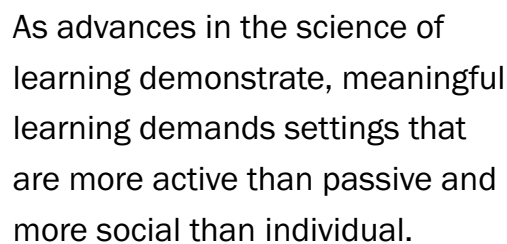
Such learning is predicated on strong student engagement, collective capacity of educators, integrated supports to address predictable effects of poverty, new uses of time, new uses of technology, and extensions of learning beyond the schoolhouse door. Accordingly, it must be fostered with policies that support and create incentives for high-quality instruction that leverages well-designed curriculum, is informed by useful assessments, and is situated in schools and classrooms that are organized around personalized learning.

As advances in the science of learning demonstrate, meaningful learning demands settings that are more active than passive and more social than individual, as adults and young people engage together in project-based and experiential learning, competency-based pathways, and performance-based assessments. Policies must also recognize and encourage meaningful learning outside of traditional brick-and-mortar settings, such as work-based learning opportunities, maker spaces, and after-school and summer programming.

> As advances in the science of learning demonstrate, meaningful learning demands settings that are more active than passive and more social than individual.

Advancing meaningful learning also requires policies that enable productive and collaborative accountability built on mutual responsibility, trust, and professional judgment. Accountability must also be reciprocal, so that each level of the system—school, community, district, state, federal—has specific responsibilities for building a learning system for all students. Such systems value transparency and continuous improvement: evaluation processes grounded in problem solving that emphasize capacity building by studying what works best and providing opportunities for educators, communities, and policymakers to learn from this research.[6]

There are two major policy areas that can foster and support meaningful learning: those pertaining to the design of curriculum and assessments and those pertaining to the design of accountability systems. We treat each of these below. (Educator capacities for implementing these new visions for learning are treated in the next section.)

Curriculum and Assessment Policies

Deeper learning, student-centered practices, and democratic values can be realized when curriculum and assessment policies emphasize learning for inquiry, problem solving, collaboration, and critical thinking. This is particularly true when practices engage students in applying their knowledge in authentic contexts, are inclusive of students' culture and language, encourage student agency and democratic participation in decisions about their education, and engage communities in the substance and exhibition of this work.

Curriculum and assessment policies that advance meaningful learning include the development and adoption of standards that emphasize deeper learning, equity, and democracy. Such standards should be accompanied by the development and use of curriculum frameworks and materials that support educators' development of lessons that implement the standards via student-centered instruction that is inquiry-based, culturally relevant, linked to real-world experiences, and evaluated through performance assessments. An explicit goal of such policies should be equitable access to deeper learning opportunities in all communities.

> Curriculum and assessment policies that advance meaningful learning include the development and adoption of standards that emphasize deeper learning, equity, and democracy.

Curriculum policies can also support demonstrations of how open education resources (OER) can both provide access to cutting-edge curriculum materials and enable the resources previously used for textbooks and related materials to be used for educator support and capacity building for using these resources.

Curriculum and assessment policies can also initiate and support the development of curriculum and school redesigns that restructure the traditional college and career preparation to make it more relevant and connected to authentic contexts and problems and to contemporary expectations of employers and higher education institutions. This might include building strategies such as linked learning, which connects schoolwork to learning in communities and businesses, into federal and state policy frameworks and funding streams. It might also include revisions of high school graduation requirements and college admissions policies to include attention to student work that demonstrates higher-order thinking and performance skills.

Leading-edge policies should also support research and development of personalized systems that promote opportunities for deeper learning tailored to the learning styles, pace, and goals of individual students. Such systems should ensure that personalized approaches are both focused on the needs of individual learners and continue to build skills of collaboration and social-intellectual engagement in diverse groups. Such policies should also include safeguards against unintended "tracking" effects that could reinforce larger social inequalities that limit learning opportunities for young people who have

*been historically underserved. Policies should encourage equitable access to the educational benefits that can accrue from **learning in diverse schools and classrooms**—among peers with a wide range of knowledge, skills, and experiences.*

Meaningful learning can also be fostered by the creation of new systems of **higher-quality assessments** that support the inclusion of higher-order thinking and performance skills in state and national assessments and that encourage local use of even more robust assessments, such as curriculum-embedded performance tasks, that allow students to inquire, investigate, collaborate, present, and defend their ideas, as well as to think critically and creatively in settings that engage them in community-connected work. These assessments should feed into processes that shape ongoing improvements in curriculum at the school and classroom level and help guide more productive learning experiences for students at the individual level. *Forward-looking assessment policies can support research and development of **competency-based approaches** to demonstrating learning and awarding credit that move beyond the constraints of grade-level standards to focus on individual progress.*

> Meaningful learning can also be fostered by the creation of new systems of higher-quality assessments that support the inclusion of higher-order thinking and performance skills in state and national assessments.

Such policies reflect the values of equity, trust, and responsibility when they are used in ways that open up (rather than denying or constraining) greater learning opportunities for young people and when they are used to encourage self-assessment, guiding improvement and ongoing learning for students and educators, rather than being used as tools for sanctions or punishments. Below, we suggest specific policies at the federal, state, and local levels that can support the adoption and implementation of meaningful learning practices.

Federal policies can
- support a research agenda with a broad focus on youth development and learning science (including investigations of the educational benefits of nontraditional learning environments) to inform curriculum development aimed at promoting deeper learning in diverse schools and communities;
- support the development of a curated clearinghouse of open educational resources that states, districts, and schools can draw from as they create curriculum and instruction for meaningful learning;
- invest in the development and implementation of high-quality assessments of deeper learning that are responsive to students' cultural and linguistic diversity—and in states' capacity to develop and use such assessments;
- encourage state assessment plans to include demonstrations of students' depth of knowledge and ability to apply their learning through performance-based assessments that are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically sensitive;
- incentivize state and local development and use of performance assessments, including as part of state accountability systems, where they are used for improvement and information rather than for sanctions and punishments;

- *invest in research and development to create, pilot, and test personalized, out-of-school, and competency-based curriculum and instruction, with safeguards against reinforcing unequal opportunities and stratification; and*
- *invest in research and development to create, pilot, and test approaches to creating culturally and socioeconomically diverse **learning environments** focused on meaningful learning.*

State policies can

- develop and adopt standards, curriculum frameworks, and materials that emphasize deeper learning and student-centered instruction in the content areas and that are responsive to cultural and linguistic diversity;
- support educators to use curriculum and materials that emphasize student-centered learning for inquiry, problem solving, collaboration, and critical thinking; that engage students in demonstrating and applying their knowledge in authentic, culturally responsive ways; and that are inclusive of diverse students' cultures and languages;
- create systems of high-quality assessments that include state and local performance-based components that evaluate higher-order thinking skills and applications of knowledge to real-world problems;
- incentivize the creation and expansion of schools that offer culturally and socioeconomically diverse learning environments focused on meaningful learning;
- include local stakeholders—including educators and community members—in the development and adoption of curriculum and assessment policies focused on deeper learning and student-centered instruction; and
- *invest in research and development to create, pilot, and test well-scaffolded, equitably available, personalized, and competency-based curriculum and assessment systems that are designed to avoid tracking and stratification.*

> State policies can incentivize the creation and expansion of schools that offer culturally and socioeconomically diverse learning environments focused on meaningful learning.

School districts, working in partnership with states, can create policies that

- select curriculum materials that emphasize deeper learning, including high-quality, open educational resources;
- support and engage local educators in developing and sharing curriculum units and lessons that emphasize deeper learning in the content areas and that are responsive to the cultural and linguistic diversity of the community;
- use robust, locally designed assessments, such as curriculum-embedded performance tasks, that allow students to inquire, investigate, collaborate, present, and defend their ideas, as well as to think critically and be creative, and that provide more information about their learning progress and needs;
- engage communities as participants in assessments as observers and discussants of students' engagement and performance on meaningful learning tasks;
- *pilot strategies that allow students to advance based on demonstrated competency rather than on seat time or Carnegie units, with protections against creating unequal opportunities and stratification;*

- *engage communities as partners in developing personalized and competency-based curriculum and assessment policies, with protections against creating unequal opportunities and stratification;*
- *develop graduation policies to allow demonstrations of college and career readiness with portfolios of work and student presentations, as well as evidence of success; and*
- *engage communities as partners in piloting and expanding culturally and socioeconomically diverse learning environments focused on meaningful learning.*

> School districts, working in partnership with states, can create policies that support and engage local educators in developing and sharing curriculum units and lessons that are responsive to the cultural and linguistic diversity of the community.

Accountability Policies

A sound approach to education policy should create accountability strategies that support high-quality teaching and learning for all children, along with means to monitor results and correct problems where they occur. To achieve these goals, an updated accountability system must be informed by multidimensional information about meaningful student learning and the aspects of school performance that support this learning. A key goal of an effective accountability system is continuous improvement—or "getting better at getting better."

Developed through democratic processes, accountability strategies should share responsibility among federal, state, and local levels and between schools and communities, with educators, parents, policymakers, and community members learning together and holding one another accountable through transparency of information and expectations for corrective action where problems are found. There should be a synergy between the "ends" of what we want for learners and the "means" of how the system engages educators. A culture of active, student-centered learning for youth should be mirrored and modeled in an active culture of professionalism, responsibility, and respect for adults.

A well-designed accountability system should highlight and measure the things that matter most for student success and those that provide the most useful data and incentives for educators and communities to engage together in school improvement. Accountability focused on meaningful learning should rely on **multiple measures** that assess the range of skills and competencies students need to be successful upon graduating from high school, as well as the opportunities they have to learn. Accountability that is designed to **continuously improve** teaching and learning must also focus on the resources and conditions that support these opportunities to learn.

Productive accountability will **identify and address problems or challenges** at each level—state, district, and classroom—that impede equitable and student-centered approaches to deeper learning. The information in an accountability system should be used to identify and support districts and schools in need of assistance and inform **school capacity building**, through the use of **school-quality reviews** that guide needed changes, for example, and through processes that engage communities in school improvement.

These accountability principles are germane both to making near-term improvements in the system and to paving the way for system redesign. ESSA marks an important move toward building state accountability systems that can track critical areas of school and student success to guide targeted improvements. It creates opportunities for local innovation and democratic participation, as states are expected to design new approaches to accountability and improvement with significant stakeholder engagement. *Forward-looking policies should advance this work by building into accountability systems the means for assessing educator engagement in continuous improvement and accountability and the extent to which communities are involved in deliberations about the future directions of education and system transformation.*

> Productive accountability will identify and address problems or challenges at each level—state, district, and classroom—that impede equitable and student-centered approaches to deeper learning.

Each of the policies listed below can advance well-designed systems that employ accountability as a tool to support continuous improvement and democratic participation.

Federal policies can
- promote states' use of multiple measures that support deeper learning and equity, including high-quality assessments, indicators of student inclusion, school climate, and opportunities to learn;
- provide information through federal data sets about equity in students' opportunities to learn, inclusion, and access to equitable resources and teaching capacity;
- build the capacity of state education agencies so that they can support districts and communities to engage in continuous improvement processes; and
- support research to further develop programmatic strategies and measures that support deeper learning outcomes, including social-emotional learning, meaningful opportunities to learn, and student, family, and community engagement.

State policies can
- develop accountability and improvement systems that combine information on school outcomes with diagnostic processes and knowledge resources to support ongoing improvement;
- include in the accountability system multiple measures that are actionable and provide incentives for schools to focus on deeper learning for all students—such as indicators of college and career readiness, student engagement, social-emotional supports and competencies, school climate, and inclusion;
- report indicators of school quality, resource sufficiency, and opportunities to learn—including access to a rich curriculum and well-qualified educators—across communities, schools, and student groups in order to put equity front and center;
- couple quantitative data with school quality reviews that examine the quality of teaching and learning to guide improvement;
- build district and school capacity to engage in diagnostic analysis and continuous improvement processes that foster educator and community engagement in developing systemic changes;

- *track the extent to which students in different demographic subgroups have access to adequate resources and learning opportunities, in order to address inequities; and*
- *provide incentives to enhance diversity and equity (e.g., resources for magnet schools and interdistrict transfers that desegregate school by race and income).*

Local policies can
- construct local indicators of school quality, resource equity, and learning opportunities that provide regular information on what students are receiving, as well as how well they are doing, and use the data to drive greater equity;
- use school quality reviews or similar strategies to better understand the quality of teaching and learning so as to guide improvement strategies;
- *engage educators and community members in using data and information to improve low-performing schools with evidence-based interventions and supports; and*
- *establish high-quality school and community partnerships—including community schools and intentionally diverse schools—as part of districts' improvement strategies for low-performing schools.*[7]

II. Professional Capacity

To ensure that all American youth are equipped with the knowledge and skills needed in today's world, we need also to ensure that we are developing educators with the skills for teaching in ways that yield those outcomes. This means that preparation for teachers and administrators should equip them to organize student-centered learning environments designed to reach deeper learning goals. It means that educators should enter the profession ready to actively engage diverse youth and to develop the intertwined academic, social, and emotional skills that young people must learn to apply their knowledge wisely.

Our approach to professional capacity must recognize that teaching skills continue to develop and grow over time: Even well-prepared educators need ongoing support to assess, reflect, and revise their professional knowledge and skills. To promote what Michael Fullan calls collective "professional capital," our system must build in time and tools that allow educators to engage collectively in a continuous cycle of inquiry, along with structures that spread knowledge and good practice. It must also recognize that school and classroom designs affect educators' performances—that educators' capacities can be activated and strengthened or undermined by the contexts in which they work.

> To ensure that all American youth are equipped with the knowledge and skills needed in today's world, we need also to ensure that we are developing educators with the skills for teaching in ways that yield those outcomes.

Three major policy areas can develop, support, and enable strong professional capacity in schools: those pertaining to the recruitment, development, distribution, and retention of educators; those pertaining to new designs for schools and other learning settings; and those pertaining to system changes.

Educator Policies

Educator policies must be grounded in a conception of teachers and leaders as expert, continuously learning, career professionals who can support student-centered practices for young people that lead to deeper learning. This requires policies governing **educator preparation, induction, professional development**, and **evaluation** that focus explicitly on enabling educators (both teachers and leaders) to engage students in rich and relevant learning; support their academic, social, and emotional development; teach in culturally and individually responsive ways; engage constructively with parents and communities; and create equitable, democratic learning environments.

These goals can only be accomplished if policies appreciate that educators apply their knowledge and skills in complex and often unpredictable settings and must aim to create environments in which young people develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of deeper learning in ways that reflect equity and democracy. This conception leads to policies far different than those that view teachers as short-term workers performing routine tasks along an education assembly line with administrators as shop floor supervisors who ensure worker compliance. Instead, professional teachers are skilled masters of a sophisticated repertoire of practices that require diagnostic skill and judgment as they are used to meet the individual needs of students. Teachers develop a growing set of instructional skills through deep preparation and ongoing development with colleagues within and beyond the school who share common content and student concerns.

> Teachers develop a growing set of instructional skills through deep preparation and ongoing development with colleagues within and beyond the school who share common content and student concerns.

Policies must provide for educators the same kinds of learning opportunities, experiences, and assessments that we want educators to provide for young people. Policy tools for advancing these goals include **accreditation and licensing** standards that guide preparation and entry into the profession, along with inducements to develop highly accomplished practices throughout their careers, such as **National Board certification**. These standards and strategies can articulate learning progressions for teachers that illustrate how skills and abilities may be developed more deeply over time, creating a road map for teacher development that can guide supports for and assessment of teaching practice.

Recognizing that professional capacity is also dependent on the nature of the organizations in which teachers practice, policies must also support capacity building in districts, schools, and communities. Building the collective professional capital that supports shared norms and practices—in turn associated with much stronger gains in student achievement[8]—requires investments in transformative **models of preparation and professional development** that support strong clinical practice, such as residencies, professional development schools, collaborative learning networks, professional development institutes, and coaching from skilled master teachers in support of deeper learning practices within and across content areas.

Educator policies concerned with equity must also ensure the **adequate supply, equitable distribution**, and **retention** of a diverse pool of capable teachers and leaders. These policies must protect high-need communities of concentrated poverty and racial isolation from the harmful

consequences of teacher shortages and attrition. Here, too, policy tools include recruitment strategies, incentives, and supports for educators choosing to teach in such schools.

> Educator policies concerned with equity must also ensure the adequate supply, equitable distribution, and retention of a diverse pool of capable teachers and leaders.

To accomplish these things, federal policies can
- underwrite teachers' and principals' preparation in high-quality programs for a diverse pool of talented recruits who will teach or lead in high-need schools and fields—such as math, science, special education, and teaching of English learners—for a commitment of at least four years;
- invest in creating high-quality educator training (as through the Teacher Quality Partnerships grants), including sites that offer strong clinical training through teacher residencies or professional development partnerships with schools that use deeper learning practices and have strong community engagement;
- set guidelines for high-quality evidence-based professional development programs and use them in the allocation of grants to states;
- study and support effective teacher, principal, and school networks and professional development institutes, coaching, and strategies such as National Board Certification that improve educator practice and student outcomes within and across content areas; and
- require, monitor, and highlight data from state equity plans for the equitable distribution of effective teachers, and enforce federal policies calling for comparability in educator distribution and qualifications across schools.

State policies can
- set licensure and accreditation standards that require educator preparation programs to prepare educators who understand how to engage students in rich and relevant learning; support their academic, social, and emotional development; create equitable and democratic learning environments; and engage constructively with diverse communities;
- use educator performance assessments to encourage and evaluate the development of these skills (while eliminating tests and other barriers unrelated to ability to practice);
- set standards and offer supports for pre- and in-service leadership development programs that prepare leaders to advance equity and enable deeper learning as they design and manage schools, districts, and states;
- invest in preparation programs at universities that partner with districts to provide strong clinical training through teacher residencies or professional development schools that use deeper learning practices;
- create funding formulas that help equalize salaries and working conditions in order to establish teaching as a long-term career choice for expert, career professionals;
- invest in programs that train and support accomplished mentors who have released time to coach beginners in their early years;
- set guidelines for high-quality professional development (such as those developed by Learning Forward) and use them for funding effective learning opportunities for practicing educators;

- leverage continuing education requirements for licensure and salary increases to promote learning opportunities for educators, such as scoring performance tasks for students and/or for educators themselves as a means to deeply understand high-quality practices;
- develop and support teacher and school networks, professional development institutes, and coaching in support of deeper learning practices within and across content areas;
- facilitate cross-school and cross-district learning by documenting and disseminating successful practices and useful research;
- incentivize professional learning and sharing of expertise by offering compensation for developing accomplished practice (e.g., strategies such as National Board certification) and career ladders that support professional learning, mentoring, and coaching;
- incentivize an equitable distribution of a diverse pool of well-prepared educators through service scholarships, residencies, and other tools to recruit educators and prepare them well for high-need locations; and
- redesign teacher evaluation so that it reinforces student-centered practices, rewards collaboration, and encourages teachers to engage in goal setting and inquiry to support their growth, supported by colleagues who offer counsel, modeling, and peer coaching.

> State policies can develop and support teacher and school networks, professional development institutes, and coaching in support of deeper learning practices within and across content areas.

Local policies can
- establish compensation frameworks (salaries, career roles, retention incentives) that establish the profession as a long-term career choice that warrants the development of educators and leaders as expert, continuously learning, career professionals;
- establish recruitment, selection, hiring, and induction strategies (including partnerships with high-quality preparation programs) that lead to a diverse and sufficient supply of well-prepared educators who are prepared to teach equitably for deeper learning;
- negotiate teacher assignment policies—and provide excellent teaching and learning conditions and supports in high-need schools—to ensure and support the equitable distribution of well-prepared educators;
- create time for teacher collaboration and opportunities for teacher learning through individual and schoolwide lesson study, action research, peer observation, professional learning communities, and other learning opportunities; and
- develop evaluation systems that reinforce student-centered practices, incorporate authentic evidence of student learning, reward collaboration, and encourage teachers to engage in goal setting and inquiry to support their growth, supported by colleagues who offer counsel, modeling, and peer coaching.

Supportive Designs for Schools

Many current funding policies for school operations and facilities, as well as other regulations, reinforce the factory model school design developed a century ago. This antiquated approach

dictates how staff will be assigned, time will be used, students will be taught, and credits will be granted. It limits relationships between adults and students, as well as opportunities for students to apply their learning in authentic situations. It also limits opportunities for teacher collaboration and learning. In recent years, pacing guides and even teaching scripts have been reintroduced as means to standardize schooling so that it proceeds "without regard to persons," as Max Weber described the goal of the early 20th-century bureaucracy.

Education that is built on deeper learning and student-centered practices requires changes in these old schooling "regularities" to provide the time and structures for such things as learning projects that require investigation and revision; out-of-school learning and relationships with adults beyond school; varied pacing and strategies (including grouping and regrouping) for students who need different things at different times; and advancement based on performance-based assessment and competency

> Meaningful connections among students and adults within the school, between schools and the community, and among teachers all require designs that differ from the traditional model.

rather than seat time or Carnegie units. Meaningful connections among students and adults within the school, between schools and the community, and among teachers all require designs that differ from the traditional model.

Policies can provide supports and incentives to develop new designs that facilitate meaningful learning and the work of capable educators. These can both improve the schools and classrooms we have now and help pave the way for more fundamental transformation. With appropriate funding and incentives, for example, schedules can be redesigned to provide expanded learning opportunities in safe spaces that are supported by caring and knowledgeable adults in addition to educators. Partnering with community nonprofits, the learning day can be lengthened and enriched by adding hours and days to the schedule and/or with high-quality, well-coordinated systems of out-of-school and summer programs.

Redesigned schedules can provide time for collaborative teacher learning, curriculum planning, and problem solving, including peer observations and coaching in classrooms. Such time could be well focused by examining authentic student work and focusing on how to strengthen student learning in curriculum building in these settings, as well as professional development and evaluation. Policies can also support new means of organizing collective bargaining to facilitate transformations of structures and instructional strategies.

Finally, a key component of settings that foster meaningful learning is diversity—including racial/ethnic, cultural, economic, and linguistic diversity, along with a mix of learning styles, backgrounds, and experiences. The status quo, long shaped by neighborhood segregation and restrictive attendance boundaries, and more recently by the outcomes of parent-choice policies, has limited the extent to which young people experience the pluralism that characterizes the nation overall. Our current approach tends to isolate students into schools by both economic status and race and into classrooms by prior achievement and learning styles.

Students at such schools miss the increasingly well documented benefits of diversity, not only in terms of their preparation for citizenship but also on their development of deeper learning competencies.[9] Policy can be used to foster designs for schools, classrooms, and other settings that build on the strengths of the nation's diversity. For example, magnet schools and district-choice plans aimed at integration have been shown to increase both diversity and student success. Policies that rely on choice and incentives rather than compulsory busing and that use socioeconomic and linguistic, as well as racial indicators as a basis for integration, hold promise for fostering school designs that build on the strengths of the nation's diversity.

> A key component of settings that foster meaningful learning is diversity—including racial/ethnic, cultural, economic, and linguistic diversity, along with a mix of learning styles, backgrounds, and experiences.

To accomplish these goals, federal policies can
- incentivize new school designs through funds such as the former federal Small Schools Grants and ESSA funding for school transformation (which can be targeted to any schools identified for assistance and high schools flagged with low graduation rates);
- increase funding for the Magnet Schools Assistance Program;
- provide funding for other approaches to desegregation through innovative school models that attract diverse students (as in the former Desegregation Assistance Act); and
- *avoid reinforcing requirements that hold factory-model practices in place, such as age-grading and requirements for testing by grade level rather than competencies.*

State policies can
- eliminate regulations concerning the allocation of staff, use of time, granting of credits, and organization of students and curriculum that reinforce old factory-model designs;
- establish innovative and equitable designs for community schools, intentionally diverse schools, and other high-quality school and community partnerships as part of the state's improvement strategy for low-performing schools;
- *offer financial and regulatory incentives to leverage competency-based learning, personalization, and new uses of time for students and teachers, with appropriate safeguards to ensure equity;*
- *designate as "intentionally diverse schools" those that explicitly use admissions and/or attendance boundary policies to enhance diversity and support such schools with funding for transportation, facilities, teacher training, etc.; and*
- *take advantage of funding under the Magnet Schools Assistance Program in ESSA, which now can be used to support magnet schools created by a collaboration of multiple school districts (e.g., city and suburban districts joining together).*

Local policies can
- provide flexible use of time and credit for deeper learning, including internships, community service, and other approaches to out-of-school learning; extended projects that require significant investments of time for investigation and revision; and enrichment activities before and after school hours;
- support redesigned school and class schedules to provide time for professional collaboration, planning, and coaching;

- support new approaches to collective bargaining to facilitate transformations of school structures and instructional strategies;
- partner with communities to develop expanded and enriched learning opportunities beyond the regular school day and in summer;
- *engage communities with educators in using data and information to transform low-performing schools by developing designs for learning environments that are personalized, student-centered, and supportive of deeper learning opportunities within and beyond traditional school walls; and*
- *develop magnet school programs (both within districts and through cross-district partnerships) and other innovative approaches to "intentionally diverse" schools that allow and encourage parents to choose to send their children to diverse schools.*

> Local policies can support redesigned school and class schedules to provide time for professional collaboration, planning, and coaching.

System-Changing Policies

Systemwide support for capable teaching requires policies and procedures that support coherence and make meaningful learning, capable teaching, and equitable, democratic approaches commonplace rather than exceptional. As other successful countries have illustrated, federal, state, and local policies can move such practices forward with **system learning** strategies that enable educators, schools, and agencies to learn from one another.

Federal, state, and local governments can facilitate this learning by documenting and disseminating successful practices and useful research, by supporting individual and schoolwide professional learning opportunities, and by supporting schools and districts in learning from research and from each other through publications, conferences, networks, site visits, and grants for developing and sharing successful practices. Governments can also develop and support networks of likeminded schools that are working on similar problems or strategies, so that they can learn with and from each other and share what they learn with the system as a whole.

In developing system-changing policies, districts, states, and the federal government should resist issuing mandates and directives to schools that hold outmoded structures in place, and they should reduce unnecessary constraints on practice that prevent schools from adopting more successful models and student-centered practices. Once states have adopted high-quality standards and provided curriculum resources for educators to draw upon, their role in guiding practice should be modest, while their role in supporting learning should be robust.

The following examples illustrate how policies at the federal, state, and local levels can support these goals for both near-term improvement and fundamental system transformation.

Federal policies can
- support research that documents, using a variety of trustworthy research methods, and disseminates successful practices and useful findings through labs and centers, networks, learning communities, and other knowledge-sharing strategies; and

- support state capacity to collect and analyze data, evaluate policies and programs, and provide technical assistance to districts as part of continuous improvement processes at the state, district, and local school levels (as was part of ESEA prior to 1981).

State policies can
- create knowledge-sharing centers in state departments and/or universities that organize and share research with educators and that document and disseminate the practices of successful and rapidly improving districts or schools, particularly in areas that are a focus of statewide improvement (e.g., teaching English learners well, improving mathematics learning, reducing student exclusions);
- support districts to learn from the research and from each other through publications, conferences, networks, site visits, and grants to educators, schools, and districts for developing and sharing successful practices;
- partner with states to share experience and learning about adopting and implementing policies aimed at promoting deeper learning, educator capacity, connected communities, and equitable transformed systems; and
- develop and support networks of likeminded districts that are working on similar problems or strategies, so that they can learn with and from each other and share what they learn with the state as a whole.

Local policy can
- support schools in learning from the research and from each other through networking, site visits, and professional development;
- develop and support networks of educators and schools that are working on similar problems or strategies, so that they can learn with and from each other and share what they learn with the system as a whole;
- provide professional development resources—including institutes, instructional materials, and coaching—for educators, instructional coaches, parents, community members, and other stakeholders to learn more about successful, high-leverage practices; and
- develop educator evaluation systems that reinforce student-centered practices, incorporate authentic evidence of student learning, and reward collaboration, while encouraging teachers and school leaders to engage in individual and collective inquiry.
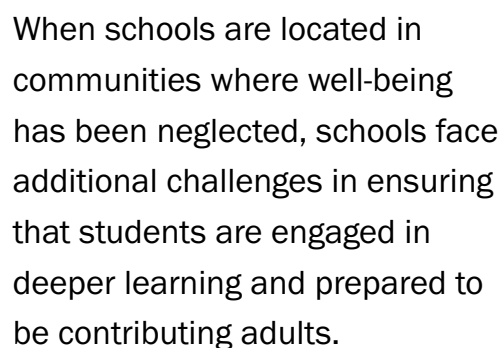
III. Adequate Resources, Wisely Used

For American schooling to develop the human potential that is our nation's greatest asset, we must commit adequate resources to the task of creating successful school systems, regardless of community location or wealth. In turn, this requires that we make a far more robust commitment

> Federal policies can support state capacity to collect and analyze data, evaluate policies and programs, and provide technical assistance to districts as part of continuous improvement processes at the state, district, and local school levels.

to equity, devoting more resources where they are needed—for instance, to counteract the effects of poverty, support English learners in engaging in language development and deeper learning, and ensure supports for students with disabilities.

We also have an obligation to ensure that these sufficient, adequate resources are used wisely, both to provide access to equitable and empowering learning and to ensure that children can come to school physically and developmentally healthy and ready to engage in meaningful learning. This dual goal—adequate and equitable resources, wisely used—requires the involvement of communities as partners. Such involvement provides local knowledge necessary to determine what resources are most essential, and it locates critical decisions about children's educational well-being in a democratic process.

To accomplish a system characterized by adequate and equitable resources, we must understand the reasons why our current system is characterized by insufficient and inequitably distributed resources. One challenge stems from unequal resources provided to districts and schools in most states, through revenue structures such as property taxes that generally favor communities that already have greater advantages. Another challenge comes from disparities in the underlying—and alterable—factors tied to poverty and other circumstances beyond school, such as physical and mental health, nutrition, environmental stress, and other factors that influence young people's development. These factors significantly impact the opportunity students have to achieve deeper learning and prepare to be contributing adults.

> When schools are located in communities where well-being has been neglected, schools face additional challenges in ensuring that students are engaged in deeper learning and prepared to be contributing adults.

Community well-being is built on safe neighborhoods, opportunities for meaningful and sustaining employment, the availability of social connections, and more. When schools are located in communities where well-being has been neglected, schools face additional challenges in ensuring that students are engaged in deeper learning and prepared to be contributing adults. The number of young people in such communities is rapidly accelerating as students in poverty make up more than half of the student body in U.S. public schools.[10]

Students who live in poverty, are English language learners, or have special education needs require more resources than more advantaged peers to engage productively in learning, in part to compensate for unequal learning resources and opportunities outside of school that are created by larger societal disparities, and in part to address their specific learning needs. Yet securing sufficient education resources has proven extremely difficult for schools and districts with large concentrations of students in poverty. From a planning and policy perspective, this kind of inequity makes it more difficult to create a sufficient and equitable resource base for learning.

If we want the potential of all young Americans to be fulfilled, our strategies must be guided by the principle that equity is not strict equality but rather differential distribution based on need. Resources of every kind—from child welfare services, early learning, school funding, facilities, materials, and time to high-quality educators—must be allocated according to this principle, across

and within districts and schools, to meet the Partnership's commitment to ensuring that these opportunities are fairly distributed across places, spaces, races, and other lines.

To accomplish a sufficient and equitable distribution of essential resources, we need new policies at the federal, state, and district levels. We suggest two areas of policy that can promote sufficient and well-used resources—policies directed at healthy beginnings and those focused on school funding.

> If we want the potential of all young Americans to be fulfilled, our strategies must be guided by the principle that equity is not strict equality but rather differential distribution based on need.

Healthy Beginnings

There is broad agreement among researchers across a wide variety of disciplines—program evaluators, neuroscientists, geneticists, and economists—that early education can give children a powerful start on the path that leads to college or career.[11] Well-designed and well-implemented programs can foster meaningful gains in school readiness and long-term benefits such as lower rates of special education, reduced grade retention, and higher high school graduation rates.[12] Further, while all children benefit from high-quality preschool, low-income children and English learners benefit the most.[13] Supporting and investing in early **health care** and **early childhood education,** along with **family engagement, nutrition, housing,** and **poverty prevention,** are critical to future success.

A key issue is structuring the right kind of deeper learning foundation in early childhood education as access is expanded. Another key issue may be structuring funding streams so that early childhood learning can occur in racially, ethnically, linguistically, and economically integrated settings rather than the segregated system many policies now encourage.

Federal policies can
- organize funding streams and match state funding to equitably support prenatal and infant health care, nurse visit programs, and high-quality early care and early childhood learning wherever possible in racially, ethnically, linguistically, and economically integrated settings; and
- provide funding for school models and community partnerships that ensure that pre-K students in high-need communities receive adequate health and mental health care, social services, summer learning opportunities, and before and after school care.

State policies can
- enact quality standards for programs and licensing standards for providers that support thoughtful, developmentally appropriate early childhood education;
- fund parental leave, child care subsidies, and early childhood learning settings that enable all children to be well cared for in safe, developmentally appropriate settings;
- structure funding streams so that early childhood learning can occur in racially, ethnically, linguistically, and economically integrated settings rather than the segregated settings targeted policies now encourage; and

- create preschool and child care models that ensure that students in high-need communities receive adequate health and mental health care, early learning supports, social services, summer learning opportunities, and before and after school care.

Local policies can

- develop early childhood settings that are developmentally appropriate; supportive of student-centered instruction focused on deeper learning; racially, linguistically, and economically integrated where possible; and manage to support smooth transitions to kindergarten and the early grades.

> Supporting and investing in early health care and early childhood education, along with family engagement, nutrition, housing, and poverty prevention, are critical to future success.

Resources

In a system that supports equity, funding should be allocated and then focused based on pupil needs, at a level and in a manner adequate to meet the needs of the whole child. Under this construct, resources are distributed unequally with more resources allocated to support those with the greatest need. In addition, there would be a strong system of supports, funded in part federally (as is the case in medicine) and managed at the state level, to ensure access to needed knowledge and skills for all educators before and after they enter the field.

Federal policy can

- require, as a condition of federal funding, that states make significant progress toward funding and resource equity;
- authorize and fund innovative approaches for achieving fiscal equity (e.g., expand to a larger number of districts the flexibility ESSA currently authorizes for 50 school districts that use weighted student funding models to direct funds to schools based on student needs);
- enforce comparability provisions in ESSA and support innovative approaches to attract well-qualified educators to high-need schools (see educator capacity section above);
- invest in technology tools for high-need schools and facilitate high-bandwidth connectivity through E-rate and similar programs; and
- invest in studies to cost out and develop funding models for new, high-quality educational designs, including those that are personalized, extend beyond traditional school schedules and buildings, are integrated with community-based supports, and are intentionally diverse.

State policy can

- identify stable and more equitable revenue sources for public education;
- adopt funding strategies, such as weighted student formula approaches adopted in Massachusetts and California, that provide school funding based on the costs of educating students who live in poverty, are new English learners, or encounter other risk factors;
- base state budgeting on research-informed estimates of the costs to educate various groups of students to meet state standards;
- encourage within-district resource allocation processes that mirror the state's weightings when distributing funds among schools;

- ensure that resources include sufficient funding to support educator capacity building and continuous improvement processes, in addition to the direct costs of educating students;
- include resource adequacy and equity indicators in the state's accountability system, prioritizing those indicators that are good proxies for the sufficiency of resources;

> Federal policy can require, as a condition of federal funding, that states make significant progress toward funding and resource equity.

- collect and report funding data at the level of the school site, as well as districts;
- require equity impact analyses that assess the impact of proposed state policies on the sufficiency of resources for all students;
- expand educator and student access to high-quality technology tools to support teaching and learning and facilitate high-bandwidth connectivity;
- develop means for building educational capacity rather than cutting budgets in ways that undermine capacity in districts in financial distress; and
- *provide support for research, development, and piloting alternative resource strategies for new designs for deeper learning settings, including those that are personalized, extend beyond traditional school schedules and buildings, integrated with community-based supports, and intentionally diverse. Such policies should include safeguards against exacerbating current patterns of unequal funding.*

Local policy can
- adopt funding strategies, such as weighted student formula approaches that provide school funding based on pupil needs;
- report to communities how resources are allocated among schools, provide evidence of the outcomes of current allocation decisions, and continually evaluate and reallocate resources to meet pupil needs;
- conduct equity impact analyses that assess the impact of current and proposed district and school policies on the sufficiency of resources for all students, including the allocation of high-quality curriculum, well-qualified teachers and leaders, learning materials, instructional supports, and extracurricular opportunities;
- engage educators and community stakeholders in determining how resources can be used best to meet the healthy beginnings and support needs of school-age young people, including such cross-sector supports as health and human services, foster care, homeless services, child protective services, recreation, libraries, etc.; and
- *engage educators and community stakeholders in determining the resources that would be sufficient to support new designs for deeper learning settings, including those that are personalized, extend beyond traditional school schedules and buildings, are integrated with community-based supports, and are intentionally diverse.*

The aforementioned policies support a capacity building strategy implemented with an equity lens, offering opportunities for thoughtful investments in schools informed by educator and community engagement and analyses of what is needed and what is working. Ideally, this strategy should work synergistically to provide young people what they need at a given moment to be able to learn most effectively, thus reducing unnecessary costs of failure that could have been avoided with thoughtful and timely investments.

IV. Connected Communities

The long tradition of local control by lay community boards of education was intended to make schools themselves responsive democratic institutions and provide a place for community engagement, checks and balances, and transparency. Examples such as the communitywide efforts in cities including Cincinnati, Ohio, and Long Beach, California,[14] illustrate that strong connections between schools and communities can support student learning outcomes and actualize a commitment to equity, democracy, shared responsibility, and trust.

A system grounded in the five pillars identified by the Partnership for the Future of Learning will prioritize policies that support community engagement in the work of creating and sustaining high-quality schools in every neighborhood. Rather than simply adopting and implementing school models and instructional practices designed or mandated by outsiders, such a system will ensure that schools and communities share the responsibility for creating and sustaining high-quality schooling.

A robust commitment to equity demands inclusiveness (e.g., connecting curriculum and instruction to diverse students' histories, cultures, and communities) and agency (emphasis on empowering underserved students, families, and communities to become equal partners in education reform). For schools to provide meaningful learning opportunities and build the capacity of educators to provide culturally relevant, student-centered curriculum to all students, they must use the local knowledge of communities to inform the development and execution of deeper learning opportunities. Moreover, such engagement reinforces public schooling as a core feature of a vibrant, free democracy upon which both individuals and the collective depend.

Although boards of education may have been sufficient to serve this function in small cities and towns of America's past, they are insufficient to play this role today, especially in the large city school systems composed of diverse communities. And of particular importance is the reality that communities that have witnessed a lifetime of educational neglect and outdated thinking at the local level must be assured that the trust given to local educators will be used wisely and responsibly, for demonstrably and dramatically better results. Community engagement can ensure that our renovated system works for all Americans, especially those who are currently ill-served by the system.

It is well understood that parents must be partners with educators in supporting children's education and successfully enabling meaningful learning that encompasses deeper learning goals. Engaging individual families is critically important to support students' learning. However, engaging groups of families and community organizations can foster collective action to build and sustain high-quality schools that have the resources, support, and expanded learning opportunities that young people need.

> Through democratic governance processes, policies must ensure that communities are involved with educators in setting goals, shaping plans, and partnering in achieving those goals for children.

Such groups bring both local knowledge and the ability to marshal community assets on behalf of the school and all of the students. Connections with community groups and actors can also promote equity by reducing the learning differences that stem from factors tied to poverty and other circumstances beyond school. Through democratic governance processes, policies must ensure that communities are involved with educators in setting goals, shaping plans, and partnering in achieving those goals for children.

Accordingly, in addition to making parents key partners in the education of their children, the education system should integrate parent and community engagement into a range of policies influencing school decision-making, including strategies for school improvement. Policies should bring educators, parents, community members, and policymakers to learn together in continuous cycles of improvement. Accountability policies should also integrate parent and community engagement into school decision making, including strategies for school improvement.

Examples of federal, state, and local policies in support of connected communities include the following:

Federal policies can
- require community engagement in the process of developing state plans required for federal funding under ESSA and other education and social service legislation;
- require states to include stakeholder and community engagement in their plans for using accountability information in a process of continuous improvement and in the construction of school improvement plans;
- invest in research and demonstration projects developing evidence-based approaches for engaging communities in district and school decision making;
- develop model standards for and indicators of high-quality community engagement, including the provision of supports for preparing parents and community members to be informed enough to participate in a meaningful and intentional way; and
- provide funding to support home/school partnerships, such as time for home visits, more regular parent-teacher meetings, and more intensive parent engagement in school activities and learning events.

State policies can
- develop interventions for struggling schools that prioritize wraparound services and community schools models that partner with community organizations to offer health care and social services, summer learning opportunities, and before and after school care that are essential to employing student-centered, personalized pedagogies;

> State policies can include community engagement in the development of state accountability plans, teacher equity plans, and proposals for federal support.

- include community engagement in the development of state accountability plans, teacher equity plans, and proposals for federal support;
- require that districts engage communities meaningfully in developing local accountability plans and indicators, as well as other school and district decision making;
- report student learning data and budgets in understandable ways to support broad stakeholder engagement in informing responsive policies and practices (such as translation into languages other than English, providing glossaries and plain language explanations, transparency about trade-offs);
- provide funding for parent engagement in schools, from home visits and parent-teacher communications to parent education and involvement in school reform;

- invest in technical assistance to districts and schools to support these constructive forms of parent-teacher communications and support;
- create model tools and knowledge-sharing frameworks for districts to use for engaging communities, such as protocols for seeking input, conducting needs assessments, and developing equity impact statements, and rubrics for assessing the thoroughness of stakeholder engagement, especially around budgets;
- support peer assistance networks and expert teams to facilitate stakeholder engagement at the district level;
- develop model frameworks and provide incentives to grow parents into roles of increasing responsibility in school systems (such as parent liaisons, Title I coordinators, community school coordinators, and school board members); and
- direct state and local boards and leaders (chiefs, superintendents) to model inclusiveness in decision making by maintaining diverse advisory boards from which they regularly collect information and seek advice; these can include representatives from local school boards, as well as university officials, parents, and youth.

Local policy can
- establish community schools (and other high-quality school and community partnerships) to create adult education opportunities, wraparound services, and expanded and enriched learning opportunities beyond the regular school day and in summer;
- adopt and fund home visiting programs and time for parent-teacher engagement to build strong connections between parents and teachers;
- integrate democratic, community engagement into a range of practices around district and school decision making;
- include student voice, as well as that of parents, in school-level decision making;
- engage community stakeholders in determining how resources can be best used to meet the healthy beginnings and schooling needs of young people;
- employ transparent processes around budgets and funding, including practices such as reporting per-pupil expenditure at the school level in real-dollar terms and distributing district funds in transparent ways, developed through community engagement in ensuring sufficient resources for equitable deeper learning;
- report to communities how resources are allocated among schools and evidence of their wise use;
- report to communities equity impact assessments that review policies to determine if they disproportionately advantage or disadvantage different communities and invite community responses;
- report school and student data in ways that are easily intelligible and actionable to school and community leaders, including information that identifies specific problems to be addressed (e.g., chronic absenteeism rates as, well as overall attendance rates);

> Local policy can adopt and fund home visiting programs and time for parent-teacher engagement to build strong connections between parents and teachers.

- *engage parent and community organizations using continuous improvement tools such as walkthroughs and teacher and student surveys, which can inform community deliberation, collaborative problem solving, and the development of transformative system changes; and*
- *foster community engagement in developing school plans that support and extend learning while connecting it to the surrounding community via externships, mentorships, and volunteer service and community participation.*

In sum, a focus on productive engagement and learning for all parties—parents, policymakers, and practitioners—should be the major goal and driver of a learning-centered, equitable, democratic policy system.

Conclusion

Public education is a central social institution that is essential to advancing our nation's ability to thrive in a rapidly changing world. To address the demands of this moment, there is significant work to be done. But with clear goals and concerted efforts to revamp the system we have into the system we need, we can achieve this ambitious but practical vision of how to build policy and practice over the coming decades.

Endnotes

1. Partnership for the Future of Learning, *Updating American Public Education: Keeping the Foundation – While Preparing for the Future*, October 2015. The Partnership for the Future of Learning is a working group of the Education Funders Strategy Group, a self-organized group of ten philanthropies dedicated to changing the national conversation about education and education reform. We draw liberally from this document here.

2. Dewey, J. & Dewey, E. (1915). *Schools of Tomorrow*. E.P. Dutton Publishing.

3. Common Core of Data, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

4. The Partnership understands that a policy framework and strategic advocacy for the policies it recommends are necessary, but not sufficient, to accomplish system transformation. Achieving the forward-looking system that the nation needs will also require a broad effort to engage Americans in reimagining and deliberating about education and how it can best prepare young people for the future. That will require changing the prevailing narrative about public schools so that the principles are logical and sensible to the public and policymakers. This new system will be advanced if particular places provide examples of the conditions and outcomes that such policies can create, ideally in schools and communities that can't be dismissed as "exceptional." Finally, making the five principles salient in policy adoption and implementation will likely require considerable activism on the part of grassroots educators and communities who share the vision that builds their power and influence in both the policymaking and implementation spheres.

5. LPI staff shared the initial list of high-leverage policies with a number of education influencers to get their views on the policies we identified and on their alignment with the principles. Each of these individuals—representing education advocacy, philanthropy, research, and policy—shared insights and feedback. These contributors are named in the acknowledgements. Additionally, Partnership members read and responded to an earlier draft of this report. The final policy framework and specific policy recommendations were constructed to reflect these comments and suggestions.

6. Darling-Hammond, L., Wilhoit, G. & Pittenger, L. (2014). *Accountability for College and Career Readiness: Developing a New Paradigm.* Stanford, CA: Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education and the National Center for Innovation in Education, University of Kentucky. https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/publications/pubs/1257.

7. Community schools are an embodiment of the PFL values, as they and the model have demonstrated results in improving academic outcomes, by offering longer school days, focusing on social-emotional learning and positive discipline approaches, providing tutoring and mentoring and on-site physical and mental health care, among other resources, and it will likely meet the evidence-based standard under ESSA.

8. Kraft, M.A. & Papay, J.P. (2014). "Can Professional Environments in Schools Promote Teacher Development? Explaining Heterogeneity in Returns to Teaching Experience." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 36 (4): 476–500.

9. Wells, A.S., Fox, L. & Cordova-Coba, D. (2016). *How Racially Diverse Schools and Classrooms Can Benefit All Students.* New York: Century Foundation.

10. *A New Majority: Low Income Students Now a Majority in the Nation's Public Schools.* Southern Education Foundation. 2015. http://www.southerneducation.org/getattachment/4ac62e27-5260-47a5-9d02-14896ec3a531/A-New-Majority-2015-Update-Low-Income-Students-Now.aspx (accessed February 21, 2016).

11. Yoshikawa, H., et al. (2013). *Investing in Our Future: The Evidence Base on Preschool Education*. Foundation for Child Development. http://fcd-us.org/resources/evidence-base-preschool.

12. Karoly, L.A. & Auger, A. (2016). *Informing Investments in Preschool Quality and Access in Cincinnati*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND.

13. Yoshikawa, H., et al. (2013). *Investing in Our Future: The Evidence Base on Preschool Education*. Foundation for Child Development. http://fcd-us.org/resources/evidence-base-preschool.

14. Anrig, G. (2013). "How to Turn an Urban School District Around—Without Cheating." *The Atlantic*. http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2013/05/how-to-turn-an-urban-school-district-around-without-cheating/275681/; Mongeau, L. (20156). "The Long Beach Miracle." The Atlantic. http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/02/the-long-beach-miracle/459315/.