yes. every kid.

legislative toolkit.
There’s no such thing as an average kid.
Let’s build something exceptional.
Individualized learning is the future.

Transformative education starts with the recognition that every person is unique, with different aptitudes, passions, and goals.

Tapping into that unique combination of qualities is the secret to unlocking the extraordinary potential that exists within all of us.

Helping students discover, develop, and apply their innate gifts to maximize their ability to contribute to society requires an individualized approach. Thus, 21st-century learning can no longer be a one-way lecture from a teacher to a student. Nor should it be a rigid trajectory programmed to steer students from elementary school to college to work. Today’s educators must equip students of all ages and stages of life with the resources and guidance they need to forge their own path of discovery and development.

This personalized approach to learning, which exposes students to a wide variety of experiences and educational methods, lies at the heart of transformative education—that is, education that empowers individuals to realize their unique potential. Ensuring that all students have access to a high-quality education that is best suited to them will require a culture change: moving away from a “one-size-fits-all” approach to one that enables every person to capitalize on their unique skills and interests to succeed in life by creating value for themselves and others.

We hope this policy toolkit will provide some ideas that inspire you to create a friendly environment for that new system. We stand ready to assist anyone who shares this vision.

—MEREDITH OLSON, BOARD CHAIR
Board of Directors

Meredith Olson  Stand Together
Derrell Bradford  50CAN
Robert Enlow  EdChoice
Derek Johnson  Stand Together
Jorge Lima  Americans for Prosperity

Contents

Good Policy Framework .................................................................06

Learning Opportunities for Families ..............................................10
Learn everywhere
Open enrollment
Course access
Education scholarship accounts
Charter schools
Private education choice should be universal, stable, and customizable

Student-Centered Education .......................................................18
Innovation vision statements
Flexibility and regulatory waivers
Move to competency-based education
Align higher education
Reimagine standards and assessment policies
Reimagine the school day and week

Modern Education Funding .........................................................24
Student-centered funding
School-level financial control
Funding portability
Pensions and capital costs are restricting innovation

Preparing Students for Life after High School ..............................30
College credit in high school
Industry certifications
Work-based learning opportunities
Skills-based hiring
Education is one of the most significant ways in which government touches people’s lives. While publicly funded primary and secondary education is guaranteed in all 50 state constitutions, these provisions do not necessitate a one-size-fits-all system of schooling resistant to innovation. Good education policy promotes a diversity of solutions responsive to the needs of every student.
It is time to demonstrate the power of allowing teachers and families to pursue solutions that meet the needs of individual students.

Most policy efforts have been focused on marginal improvements to an outdated system designed to serve school buildings—not students. This has resulted in reforms that delay transformative change and reinforce existing standardized systems. We have observed this phenomenon time and time again in policies that are sold as transformational: once created, they are slowly but surely absorbed into the existing standardized system through hundreds of seemingly innocuous changes.

We believe reframing the discussion around the true purpose of education—a system designed to serve students—will have a greater impact on realizing a system that believes every kid is capable of extraordinary things.

yes. every kid. does not believe there is a single prescription for what ails us. We are open to any community-led effort to create a more student-centered education system. Below are several policy examples that we believe move our system in that direction.
While there is not a one-size-fits-all policy prescription, there are some easy rules to follow when developing policies for your state.

THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF GOOD POLICY

yes. every kid. | 8
Ask yourself: does this policy...

- **Contribute**
  - to a diversity of solutions?

- **Empower**
  - families to choose what works best?

- **Encourage**
  - innovation and experimentation?

- **Rely**
  - on the belief that every kid is capable?

- **Allow**
  - students to customize their education?

- **Ensure**
  - funding is attached to the student?

- **Build**
  - community support?

- **Apply**
  - to every student?
Each child is different, and all children deserve a menu of options—programs, services, courses, and schools that are designed to address their interests and aptitudes. The goal is not to standardize children: it is to allow every kid to discover, develop, and apply their talents to realize their full potential.
LEARN EVERYWHERE

Provide credit for learning, wherever it occurs.

Children learn through a diversity of approaches and from a variety of experiences; this includes learning in a traditional classroom and experiences far beyond the walls of a traditional school.

Learn Everywhere policies create a path for students to earn course credits for these out-of-classroom learning opportunities. Through partnerships with nonprofits, businesses, trade associations, educators, and other community organizations, students are able to receive district- and college-recognized credit for approved programs at participating providers. For instance, students could receive credit for performing in a play at a local playhouse, participating in a robotics club, completing one of the many programs offered through a Boys & Girls Club, and many other educational opportunities provided in the community.
OPEN ENROLLMENT

Allow families to attend the public school of their choice.

Open enrollment policies allow students to attend the public school of their choice, regardless of attendance boundaries—including transfers within and outside of school district boundaries.

Public school open enrollment has existed in many forms. However, too often those designs leave the choice of whether a student can attend a different school to administrators and not to parents, even when a school has plenty of empty seats.

Instead of leaving options open to only the well-connected or based on the whims of school administrators, yes. every kid. supports open enrollment policies that allow families to enroll children in the public school of their choice.
We’re failing kids because now they don’t even learn who they are. We’re too busy with meaningless tests.

—PARENT, MIAMI

COURSE ACCESS

The freedom to enroll in a variety of courses, inside and outside of a child’s school.

In the same way that open enrollment policies allow students to enroll in schools other than those they are zoned to attend, course access policies allow students to enroll in courses other than those offered at their enrolled school. These courses can be offered online or in person and, importantly, the child’s prorated or per-course funding follows them to the provider offering the course.

Design elements of a course choice program may include cataloging approved courses and providers in a common repository, establishing the rules by which students can enroll in courses, and facilitating funding flows, among others. Courses and providers should be able to be approved by the state, districts, higher education, or some combination of all of these and more (with reciprocity granted so all options are available to all students regardless of their home location).
Education Scholarship Accounts (ESAs) combine education opportunity and student-centered funding to enable families to create a truly customized education around their individual needs.

Instead of sending money to a predetermined school, ESAs are funded using a child’s share of education funding and can be directed to the schools, courses, programs, and services of a family’s choice. Often, unused dollars can be saved for future K-12 and post-secondary expenses. In many ways, ESAs are a form of school finance reform, providing funding portability to families for a variety of individualized uses.

Change is possible, but it’ll take big steps.

—Parent, Indianapolis
Charter school laws—which exist in nearly every state—were originally envisioned as a way to provide educators with the autonomy needed to create wholly autonomous and innovative alternatives. Autonomies around curriculum, instruction, finance, personnel, and the school day are necessary to allow educators to create school environments that meet the needs of each unique community.

Over time, charter laws have been weighed down by onerous requirements that do little more than stifle innovation in the name of uniformity and sameness. yes. every kid. supports policies that preserve the original intent of charter schools: to ensure that innovative educators have the ability to create new, innovative, and sometimes untested education models in a continuous effort to learn and improve.
Private education choice should be universal, stable, and customizable

Policies that enable families to purchase a private education are an important part of moving toward an innovative, student-centered system of education. Historically, such policies have come in three main forms: education scholarship accounts (ESAs), tax-credit scholarships, and vouchers. While each type of policy has its pros and cons, yes. every kid. believes that any program should allow for three important factors:

1. Universal eligibility. Policy should respect the dignity of every person and be applied equally. Likewise, education funding should follow all students equitably to their preferred educational path. Because universal programs are open to all people, they are far more popular, maintain broad public support, and are sustainable over the long run.

Funding for nearly every type of education option allows students of all economic background to participate—except the majority of private education choice programs. No one is suggesting that we should only provide public funding for certain families who choose to send their child to a district, charter, or magnet school. Yet, when it comes to families choosing a private K-12 education, many believe that public support should only be available for children from specific economic backgrounds or geographic locations. yes. every kid. believes that every kid should have access to programs that enable families to choose an education that works for them.

2. Funding stability. To ensure every family is afforded the ability to receive an education in the environment of their choice, the funding must be there to enable that choice. That is why most of the time, funding mechanisms that are automatic and not subject to annual political fights are preferable. Thus, formula-funded programs that simply require lawmakers to fund enrollment counts are vastly superior to programs that rely on politically influenced annual appropriations or tax-credit programs that rely on a base of funding that can never scale to serve every student.

3. Customization. Many children are well-served in education environments that take place within the confines of one school building. But in a world that is increasingly encountering an unbundling of services, this should not be the only option. Ideal programs allow educators to provide a variety of services that families can customize to meet their needs. Thus, ESA programs are preferred over models that merely let families choose among whole-school options.

yes. every kid. | 16
I think the problem in education, that this country is facing, is the lack of choice.

—TEACHER
Phoenix, AZ
American schools were designed for a world that no longer exists—a standardized model of education that prepared students for a factory economy. To succeed in today’s global economy, young people need different skills and mindsets that the factory model was not designed to foster. A focus on student-centered, innovative approaches is taking root in schools across the country. Below are a few examples of policy approaches adopted in other states and districts.
INNOVATION VISION STATEMENTS

Set a vision for what education should be, and where it should go.

Transitioning an education system from a factory model to a student-centered model requires long-term commitment and alignment of stakeholders. States will be well-served by creating a clear vision statement that reestablishes the purpose of education and allows schools, districts, and educators to apply their day-to-day efforts toward realizing this vision of student-centered education.
FLEXIBILITY AND REGULATORY WAIVERS

Remove the red tape that prevents innovation from taking root.

It’s nearly impossible to construct a student-centered system of education within existing rules and regulations designed for a factory model of education. Often, policies surrounding funding, assessment, calendars, staffing, reporting, and many other areas impede innovation. A mechanism for flexibility from state- and district-level policies is needed. States can tackle this in a variety of ways; here are just a few:

• Review statutes and rules and eliminate outdated and unnecessary requirements.
• Identify and eliminate rules that prevent innovative models from being established via the state’s various governance models (public, private, charter, etc.).
• Create a system to allow schools, districts, and even educators to apply for regulatory waivers.
• Create Innovation Zones where approved schools and/or districts can be approved for greater flexibility from outdated requirements in an effort to innovate.

MOVE TO COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION

Remove arbitrary seat time rules and focus on content mastery.

Most education systems are organized around specific requirements related to the number of hours (or even minutes) of instruction a student receives in a day, week, and school year. These requirements usually influence funding, staffing, schedules, how content is delivered, and other core areas that serve as an obstacle to innovative approaches.

States would be wise to transition from these arbitrary requirements that have little correlation to learning. Instead, ‘they should focus focus
on mastering concepts and skills, regardless of time, place, and pace. This effort will likely require states, districts, and schools to rethink traditional school practices like grouping children by age, organizing content by grade-level and subject area, and funding based on time.

ALIGN HIGHER EDUCATION

Ensure innovative models are not at a disadvantage in admissions.

As primary and secondary education moves to more competency-based models of education, a key challenge will be to ensure that postsecondary institutions view their transcripts in a way that does not put them at a disadvantage compared with transcripts that feature traditional elements like grade-point average, class rank, and course completion within the context of a standardized course list.
REIMAGINE STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENT POLICIES

Don’t let a test prevent innovation.

A persistent barrier to innovation in education is a focus on end-of-year summative tests that are based on traditionally defined courses. These systems perpetuate age-based cohorts and prevent education leaders from creating learning environments that better meet children’s interests and passions.

Innovative schools are designing assessment practices that value a broader set of skills, assess learning as it happens to inform instruction, and allow students to move on when they demonstrate mastery. In short, schools are moving toward policies and designs that make testing a seamless part of a child’s education experience—not the end focus of education.

REIMAGINE THE SCHOOL DAY AND WEEK

Think of how school should look, not how it does.

Customs and laws around the days, hours, and months that children are required to sit in classrooms are largely manifestations of habit. However, schools around the country are experimenting with new models, such as four-day school weeks that allow students to pursue self-directed learning on the fifth day, year-round schooling, elimination of subject blocks/period, more out-of-classroom learning opportunities, and other changes to how we think of a typical school day.

In an ideal world, my daughter would have direct input into what her curriculum looks like.

—PARENT, MIAMI
If we live in a democracy, our students should have the choice—100%—of what they want to learn and how they want to learn it.

—TEACHER
Miami, FL
Instead of a transparent process that evaluates and funds student needs, education funding is an opaque process that few understand, and even fewer find effective. It is time to update unfair and outdated funding systems that focus on everything except what kids need to succeed. Funding systems should provide more funding to students with greater needs, reduce geographic and per-student inequities, and foster innovation so that providers can offer solutions that meet student needs.
STUDENT-CENTERED FUNDING

Fair and transparent funding based on student needs.

The funding a school receives should be based on two factors: the number of students it serves and the characteristics of students enrolled. There should be a base student amount and funding weights for different student characteristics, such as family income, disability status, and English language learners.

SCHOOL-LEVEL FINANCIAL CONTROL

Provide school leaders with the freedom to lead.

If we expect school leaders to lead, they need the freedom and autonomy to shape key aspects of school life. Freedoms around hiring, pay, schedules, and other powers granted to managers are taken for granted in our daily lives. Yet, school leaders usually have no control over these issues that have a direct impact on student learning, even the curriculum they teach. Districts and states across the country are giving power back to school leaders and granting more authority to those closest to the families they serve.

These kids are getting lost in the system and it’s sad.

—PARENT, NASHVILLE
FUNDING PORTABILITY

Fund students, not schools.

Our outdated systems of education funding typically work like this: citizens are taxed for education, this money is allocated to a local school and district, then a catchment area is drawn by which all students residing within those boundaries are compelled to attend that particular school to meet compulsory education requirements, unless their family finds an alternative through homeschooling or private school tuition.

This outdated method of funding focuses on funding particular schools—not on student needs. Instead, funding should be linked to the child and portable to the educational service of their choice. When paired with student-centered funding, this would mean that schools serving more low-income students and students with disabilities would receive higher funding amounts than schools teaching students with lower needs.
Pensions and capital costs are restricting innovation

Moving to an individualized education system is complicated by legacy costs such as pension obligations, capital expenses, and in some cases retiree health benefits.

This problem is especially acute for teacher pension systems. As unfunded liabilities worsen, resources are increasingly diverted to paying down accrued debts, which not only siphons dollars away from classrooms but also makes it more difficult to implement policies that are student-centered (as opposed to school-centered). The more that school districts rely on each child’s per-pupil revenue to pay off long-term debt, the more resistant the system will be to options outside of the status quo. Public education simply can’t afford to lose students when debt obligations consume a large share of the funding pie.

The pension problem alone is staggering in scope. At the end of the 2018 fiscal year, unfunded liabilities across all state pension plans covering K-12 teachers totaled $697 billion, and those plans were about 74% funded altogether. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic’s global market impacts, early estimates for FY2020 suggest that the unfunded liabilities in pension plans serving teachers could easily rise to over $1 trillion, depending on where investment returns ultimately fall. Worse, many pension plans failed to significantly improve their financial sustainability during the preceding decade-long, historic bull market, opting to keep chasing increasingly unrealistic investment targets instead of making the difficult—but necessary for the financial sustainability of public education overall—changes to pension plan design, actuarial assumptions, amortization and funding policies, and overall plan governance needed to create resilient systems for the future.

The unchecked growth of unfunded liabilities is more than just a fiscal crisis: it affects the quality and diversity of educational options available to families. Individualized education requires a student-centered funding system in which dollars are flexible and follow the student.
yes. every kid.
I feel like we’re getting away from the purpose of education—the ‘how this is going to help you.’

—PARENT
Phoenix, AZ
Preparation Students for Life after High School

Regardless of their chosen path—college, career, or a mix of both—students in our current K-12 systems are not being effectively connected to the world they will face after high school. The key is exposure and preparation: showing kids the paths that are available to them, preparing them to succeed, and providing them opportunities to build competencies while still in high school.
There are many obstacles to young people finding fulfillment in life after high school.

Those interested in entering the workforce right out of high school face a societal perception that enrolling in a college or university is always a superior decision.

This has led to a degradation of career-focused education in K-12 learning, lack of quality exposure to different career pathways, and an arbitrary separation between the learning that takes place in high schools and the learning that industries and workplaces say they value.

For those interested in continuing their education at a college or university, the emphasis has tended to be less about furthering education attainment and more about performing well against a predetermined standard of performance that doesn't necessarily equate to career—or industry-readiness. It is time to transform how we think about preparing students for postsecondary success, and the workforce, and removing the barriers and perceptions that keep each sector in its own silo.
COLLEGE CREDIT IN HIGH SCHOOL

Receive early college credit via dual enrollment and other means.

Dual enrollment policies (sometimes called concurrent enrollment) allow high school students to enroll in college courses that lead to credit in both the K-12 and postsecondary systems. Typically, the student enrolls in classes at a local college while still being enrolled in the K-12 system. States should expand their current programs (or create them if they do not exist) to ensure students have access.

Other strategies that allow high school students to earn college credit in high school include: early college high schools, preparing students to earn college credit through mastery of CLEP exams, and accelerated course options (Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, etc.).

We need more of a sense of freedom for these children.

—PARENT, MIAMI
INDUSTRY CERTIFICATIONS

Earn valuable workplace credentials in high school.

Such credentials are valuable and necessary to work in a variety of occupations—from agriculture and manufacturing to information technology and health—and often convert to college credit as well.

Given international workplace demand for these credentials, the education system should incorporate them into K-12 learning in the same way children are credentialed as being competent in English, math, and other traditional subjects. States are accomplishing this through a variety of methods: financial incentives for schools/districts to increase the number of certificates, partnerships with industry, tax credits for businesses that provide credentialing resources, etc.
I don’t feel like we’re showing kids what their potential could even be.

—PARENT, INDIANAPOLIS

WORK-BASED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Career exposure and experience while in high school.

Work-based learning policies and programs allow students to engage with employers and industries to improve career awareness and experiences while young people are still in high school. Programs usually begin by exposing students to an array of industries/occupations through job shadowing, workplace tours, mentoring, etc.; followed by engaging with a career of a student’s choice through internships, embedded projects, etc.; and culminating with real-world career experience through apprenticeships, on-the-job training, or even entry-level jobs while still in high school.
SKILLS-BASED HIRING

Hire based on demonstrated skills.

Scroll through any job posting website and you’ll see a common theme: postings that require applicants to have at least a bachelor’s degree. Yet, major employers—including Google, Apple, and Bank of America—are learning that generic degrees and class rankings do not necessarily equate to the skills they need from employees. Instead of making a degree a requirement, employers—particularly state and local governments—should expand their applicant pool to individuals who have the proven background, credentials, or experience needed to be a good fit for their advertised position.