



America Forward on K-12 Education

(Interim platform)

Introduction

America Forward is a coalition of more than 100 organizations nationwide, focused on advancing public policies that foster innovation, identify more efficient and effective solutions, reward results, and catalyze cross-sector partnerships in education, early childhood, workforce development, youth development, and poverty alleviation. We are educators, advocates, case managers, and organizers working in more than 15,000 communities across the country and touching more than 9 million lives every year.

Our organizations work to support students, young people, families, educators, workers, leaders, and communities by providing critical tools, supports, funding, and resources to increase accessibility and improve outcomes. America Forward brings together nonprofit leaders and social entrepreneurs with policymakers to leverage community-based solutions to address systemic inequities that exist in both our education and workforce systems. Over the past year, the coronavirus pandemic, a renewed national reckoning on racial injustice, and the economic instability that so many are experiencing, have only deepened these disparities and highlighted the vital need to reimagine and restructure these systems with an intentional focus on equity; multi-dimensional, holistic skill and competency development; sustainability; and expanding opportunity so that every person can thrive.

K-12 Education

Long-standing systemic inequities in our education system prevent under-resourced students and communities from accessing holistic supports that enable educators to adequately respond to the strengths and needs of each child, causing even the most well-intentioned educators to struggle within outdated and unsupportive systems. These historically under-resourced students include, but are not limited to, students who are Black, Latino/a/x, Indigenous, Dual Language Learners or English learners, and/or from countries outside the U.S., as well as students with disabilities and students with learning differences. It is imperative that the federal government continue to pass intentional policies and provide critical funding to ensure that all education systems have the flexibility, support, and resources they need to deliver high-quality education and improve outcomes for students, families, and communities across the country, creating a clear and more equitable pathway to higher education and career success.

To address these long-standing, structural inequities, we must transform the systems we have, using what we know from the science of learning and development and whole-learner approaches to both meet the acute needs of the moment, and nurture innovation to build the system that we need at scale for the long-term. Holistic approaches to learning that take into account the needs and strengths of the whole child. Calling for a K-12 education system that does this means adopting approaches that are grounded in the science and reflect the dynamic, interconnected nature of how students learn and interact with the world by allowing students to engage in meaningful, engaging, iterative, socially interactive, real-world, culturally affirming, and joyful learning experiences. It includes supporting the physical, social, emotional, creative, and cognitive skill development and creating conditions for optimal learning and development for every young person, by focusing on approaches to teaching and learning that prioritize and integrate positive developmental relationships, students' safety and sense of belonging, intentional development of a breadth of students' skills and mindsets, and rich instructional experiences.

To ensure these kind of learning environments are accessible to all students and communities, the federal government can incentivize both innovative, outcomes-oriented and evidence-based programming; effective cross-sector partnerships; safe and positive learning environments; comprehensive student support systems that work to remove barriers to learning across the continuum of home and school, including investments in core infrastructure such as high quality professional learning, instructional materials, and connectivity access; and a strong, supported, and diverse education workforce. These are all critical elements that, together, have the potential to drive the comprehensive, locally-based, systemic change that is needed to expand access to high-quality learning and development opportunities across K-12 education systems.

One of the key levers available to federal policymakers to advance these priorities is the continued implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). As states, districts, and schools work to bring their policies and practices in line with ESSA, federal policymakers should ensure that federal rules and incentives align closely with the key high-level priorities described previously, and intentionally address more specific priorities, like advancing equity for students who face systemic barriers to high quality educational opportunities, promoting innovative solutions to instruction, assessment, accountability, and professional development that more closely reflect the holistic needs and strengths of students and educators, supporting accountability and transparency, and ensuring all students have effective teachers and school leaders.

POLICY PROPOSALS

Innovation: Promote continued innovation in K-12 education

The impact of high-quality K-12 learning experiences is documented but scaling best practices and ensuring equitable access remains a challenge. Particularly as schools face the challenge of providing effective and meaningful learning experiences during the pandemic, it is essential to incentivize and learn from innovations from the field that are focused on building an education system that can meet

needs around learning, developing 21st century skills, and promoting student health and well-being. Leveraging and learning from such innovations, will serve as a foundation to the path toward building a system rooted in equity and focused on developing the whole learner, that can address the immediate needs today and lay a strong foundation for the path to recovery. When so many public school systems are remote or a hybrid of in-person and remote learning — continued innovation and improvement is desperately needed, as is further research and data that leverages what the science of learning and development. We must seize the opportunity to learn from what is known and the innovations happening *now* to transform our education systems to make them more effective, more equitable, and more resilient in the face of any future crises.

The federal government is uniquely positioned to promote and accelerate innovation across the diverse settings in which K-12 education takes place by providing funding for research and evaluation, as well as for states to pilot new evidence-based, innovative integrated efforts that leverage whole-learner approaches across learning settings.

To promote and accelerate innovation, the federal government should **establish an Education Equity and Preparedness Initiative** to harness the innovation brought about by the response to the COVID-19 crisis and catapult us into the future. This would include:

- **COVID-19 Education Impact Research:** Fund research to understand the impact on learning and development during the pandemic and the innovations and best practices that came from it. Funded research projects would be for partnerships among research organizations, educational institutions (early education, K-12, higher education, and opportunity-youth serving organizations), nonprofit partners, and community organizations. The research must focus on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the nation's education system including: disruptions to learning and development that deepened opportunity gaps and heightened educational inequities; efficacy of remote learning, including how the developmental needs of students are served in a remote setting; impact on the education workforce; and the effect on specific learner populations such as students who are Dual Language Learners or English learners, students with disabilities, students with learning differences, students Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), students from under-resourced backgrounds, and students who face barriers to high school completion and opportunity youth. In addition, research must focus on the best practices in addressing learning and development during the pandemic including: remote learning and hybrid environments; approaches to teaching and learning that prioritize and integrate developmental relationships, students' safety and sense of belonging, intentional development of students' skills and mindsets, and rich instructional experiences; the role of high-quality non-profit partners; utilization of competency-based education approaches to measure student performance and move students along a continuum of learning-based personalized pathways and skill development, rather than seat time; innovative professional development that emphasize whole-learner development; supports for family and student partnership and engagement; and wraparound services like school meals, child care, mental-health and trauma-informed supports.

- **Next Generation Education Development and Recovery Fund:** This fund would support two types of innovations: (1) rapid development and testing of technology and programs, in particular those that support the strengths and needs of students who are Black, Latino/a/x, Indigenous, Dual Language Learners or English learners, and/or from countries outside the U.S., as well as students with disabilities and students with learning differences, students living in poverty, and students facing systemic barriers to high-school completion; and (2) longer-term grants focused on bringing implementation of newly-developed, integrated innovative, outcomes-oriented technology, programs, and practices to scale.
- **National-State-Local Education Preparedness Task Force:** Launch an Education Preparedness Task Force of experts at the national, state, and local levels in order to leverage the knowledge of those leading on innovative strategies and effective implementation to promote healthy learning and development during the pandemic. Members of the Task Force would include key government leaders from the Administration, Congress, Governors, state and local superintendents, and other elected officials, as well as parents, students, educators, school leaders, nonprofit organizations, and researchers, including experts in the science of learning and development. Over the course of six months, the Task Force would make recommendations on the areas in which new federal, state, and local investments and strategies are needed - focused on advancing equity and supporting those students who have inequitable access to existing opportunities and resources for learning.

Evidence: Promote continued research and development and the use of outcomes-based and results-driven programs

Although we have seen rapid advances in our understanding of student development and high-impact interventions, critical research areas remain. Research and development are still needed to address implementation challenges of whole-learner approaches and explore new frontiers of measurement through comprehensive multi-dimensional approaches to assessment, rooted in equity. At the same time, the federal government should work to strengthen its existing grant programs and tiered-evidence approaches by ensuring there is enough funding supporting the science that exists as well as implementation science. Whether it is investigating how to scale proven interventions or investing in integrated interventions that fit into a comprehensive vision to improve holistic outcomes for children, we must continue to build an evidence base that can inform and guide policymaking, as well as be openly accessible to practitioners, to inform and guide implementation efforts on the ground. To fulfill its critical role in funding research and evaluation, the federal government can:

- **Create a new Institute for Education Sciences Fellowship program** available to aspiring researchers and psychometricians who will commit to the study and, when appropriate, test the implementation of effective, evidence-based whole-learner assessments and measurement tools that will incentivize the adoption of innovative whole-learner approaches at scale. The program should be conducted in partnership with school systems to ensure the focus is relevant

and community-informed. The program should ensure it strongly encourages applicants from BIPOC communities to apply, as diverse perspectives from lived experiences will strengthen the research of assessment and measurement.

- **Utilize the Innovative Assessment and Accountability Demonstration Authority**, which allows the Secretary to grant up to seven states the ability to pilot innovative assessments aligned to grade-level standards for use in their statewide accountability systems, including competency- and portfolio-based assessments.
- **Fund research and development of valid and reliable whole-learner assessments** that will create a more comprehensive and complete picture of students' strengths, successes, and areas for growth. Such research and development will incentivize the adoption of whole-learner approaches, which focus on growth and achievement of grade-level academic/cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and creative skills.
- Expand tiered-evidence competitive grant programs to **support the development, implementation, and scaling of whole-learner approaches, including expanding approaches that have been rigorously evaluated, and also building evidence for a range of innovative new programs, models and approaches**. This includes increasing funding for the Education Innovation and Research (EIR) program, and dedicating the increase to support the rigorous study of promising whole-learner innovations. Establish funding priorities to allow schools, nonprofits, or other educational organizations with the strongest whole-learner frameworks — based on clear, evidenced-based, measurable outcomes — to receive more funding for their practices, which can then be scaled locally, regionally, and nationally.
- Fund greater investigation to help **measure the impact of whole-learner approaches** on children's development and outcomes in school and later in life, in order to better understand the opportunity gap and its short- and long-term effects. This includes funding research at the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) on the impact of the opportunity gap and the impact of whole-learner interventions to improve our understanding of how to identify specific approaches and best practices that will meaningfully shrink existing gaps in learning and development.

Partnerships: Encourage and incentivize partnerships between states, communities, K-12 education providers, and effective external partners

Effective schools create partnerships that result in joint efforts to improve classroom- and extended day-based instruction, meaningfully engage parents and caregivers in service of student learning, leverage additional resources, talent, and expertise, catalyze innovation and problem-solving, and increase the rate and level of student progress in line with the school's vision for learning and development. They acknowledge that students don't leave their lived experiences at the door when they come to school, and embrace a comprehensive approach to supporting students' cognitive, social, and emotional

development and their mental and physical health - in order to create joyful, meaningful learning experiences in K-12 while readying students for college and career. To ensure schools, students, and families are supported with comprehensive services that meet their needs, the federal government must:

- **Incentivize innovative and evidence-based partnerships in every Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) program**, including Title I, Title II, Title III, Title IV-A, and Title IV-B, in order to help school and districts support whole-learner experiences for educators, staff, students, and families. Such partnerships could include partnerships with community-based organizations that can provide effective and culturally competent, trauma-informed mental health and social-emotional supports to all students impacted by the pandemic, including those students who experienced disproportionate impacts, including but not limited to students who are Black, Latino/a/x, Indigenous, Dual Language Learners or English learners, and/or from countries outside the U.S., as well as students with disabilities and students with learning differences.
- Incentivize innovative and evidence-based programs that **specifically focus on preparing students for college and career with the support of effective external partners**, such as those which provide students with opportunities for enriching activities, internships, apprenticeships, college preparation — through advanced coursework opportunities including dual enrollment and early college high schools — and other expanded learning opportunities that align with challenging state academic standards and have a track record of improving academic achievement, graduation rates, college access, and success.
- **Make capacity-building federal grants to nonprofit and national service organizations** since these organizations need access to growth capital in order to expand, even if earned income is available from schools and other sources. Growth capital grants should be available for nonprofits basing program models off a strong evidence base and, when available, evidence of success, along with operational grants to enable programs to operate in under-resourced schools.
- Update federal student data privacy laws to **enable data-sharing agreements to a standard process for de-identifying student data** that, if followed, allows for partner organizations to have access to anonymized data for research and learning purposes. Data on student achievement and other outcomes are essential to enabling both schools and external partners to offer tailored supports, assess progress, support continuous improvement, and conduct evaluations. In addition, these data allow for the high-quality evaluation and continuous improvement of programs, helping to ensure that limited resources are invested effectively.
- **Offer incentives for evidence-based coherent school design and aligned services to schools to advance whole-learner approaches, that are informed by and center student and family voice.** Schools should be encouraged to create a coherent blueprint of their mission, vision, instructional, and family engagement practices to enable alignment, both within the school and

with external organizations. This blueprint should include strategies to support learning at home and school. Federal policy should encourage local organizations serving school-age youth and their families to work closely with schools and align services where possible. Federal and state programs should incorporate incentives for coherent school design work that is centered on evidence-based practices and advancing the holistic development of students, as well as for local organizations to partner with education institutions to improve outcomes for youth and their families. Federal and state programs should also incorporate incentives for districts to redesign their central offices to support schools in their coherent, local redesign efforts.

- **Fund a Whole-Learner Implementation grant** to fund intermediaries operating innovative programs, including those with evidenced-based practices to provide critical technical assistance to educators and support implementation of academic standards, assessments, and accountability systems that reflect a whole-learner, developmentally aligned curriculum, that recognizes students' strengths and develops their wide breadth of skills (i.e., cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and creative), and addresses experienced trauma.

National service: Leverage national service to advance equitable access to high-quality education.

National service is a powerful tool that can be leveraged to strengthen civic participation, develop community leaders, and help the country tackle its most pressing challenges, including supporting systemically under-resourced schools and communities. National service members work alongside teachers and families, in and out of the classroom, providing whole-learner supports through positive developmental relationships, building a school environment of safety and belonging, and supporting students' transition from high school to college and career. To ensure that all students have adequate and equitable access to a high-quality education, as well as add additional adult capacity and expertise for the implementation of whole-learner approaches, the federal government can:

- **Fully fund the Serve America Act**, including the summer of service and semester of service programs, **and increase the amount of national service positions to 250,000 by 2023**, as proposed in the Cultivating Opportunity and Response to the Pandemic through Service (CORPS) Act.
- **Expand AmeriCorps to ensure there are enough participants in the program to deploy a team of AmeriCorps members to provide every school serving high percentages of students from families experiencing poverty, the option of fielding a team of AmeriCorps members to address their priority needs.** Positive developmental relationships are transformative and key to building the foundation upon which effective and enduring learning takes place. These relationships foster a sense of connectedness that powerfully shapes each learner's ability to learn, enables children and adolescents to manage stress, ignite their brains, and fuel the connections that support the development of the complex skills and competencies necessary for learning success and engagement, while promoting well-being, positive identity development, and belief in their own abilities, all at the same time. This added capacity will allow for more

positive developmental relationships, as well as differentiated instruction and individual attention for students in K-12 and their family, leading to more responsive instruction and better learning and development outcomes within whole-learner frameworks.

- **Encourage the Department of Education to provide technical assistance and guidance to states and districts** highlighting what federal education funding streams can be used (or blended) to fund partnerships with AmeriCorps programs to bring additional supports and capacity to their schools with demonstrated knowledge of whole-learner approaches.
- **Incentivize a public-private partnership to fund an Early Childhood Legacy Corps** to offer financial incentives for older adults to serve in early childhood programs - expanding the talent pool, supporting early childhood programs, and creating a pathway to the professional and paraprofessional early childhood workforce.
- **Fund a focused recruitment campaign for the national service programs**, including a state-of-the-art website, to ensure that underrepresented individuals — particularly those from BIPOC communities, under-resourced communities in urban, suburban, and rural America, and those who are opportunity youth — have **adequate and equitable access and are aware of national service opportunities**.
- **Establish a new higher education grant program and/or specific incentives within current federal grant programs**, such as enrollment support, credit hours, AmeriCorps Segal Education Awards match or other financial support **for AmeriCorps alumni who have served the equivalent of at least one full year term (1700 hours)** in the previous five years to support their application to and enrollment in institutions of higher education in programs focused on developing K-12 educators and educational leaders.

Results: Focus K-12 learning resources on performance and results

Too often, national programs for K-12 learning focus on input measures and compliance, without giving similar attention to outcomes and success. To ensure states and districts can focus on both performance and outcomes rather than mere compliance, federal law and policy should:

- Empower school districts to **deploy federal dollars to link funding to outcomes** by providing stronger incentives, funding for staff, capacity and technical assistance to execute pathbreaking pay-for-success projects within the K-12 system — first authorized by ESSA — and forge strong community partnerships to ensure those funds are spent to drive better measurable outcomes for children and families served. With this support, more districts can take advantage of existing laws that allow state and local educational agencies to tie dollars to outcomes relating to safe and supportive schools and student physical and mental health through the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Program.

- Harness the power of technology for education to **support personalization of learning and allow for data-informed decision making**; this includes using data to track and improve outcomes, while ensuring student data privacy. Data should be equally accessible to parents and teachers, so that families and educators can team up to support student learning. A rich array of data provides critical information about individual student and educator performance, as well as school performance, culture, and climate, that reflect a school’s approach to learning and development and capacity to create integrated, meaningful learning experiences that develop a breadth of skills. ESSA requires that rates of postsecondary enrollment be reported at the state, district, and school levels for the students in the year after they graduate from high school, with data disaggregated by race and ethnicity, disability status, English learner status, and status as economically disadvantaged. College persistence and completion rates should be added to required data, along with making new linked data sets available to researchers so that we can better understand what’s working.
- **Develop privacy protections and access protocols for all data.** Policymakers should engage students and families, as well as teachers and other educators, in developing rules relating to data collection, secure storage, access, and ultimately deletion of student data, recognizing that students and their families — not schools or government — are the rightful owners of individual student data.
- **Incentivize the replication and expansion of high quality public charter schools** that have demonstrated success in significantly improving outcomes for all students through a whole-learner lens, and which have sound financial and business management plans in place. Establish transparent plans for closing public charter schools that do not meet high standards of performance. Key measures of success include supporting equal access and enrollment for all students, including students with disabilities and other students who face systemic barriers to their success.

K-12 workforce: invest in building a strong local K-12 educator and school leader workforce

Effective teachers and school leaders play an outsized role in students’ ability to succeed in school. Unfortunately, many schools in high-poverty urban and rural areas face systemic challenges in teacher recruitment. Nationwide, the teacher corps faces a lack of diversity, particularly among teachers who are Black and Latino/a/x, as well as shortages in specific subject areas, like STEM and special education. Ensuring that every school has a strong, diverse pipeline of educators, retains those teachers and leaders, and provides them with the support and professional development necessary for them to thrive requires a significant shift in national priorities and paradigms. To support states and districts in their efforts to attract, retain, and support a transformative teacher and school leader corps, the federal government should:

- **Ensure all students have effective teachers and attend schools with strong educational leaders.** This includes ensuring that all new educators receive induction, coaching, and

mentoring assistance during their first two years on the job, informed by the science of learning and development and whole-learner approaches to education; receive regular assistance from a rigorously selected, trained, and supported coach, mentor, veteran teacher, or high-quality nonprofit partner, who must be rigorously selected, trained, and supported in whole-learner approaches; and be prepared to work with students who have learning and attention issues. Specific attention should be given to the induction, mentorship, and support of BIPOC teachers and school leaders.

- **Ensure teacher preparation programs equip educators to partner with parents in service of student learning.** Pre-service training must better support teachers to understand how to effectively collaborate with parents to support classroom learning at home. Teacher preparation programs should include practical experiences in which teachers team up with parents to help students reach learning goals.
- Strengthen and expand programs such as student loan forgiveness, which are intended to **incentivize teachers and school leaders to work in high-need, rural, under-resourced schools and high-need fields.**
- **Invest in alternative teacher preparation programs, including teacher residency programs, with proven outcomes,** leaning into the powerful pipeline represented by national service corps members. Such programs can offer streamlined pathways into teaching for individuals interested in changing careers who have specific subject-matter expertise, where a district might face a shortage of teachers in a specific subject area (i.e., STEM, special education, etc.).
- **Refocus Title II of the Higher Education Act (HEA)** on the full complement of training and professional development opportunities needed to prepare teachers to implement and lead whole-learner approaches, including the development of strong teacher-student relationships.
- Require grantees under Title II of HEA to **align training for early educators with K-12 educators,** so that all children experience a continuum of whole-learner approaches, rather than facing disruption that can hamper positive impacts on learning and development.
- **Support professional development for teachers to use technology to support personalized learning opportunities** for students. Such development must include training on how educators can safely access and effectively use the data provided through such technology. With more data available to track each student’s progress, educators can gain actionable and specific insight into where their students are struggling and where they can accelerate. This development must also include **skills training for teachers to meaningfully engage families to support student learning at home.**

- Fund professional development providers that leverage **evidence-based, personalized, competency-based professional learning opportunities connected to the science of learning, that modernize and elevate the teaching profession.**
- Expand Title II of ESEA to **support the adoption of evidence-based best practices in both professional development and mentorship** that advance the development of whole-learner approaches in an integrated, technology-rich context.
- Prioritize staffing structures — from district-level leaders to individual support staff — that encourage efforts under Title I and Title II of ESEA to **support school leaders, educators, and staff — at the district and school levels — in the implementation of whole-learner approaches.**
- Establish regulations that **permit the use of peer-to-peer and team-based learning** that allows educators to experience and develop a common language around the elements of whole-learner approaches.
- Require that ESEA Title I plans for **teacher and school leader assessments incorporate whole-learner approaches and outcomes.**

Equity: Recognize a commitment to equity

All students deserve excellent, holistic learning experiences, with high-quality, culturally-affirming, and developmentally appropriate content. But we know that some students face longstanding, systemic barriers and constrained access to such educational experiences; that includes, but is not limited to, students who are Black, Latino/a/x, Indigenous, Dual Language Learners or English learners, student from countries outside the U.S., as well as students with disabilities and students with learning differences.

To address aspects of educational inequity in the K-12 education system, the federal government should:

- **End the digital divide in schools and at home**, including:
 - Making the E-rate program permanent, ensuring additional support to make technology acquisition by under-resourced school systems more equitable, and **ensuring that schools can provide up-to-date technology and related learning tools that students need.** As E-rate includes libraries, making the program permanent would assist with expanding internet access beyond the boundaries of the school. Digital access at home remains a significant barrier to equity in education and has had devastating effects on learning for students from systemically under-resourced communities during the pandemic; access differs by race/ethnicity, geography, and income. Innovative

strategies and funding are needed to expand out-of-school technology access for students.

- Specific federal funding should be designated to **support the integration of durable, equitable, and accessible technology and infrastructure into classroom settings** — including physical technological tools and software — and to provide the technical assistance and expertise required to seamlessly and successfully merge these tools into curricula across diverse school ecosystems, including extended day, home, etc. Professional development and on-site coaching for educators, supported by Title II-A and Title IV-A, is essential and must be at the center of technology integration.
- **End the school-to-prison pipeline** by using innovation and evidence-based strategies to improve school safety and stop the practice of referring students — including a disproportionate number of students who are Black, Latino/a/x, and Indigenous, and students with disabilities and students with learning differences— to law enforcement for minor behavioral infractions. This includes:
 - Requiring, as a condition of federal funding, that all school resource officers be trained in social-emotional capacities and reverse zero-tolerance policies, and **incentivize the placement of counselors over school resource officers, ensuring that counselors are trained in de-escalation, trauma-responsive practices, and culturally responsive pedagogy**. Additionally, **incentivize policies that move away from exclusionary and corporal disciplinary practices and instead promote restorative justice, counseling, mental health services, and/or other evidence-based approaches**.
 - **Creating a school-safety innovation fund** that provides funding to test, evaluate, and scale effective behavior and safety-related practices, with special priorities for initiatives developed by students, families, and/or teachers.
 - Giving **priority in existing federal justice grants to applicants that propose a community partnership approach** that aims to reduce student interaction with the criminal justice system, and keep youth out of the criminal justice system altogether.
- **Support legislative and executive actions to provide a pathway to permanent legal status for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) beneficiaries**.
 - While undocumented students are constitutionally protected to attend K-12 schools free of impediment of harassment, legislative and executive actions to support DREAMERS under DACA would provide protection and opportunity, and would allow these students to continue living in and contributing to the United States.

Family engagement: Support programs that engage families in meaningful ways in their children's learning

Children spend 75% of their waking hours outside of the classroom. Parents and caregivers play the most critical role in the development and trajectory of their children, with parental involvement in their children's learning being a more powerful predictor of academic success than other variables including social class and level of parental education. Yet often only affluent, educated parents and caregivers-- most often those who are white and English-speaking-- are in a strong position to have easy access to tools to support their child's at-home learning and educational success, or make choices or exercise power to support their child's path through the education system. However, research shows that parents across all demographics are more interested in a whole-learner approach to education than the system that serves them is currently structured. Parents see academics and preparation for college and career as the floor, not the ceiling, and focus more on the development of holistic skills, aligned with the science of learning and development, that make students capable of self-sufficiency, social connection, and productivity. They believe that children learn in different ways, and not every educational approach works for each child at any given stage of their development.

There are many ways that school systems can adapt to engage parents as educational partners, facilitate their ability to make choices for their children, and ultimately empower them to exercise their innate power as agents of change in their families and communities. To support this, the federal government should:

- Implement school policies that **recognize and engage parents and caregivers as full educational partners**, including sharing information on evidence-based practices to support in-school learning at home; providing data in easily accessible, digestible, and culturally-affirming formats; and engaging parents in goal-setting and school-based decision making. Educators and families get more done when they work in tandem—rather than in parallel—to meaningfully support students. This includes increasing the ESEA Title I parent engagement set-aside to expand district capacity to support schools in engaging and supporting parents — particularly in goal setting and school-based decision making — sharing best practices, and modeling high-quality whole-learner approaches with their children.
- Expand funding for community schools, community centers, and aftercare facilities to **support the co-location of critical services — like child care, libraries, and centers for physical and mental health care — with opportunities for parents and caregivers to learn about and experience whole-learner approaches** and to explore how they can lift up the concepts at home. This should include creating financial incentives for developers to consider co-locating services at the front end of building design and rewarding those who sustain service providers as occupants within their buildings. Co-location of essential services will meaningfully decrease the burden on families and allow more parents and caregivers to be actively involved in their children's education, without sacrificing their other critical responsibilities.

- **Expand the EIR program** to include a priority to evaluate and disseminate best practices for on-site co-location of services to enhance parent engagement and activate parents as partners in learning.

Conclusion

The past year in America has been defined by unprecedented challenges, enormous loss, and our continued struggle to confront deeply entrenched, systemic injustice and inequity. Nonetheless, we see enormous opportunity; opportunity to work collaboratively towards policies that expand opportunity, that embrace innovation, that leverage science and evidence, that meaningfully advance equity, and that commit to building a K-12 system that offers engaging learning that sparks joy and meaning for all students as they are today and prepares them to participate fully in our democracy and a globally competitive workforce. In the face of seemingly intractable challenges, we are determined to continue amplifying the voices of our Coalition members, determined to uplift effective, evidence-based, community-based solutions, and determined to build more equitable, accessible, high-quality systems that support students, educators, workers, nonprofit leaders, and families in all of our communities. We look forward to working alongside our Coalition members, partners, and policymakers to make this vision a reality.

About America Forward

America Forward is the Washington, D.C.-based nonpartisan policy initiative of New Profit, a pioneering national venture philanthropy organization that invests in a portfolio of breakthrough social entrepreneurs and systems-change initiatives, catalyzes and builds their impact, and transforms how government and philanthropy pursue social change to ensure that all people can thrive.

America Forward unites social innovators with policymakers to advance a public policy agenda that advances equity, fosters innovation, rewards results, catalyzes cross-sector partnerships, and transforms local impact into national change. The America Forward Coalition comprises a network of over 100 social innovation organizations that champion innovative, effective, and efficient solutions to our country's most pressing social problems. Since 2007, our Coalition organizations have successfully advocated for lasting policy change in education, workforce development, and Pay for Success policy; leveraged \$1.7 billion for social innovation; and driven millions of federal resources toward programs that are achieving measurable results for those who need them most.