



LEARNING 2025:
NATIONAL COMMISSION ON STUDENT - CENTERED,
EQUITY - FOCUSED EDUCATION

An American Imperative: A New Vision of Public Schools

**A Report from the Learning 2025: National Commission on
Student-Centered, Equity-Focused Education**

April 8, 2021

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Dedication

For Educators

We dedicate this effort to the indefatigable educators who courageously persist, adapt, and do whatever it takes to care for learners. We salute and thank you.

As we met as a Commission to identify how education must change to improve outcomes for ALL learners, restoring the joy and honor of your work was equally present in our minds and objectives. We believe that the recommendations that follow will have the intended effect of further supporting and encouraging you to merge your gifts with resources that will enhance your efficacy and service to learners and allow for work that is fulfilling, deeply meaningful, and exhilarating.

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Executive Summary

The Learning 2025: National Commission on Student-Centered, Equity-Focused Education—a collective of thought leaders in education, business, community, and philanthropy as convened by AASA, The School Superintendents Association—calls for holistic redesign of the public school system by 2025.

The COVID-19 pandemic has served as a forcing function. It has exposed the severity of systemic inequities and injustices that impact Americans and jeopardize the very core of our republic. It has also presented an opportunity to *finally* reshape schools to meet ALL Whole Learner needs for optimized achievement.

The Commission believes the time for action is now. Educators across the country continue to adapt to a hybrid school model and create plans to recoup pandemic-induced learning loss. As they do, we ask educators to seize this opportunity to realize our vision of holistic school redesign.

The full Commission report articulates in detail our vision, which is intended to function as guardrails for specific change while also empowering districts and schools to tailor plans to the needs of their learners, educators, and communities. We have identified three core components and corresponding essential areas of systemic school redesign. As leaders, teachers, and students work to realize this vision, all must play an active role in redesigning systems, reengineering instruction, and co-authoring the learning journey.

Our vision of systemic redesign is as follows:

- 1) **Culture:** Systemic redesign must happen within an intentional, relationships-based culture that is:
 - a. *Whole Learner Focused:* The entire system must attend to the social, emotional, cognitive, mental health, and trauma-based needs of ALL learners.
 - b. *No Learner Marginalized:* ALL children, families, and staff must be embraced, valued equally, and served with equity—regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender, socioeconomic circumstance, or disability.
 - c. *Future-Driven:* Schools must routinely anticipate forthcoming changes in the career, social, economic, and technological landscapes to inform all decisions today.
- 2) **Social, Emotional, and Cognitive Growth Model:** Learning must entirely reorient around the learner.
 - a. In order to meet ALL learners' social, emotional, and cognitive needs, instruction and learning must happen on a growth model continuum, where *data analytics, planning, learning, and evidence of learning* operate in a feedback loop to personalize learning.
- 3) **Resources:** Panels of school, association, state, and federal leaders must convene to determine how to unlock resources to meet ALL children's Whole Learner needs in the following categories:
 - a. *Learning Accelerators:* Broadband must be deemed a public utility so that ALL learners have access to the technologies necessary to access and accelerate learning.
 - b. *Aligned Community Resources:* To meet Whole Learner needs, educators, learners, and learners' families must have access to a robust, multi-tiered system of supports.
 - c. *High-Quality Early Learning for ALL Children:* ALL children must engage in high-impact early learning to prepare them to function as co-authors of learning in their K-12 journey.
 - d. *Diverse Educator Pipeline:* Educators and staff must represent the learners, families, and communities they serve so that true culturally responsive learning is possible.

We invite all who love children and care about both their futures and the future of our nation to join us in this American imperative.

An American Imperative: A New Vision of Public Schools

A Public School System—and a Nation—at Inflection Point

We as a nation are painfully divided and facing a series of systemic and cultural crises. The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare profound issues that we have known about for decades but have addressed with only minimal success. Confronting and overcoming long-brewing racial, economic, and social injustices and disparities so that we may promote and safeguard healthy civic participation for all is the imperative of our day. These challenges require that all Americans consider their role in protecting our republic and forming a more perfect union for all citizens.

For educators, these challenges demand that we evolve the public school system so that it can equitably and effectively meet the needs of ALL learners—from those children who have been systematically marginalized to those with disabilities to those who benefit from more independence, and all in between. Action has never been more urgent or consequential. Superintendents, building principals, teachers, school boards, teachers unions, and community leaders all must accept responsibility for addressing our nation’s challenges and play a central role in defining and leading systemic change in our districts and schools. Achieving this level of accountability will ask all of us to redefine our roles and responsibilities in the education system.

To articulate a call to action and a shared vision for public educators, AASA convened the Learning 2025: National Commission on Student-Centered, Equity-Focused Education. This report holds recommendations for school transformation from the Commission’s thought leaders in education, business, community, and philanthropy. It captures a new vision of public schools as ecosystems of future-driven, rigorous, energetic, and culturally vibrant learning, where leaders, administrators, teachers, learners, families, and communities all play a role in redesigning the system, reengineering instruction, and co-authoring the learning journey. The recommendations require that educators are empowered and equipped to meet Whole Learnerⁱ needs by personalizing and customizing instruction and coordinating resources to support ALL children’s overall growth and well-being.

The Learning 2025 Commission recommendations are intended to clarify a critical imperative for superintendents, school leaders, school boards, unions, and community leaders. While calling for holistic redesign of our schools, this report provides guardrails for change and simultaneous calls for empowerment of districts and schools to enact change in ways best suited to the unique circumstances of their learners, families, and communities. Change of the scale we believe is necessary to meet ALL learners’ needs and prepare them for well-being, self-sufficiency, and success must be evolutionary and incremental and will take several years. Therefore, this report recommends a multi-year transition plan. Lastly, the report will lead to the identification of a culturally representative sample of Demonstration Sites from across the United States. Each will be the subject of a case study designed to guide schools,

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districts, and regions in realizing the vision articulated in the Commission’s recommendations. Policy support from local, state, and national leaders will be integral to the overall effectiveness and success of operationalizing this vision.

We have an opportunity to *finally* bring our schools into the future and transform them into nimble systems that can personalize and customize instruction and supports for ALL learners, while simultaneously restoring dignity and honor to teaching and reigniting the joy of learning for all. We invite you to join us in this American imperative.

Our Vision of Public Schools: Holistic System Redesign

We believe there is no time for ad hoc or piecemeal changes to our schools. Rather, our vision calls for holistic redesign of the public school system by 2025. To articulate this vision, we as Commissioners applied our experience; our own research and the research of others; our understanding of how technology will continue to transform how we learn, work, and live; and what we know must change so that we can educate in a way that prepares ALL children for healthy lives, lifelong learning, productive civic engagement, self-sufficiency, and career fulfillment—in *their* future worlds.

As we defined our vision of holistic school redesign, we were guided by a core belief that schools must operate as the heartbeat of the country we want and believe in—a country where freedom, justice, and opportunity are extended to everyone, without question, qualification, or exception. We achieve this only when educators stand firmly against the marginalization of any child and steadfastly in favor of building a new system capable of meeting ALL children’s Whole Learner needs equitably. Schools must be culturally responsive, culturally representative, and inclusive incubators of honest, courageous discourse about the issues most important and sacred to the well-being of our country and democracy, such that learners grow into committed stewards of a country and world where marginalization, racism, racial and ethnic injustices, and any and all discriminatory practices are rooted out and eradicated.

Building a New System of Leading, Teaching, and Learning

At the center of our vision are the three most critical functions for realizing systemic change: leading, teaching, and learning. Districts will still have the discrete positions of administrators, teachers, and students. If we are to *finally* and *actually* deliver learner-centered, equity-focused education to ALL learners, then we must experience a paradigm shift in how those in these positions function. While superintendents maintain the lead responsibility for systemic redesign, everyone in the learning ecosystem must lead, teach, and learn. Specifically, where administrators once managed and led, teachers once taught, and students once received instruction, all of those in these positions must—to varying degrees—play a role in redesigning the school system, reengineering instruction, and co-authoring learning. While administrators, teachers, and learners will have a primary focus, as depicted in Figure 1, all will be vital to the successful transformation of their schools and districts and our education system writ large.

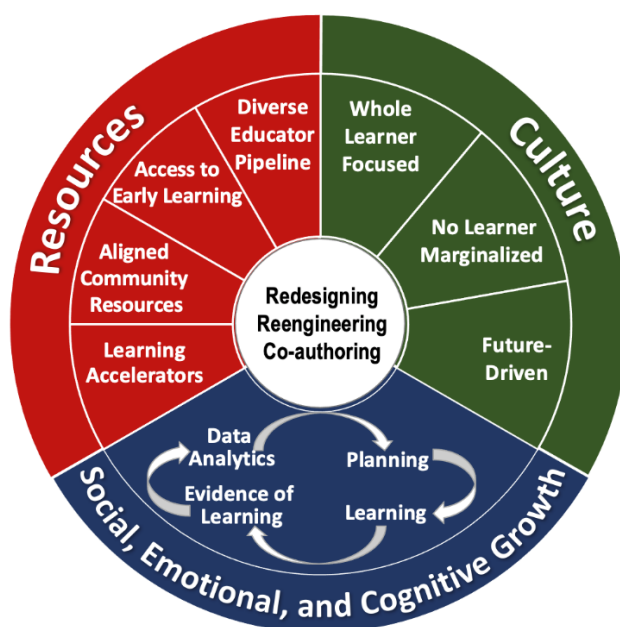
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Redesigning Systems	Reengineering Instruction	Co-authoring Learning
Leaders	Leaders	Leaders
Teachers	Teachers	Teachers
Learners	Learners	Learners

Source: AASA Learning 2025 Commission

Figure 1. Leaders, teachers, and learners will all play a role in the three functions of redesigning systems, reengineering instruction, and co-authoring the learning journey. Leaders will be primarily focused on system design, teachers on engineering instruction, and learners on co-authoring their personalized learning journeys.

From this functional center, a new system of learning must emerge. Figure 2 illustrates three core components and their corresponding essential areas that must be present and addressed in any school system and community in order to meet our vision.



Source: AASA Learning 2025 Commission

Figure 2. The realization of our vision is contingent upon everyone in the learning ecosystem—leaders, teachers, administrators, support staff, learners, families/caregivers, and community members—working coherently toward the same goals captured in this visual. The three core components—Culture; Social, Emotional, and Cognitive Growth; and Resources—are interrelated and work interdependently to create a holistically redesigned school system.

While the components and corresponding essential areas are requisite for holistic transformation, they are intended as the structure from which districts can build out systemic change tailored to the specific

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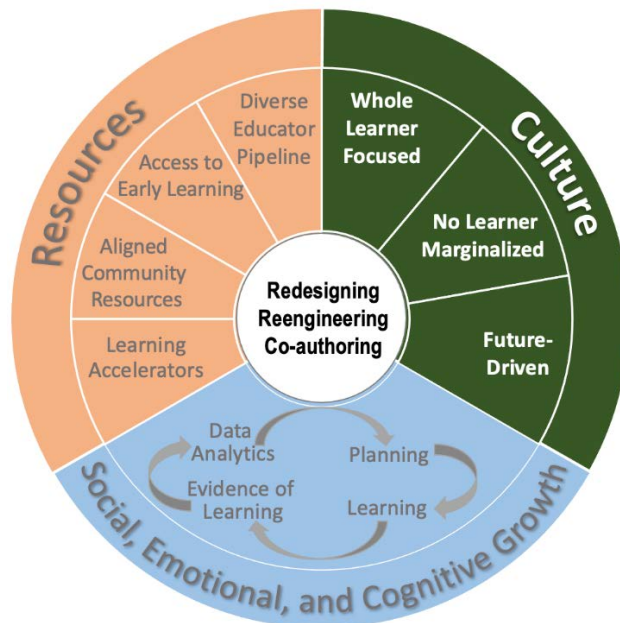
circumstances of their schools and communities. As a Commission, we believe that one-size-fits-all solutions must no longer be tolerated. Instead, districts and schools must be liberated to apply practices that work for *their* learners, families/caregivers, staff, and communities as they realize this vision.

Those of us in official leadership roles must rise to the occasion and spearhead, enable, inform, and shape the fulfillment of this vision. Doing so will require that leaders graduate from searching for consensus to molding consensus. They must also adopt and model a mindset of leadership as disposition, not position, and in turn solicit and elicit leadership, innovation, and support from all relevant stakeholder groups: learners, families/caregivers, communities, educators, support staff, boards, and administrators.

Realizing Our Vision for School Redesign: Operationalizing Three Core Components of Systemic Change

The three core components of systemic change in our vision are: 1) Culture, 2) Social, Emotional, and Cognitive Growth, and 3) Resources. Within these components are corresponding essential areas that learning communities must build into and address in their new systems.

Component 1: Culture



Source: AASA Learning 2025 Commission

Systemic redesign must happen within an intentionally created, relationships-based culture. The three essential areas of culture in our vision are as follows:

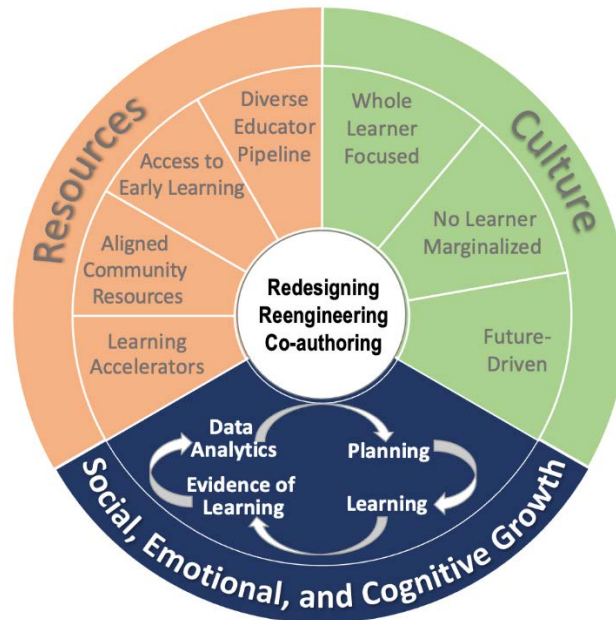
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- 1) *Whole Learner Focused*: To address the needs of the Whole Learner, the entire system must attend to the social, emotional, cognitive, mental health, and trauma-based needs of ALL learners. This is possible when schools are a safe haven where everyone feels a sense of belonging; schools are a place where learners' curiosities are stoked, their gifts and talents are unearthed and encouraged, and their love of learning is untapped so that learners may sustain success and well-being throughout their lives; the system adjusts to the needs of the learner, rather than forcing the learner to adjust to it; and the importance of and need for all relevant developmental relationships—learner-teacher, learner-learner, staff-staff, educators-parents/caregivers—are emphasized to foster the trust that predicates a Whole Learner focus. See Appendix 1.
- 2) *No Learner Marginalized*: When we say the system must enable meeting the needs of and fostering growth for “ALL learners,” we mean ALL—and especially the Black learners, Indigenous learners, and learners of color who have historically been the most marginalized. We believe this is possible only in a culture where all children, families, and staff are embraced and valued equally, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender, socioeconomic circumstance, or disability. Public schools must serve as pillars of anti-marginalizationⁱⁱ and systemic equityⁱⁱⁱ—where ALL children are loved and respected; viewed for their humanity, boundless potential, agency in their lives, and vital and valued role in our nation; supported by a personal advocate across their learning journey; and provided the equity required to put them demonstrably on a path of well-being, success, and fulfillment. See Appendix 2.
- 3) *Future-Driven*: Many of today's school practices and processes were born from the 20th-century industrial model of education. As a result of these legacy practices and processes, we too often teach outdated skills that prepare learners for *our* past, not *their* futures. This simply cannot persist. We must redesign schools and reengineer learning through a future lens. This means filtering decisions through an awareness that the world our learners will navigate as adults will be evermore transformed by rapid technological advancements, artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and more. We must pay close attention to the evolving implications and fundamental shifts technology has on our workplaces, homes, and society and adapt what and how we instruct accordingly.

A school culture that is future-driven will routinely look into the future to anticipate forthcoming changes in the career landscape. We must then use these insights to inform the skills we teach, the technologies we use to teach, and the career pathways we introduce to learners today. This will also require creating new and eliminating old post-secondary pathways and/or adapting curricula as necessary to remain relevant to learners' futures—as it is through relevance that we can engage and challenge our learners to reach high expectations. See Appendix 3.

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Component 2: Social, Emotional, and Cognitive Growth



Source: AASA Learning 2025 Commission

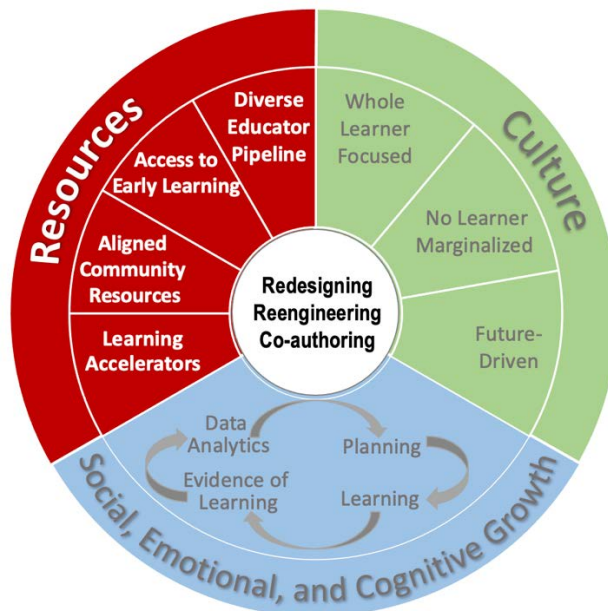
Systemic redesign must encompass the reengineering of teaching and learning to reorient around the individual learner. In our vision, learners are co-authors of their learning journey; they are empowered agents, continually invited and habituated to voice their Whole Learner needs and preferences and their interests and passions so that educators can adapt instruction to them. Blanket instruction that stops short of incorporating the individual social, emotional, and cognitive growth needs of learners is insufficient to prepare them for lifelong success and well-being. See Appendix 4 for detail on the “learner as co-author” concept.

A Social, Emotional, and Cognitive Growth Model

True personalized learning is possible only when teachers instruct and assess and learners learn on a growth model continuum. This is achieved when *data collection and analysis, planning, learning, and evidence of learning* work in a constant feedback loop so teachers can: 1) bring more precision to personalized instruction and learning, and 2) routinely engage learners and their parents/caregivers in data-driven conversations about the learners’ growth and dynamic learning plans. Furthermore, we must use multiple forms of formative and summative evidences of learning—including tests, learner portfolios, demonstrations, and rubrics—to capture learners’ social, emotional, and cognitive growth. Educators must be liberated to use grade-/age-based or alternative groupings as appropriate for learning and to apply supports targeted to the specific needs, interests, learning styles, aptitudes, and gifts of learners. School leaders must also be empowered to overhaul schedules and learning calendars to unlock as much cognitive, social, and emotional learning and support as possible. See Appendix 5.

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Component 3: Resources



Source: AASA Learning 2025 Commission

In our vision, resources will be most effectively allocated when learner voice is proactively sought and incorporated into decisions at the classroom, school, district, and board levels. Hindrances to accessing or utilizing the resources learners need must be removed. We recommend that communities convene a panel of school, association, state, and federal leaders to identify and develop an action plan to eliminate stifling requirements that would otherwise inhibit progress toward learner-centered and equity-focused education. Educators and business leaders must also create consensus with policymakers around the urgent need for successful practices to drive policy—not the other way around.

We see the following areas as most critically in need of adequate resourcing to achieve specific, vision-aligned goals:

- 1) *Learning Accelerators*: In our vision, the multiplier effect of technology—used in combination with intentional and future-driven teaching and learning—is unleashed so that schools and educators can function as accelerators of learning for ALL children. To this end, technologies must be embraced for their potential and interwoven into the fabric of school systems in order to unlock a “learn everywhere” model and support and sustain high-impact, engaging, and learner-centered learning across in-person, remote, and hybrid learning modalities. Importantly, schools must ensure that technologies tangibly enhance teaching and learning and are optimized for the greatest benefit and power they offer. A Learning Accelerator requires that educators and learners are comfortable leveraging data for personalized learning and evidence of learning. Achieving this level of technology competence will require embedded and ongoing professional development for educators. This vision for enhanced learning is possible when leaders: 1) ensure ALL learners have access to quality technology tools and broadband in both

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school and their homes; and 2) steadfastly engage policymakers to designate internet broadband as a public utility. See Appendix 6.

- 2) *Aligned Community Resources*: For educators to meet Whole Learner needs comprehensively and with equity, the system must empower and enable all educators, learners, and learners' families to readily access a robust, multi-tiered system of supports. Such aligned resources will require that districts create community cabinets to coordinate internal and external supports and services. Educators must recognize the invaluable resources that families and community are, in that children learn more deeply when families and community members are actively involved in children's learning, school events, and post-secondary pathways. In order to leverage these invaluable resources, schools must transform into indispensable resources to the community at large (for example, by providing services and assistance, hosting community-building and service-oriented events, and functioning as a hub of inclusion and strength).
- 3) *High-Quality Early Learning for ALL Children*: ALL children, regardless of geographic location or socioeconomic circumstances, must have access to high-quality early learning opportunities (preschool, homeschooling, community centers, etc.) that prepare them to function as co-authors of learning in their K-12 journey. This requires articulation of clear and observable outcomes of early learning, including social, emotional, and cognitive goals. Equity must feature prominently in these plans, as children's varying socioeconomic realities, developmental needs, parental preferences, and local community resources influence the range of options for a given child. Importantly, public schools must access funding to expand their mandate to include high-quality early learning for ALL children. See Appendix 7.
- 4) *Diverse Educator Pipeline*: Districts must proactively assemble educators and staff who are representative of the learners, families, and communities they serve so that true culturally responsive learning is possible. In order to achieve this, we must rethink how we recruit, develop, promote, and support a diverse and inclusive talent pipeline to serve America's youth. Essential to this effort will be identifying constructive and tangible measures that will increase the status of being an educator. We must also partner with high schools and universities to open numerous and inclusive pipelines that feed into more pathways to become a certified educator.

To realize a vision for a diverse talent pipeline, we call for a nationwide effort to: 1) provide student loans to those who complete accredited teacher education preparation programs and teach in Title 1 schools (akin to a G.I. Bill for teaching), and 2) forgive student loans of educators who complete accredited principal preparation programs and serve as leaders in Title 1 schools (akin to a G.I. Bill for principals) in order to prioritize diversity and inclusion in the corps of educators who lead systemic change and serve America's children. See Appendix 8.

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Launching Our Vision

We as Commissioners of Learning 2025 commit to leading, promoting, and supporting the development and implementation of plans to operationalize the vision of holistic school redesign outlined herein. This work will predicate on two key developments: 1) the articulation of “Portraits Of” and 2) the identification of Demonstration Sites.

Portraits Of: Learner, Educator, Educational Leader, and System

Central to this work will be articulating the Portrait of a Learner, Portrait of an Educator, Portrait of an Educational Leader, and Portrait of a System in our vision of a system that can *truly* support learner-centered and equity-focused learning for ALL learners. These Portraits will serve multiple purposes: They will help educators visualize the new, future-driven outcomes of this transformative work (i.e., how the school system—and everyone in it, including family/caretakers, support staff, and community members—will operate and why once the vision is realized); how leaders, teachers, and learners will function in the system; and what learners will be capable of after graduating from the system. The Portraits will be leveraged to build the roadmap, expectations, and trackable metrics of holistic school redesign. See Appendix 9.

Demonstration Sites

AASA, in partnership with other national collaborative organizations, will identify Demonstration Sites that exemplify the actions expressed here to serve as models to districts and schools nationwide. Demonstration Sites must encompass those at Lighthouse, Aspiring, and Emerging stages of implementation for the purposes of scaffolding and optimizing learning for others. To serve as beacons from which other districts can learn, the Demonstration Sites will be supported, monitored, and asked to report annually through 2025.

We will identify Demonstration Sites at three interconnected levels:

- 1) *Lighthouse Sites*: Sites that exemplify the actions expressed here and can serve as models to other educators; build the list of necessary steps to realize our vision and enable and sustain deep, systemic change; and drive public policy at the national, state, and local levels. AASA and partners will share these sites’ successful practices widely through video presentations and case studies. These sites will also be showcased at AASA’s Learning 2025: National Commission on Student-Centered, Equity-Focused Education conference in 2022 and other AASA events.
- 2) *Aspiring Sites*: Sites with initiatives underway that position them with the potential to soon become Lighthouse Sites. AASA will facilitate a network of Aspiring Sites so that they can share their processes and practices with each other on an ongoing basis.
- 3) *Emerging Sites*: Sites that are early in their practices and processes and demonstrate potential to become Lighthouse Sites by 2025. AASA will support these sites in their work.

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Appendices

Appendices were drafted by subcommittees composed of Commissioners with area expertise. Each is designed to function as a standalone document. Certain elements and concepts are mentioned in multiple appendices. Such repetition captures the holistic and integrative nature of our vision, which is strengthened through the application of system-wide mindsets, processes, practices, and tools.

Appendix 1: Whole Learner Framework and Design

When the Commission uses the term “Whole Learner,” we intend it to encompass and extend beyond the “Whole Child” approach to education, where the entire learning system is designed to meet core needs for safety, critical thinking and cognition skills, literacy and numeracy, physical health, and social and emotional well-being. “Whole Learner” emphasizes an even more foundational concept: that leaders, educators, and practitioners in different disciplines—whether in schools or the larger community—must do whatever it takes for children to become lifelong learners capable of discovering, honing, and leveraging their strengths and navigating an always-evolving economic environment in order to lead mentally, emotionally, and physically healthy, fulfilled, self-sufficient, and productive lives.

We also believe that a Whole Learner focus must be firmly embedded in the school system’s culture. Accordingly, we have established a framework to guide transformation to a learning environment that meets ALL children’s Whole Learner needs. The seven elements of Whole Learner Framework and Design are: 1) positive developmental relationships; 2) environments filled with safety and belonging; 3) rich learning experiences and knowledge development; 4) development of skills, habits, and mindsets; 5) integrated support systems; 6) whole system supports for community-at-Large; and 7) broader growth measures of learner, school, and district success.

The seven elements are the result of scientific knowledge from diverse fields as to how to equitably support the holistic development of all learners. In many ways, the seven elements are not controversial and resonate with educators. However, despite positive associations, they have not yet been widely used to develop and create comprehensive learning settings; nor have they been fully integrated into schools to yield healthy development, learning, and thriving. Both historical traditions and current policy built on dated assumptions about school design, accountability, assessment, and educator development have impeded progress, as these constraints do not support robust implementation, let alone integration of the seven elements.

A Whole Learner focus has implications on all levels of the ecosystem, from the classroom to the school to the district to the larger macrosystems in which a school is nested. All must join together to produce an intentionally integrated, comprehensive, developmental enterprise committed to equity for ALL learners. While we list seven individual elements, they truly support learner needs, interest, talents, voice, and agency when they are integrated and reinforce each other. The aim of the elements is a context for development that is greater than the sum of its parts and is transformative, personalized, empowering, and culturally affirming for each learner.

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The seven elements of Whole Learner Framework and Design are as follows:

- 1) *Positive Developmental Relationships*: The key characteristics of a developmental relationship include emotional caring and attachment, reciprocity, progressive complexity, and a balance of power. It is the type of relationship that can make you believe you can do something you didn't know you could do. The emotional connection is joined with adult guidance that enables children to learn skills, grow in their competence and confidence, and become more able to perform tasks on their own and take on new challenges. Children increasingly use their own agency to develop their curiosity and capacities for self-direction. Developmental relationships can both buffer the impact of stress and provide a pathway to motivation, self-efficacy, learning, and further growth.
- 2) *Environments Filled with Safety and Belonging*: Children will engage optimally and learn best when they feel physically, emotionally, and identity safe and when their cultures and values are represented in their learning communities. Learning communities that have shared values, routines, and high expectations and that demonstrate cultural sensitivity and communicate worth create calm and ignite the capacity for engagement and creativity. This means eliminating harmful practices such as negative stereotypes and biases, bullying or microaggressions, unfair discipline practices, tracking, and other exclusionary or shaming practices. Instead, co-creating norms; giving ownership to students over their bodies, choices, and learning; and having predictable, fair, and consistent routines and expectations for all community members creates a strong sense of belonging.
- 3) *Rich Learning Experiences and Knowledge Development*: Rich personalized learning experiences are those that fully engage and challenge learners across all disciplines. They build on learners' prior knowledge and experiences so that they may discover what they can do in their zone of proximal development. Children learn best when they are engaged in authentic, meaningful activities and collaborating with peers to deepen understanding and practice transferring knowledge to new settings.
- 4) *Development of Critical Skills, Habits, and Mindsets*: Social, emotional, and cognitive skills are essential for productive and engaged learning, work, and well-being throughout life. They include self-regulation, executive functions, social skills, growth mindset, resilience, perseverance, and self-direction. Social, emotional, and cognitive skills are cross wired in the brain and develop in increasingly integrated ways over time along individual and unique pathways. When integrated with content, these skills work together to produce higher-order, 21st-century skills such as problem-solving, collaboration, metacognitive analytic skills, and mastery-level academic competencies.
- 5) *Integrated System of Supports for Learners*: Learning environments that are designed with multiple protective factors in place—including health, mental health, and academic supports such as tutoring, mentoring, opportunities to extend learning, and opportunities for children to build on interests and passions—will enhance learner engagement, achievement, and fulfillment. Robust tiered support systems enable more learner potential. They also serve to tip

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the balance to an environment in which children feel that their assets are recognized and that they are supported in taking risks in their learning.

- 6) *Whole System Supports for Community-at-Large*: When schools function as hubs of supports and resources to the greater community, a virtuous cycle of benefits for learners and community members is unleashed. Offering whole system supports requires that district leaders establish partnerships that will allow schools to expand services for community members. In turn, districts can welcome community members to schools to take advantage of those services. The net effect is a community galvanized around school and learner goals. Such an integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development, and community engagement leads to improved learning, stronger families, and healthier communities. Offering whole system supports requires reimagining roles, responsibilities, relationships, and partnerships focused on building assets in children, families, schools, and community.
- 7) *Broader Growth Measures of Learner, School, and District Success*: Meeting Whole Learner needs requires that children learn and are assessed on a social, emotional, and cognitive growth model continuum. Schools, then, must also be as broadly assessed to determine success in meeting Whole Learner needs. New models that measure both the efficacy of holistic supports and Whole Learner outcomes are needed. Multiple measures and balanced scorecards should track key performance indicators that reveal the efficacy of integrated and whole system supports that are targeted to promote broad measures of student well-being and learning. Data should be actionable for educators and policymakers relative to closing opportunity and achievement gaps.

Next Steps

In order to establish and operationalize a Whole Learner Framework and Design by 2025, superintendents and school boards must take the following actions:

- 1) Integrate and adopt the Whole Learner vision as a central tenet of the district's culture and strategic plan;
- 2) Review and revise board policies and procedures where necessary to align with a Whole Learner culture;
- 3) Conduct Whole Learner needs assessment to identify assets and opportunities;
- 4) Identify existing Whole Learner aligned assets and successful practices that can be amplified;
- 5) Align whole system resources (i.e., family, district, and community resources) in an integrated manner to address Whole Learner growth opportunities;
- 6) Build capacity by investing in professional learning of adults within and across community-based partner organizations to design structures and implement successful Whole Learner practices;
- 7) Identify and progress-monitor Whole Learner key performance indicators using broader growth measures of learner, school, district, and community success.

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Appendix 2: No Learner Marginalized

Every learner must be respected, loved, nurtured, and supported regardless of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or disability. COVID-19 has exacerbated the educational inequities present in our system that disproportionately hurt many of the aforementioned protected groups. Rather than default to further segregation and denied opportunities for the learners we have traditionally marginalized the most, we aim to create inclusive, meaningful learning that focuses on identity development, critical thinking, academic skill and cognitive growth, and joy.

Providing robust learning experiences and joyful spaces for ALL learners must involve anti-marginalization curricula that support young people in their development of anti-oppressive understandings and practices. The curriculum must promote specific approaches to learning, with ALL learners engaged in critical thinking, differentiated instruction, cooperative learning, and collaborative grouping.

By 2025, our nation's approach to social, emotional, and cognitive learning must aim to reverse the legacy of marginalization and establish communities built on love, respect, and joy. We must:

- 1) Center on the perspectives of traditionally marginalized learners in the curriculum design process in order to engage ALL learners as co-authors and leaders in their growth and development.
- 2) Develop and implement an anti-marginalization curriculum for ALL learners. These curricular units of study (case studies and projects) must be inquiry-based; involve original research, fieldwork, and collaboration with experts; require learners to synthesize learning from multiple disciplines; and be in service to the community (global and/or local). The units must be developmentally appropriate and touch on multiple forms of oppression, including race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or disability.
- 3) Engage all educators in personal identity exploration to determine how their identities intersect with others and are revealed through the engineering of learning experiences.
- 4) Provide structures of support that include mental health integration, multidirectional communications with community partners, personalized instruction, and year-round and after-school programming.

The path to full implementation of anti-marginalization approaches to teaching and learning will include multiple opportunities for learner voice and choice. Leaders must create new and leverage existing structures to amplify learner experiences and feedback. Additionally, partnership with experienced and expert organizations will be needed in order to provide technical expertise for school districts.

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Appendix 3: Future-Driven

The future-driven education model anticipates the skills, knowledge, and behaviors that society and the global economy will demand from a high school graduate at any point in time in the future—be it five, ten, or twenty years from now. To become future-driven requires a full redesign of the education journey that learners will take on their way to mastering those skills, knowledge, and behaviors. Many jobs of the future are not in existence today, so breaking from our existing forward-leaning system to a future-driven one is essential if we are to truly enable learners to succeed in their futures. To do this, we simply cannot continue to refine and add to the traditional system, which was designed to address the needs of the past century.

In a vast majority of districts, decisions about next year’s curriculum, instructional programs and practices, bell schedule, calendar, bus schedule, budget, physical plant, staffing, human resources rules, etc. begin by building up from what is in place in the current school year. Typically, this approach to decision-making has resulted in adding more standards, budget demands, and regulations to the aforementioned items, which only compounds year after year. These forward-leaning practices have kept our schools tethered to the agrarian calendar and industrial bell schedule, where disciplines are taught in isolation and staffing patterns and technology have to conform to existing instructional practices. For example, many educators still hold the belief that learners cannot use technology or work with others to complete a test because it would constitute cheating. This is an outdated mindset. In reality, technology and collaboration skills are vital for success in today’s society.

If we are to prepare learners for *their* future and not *our* past, the 20th-century paradigm of American education should be relegated to the dustbin of history. Personalization of learning will be a critical aspect of the future-driven model—including adapting instruction to an individual’s learning style and engaging learners in relevant, future-driven skills. Doing so necessitates that educators reimagine the journey that learners will embark on in response to changes in technology, the economy, and the environment, as well as shifting demographics and their impact on the skills today’s learners will need in their careers and lives. Furthermore, we must be thoughtful and deliberate in identifying and growing the cognitive, social, and emotional skills and habits that learners will need to thrive in the immediate years ahead.

To be future-driven, educators must routinely review research about projected career landscape changes and trends to inform decisions today. As an example, [McKinsey](#) released a study in 2018 detailing changes in work requirements through 2030. This study looked at the nation’s small-, medium-, and large-size companies and determined that through 2030, there will be a 15 percent decline in basic cognitive skills and a 14 percent decline in manual and physical skills. Those decreases are in large part due to the advancement of artificial intelligence algorithms, which allow machines to complete certain tasks far faster and more efficiently than humans can. AI technologies have become so advanced that algorithms are even able to write other algorithms. Thus, humans will need to excel in the tasks that machines cannot do. The McKinsey study speculates an 8 percent increase in higher-order cognitive skills, a 24 percent increase in social and emotional skills, and a 55 percent increase in technological skills by the year 2030. Insights like these must be a central focus as we redesign learning and instruction in the years ahead.

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The future-driven approach must also consider that learners today are different from learners of past generations and, as such, have different innate aptitudes and abilities. For example, today's learners represent the first generation that grew up with personal and portable digital information and communication devices. Smartphones and iPads are an extension of their being, and they are deeply focused and dependent on technology to communicate, learn, and function. Also, modern learners have different aspirations and expectations from those of previous generations. In turn, what motivates them is in many ways different from what excited us when we were in school. Empowering today's learners to co-author their personal learning journeys that will lead them to multiple post-secondary options and opportunities will engage and drive them to achieve.

Next Steps

The transition to a future-driven system will take years to complete. The Commission has set 2025 as the target year for transition completion. As a first step in this multi-year effort, the Commission recommends that districts create a culture that embraces a future-driven mindset. In such a culture, what children will need in order to be successful, fulfilled, and healthy in all senses in *their* futures must be the lens through which all decisions are made. In practice, this asks that district leaders routinely share information about the shifting skills, knowledge, and behaviors learners will need in *their* futures and can occur through presentations and ongoing discussions with educators, school boards, parents, the general public, and the media. Some of these constituents may not envision how dramatic these shifts will be, so the ability of the district leaders to be effective communicators is paramount for creating a future-driven culture.

Next, district leaders need to show the gap between the social, emotional, and cognitive skills learners will need for success in their futures and those on which schools are presently focused. Engaging educators, employers, parents, and the general public in establishing a Portrait of what a graduate and citizen of the community should look like will be helpful in building ownership in the district's vision. Once those desired outcomes are identified, the Commission recommends that district leaders ask learners who express the most excitement about co-authoring their learning journeys and educators who are most committed to the concept of reengineering learning to come together and demonstrate how the transformation can benefit all others. This pilot group of learners and instructors can assist district leaders in redesign of the system. They can also provide additional guidance and encouragement to other learners and educators in the district as they transition to full implementation of a future-driven system by 2025.

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Appendix 4: Learners as Co-Authors of Their Learning Journey

In our ever-changing and unpredictable world, learners need to master the skill of knowing what to do when they do not immediately know what to do. Doing this effectively involves the development of agency and executive function skills, which is made possible through the learner’s active engagement in experiences they typically do not encounter in today’s schools. In order for learners to develop these skills, they must be empowered, proactive agents—or co-authors—of their learning journey. In general, the current education system, which has been relatively unchanged for 125 years, does not enable this depth of learner agency or this type of dynamic and future-driven learning.

The new, bold concept of students as co-authors of their learning journey is a dramatic change and leap forward in the roles and responsibilities of learners, teachers, and leaders. It signifies a major cultural change; for it to work, teachers will need to split decisively from the outdated instructional practices that dominate most classrooms and expand their mindset to become engineers, designers, and facilitators of learning. This is done by breaking from the proficiency model and adopting a personalized cognitive, social, and emotional growth model that combines data and technology to inform and accelerate learning.

Central to enabling learners as co-authors is empowered engagement. If learners have a say in determining what and how they will learn based on their personal interests and goals, their engagement dramatically improves. This in turn leads to a heightened focus on and commitment to learning, where substantial improvement in performance is realized in both the short and long term.

Naturally, educators need to be actively engaged in this process as well. It is teachers’ responsibility to illuminate the path forward and show learners what to learn, where to apply their knowledge, and how to act as they continue on their learning journey. The process is dynamic and will require routine adjustments due to learners’ changing aspirations, goals, and aptitudes. Strengths and weaknesses of both learner and teacher will become evident during the journey, which will further inform instruction.

Dynamic and adaptive e-learning systems will be of profound use in the co-authored learning journey. These technologies make it possible and relatively simple to accelerate growth and personalize instruction for each learner. Built of the same principles as gaming, e-learning technologies can provide engaging and motivating learning experiences for the learner as they simultaneously collect real-time formative data that the teacher can use to target instruction.

A culture and mindset change to learners as co-authors of their learning journey will require a substantial commitment to professional development and ongoing support for educators. Multiple redesign challenges at the district level will likely emerge and require resolution. Budget allocations to various departments and functions will be impacted: Human resources and contract provisions will have to be reexamined and adjusted. Physical facilities will need to be modified. And technology and data will require a tremendous boost in planning, funding, and training.

This is ambitious but vital work. It will take rigorous commitment, unwavering focus, and years to implement fully and effectively. The Commission recommends that districts clearly identify and describe

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what the goals are for the learner, teacher, leader, and schools at a future date and then begin the transition to that new vision. The Commission has established 2025 as the point of departure to build back from, as it is close enough to create a sense of urgency to move forward but far enough to allow for annual and incremental steps.

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Appendix 5: Growth Model

The entire enterprise of education is about growth over the life span of the learner. Growth is optimized and consistent when teaching and learning exist on a growth model continuum as made possible through learning personalized to the social, emotional, and cognitive needs of the learner. A growth model unlocks potential and accelerates learning for every child. Growth is facilitated when planning, learning, evidence of learning, and data analytics are combined in a virtuous feedback loop. Data and information are shared dynamically within and across these four components to foster growth.

Implementing a growth model continuum will require a shift in both mindset and process. Four essential shifts are necessary:

Shift 1: Redefining Proficiency

The heterogeneity of any classroom of learners means that some may be above proficiency and some may be below. Reaching all learners where they are and eliciting continuous growth requires the adoption of a growth perspective. A growth perspective signifies a transition away from a single snapshot-in-time measure of “proficiency” to a “multiple measures” model, in which “proficiency” is viewed as the floor and not the ceiling.

Shift 2: A Life-Span View of Learner Growth

In our current accountability models, growth data is privileged to a few grade levels, typically grades 3 through 8 and one year in high school. We must adopt a life-span view of growth for every learner so that we recognize that collecting growth data at every age and grade level is critical. For example, when it comes to the cognitive growth of reading, much of the growth—or lack thereof—occurs before grade 3. A learner-centered, life-span view of growth requires not doing more assessments but doing more *with* the assessment data we have. When formative assessments (leading indicators) and summative assessments (lagging indicators) share a common scale, all the data can be used to build individual growth trajectories for every learner across their entire education.

Shift 3: Broad Adoption of Growth-Accelerating and Adaptive Learning Technologies

In recent years, we have seen the emergence of several dynamic e-learning systems that leverage artificial intelligence to adapt to an individual learner’s progress and accelerate growth accordingly. These technologies blur the distinction between assessment and instruction. Built on the principles of gamification, such technologies challenge learners with higher and higher levels of learning as their abilities advance. The result is twofold: As children use them, the technologies mine data that can further inform personalized instruction, and they accelerate growth from within an individual’s zone of proximal development, which is where learners are most engaged and motivated. Schools must fold these technologies with intention into instruction and learning on a broad scale in order to harness the benefits that are integral to a growth model.

Shift 4: Actionable Assessment Data and Feedback

By design, a growth model yields ongoing and rich data. Optimally, data is collected from daily classroom activities, formative assessments, and summative assessments. Yet this data is only as valuable as it is transparent and usable. In a growth model, educators, learners, and parents have ongoing access to

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data and understand how to take action with it so that learner growth maintains momentum and advancement. Data becomes the lever for the co-authored learning journey, in that it guides teachers to personalize instruction and empowers learners and their families as active agents in learning.

Next Steps

The four components of a social, emotional, and cognitive growth model—planning, learning, evidence of learning, and data analytics—require the seamless and integrated sharing of data and information. The necessary infrastructure commitments and investments, broken down by year, are as follows:

2022

- Delivery and execution of staff development for all constituents
- Identify the social, emotional, and cognitive variables of interest
- Utilization of a learner information system that will host all data
- Utilization of a growth interface that reports individual growth trajectories
- Audit the assessment tools and e-learning engines in place and identify gaps

2023

- Design report card and dashboard for various constituents
- Beta test the growth output and modeling
- Build communication plan for constituents
- Ongoing staff development and training

2024

- Measure administrator, educator, parent, and learner engagement
- Report growth measures quarterly throughout the year
- Build an annual growth report at district, school, classroom, and learner levels
- Ongoing staff development and training

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Appendix 6: Learning Accelerators

Schools, and those responsible for delivering instruction and learning, operate as learning accelerators when systems are designed and educators are trained to leverage multiple resources to maintain the highest level of learning possible for an individual learner on an ongoing basis. When we speak of accelerating learning, we do not mean simply speeding up instruction. The speed at which learning happens is not the goal or purpose of schools and educators functioning as learning accelerators. The goal is to create deeper and more lasting understanding of what is learned within the larger context of ongoing learning. Individuals learn at different speeds, and the speed at which they learn is a function of current aptitude in a given subject. In some cases, we may need to slow down instruction in order to accelerate learning, which can only be accomplished at an individual level and when supported by real-time data. When a school is a learning accelerator, educators know how and are empowered to stretch learners—including beyond grade-level—in areas where there is strength and pull back and slow things down in areas that require more guidance.

Digital delivery systems are integral to accelerating learning. The digital delivery of learning and instruction through modern technology is no longer a passive process; rather, it is a means to collaborate, create, communicate, and connect. The use of digital or e-learning systems during COVID-19 lockdowns was scattershot in the early stages, but as time went on and school systems got their bearings, technology was a lifeboat for learners. How technology was deployed in 2020 was extremely varied and depended on the technologies available and whether kids had access to them. At the classroom level, how learners were engaging with technology was often dependent on how capable teachers were at using technology to deliver instruction.

Adaptive e-learning systems are also a lever for accelerated learning. Adaptive e-learning systems are built on the principles of gamification, in that they offer rewards as an incentive for learners to stretch their learning and complete tasks or challenges. The motivation to master content and move on to a higher level of learning develops persistence. E-learning systems rely on artificial intelligence to process a learner's real-time data—such as correct/incorrect answers and time to complete tasks—in order to adapt instruction to a pace and complexity that is most beneficial to the learner. A high-quality e-learning system uses this dynamic adaptation to provide seamless, integrated support at the point of instruction, not after. In doing so, learners remain in their zone of proximal development as they continue to progress. E-learning systems also provide rich data that can help educators gain insight into how to personalize learning with greater precision and maintain ongoing learning for ALL learners.

Digital delivery systems and AI-powered adaptive e-learning systems can be incredible assets to personalization and ongoing learning. For schools and educators to function as learning accelerators, we believe such technologies must be a fixture of and fully integrated into the school system. However, all technologies must be used thoughtfully to facilitate the personalized and co-authored learning journey by helping both the learner and educator collaborate, create, communicate, and connect. In order to achieve this, we must learn from what does and does not work. As we incorporate high-impact technology use into a redesigned school system, we must continue to mine insights from what we observed in remote and hybrid learning during pandemic lockdowns and commit to building new systems that allow for and enable technology maximized for personalized learning.

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Currently, policy dictates practice. We must flip that script and allow successful practices to inform policy. However, a one-size-fits-all approach to accelerating learning through adaptive technologies will not work. Experimentation and piloting at the state and regional levels will be necessary. To implement the learning accelerator concept at scale, we recommend starting small with experienced districts that understand the benefits of available technologies and are committed to the work. For that, we are thankful to the Demonstration Sites for playing an instrumental part in the Commission's work.

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Appendix 7: High-Quality Early Learning for ALL Learners

ALL children, regardless of socioeconomic status or community dynamics, should experience high-quality early learning that prepares them to enter kindergarten capable of functioning as co-authors of their learning journey. Families need access to multiple organizations that are equipped to enrich and support their children’s wellness, health, and socialization and provide high-quality learning experiences, including language development.

Research on early learning validates its importance for ALL learners, as it reveals the following about the impact of high-quality early learning on children:

- Early learning supports brain development during formative years, which has a lifetime impact on learning ability.
- The third-grade learning gap can be traced back to the lack of early childhood development and learning opportunities.
- Many of the challenges around equity are attributable to experiences, or lack thereof, in the earliest years of development.
- High-quality early learning has the effect of preparing young people to become economic contributors to society, rather than beneficiaries of it. In other words, the return on investment for access to high-quality learning for ALL learners is dramatic, materially lifelong to the learner, and directly relevant to our nation and economy.

Many excellent early learning programs currently exist, including schools, museums, community organizations, etc. Unfortunately, there are also some programs that provide little more than basic childcare. Therefore, all school districts and communities must work to identify how educators, families, and local organizations can support every child during their early years to grow, develop, and thrive. As a united group, these stakeholders must examine current practices and build on strengths to create diverse, equitable, and engaging early learning experiences for ALL children. This process should begin with:

- A thorough analysis among educators, community leaders, and families of the collective resources, supports, and services in place that can promote high-quality, equitable, and diverse opportunities accessible to ALL early learners
- The creation of a list of skills, dispositions, and habits of mind that ALL early learners need to develop, including the identification of the accompanying strategies for how adults can teach these skills, dispositions, and habits of mind and guidelines around the settings in which they can be taught (e.g., home, school, and other social settings)
- A plan to ensure high-quality early learning experiences are accessible to ALL young learners, regardless of socioeconomic status, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or disability
- The development of a widely shared “how-to” reference kit for families with early learners that provides practical strategies and teaching practices. To help families in reinforcing these strategies and practices and maintain strong family engagement in their children’s early development, support sessions must be made available on an ongoing basis.

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Schools and community organizations need to provide families with the following support and resources to aid their child's development:

- Print and video resources, as well as home visits when possible to share information on how and why the early learning years are the foundation of the learning continuum
- The outcomes they should hope to observe as their child develops physically, socially, emotionally, and cognitively
- Practices and strategies that parents and families can employ to support those outcomes
- Where they can go for information, assistance, and support

Bringing high-quality early learning to scale for ALL children will require a substantial financial commitment at the local, state, and national levels. Educators, community leaders, and families must unite to push state and federal legislators to sponsor and support legislation to mandate access to high-quality early learning opportunities. This campaign should focus on early learning's return on investment in terms of economics, equity, academics, and personal skill development.

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Appendix 8: Diverse Educator Pipeline

Growing both the number and the diversity of teachers and school leaders at every level must begin with an earnest commitment to restore honor to the education profession. Our country must again perceive education as prestigious and desirable career in order to attract and retain those we need, particularly in the numbers we need, so that educators represent the diversity of the learners in their schools. Furthermore, educating today—and especially per the vision laid out in this report—is a high-skilled, complex endeavor for which we need the brightest and most capable minds. Thus, recruiting and retaining top talent should be a national objective, supported with the necessary federal structures and resources, including accountability measures that will ensure significant improvement in reducing/eliminating longstanding acute teacher and leader shortages.

To achieve this goal, districts and schools will need to implement data-driven initiatives to recruit, prepare, support, and retain a highly skilled and diverse corps of teachers and leaders. However, this imperative has to begin with a financial investment and commitment at the state and federal levels to identify the best and brightest scholars for the profession (Teacher Corps, Pathways to Teaching, etc.). An aggressive recruitment effort will communicate the value and prestige of these positions.

Appropriate compensation packages must be a part of the aggressive recruitment effort. These compensation structures, salaries, and non-salary benefits must be comparable to those for professions that require similar complex skill sets, preparation, and work conditions. Non-salary benefits could include housing and living expenses, loan forgiveness, tax incentives, expanded leave options, and other incentives. Educators should also have a greater say and respected voice in determining the most critical components of their work, including standards, working conditions, and accountability measures. With these improvements, the best and brightest will consider education as a viable career option.

Intentional Actions to Diversify the Ranks

Equally important is a fierce commitment to increasing the preparation, recruitment, and retention of educators of color in classrooms and schools. The latest research confirms that it takes a diverse corps of educators to teach children and lead schools effectively. Employing qualified educators of color will improve the experience of ALL learners, especially learners of color, and will contribute significantly to closing achievement gaps. The federal government can and must provide resources and support for states and districts with established goals and action plans to ensure these goals are met. This work must be visible and intentional.

Removing Barriers

In order to meet this call to action, we must collaborate with the educator preparation program leaders and educator licensure agencies that are often gatekeepers of who and how many can become educators. Together, we must identify and dismantle barriers to effective recruiting, credentialing, hiring, and retention of talented and highly diverse staff. Successful strategies, programs, and processes that ensure a high-quality and highly inclusive workforce can be identified to facilitate the addition of highly talented individuals to our ranks in the classroom and school/district leadership.

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Effective “grow your own” programs that meet these objectives and standards should be studied, replicated, and resourced as needed. Through such successful programs, we can capture the promising talent and expertise of high schoolers who want to be educators, those already employed in the industry in non-certified positions, and career-transitioning professionals.

Mentoring and paid residency/internship programs, though proven a critical component to recruiting and retaining new teachers and leaders, are often under-resourced, of short duration, and inadequately structured. Successful programs should be replicated whenever possible and new programs structured to ensure success of participants and sustainability.

Next Steps

- Create a national task force to examine these issues and offer legislative and funding priorities that support creative solutions to the teacher, leader, and educator shortages in general and the teacher, leader, and educator of color shortages in particular. Similar task force structures at the state and district levels can accelerate this work in support of statewide and local district efforts.
- Establish national goals, with supporting structures and guidance, to address these shortage areas. Such goals should be established, with allocation of available resources, at the state and local levels.
- Establish, encourage, and promote alternative credentialing programs/efforts that remove barriers to securing employment in the field.
- Create a national database/clearinghouse of successful programs, districts, states, etc. that have addressed these concerns with success.
- Establish immediate funding opportunities for those who wish to pilot proven/successful programs.

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Appendix 9: “Portraits Of”

“Portraits” are the articulation of what the learner, educator, educational leader, and system will look and function like in our vision of holistic school redesign. Portraits—when framed as an aspirational and descriptive vision of outcomes for the system, the leader, the educator, and the learner or graduate—can create momentum for achieving education transformation. They do so by galvanizing educators and the community around a shared vision and a more comprehensive definition of success that goes well beyond the limitations of what any standardized test can reveal about a learner’s future readiness. They also serve as the foundation from which leaders can determine what must change in the system and what supports must be embedded in the system for all Portraits to be realized.

When the broader community—learners, teachers, families, local businesses, and community leaders—comes together to define the hopes, aspirations, and dreams for their young people, the resulting Portrait of a Learner becomes the shared vision and the school system’s north star.

The process of articulating the Portrait of a Learner requires deep, provocative conversations with the entire community. It allows stakeholders to wrestle with how the world is changing and the implications those changes have on the school system. The process begs us to ask: How do we best equip ALL learners for tomorrow’s workforce? How do we best prepare them to be empathetic, adaptive, and lifelong learners and productive contributors to their communities and the nation? How do we cultivate learner agency and pathways while also investing in our learners’ overall well-being?

Because the Portrait of a Learner articulates a community’s shared aspirations for its young people, it serves as the touchstone for the other Portraits. With the Portrait of a Learner as an anchor, educators can intentionally design and align the system around delivering an education that empowers learners with the self-awareness and agency to be empathetic human beings, equipped as lifelong learners, creators, innovators, and contributors.

The Portrait of a Learner is leveraged to articulate the following Portraits:

- *Portrait of an Educator:* Creating the Portrait of an Educator allows educators, learners, parents, and other stakeholders to collectively imagine what teaching will look like when educators are functioning as designers, engineers, curators, and facilitators of deeper learning. From there, leaders can identify the professional development and supports educators will need to thrive in their new roles.
- *Portrait of an Educational Leader:* In realizing our vision of schools, leaders must function as galvanizing change agents. This will demand that they apply systems and design thinking and change management skills—new skills for many. In building the Portrait of an Educational Leader, stakeholders can grasp the new capabilities leaders must have and the correlating supports they will need in order to successfully lead systemic school redesign.
- *Portrait of a System:* As the vision and outcomes of educational systems change, so too must the roles of everyone in the system and the supports they are provided in order to meet evolving

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expectations. This is the responsibility of the system and the reason for the Portrait of a System. It drives the intentional redesign and alignment of all aspects of the broader education ecosystem in order to realize the Portrait of a Learner for ALL learners. It is grounded in an understanding of systems, systems interdependency, and human-centric design; that is, the interplay between human beings and structures/processes. The Portrait of a System should be designed to ensure Whole Learner supports and whole-community structures are leveraged to promote learner success.

Portrait Design Process

The Portrait design process can be a powerful tool for creating collective and local commitment toward a new vision for education. The design process is a function of design teams, with stakeholders appropriate for the Portrait in question. However, each design team should include a broad array of community stakeholders, making certain that the voices that shape the design represent the broader demographics of the entire school community. There should be an intentional effort to include voices that have often been marginalized. Finally, one of the most important stakeholder groups to include in this process is learners—the primary consumers of the educational system. We encourage school system leaders to consider ways to have learners play a significant role in this design work.

As noted, the Portrait of a Learner is the first Portrait completed in this work, as it is used as a foundation for all other design work. To establish collective understanding, ownership, and agreement about why change is needed, the design process for the Portrait of a Learner must begin with an in-depth study of the societal, cultural, technological, and environmental changes occurring across the globe, as well as projected future changes. These forces of rapid change must be the lens through which the design team considers the social, emotional, and cognitive skills most critical for learners to be able to thrive in their futures. This, in turn, informs the articulation of the Portrait of a Learner.

The design of the other Portraits should begin with a review of the Portrait of a Learner and then consideration of how the Portrait in question must align around the Portrait of a Learner to realize its outcomes. It is recommended that local school boards formally adopt their Portrait of a Learner to signal commitment to the systemic changes that will emerge from it.

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ⁱ Whole Learner: The term “Whole Learner” encapsulates the “Whole Child” approach to education, where the entire learning system is designed to meet core needs for safety, critical thinking and cognition skills, literacy and numeracy, physical health, and social and emotional well-being. The Learning 2025 Commission advocates for a Whole Learner focus embedded in system culture in order to emphasize an even more foundational concept: that leaders, educators, and practitioners in different disciplines—whether in schools or the larger community—must do whatever it takes for children to become lifelong learners capable of discovering, honing, and leveraging their strengths and navigating an always-evolving economic environment in order to lead mentally, emotionally, and physically healthy, fulfilled, self-sufficient, and productive lives.

ⁱⁱ Anti-marginalization: When the Commission speaks of anti-marginalization, we mean we must refuse any school system or aspect of it that has the effect of marginalizing even one child in any way. Instead, we must hold ourselves to the highest standard of intentionally designed systems that are rigorously and routinely vetted for and eradicated of bias and therefore capable of nimbly meeting ALL children’s Whole Learner needs.

ⁱⁱⁱ Equity: Historically, educational equity has meant that every learner has “access to the educational resources and rigor they need at the right moment in their education across race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, sexual orientation, family background, and/or family income” (from [“States Leading for Equity: Promising Practices Advancing the Equity Commitments,”](#) completed in partnership with America’s Promise Alliance, the Aspen Institute, and the Council of Chief State School Officers, 2018). We as Learning 2025 Commissioners assert that in order to enable education that is truly responsive to racism, racial/ethnic injustice, or discrimination of any kind, the definition of educational equity must expand to include: 1) the revision of practices and processes to root out systemic disproportionalities and replace them with trackable plans that promote and protect equitable access to the highest possible levels of learning and support services for ALL learners; and 2) equitable representation of ALL learners’ cultures and backgrounds in the school’s staff, curriculum, learning opportunities, and decision-making processes.

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