THE PUBLIC PUBLIC EDUCATION PROMISE



FOREWORD

By David R. Schuler, Ph.D. Executive Director, AASA

I was raised in a small town in rural Wisconsin. My father was a veteran of the Korean Conflict (you can call it what you want, but it seemed like a war to me) before returning to work for the local energy company, and my mother taught high school English until she retired. My dad served on our local school board and served our community as a representative on the Parks and Recreation Commission and on the Police and Fire Commission for decades. I was so proud of my parents' public service to our local community. The essential role of public service—for country, for community, and for our nation's youngest minds—underpinned my upbringing and shaped my values system.

When I graduated high school and thought about how I might best serve our country, the answer came quickly. What's more important than providing young people with an education that enables them to dream, hope, and plan for their own bright futures? Whether that's serving in the military, taking over the family farm or going to college, the point is that they have options and that they are prepared, empowered, trusted, and ready to make those important decisions.

Prioritizing access to high-quality public education must remain a core bi-partisan American value. Public schools are often the economic engines of entire communities, the largest employers, and the social glue ensuring the community remains connected to the things that matter, like who wins the game on Friday night!

Schools are not just for learning how to read, using technology, and solving math equations; they are where we make our first friends and experience the joys and frustrations of adolescence. They are also where young people are allowed to try new things and discover more about who they are, who they want to be, and what they want to do with their lives.

Our duty as educators and school system leaders is to ensure that our students graduate not only as good students but as good citizens.



- ▶ What does that look like in practice?
- ▶ How do we prepare students with the skills for future careers and challenges that don't yet exist?
- ► How do we teach life skills—like financial literacy, critical thinking, and resilience—so our children can thrive in the real world?
- ls K-12 still the appropriate age range, given what we know now about early childhood development and cognitive development?
- ▶ Who do schools need to partner with—and how—to ensure students, businesses, and community-based organizations benefit from learning opportunities provided by working together?
- ▶ What do teachers need (and when) to be prepared to succeed and support students to the best of their ability?
- ▶ What multi-measure assessments are we tracking so that students are set for good-paying jobs and bright futures, whether that's by entering the workforce upon graduation or through a two-year, four-year, military, entrepreneurship, or other post-secondary education opportunity?

The Public Education Promise is our commitment to providing every child in every community with a highly effective education that prepares them for college, career, and real life in the real world. It is a recognition that preparing America's public school students to become active, contributing citizens goes beyond academic achievement and includes learning essential skills like critical thinking, curiosity, collaboration, problem-solving, and resilience.

For this to be achievable, the people serving on the frontlines of learning must be supported and empowered to lead. In America's highly decentralized public education system, we believe teachers, principals, counselors, coaches, and district leaders—the practitioners—are the on-the-ground experts best positioned to initiate and effect the changes necessary to improve learning experiences and outcomes for every student. However, we cannot expect learning experiences to be powerful and impactful if we add more and more to teachers' plates on a given day. We need to focus on the skills that are integral for a student to be successful and permit teachers to prioritize the skills and concepts students require to be successful.

The Public Education Promise Future–Ready Framework, developed by The Public Education Promise Advisory Committee, is deceptively simple. Each of the five principles is rooted in practice and designed to integrate well with how public schools currently operate. It represents a fundamental redesign of the current education system, rooted in principles and practices flexible enough to enable practitioners to lead in ways specific to their community context but sturdy enough to prepare all students to thrive in futures they cannot yet imagine. This work is intended to be done in partnership with employers, local businesses, philanthropy, faith and community-based organizations, and families. A strong public education foundation sets America apart from other democratic nations. It is the essence of democracy. At the end of the day, public education is about protecting both our children's futures and America's future.

INTRODUCTION

Across the country and across the political aisle, we largely all want the same things for America's children: The opportunity to receive an education that prepares them to contribute as productive members of society and find success in life on a path of their choosing.

What student doesn't want a school experience that teaches them the skills they need to support themselves and their families?

What teacher doesn't want to feel supported and empowered to work with parents, other educators, and community members to create the best possible learning environment for every single student?

What parent doesn't want to send their kid off each day to a place where they know they will be safe, cared for, and prepared with the life and work skills they need to thrive as independent adults (who eventually move out of the house!)?

And what American doesn't want to live in a country that ensures young adults graduate high school ready for college, career, and real life?

What if we could do all this while creating space for joy, belonging, curiosity, and a love of learning? At the end of the day, young people should be excited about going to school, teachers should feel empowered by their incredibly important service role, and parents should feel good about the education their children receive in America's public schools.



This is what is possible when we commit to fulfilling our public education promise for every child in America.

Strong public schools are essential to our country's success. An educated workforce powers our economy and is the foundation of our society. We entrust our nation's teachers, principals, support staff, local board of directors, and administrators with the care and education of nearly 50 million students annually. In doing so, we rely on public schools to develop America's children with the knowledge and skills they will need to succeed in the modern economy and as citizens.

Prioritizing public school success is common sense. Investing in the futures of America's K-12 students will determine the future of our communities, our civil society, our economy, and our democracy.

Recent opinion polling shows that while Americans express dissatisfaction with how they perceive public education trending nationally, parents tend to be satisfied with the education their child receives from their local public school. This disconnect points to a clear need to untangle the satisfaction parents—and students—receive from their lived experiences in public schools vs. the opportunity for school system leaders to adopt system-wide practices that meet the demands of today's workforce and acknowledge the growing body of research into how children learn and develop.

A desire for public education excellence is one of the few subjects that every American should agree on. Every parent wants a good life for their children in which they can achieve the American Dream and lead a fulfilling and meaningful life. Every employer in America wants trained, competent, and confident workers. Every community in America wants engaged, active, and informed citizens.



So how do we prepare America's children to achieve these shared goals?

America's standing as a global power will rely upon producing future-driven school leaders, future-ready graduates, future-ready entrepreneurs, and future-ready citizens to ensure America remains the greatest global economy the world has ever seen. This will require a return to a focus on the New Basics: adaptability, curiosity, analytical thinking, flexibility, critical thinking, collaboration, time management and problem solving, among others.

The World Economic Forum's "Future of Jobs Report 2025" states that:

"On average, workers can expect that two-fifths (39%) of their existing skill sets will be transformed or become outdated over the 2025-2030 period. Analytical thinking remains the most sought-after core skill among employers, with seven out of 10 companies considering it as essential in 2025. This is followed by resilience, flexibility and agility, along with leadership and social influence.

Al and big data top the list of fastest-growing skills, followed closely by networks and cybersecurity as well as technology literacy. Complementing these technology-related skills, **creative thinking**, **resilience**, **flexibility and agility**, **along with curiosity and lifelong learning**, are also expected to continue to rise in importance over the 2025-2030 period."

The comparative advantage to society of a strong public school education is undeniable. In serving every child in every community, each school draws from and demonstrates the unique strengths and character of regional, rural, urban, and suburban America. From significant advantages in workforce readiness by equipping students with practical skills, real-world problem-solving abilities, and direct career pathways to widespread access to career and technical education programs, dual enrollment, and industry certifications, public schools prepare students for a range of post-graduation opportunities, from college to apprenticeships and skilled trades. As the economic engines of many communities, their strong partnerships with local businesses provide hands-on learning experiences that align with workforce needs.



Future-ready schools across the country are already embracing these skills of the future by redesigning practices that prioritize student success with a more expansive view of what success looks like—whether that's joining the clergy, the military, serving in an apprenticeship before entering the workforce or embarking on a two-year or four-year degree/certification program. Beyond technical and financial literacy, we know from practice and research that it is possible—as well as our responsibility—to teach essential skills like resilience, critical thinking, and creative thinking. Our children deserve to learn the real-life skills they can apply in the real world, and our job in America's public schools is to scale that work so every child in every community receives a highly efficient and adaptive public education.

Our country's strength lies in its vast diversity of industry, people, and communities, and continued success relies on our schools recognizing that success looks different for every child in every community. We must rethink how we measure and assess a more expansive definition of success so that:

- Every student in America is prepared for real life in the real world.
- ▶ Every student in America is prepared to contribute to society as an active and contributing citizen, armed with the critical thinking and problem-solving skills necessary to navigate life as well as work.
- ▶ Every teacher in America is supported in focusing on providing practical, fact-based, engaging, and meaningful learning opportunities to every child who enters their classroom.
- ▶ Every student, parent, and teacher feels respected, heard, engaged, and genuinely invested in the success of each child's individual K-12 experience and education.
- ▶ Every partner in the community—from business leaders to clergy and directors of after-school programs—recognizes the importance of a strong local public school system to the success of their economy, social fabric, and future growth and prosperity. Every public school supports, facilitates, and integrates the unique learning experiences available to students in their communities.

Intentionally creating a learning environment that ensures these principles are the norm for every child, not just some, requires reimagining the key student performance indicators we use to measure public education. This way, our children will be ready to thrive as people, employees, and citizens upon graduating from school.

It requires leveraging the fact that public schools are an incredibly important part of a larger infrastructure including parents, institutions, organizations, and communities that fundamentally shape young people's learning and community success.

It requires a practice-first mindset that empowers teachers, students, and parents to co-design, innovate, iterate, and collaborate on the best education practices to graduate independent, happy, and successful future-ready students.

If every student graduates high school with confidence in their skills and strengths—and ready to work, serve, and contribute meaningfully to their community and country—then we will have fulfilled America's Public School Promise.

THE IMPERATIVE TO TRANSFORM PUBLIC EDUCATION

In 2021, AASA, The School Superintendents Association, established the Learning 2025 Commission, a coalition of thought leaders in education, business, community, and philanthropy. The Commission's charge was to develop recommendations for transforming public education in America to be more student-centered and future-driven. The recommendations that the Commission advanced were for nothing less than a "holistic redesign of our schools," premised on the beliefs that:

- Systemic redesign must happen within an intentional, relationships-based culture that is whole learner-focused, in which no learners are marginalized, and schools are future-driven.
- Learning must entirely reorient around the learner to support their social, emotional, and cognitive growth.
- School, association, state, and federal education leaders must collectively unlock resources that tap into learning accelerators, connect schools with community-based supports and services, ensure high-quality early learning for all children, and diversify the educator pipeline.

These recommendations were not merely theoretical; they have become the foundations of efforts nationwide to redesign and rebuild the public education system America needs. More than 135 districts across 20 states joined AASA's Learning 2025 network and committed to implementing the Commission's recommendations.

Learning Beyond 2025

Looking beyond 2025, AASA convened an advisory committee of key future-driven stakeholders—again, a diverse coalition representing education, business, community, and philanthropy—to shape the next phase in its efforts to strengthen public education practice so it can fulfill the American promise.

The Public Education Promise Future–Ready Framework calls for the renewal of America's Public School Promise. The descriptions of what American public education can and should be are built on the foundational principles of Learning 2025 in ways that are responsive to the present context and oriented to the everchanging global economy.

This framework acknowledges the genuine constraints—political, cultural, and material—that public schools operate within and govern what is possible in terms of redesign and transformation. Accordingly, it is not prescriptive. Instead, the framework proposes an interlocking set of principles to guide decision–makers in public schools committed to graduating future–ready students who are prepared for success after high school.

FUTURE-READY FRAMEWORK FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

As public education leaders, we are committed to adopting highly efficient practices and programs that support and educate America's children. We will work in partnership with students, parents, and the community to ensure we measure what matters and provide our students and teachers with the skills and support they need to succeed.

We also recognize that reorienting, realigning, and restructuring does not happen instantly, nor is it the sole responsibility of schools and educators. Some public schools are better positioned to begin this work immediately, and some will face more significant challenges to transformation—whether related to resourcing, policy, or cultural constraints—that require more time and engagement.

PRINCIPLE 1

Prioritize Student-Centered Learning

PRINCIPLE 2

The New Basics: Real Skills for Real Life

PRINCIPLE 3

Attract, Hire, Retain, and Reward the Best People

PRINCIPLE 4

Build Highly Engaged Family, Community, and Business Partnerships

PRINCIPLE 5

Measure What Matters

PRINCIPLE 1:

Prioritize Student-Centered Learning

"In my experience, students come to life when schools combine academic excellence with a thoughtful, innovative approach to learning. Creating space for curiosity, voice, and growth shouldn't be extra—it should be essential as we create programs that help every learner thrive in today's world."

–Dr. David LawSuperintendent, Minnetonka Public Schools

Our children only get one chance at a K-12 education.

America's public schools are entrusted with a profound responsibility: nurturing the unique potential of every young person. Recognizing our students' reliance on this period of time to prepare them for real life in the real world, we must ensure what is taught in school is fit-for-purpose and closely aligned with each student's individual needs and strengths.

This goes beyond meeting basic needs or chasing rigid outcomes. It's about engaging students with meaningful learning opportunities—inside and outside the classroom—that ignite joy, curiosity, and confidence. It's about ensuring our public schools are places where every child in every community knows they belong, are valued, and have a voice. It's about prioritizing the New Basics that teach life skills such as problem-solving, self-reliance, resilience, and critical thinking alongside reading and math. It's about expanding on these skills and interests by providing experiences in the community through afterschool and summer programs, internships, externships, and service projects. It's about recognizing that a K-12 public education opens the doors to a huge world of possibilities.

For all children, building resilience through persistence and trial and error is foundational for success in the real world. Ensuring that children are mentally fit and physically healthy is critical to developing a well-rounded child who leaves their K-12 education ready to excel at whatever they put their mind to.

Every child's road to mastery of a task, skill, or subject differs. Whether through direct instruction, voice and choice, project-based learning, or something else, teachers and staff should work with students to co-create meaningful learning experiences in the classroom, on the field, in the cafeteria, and on the bus. Giving students a voice so they can participate in their learning journey with increasing independence as they mature fosters a collaborative environment where students, teachers, parents, and communities shape public education experiences.

This requires a level of adaptability and a commitment to engaging young people in ongoing conversations about what they're learning, what they are passionate about, what they need to be successful, what they hope for the future, and what barriers exist to achieving those goals.



Questions to Guide Practice on Prioritizing Student-Centered Learning:

- What does the science of learning tell us about how students best develop the abilities they will need—life and professional skills—to succeed in the modern workplace?
- ▶ How do we prepare students to be good citizens?
- How do we ensure our students feel safe, supported, engaged, and have a true sense of belonging in our public schools?
- How do we ensure students have the opportunity to apply the skills they are learning both inside and outside the classroom, through engaging productively with their local community, whether through sports, after school activities, the arts, or service projects?
- How do local schools partner with communities to develop a shared vision or portrait of success for Students so they are prepared for life beyond school?

- ► How do teachers, parents, staff, and community members work together to ensure students build on their skills through experience, practice, and increasing autonomy as they work toward mastery? What does that developmental road to mastery look like in practice and curriculum?
- How can modern technology support student learning to enhance their voice and autonomy?
- How does the typical school day format work for today's students, parents, and workforce readiness? Are there structural and system changes that need to be made to optimize learning?
- What does "student-centered learning" look like, ideally, to students, and how do we measure self-efficacy and ensure students can make their own decisions?

Additional Resources:

Corwin Visible Learning. Visible Learning Meta^x. https://www.visiblelearningmetax.com/influences

Pittman, K., and M. Irby. (2023). "Too Essential to Fail: Why Our Big Bet on Public Education Needs a Bold National Response." Education Reimagined.

PRINCIPLE 2:

The New Basics: Real Skills for Real Life

"We will never be able to teach students all the information they will need to know to be successful, therefore we must prepare them to be curious learners and creative problem solvers. When we make sure kids love learning we don't just prepare them for a test, we prepare them for their future."

—Richard Culatta
Chief Executive Officer, ISTE+ASCD

What is a "future-ready" student? One who is prepared upon graduation to take full advantage of any of the wide range of options available, including college, career, military, entrepreneurship, or some other form of service. A high-quality education results in students seeing all the possibilities before them, exploring those possibilities, setting goals, and making informed decisions based on their interests, skills, and aspirations.

America's continued dominance as a world and economic power depends on public education systems producing highly skilled, well-rounded students capable of adapting to new technology and new ways of working. Alongside traditional subjects such as reading and math, students need to learn financial and digital literacy as part of the core curriculum. Additionally, there should be an emphasis on building social and workplace skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, time management, goal setting, and self-regulation.

To effectively prepare students for the future workforce and real life, we must utilize all we know about how individuals learn, grow, and adapt over time.

This growing body of research on the science of learning shows that teaching students self-regulation, empathy, and teamwork is critical for overall well-being and success. These skills are essential for building positive relationships and collaborating with others in the workplace and play a significant role in managing stress, adapting to change, and navigating complex social situations. By understanding how students best learn and manage themselves, educators can tailor their teaching approaches to meet the needs of students better and equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge for success in the future at work, at home, and in the community.

Part of this work is teaching kids good, healthy habits that are conducive to learning. The emphasis on routine, play, and process was more commonplace before No Child Left Behind, which led to a focus on increasing the volume of content that ended up displacing teaching kids not just what to learn but how to learn. We must return to a balance between the two, dependent on age and ability.



Questions to Guide Practice on Teaching the New Basics:

- According to the latest research, what curriculum is most conducive to learning at each stage of development?
- How do we ensure our youngest students are learning in the ways most appropriate for their developing minds?
- ▶ How do we make sure teachers are not too loaded-down with content so they have room to teach life skills and students have time for play and exploration - what strategies can we use to provide instruction on critical thinking, time management, self-regulation, empathy and teamwork?

- How do we measure the New Basics to better understand student potential in ways that go beyond test scores?
- How do we best balance traditional core curricula with the New Basics, such as digital and financial literacy?
- What are employers telling us are the most valuable skills for students in the modern economy?
- What community partners and experiences should schools facilitate and prioritize so students receive the best opportunities to build upon their skills outside the classroom?

Additional Resources:

Lee, C. D., Lerner, R. M., Gadsden, V. L., & Osher, D. (2023). The Science of Learning and Development: A View of the Issues. Review of Research in Education.

Batelle for Kids. (2024). The Future of the Portrait of a Graduate.



Attract, Hire, Retain, and Reward the Best People

"The heart of every successful school system is its people. In my experience, when educators are empowered with meaningful professional growth, trusted to lead, and recognized for their impact, they rise to meet the highest expectations. Attracting and retaining great talent requires more than incentives—it demands a culture of collaboration, innovation, and shared purpose."

-Dr. Suzanne Lacey
Superintendent, Talladega County Schools

Almost every person can recall a teacher, coach, or counselor who made a positive and lasting impact on their life. Maybe that person offered stability and support during a difficult time or helped transform their lives with encouragement and guidance.

Talented, motivated, and highly effective educators are essential to student success. Investing in their growth, success, and support is one of the best investments every citizen can make in protecting America's future.

That's why it's critical that educators—who have the most influence on and spend the most time with, our nation's young people outside of their immediate family and friends—feel valued, motivated, and supported in their vital public service role. It's up to school system leaders—working with higher education, community leaders, and government—to lead on how American public schools best attract, retain, train, and reward the people who are among the most prominent role models and coaches in any young person's life.

How can we design an educational environment that ensures teachers are skilled in meeting students where they are, provides robust opportunities for their professional learning, and genuinely values their work in preparing students to thrive after high school graduation? To develop a deep bench of highly skilled and highly motivated educators in the talent pipeline, we must re-examine the current staffing models and teaching environments that no longer work for the community or the school. This requires looking at the core drivers of this shortage and what we can do to attract, retain, and reward the people who are preparing America's children for their futures.

Questions to Guide Practice on Strengthening the Educator Pipeline:

- What barriers currently exist to attracting, retaining, and rewarding the most talented teachers, principals, administrators, and staff?
- What alternatives to traditional staffing models—such as multi-classroom leadership, team teaching, personalized technology, flexible staffing, rotating specialists, and remote instruction—might work in my community?
- What factors—economic, local, national, cultural—drive teacher shortages?

- Are there ways—such as micro-credentialing and alternative certifications—to attract more talented individuals from sectors other than education for these critical roles?
- What does a diversified model look like for rewarding and retaining employees and how can we utilize public and private funding to close funding gaps?
- What benefit packages and other factors, such as coaching and mentoring, can we provide to build a positive, empowering, and meaningful education environment that educators will want to stay fully engaged with for a long time?

Additional Resources:

Chiefs for Change. (2024). "Strengthening the Pipeline: Landscape Analysis Supporting and Elevating the Teaching Profession."

Shuls, J. V., & Flores, J. M. (2020). Improving teacher retention through support and development. Journal of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, 4(1), n1.



PRINCIPLE 4:

Build Highly Engaged Family, Community, and Business Partnerships

"I've seen firsthand that public education changes lives and strengthens communities. Our schools are one of the few places where every child—no matter who they are or where they come from—can discover their potential and prepare to lead with purpose. As superintendents, we carry the responsibility to lead with courage and innovation. This work is about building systems that truly see every student and help every one of them thrive. That's the promise of public education—and it's worth fighting for."

—Dr. Joe Gothard
Superintendent, Madison Metropolitan School District

Students succeed when families, schools, businesses, and philanthropic and community leaders work together as an engaged alliance. Providing every child with memorable learning experiences is a shared responsibility, and it is essential to ensure students excel, families feel heard, and communities actively benefit from a strong public school education. When children leave the school building, their opportunities to learn, grow, and experience new things should continue. Whether reading a book with a parent, practicing a new skill with an after-school program, participating in an internship or externship with a local business, or experimenting with a new technology, learning should not be confined to the classroom.

This will look different for every district, since every American community is unique in its current and future needs. A comparative advantage of public education is the inherent community-minded focus. Each school is inherently a product of, and a tribute to, its local community. School leaders, school board members, parents, business leaders, community leaders, and other community partners should collectively form a vision and a plan to prepare children for their best chance of success after high school.

When families are engaged as true partners, students are more likely to achieve higher academic success, attend school consistently, and develop essential life skills. Collaboration with families help foster trust, create open lines of communication, and establish a shared commitment to student success. Parents know their children better than anyone and bring unique insights into their strengths and needs, empowering teachers to make better-informed decisions that benefit the entire community. Engaged families are more prepared to support their children's learning at home, advocate for their needs, and connect schools to additional community resources.

When communities are active partners, they function as an expansion of the classroom, and students have the opportunity to road-test their newfound skills and build confidence through exposure to new experiences. This is essential to improving student achievement, as well as for strengthening the overall community that benefits from student, family, and school engagement. Schools that consistently and meaningfully involve local businesses, afterschool and summer programs, and community establishments create stronger, more connected communities. In turn, partnerships ultimately help districts navigate challenges, enhance student success, and build long-lasting support for their schools.



Questions to Guide Formation of Highly Engaged Family, Community, and Business Partnerships:

- ▶ How can schools and communities work together to ensure that learning experiences are not confined to the classroom but rather extend into the broader community, providing students with opportunities to apply their skills and knowledge in real-world settings?
- How can schools and communities work together to ensure that all students, regardless of their background or circumstances, have access to high-quality learning opportunities in a seamless and integrated learning ecosystem that supports the whole child?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of existing partnerships between the school and community organizations and businesses?

- ▶ How can we collaboratively develop and articulate a shared vision for student success that reflects the aspirations of families, schools, and community partners while ensuring that all stakeholders have a meaningful voice in the creation and implementation of these plans and strategies?
- How can community resources and partnerships be leveraged to create diverse and enriching learning opportunities that cater to the unique needs and interests of all students? How can community partnerships be sustainable and mutually beneficial?
- What proactive measures can be taken to build trust and establish open communication channels between families and schools, particularly for families who may feel marginalized or excluded? What are the existing barriers to this kind of engagement?
- How can schools connect families to additional community-based resources, such as healthcare, social services, and afterschool programs?

Additional Resources:

Pittman, K., and M. Irby. (2023). "Too Essential to Fail: Why Our Big Bet on Public Education Needs a Bold National Response." Education Reimagined.

Winthrop, R., A. Barton, M. Ershadi, and L. Ziegler. (2021). "Collaborating to transform and improve education systems: A playbook for family-school engagement." Center for Universal Education, Brookings Institution.



Measure What Matters

"If our goal is to graduate students who are prepared and inspired for their future then assessment should reflect the skills and mindsets our students need to thrive. When we measure what matters, we affirm that learning is more than a letter grade—it's a journey toward mastery, purpose, and lifelong learning. At Ephrata, and many other districts across the nation, we've seen how a focus beyond the tests, on real-world competencies, can help every learner become Life Ready."

–Dr. Brian TroopSuperintendent, Ephrata Area School District

Schools need to adopt multiple measures aligned with local and state priorities, as well as current and future workforce and industry needs, expectations, and realities. We know that future-ready students must be prepared with real-life skills for the real world. The New Basics discussed previously include emerging literacies—such as digital, financial, and Al—as well as a return to good habits and a focus on producing well-rounded, healthy, and happy students.

A defining feature of public education in America is the extent to which local priorities and local control shape how a system structures itself and its resources. Aligning priorities with system performance measurement is essential if measurement is to function as a basis for improving how the system serves learners.

Since the launch of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002, schools and communities have relied heavily and primarily on the use of high-stakes testing to determine student success and school district performance levels. High-stakes tests typically focus on specific academic subjects and basic skills that do not always align with the new, broader set of skills, knowledge, and attributes required for success in the evolving workforce and society. NAEP's "Nation's Report Card" relies on standardized testing, some of which has not evolved since the 1970s. To accurately assess student performance, future-driven school leaders must prioritize measuring what is truly relevant to the future of the workforce and America. By incorporating various assessment tools and methods, educators can better support students in developing the skills and competencies needed to thrive and succeed in the real world.

We know that success after high school looks different for every student and goes beyond test scores. Our ability to assess student success must fully measure all the ways that public education supports and develops students—their well-being; life skills; skills acquisition; exposure to the arts, sports, and recreation; productive interactions with peers and community; and civic development.

A highly successful K-12 education should produce more than just straight-A students—it should produce productive and engaged citizens who can advance America's future. Using a variety of relevant measures provides a more comprehensive picture of a student's abilities and readiness for work and life. School districts are encouraged to incorporate a combination of assessment tools and methods to guide their practice and ensure students can thrive and succeed in the rapidly changing landscape of the 21st century.

School districts that use multi-measure assessments look at various factors, such as academic performance, course enrollment, out-of-school experiences, attendance, and discipline. They can also include measures of essential life skills, such as critical thinking, collaboration, and communication. These data points, used to guide school district offerings, are more likely to indicate whether students are being prepared for the real world.

Questions to Guide Measuring What Matters:

- ▶ Do measures of student learning currently in use in the district reflect the full range of desired learning outcomes, including the New Basics?
- What is not being measured effectively that should be?
- What are the barriers to revising or expanding existing measures?
- What additional resources or support do schools and teachers need to implement any new measures or assessments the district may adopt?

- How can we improve communication with the learning community about the importance and value of using multiple measures and assessments to gauge student success?
- Are school performance metrics distinguished from student performance metrics and used accordingly to inform decision-making?
- Are state and national evaluations like NAEP still useful in today's context, and how can they be adapted and evolved to better reflect student achievement and potential?

Additional Resources:

KnowledgeWorks. (2021). "Measuring Forward: Emerging Trends in K-12 Assessment Innovation."

Erwin, B. and L. Bloomquist. (2024). "50-State Comparison: School Accountability Systems." Education Commission of the States.



Acknowledgments

At its heart, the Public Education Promise is about how America can deliver on what every child in every community deserves: an education that prepares them not just to pass tests, but to live meaningful, joyful, engaged, and successful lives as adults in the real world.

It's about ensuring schools are places of belonging and possibility—where curiosity is nurtured, resilience is built, and future–ready skills are developed. This is work that matters deeply to the future of our communities, our economy, and our country. America's standing in the world depends on how well we prepare this next generation—not only as students, but as citizens.

We are profoundly grateful to the distinguished education, business, philanthropic, and community leaders who contributed their energy, expertise, and time to the development of this Public Education Promise Future–Ready Framework. The Public Education Promise Advisory Committee exemplifies the spirit of partnership, innovation, and a shared commitment to the bright future of America's children that this work requires. Thank you for helping to shape a future–ready vision of public education grounded in practice, possibility, and purpose.

Public Education Promise Advisory Committee

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