

EDUCATION AGENDA 2017

**Top Priorities for State Leaders, the Next
Administration, and Congress**

JANUARY 2017

About New America

New America is committed to renewing American politics, prosperity, and purpose in the Digital Age. We generate big ideas, bridge the gap between technology and policy, and curate broad public conversation. We combine the best of a policy research institute, technology laboratory, public forum, media platform, and a venture capital fund for ideas. We are a distinctive community of thinkers, writers, researchers, technologists, and community activists who believe deeply in the possibility of American renewal.

Find out more at newamerica.org/our-story

About the Education Policy Program

New America's Education Policy program uses original research and policy analysis to solve the nation's critical education problems, serving as a trusted source of objective analysis and innovative ideas for policymakers, educators, and the public at large. We combine a steadfast concern for low-income and historically disadvantaged people with a belief that better information about education can vastly improve both the policies that govern educational institutions and the quality of learning itself. Our work encompasses the full range of educational opportunities, from early learning to primary and secondary education, college, and the workforce.

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Find out more at newamerica.org/education-policy

About EdCentral

EdCentral is the Education Policy program's blog, featuring insight and analysis of education policy and related issues in early learning, primary and secondary education, college, and the workforce.

edcentral.org

Contact Us

To learn more about these recommendations, please find contact information for our policy experts here: newamerica.org/education-policy/our-people/

Today's students are the next generation of American doers and thinkers. The most diverse population ever, they have the honor and the burden of keeping the United States on the forefront of innovation and social progress.

To ensure students can succeed, our country's publicly-funded education system—from early learning to public schools, and through higher education and workforce training—must be strengthened. So far, this system has failed too many of our country's young people—turning them off of learning before they exit elementary school, leading them to repeat grades or drop out, requiring them to engage in costly remediation, and more. Widespread disparities are festering between students from high-income and low-income families; racial justice is still wanting; and linguistic diversity is still seen as a challenge instead of an opportunity. To reform this system, New America's Education Policy program recommends that leaders in the new administration and members of Congress turn their attention to the following 10 actions. States especially should seize new opportunities to reform the system; **recommendations for state leaders are highlighted throughout.**

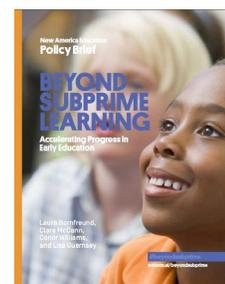
1) Expand access to quality early learning.

Science shows that learning experiences in children's early years sets them up for success in school and life. Yet in many parts of the country, families cannot take advantage of early learning programs because of waiting lists, prohibitive costs, or a lack of programs. To avoid paying for costly remediation later in students' schooling, we should prevent the gaps from appearing in the first place. Policy leaders should:

- **Support families with young children by:**
 - **improving the accessibility of child care and the quality of the teaching and learning in those facilities;** and
 - continuing the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting program for families who desire those services.
- Change the Head Start Act to allow for more innovation and coherence across local, state, and federal efforts to expand Head Start, high-quality pre-K, and other early learning opportunities.
- Reward states that **require school districts to offer full-day kindergarten (in which the day is equivalent to the number of hours in a first-grade day), and provide adequate funding to help districts make it available.**



From Crawling to Walking
[November 2015]



Beyond Subprime Learning
[July 2014]



From Crawling to Walking
[November 2015]



Flipping the Paradigm
[November 2015]



Mapping College-Ready Policies
[June 2015]



Beyond the Skills Gap
[October 2014]

2) Smooth transition points from pre-K through higher education and into the workforce.

Without seamless transitions, students and their families are at risk of losing ground and wasting time and resources trying to figure out new requirements, standards, and eligibility limits. Transition points are too often ignored in policy because they are challenging, since different systems typically employ different language, expectations, standards of professionalism, and so on. Yet to continue avoiding these intersections is to continue wasting resources and shortchanging students. To address these problems, policy leaders should:

- Encourage states and districts to **develop professional learning systems that link early childhood teachers (for ages 0–5) with teachers in the early grades (K–3).**
- Provide strong incentives for PreK–12 systems and higher education systems to **align academic expectations and policies, including assessment, credit requirements, and course placement policies.**
- Help states and districts **expand Early College High Schools and other dual-credit earning opportunities, particularly to historically underserved student populations, and help ensure that credits earned are transferable.**
- Promote state efforts to **collect and report measures of readiness from pre-K to college.**
- **Support the development of alternative pathways through education and into the labor market including apprenticeship, competency-based training, and other types of work-based learning.**

3) Transform the preparation and ongoing development of educators.

Ensuring all students receive high-quality instruction will require renewed focus on how prospective educators—teachers and principals—are recruited and prepared for their roles, whether they receive relevant and evidence-based professional development once they become educators, and whether they succeed in helping children learn and grow. Policy leaders should:

- Encourage states to **promote a focus on meaningful professional learning and growth throughout the educator pipeline, including preparation, entry into the profession, and in-service development by:**
 - coordinating the various pieces of the pipeline by setting a goal and then “backward-mapping” to determine what it takes to achieve it;
 - creating incentives to recognize and reward professional learning that is relevant, evidence-based, and meets pressing, real-world needs of teachers and students; and
 - enhancing incentives for educator preparation programs and school districts to adopt high-quality apprenticeship models for educators in their first year of service.
- **Promote educator preparation programs and in-service professional learning systems that prepare educators for the Digital Age by:**
 - integrating technologies and digital media into the teaching and assessment of specific subject matter (in contrast to the isolated teaching of tech skills without connection to content); and
 - focusing on media literacy, data literacy, and critical thinking.
- Encourage states to **reform principal preparation programs and other leadership credentialing programs to incorporate more content related to early childhood education.**



No Panacea [June 2016]



Bringing it all Together [May 2016]



Beyond Ratings [March 2016]



Envisioning a Digital Age Architecture [March 2014]



Time to Improve [March 2014]



The Case for Open Use Policies
[October 2016]



Integrating Technology in Early Literacy
[July 2016]



Starting from Scratch
[February 2016]

4) Align research and development to educational practice.

The federal government needs an R&D agenda that is designed and engineered to provide results that are more timely, less expensive, and more relevant to the improvement of educational practice. Policy leaders should:

- Support more rapid-cycle testing of ideas and innovations, and provide more flexibility in funding smaller, collaborative research projects.
- Create more sustained partnerships between researchers, practitioners, and the commercial sector.
- **Make publicly-funded educational materials (such as training guides and research articles) freely available through open use policies that allow users to view content, as well as download, copy, keep, analyze, and reuse it for any purpose.**
- Promote longitudinal research (and common datasets) that examine student outcomes over time and across grade spans (from preschool through postsecondary education).

5) Build an infrastructure for supporting dual language learners (DLLs).

Around one in five American students speaks a language other than English at home, and census projections estimate that this number will continue to rise in the coming decades. The nation will rely on this population of students to replace Baby Boomers in the workforce, support the retirement of a growing senior population, and reinvigorate our increasingly skills-based economy in an ever-more-global marketplace. These students need to have their linguistic and academic development incorporated in all stages of policy formation and implementation. Policy leaders should:

- Maintain the accountability regulations within the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to ensure strong federal protections of DLL civil rights.
- Increase federal funding of ESSA's Title III to match rapid growth in the DLL population.
- Provide competitive grant funding to states, or consortia of states, interested in developing assessment systems to measure language skills in DLL home languages.
- Use grants from the Office of English Language Acquisition to support the creation of alternate career pathways that help multilingual paraprofessionals and teacher assistants become fully licensed teachers.



Multilingual Paraprofessionals
(June 2016)



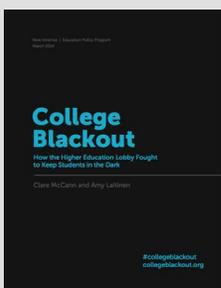
Skills for Success
(November 2014)



Chaos for Dual Language Learners
(September 2014)



Is Stitching State Data Systems the Solution to the College Blackout? [April 2016]



College Blackout [March 2014]



Many Missing Pieces [September 2010]

6) Improve access to and linkages between education and workforce data while protecting student privacy.

Despite a tremendous amount of available administrative data, policymakers, students, and families know shockingly little about how particular schools and programs are serving students. The federal government should improve inefficient data systems and overturn the ban in higher education that prevents linking existing federal higher education data sources for policy evaluation and research purposes. In PreK–12 systems, federal guidance and incentives could spur better data collection and data-sharing policies to ensure that educators and families can get a full picture of student needs and student progress over time. Policy leaders should take the following steps to improve data-driven decision-making while ensuring student privacy and data security remains a top priority:

- Ensure smarter use of data in PreK–12 schools by:
 - continuing programs supporting data infrastructure-building, such as the State Longitudinal Data Systems grants; and
 - providing guidance on how early childhood data systems, including those based on Head Start and other pre-K data, can be linked responsibly with public school data systems.
- **Improve data access and quality in higher education by:**
 - making data from the National Student Loan Data System more public and transparent;
 - overturning the ban on a student-unit record system so that existing data systems can speak with one another to answer critical questions about student and institutional outcomes;
 - **collecting and releasing additional, more specific institutional data on graduation rates, loans, and student living expenses; and**
 - **supporting the continued development of strategies to collect data on non-degree credentials, including certificates, industry and professional certifications, and occupational licenses.**

7) Hold “bad actors” in the higher education system accountable.

Millions of students have been defrauded by unscrupulous for-profit colleges. The federal government has taken important steps to help these students and should continue to do so. Policy leaders should:

- Continue to weed out the worst college companies and provide real relief to borrowers who have been defrauded.
- Overhaul the Education Department’s college gatekeeping standards to keep unscrupulous schools out of federal student aid programs to begin with.
- Hold institutions accountable based on their student loan repayment rates.

8) Simplify and target financial aid to the students who need it most.

Federal financial aid is one of the most important ways to provide access to higher education for low- and middle-income students. The system for distributing aid has become so complex that it is difficult to navigate for those who need the benefits most. Government must simplify existing programs in ways to help students better understand and access aid. Policy leaders should:

- Improve federal loans by:
 - switching to interest-free federal loans with total cost of loan displayed up front; and
 - eliminating Grad PLUS loans and adding an ability-to-repay metric to Parent PLUS loans.
- Improve the Pell Grant by:
 - allowing for year-round distribution of the grant;
 - creating a Pell Bonus program for institutions that enroll significant numbers of Pell students and have good student outcomes; and
 - allowing Pell grants to pay for assessments of work experience for college credit.
- Improve the Higher Education Tax Credits by:
 - making the American Opportunity Tax Credit fully refundable, so that it can better assist low-income families with higher education expenses; and
 - allowing all higher education tax benefits to cover non-tuition living expenses, so that students who attend low-cost institutions or receive substantial grant aid can still benefit from these programs.
- **Simplify and standardize financial aid award letters.**



More than Tuition
[May 2016]



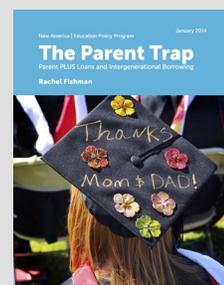
A New Look at Tuition Tax Benefits
[November 2015]



Myths & Misunderstandings
[January 2015]



Building an AOTC Movement
[May 2014]



The Parent Trap
[January 2014]



Strengthening the Partnership (April 2016)



Starting from Scratch (February 2016)

9) Repair the federal-state partnership in higher education.

The federal government provides hundreds of billions of dollars per year to states and colleges in the form of financial aid, guaranteed student loans, and tax preferences, yet requires virtually nothing in return. College graduation and learning results are lagging even as many states reduce their investment in higher learning with impunity, driving up tuition and forcing a growing number of students and families to take on burdensome debt. It is time to renegotiate the federal-state higher education partnership. The next version of the Higher Education Act should:

- Require colleges to enroll a minimum number of low-income students and charge all students no more than their official Expected Family Contribution, in exchange for federal funding from a new block grant program financed by repurposing poorly targeted and ineffective higher education tax credits.
- Require states and colleges to develop more robust systems of ensuring higher education excellence by publicly reporting information about education outcomes developed in collaboration with individual colleges based on their specific student populations and organizational missions.
- Reward states and colleges that are most effective in enrolling diverse student populations and helping them earn high-quality, affordable degrees.

10) Connect education and the labor market by moving beyond the “skills gap.”

Rebuilding the American middle class and reducing income inequality will require new models for delivering postsecondary education that recognize the need for more targeted skills development. Adult and nontraditional students, who make up the majority of the postsecondary student population, are not well supported by current education and training policies. Gaps in policy infrastructure make it too easy for institutions to provide low-quality career education programs while also making it too difficult for institutions to build the partnerships and programs that facilitate student transitions to jobs and careers. Policy leaders should:

- **Provide more support for adult and non-traditional learners by:**
 - protecting and expanding provisions in Title IV of the Higher Education Act (HEA) that support on-ramps, including the “Ability to Benefit” provision;
 - **expanding funding for, and access to, adult education and English-as-a-Second-Language programs, particularly for immigrants and school dropouts;**
 - restoring eligibility for Pell grants to incarcerated individuals who meet other eligibility requirements; and
 - fixing and expanding the federal work-study program in HEA to better target resources and promote career pathways for low-income students.
- **Support the development of alternative educational pathways to work by:**
 - building stronger alignment between the major federal education and training policies, including HEA, the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, ESSA, and the Fitzgerald Act, through shared definitions, combined or joint planning, and shared performance metrics;
 - supporting innovation in the design and delivery of postsecondary education and training, including upside-down degrees, competency-based education, skills accelerators, and digital credentialing;
 - **providing more structured, work-based learning opportunities to secondary and post-secondary students, including internships, job shadowing, co-ops, etc; and**
 - **strengthening career navigation and counseling services at both the secondary and postsecondary level through investments in counselor professional development and stronger alignment between schools and the public workforce system.**



Flipping the Paradigm
[November 2015]



Beyond the Skills Gap
[October 2014]

New America's State and Local Reports

California

Looking at policies for teachers and other professionals in child care, pre-K, transitional kindergarten, and early grades.



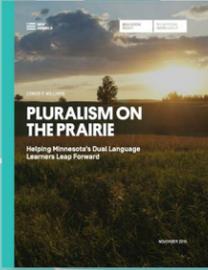
Portland, OR

Tracking policies that helped Portland's David Douglas School District meet state and federal expectations for DLLs.



Minnesota

Helping children achieve success in literacy and support the DLL student population.



Indiana

Looking at the evolution of early learning and the possibility of pre-K program expansion.



Harrisonburg, VA

Studying what a small city has done to become a state leader in DLL education.



New York

Looking at redesigned policies and practices to better support the education of the multilingual population.



Texas and California

Exploring how to better serve Hispanic students in higher education.



San Francisco

Studying San Francisco Unified School District's implementation of a pre-K to 3rd grade bridge.



Fresno, Oakland, and East San Jose, CA

Examining how three communities are reforming early childhood programs and teacher training.



San Antonio, TX

Supporting dual language learners' linguistic and academic development.



Tennessee, Delaware, Colorado, and Louisiana

Providing insights into using teacher evaluation systems for professional growth.



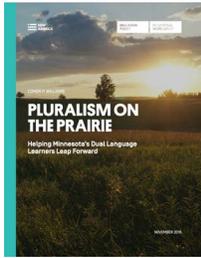
Washington, DC

Examining how school choice, gentrification, and accountability policies intersect with DLLs' needs.



Other Resources from New America's Education Policy Program

For more on **state-level** innovation and policy:



On Minnesota: Pluralism on the Prairie
[November 2016]



On New York: From Blueprint to Building
[November 2016]



On Indiana: Slowly but Surely
[October 2016]



Is Stitching State Data Systems the Solution to the College Blackout?
[April 2016]



How to Fix Remediation at Scale
[March 2016]



Beyond Ratings
[March 2016]



On Massachusetts: Starting Young
[November 2015]



On California: Not Golden Yet
[September 2015]



Building Strong Readers in Minnesota
[September 2015]



Community College Online
[February 2015]

For more on **community-level** innovation and policy:



On Harrisonburg, VA: A Critical Mass
[October 2016]



Stronger Teaching and Caregiving for California's Youngest
[March 2016]



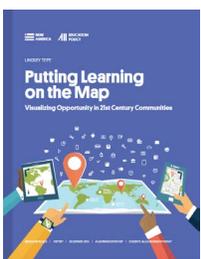
On San Antonio, TX: Boomtown Kids
[October 2015]



On Washington, DC: Stories from the Nation's Capital
[October 2015]



On Portland, OR: A Voice for All
[October 2015]



Putting Learning on the Map
[December 2014]



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