

# THE COMMUNITY AGENDA for AMERICA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS



OUR NATION faces alarming challenges in the task of educating all of our young people. In seeking solutions, we often find ourselves divided. Public schools are fundamental to our democratic values and must not be isolated from their communities. This disconnect does not serve our children well. When addressing public education, we must act collectively.

Schools now enroll the most diverse group of young people in our history. Their progress depends on the environment in which they live and learn. Too many districts report stagnant high school graduation rates and unacceptably low performance in math and science. Too many students are disengaged from learning. Too many young people are seen as problems rather than as individuals with assets, hopes, and dreams. As citizens, we are less involved with our schools and in our democracy. We must recognize that community issues—poverty, violence, family stability, and substance abuse—are school issues.

These issues are realities—not excuses. Without question, our schools need qualified teachers and strong principals. Like all public institutions, schools must be accountable for performance. But, just as surely, our young people and their families need more connections, more support, more opportunities, and more learning time to be successful. We can and we must do both. We must create effective schools that have robust relationships with families and other community institutions.

When we are willing to work together, we can improve education. The education reform and accountability debate, however, is missing a key ingredient. To achieve our common goals, we must engage in serious dialogue about how to harness the shared capacity of our schools and communities.

Therefore, we propose *The Community Agenda for America's Public Schools*.

## THE COMMUNITY AGENDA

*The Community Agenda* is built on four core beliefs:

- ▶ **Communities and schools are fundamentally and positively interconnected.** Engaged communities build strong schools; effective schools are essential to strong communities.
- ▶ **Schools can make a difference in the lives of all children.** The quality of schools matters. High academic standards, rigorous curricula, high-quality teachers, effective school leadership, aligned tests, accountability, and strong professional development are important factors for student success.
- ▶ **Children do better when their families do better.** We recognize this inextricable connection and actively support the strengthening and empowering of families.
- ▶ **The development of the whole child is a critical factor for student success.** Children grow into successful adulthood through high-quality instructional opportunities in school and out of school; by exploring their talents and interests through experiences that stretch their aspirations; and by receiving the social, emotional, and physical support they need to succeed.

At the heart of *The Community Agenda* is a *commitment to work together to create strong and purposeful partnerships* for change and results.

This idea—fully embraced—would make all Americans responsible and accountable for excellent schools and the positive development of all our young people. Every institution that influences positive outcomes for children and youth must be part of the agenda—schools, families, government, youth development organizations, health, mental health and family support agencies, higher education and faith-based institutions, community organizing and community development groups, unions, and business. Each brings assets and expertise; each must change how it does its work; and all must work together to close the opportunity gap.

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## THE RESULTS WE SEEK

We know that results matter. Experience and research tell us that when schools and community partners collaborate and align their resources toward common results, young people succeed. We seek these results for all students:

- ▶ Children enter school healthy and ready to learn.
- ▶ Students are engaged, motivated to learn, and involved in their communities.
- ▶ Students learn in positive, safe, and respectful environments before, during, and after school.
- ▶ Children and young adolescents are healthy—physically, socially, and emotionally.
- ▶ Families are actively involved in the education of their children and are committed to post-secondary opportunities for them.
- ▶ Children and youth live in self-sufficient and supportive families and communities.
- ▶ Young people succeed academically and graduate from high school ready for post-secondary education, careers, and success as family and community members.

When we achieve these results, young people will have the knowledge and sophisticated skills they need to contribute to the economy and the confidence, competences, and commitment to family and community necessary to sustain a just and effective democracy.

## STRATEGIES THAT WORK

The capacity and energy of a wide range of partners belongs at *The Community Agenda* table. Schools and their community partners must work together to support the core teaching, learning, and developmental purposes of education and to strengthen families and the community.

A growing number of schools and their communities are moving in this direction. They are reclaiming their schools as centers of community. These places are called *community schools* by many, but other names apply as well—community learning centers, full-service community schools, schools as hubs, Beacon schools, and schools with community-based integrated student services. These places have already begun to transform in the ways we've envisioned—changing their curriculum and instruction, scheduling, school layout, and especially the relationships and responsibilities among school staff, students, families, and community partners. They rely on multiple, inter-related strategies:

- ▶ **High expectations focused on high achievement encourage students to move forward.** Every adult in the community acts on the belief that all students can learn, succeed, and contribute to society.
- ▶ **A focus on real-world learning engages students.** Students apply their learning through service learning, civic and environmental education, and see the relevance of their coursework in their lives. Moreover, youth and the school itself help to solve problems in their own community.
- ▶ **Bridging school and community resources helps students broaden their skills and aspirations.** School and community resources are integrated to provide academic support, enrichment opportunities, mentoring relationships with caring adults, internship and job training opportunities, conflict resolution training and more. These opportunities encourage students to discover their unique assets and talents—academic, artistic, athletic, musical, leadership, and scientific.
- ▶ **Integrated student services improve students' chances for achievement.** Through a single point of contact in the school, community-based integrated services, which are responsive to individual needs, become available to those students requiring multiple, coordinated supports.
- ▶ **Building social and emotional competencies nurtures life skills.** Schools promote children's social and emotional learning to equip them with the personal and interpersonal skills they need.
- ▶ **Addressing barriers to learning supports student success.** Schools address physical and mental health issues affecting individual students and their families—as well as the entire school community—before major problems emerge.
- ▶ **Welcoming and engaging schools facilitate school-community-family relationships.** Schools are open to students, families, and community members—spanning the generations—for learning and recreation, before and after traditional school hours, into the evenings, on weekends, and during the summers. Families and residents participate in the life of the school and the school is a center for community dialogue and problem solving.

Effective implementation of these strategies requires local capacity to build and bring together community leadership, manage school and community resources, and engage everyone in the work of improving the lives of young Americans.



## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations will guide the signatories to *The Community Agenda* as we work to craft policies that support our goals.

### ► *Results-Focused Partnerships*

Through results-focused partnerships, the resources of all government and community institutions can be aligned and applied in a more coordinated and effective fashion. We propose that federal, state, and local government leaders provide concrete incentives to improve the coordination of existing funding streams and to support broad-based, local coalitions that can develop and sustain partnerships between schools, families, and communities.

### ► *Youth, Parent, School, and Community Involvement*

The people and places affected by public policy must have a voice in its implementation. We propose development of policies that enable partnerships between youth, parents, and community leaders as well as school leaders, including principals and teachers, in the planning and oversight of school-reform and community initiatives.

### ► *Community–School Coordination*

Effective coordination is essential at the school site. Research shows that students can and will achieve when resources for addressing students' academic and other needs are tailored, coordinated, and accessible. We recommend policies that provide for staff in every school who will coordinate results-focused partnerships, integrate school and community resources based on individual student needs, and engage parents as well as other community members.

### ► *A Broad-Based Accountability Framework*

A single, standardized test should not be the only basis for judging schools or students. We recommend an accountability model that includes multiple measures of academic achievement as well as measures of engagement; attendance; social, emotional, and ethical competencies; physical well being; and family and community involvement. Furthermore, government and community leaders must be accountable for creating conditions that enable young people and their families to thrive.

### ► *Public Access to Data*

Data collection must go beyond test scores if schools, families, and communities are to identify challenges and work together. All public agencies concerned with children, youth, and families should make disaggregated data available to the public on an array of indicators related to student learning and development as well as key family and community factors.

### ► *Professional Development and Capacity Building*

Policymakers must ensure that highly qualified persons are employed as teachers, principals, and other school personnel as well as those hired for positions in social work, youth development, health and mental health, and community development. They also must have the training and ability to work more effectively with families, communities, and each other.

### ► *Increased Investments*

Ensuring that disadvantaged students in under-resourced communities have access to an excellent and equitable education has been the cornerstone of national policy for more than 40 years. *The Community Agenda* calls for adequate—and additional—funding for essential services and opportunities in the following areas: early care and education, out-of-school-time enrichment, mentoring, preventive health, mental health, family services, family and community engagement, service learning, civic learning, and environmental learning.

## OUR CALL TO ACTION

Equal access to a high-quality education and to the supports and opportunities students need to succeed are fundamental to our democracy. Student success is critical for all Americans—young and old—and for our future as a nation.

The President and the Congress should designate a Commission to launch a national conversation on *The Community Agenda* and define specific legislative and programmatic recommendations for its implementation. This Commission should include key Cabinet secretaries, educators, and other national, state, and local leaders as well as practitioners concerned with youth, family, and community. The recommendations of the Commission should lead to a White House Summit on improving results for children, families, and communities.

As signatories, we embrace the challenge of *The Community Agenda for America's Public Schools* and pledge to implement its principles and recommendations through our own networks and initiatives. We urge our national, state, and local leaders to immediately adopt policies guided by the core beliefs and recommendations we have set forth. We call upon all those engaged in leading, managing, or supporting schools, families, and communities to make *The Community Agenda* their own.

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## LIST OF ORGANIZATIONAL ENDORSEMENTS

### Community Engagement/ Community Building

21st Century School Fund  
American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees  
Annenberg Institute for School Reform  
Asset-Based Community Development Institute  
Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools  
Center for Community Change  
Concordia, LLC Architecture and Planning  
Enterprise Community Partners  
Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options  
League of United Latin American Citizens  
Public Education Network  
Rural Schools and Community Trust  
United Neighborhood Centers of America  
United Way of America

### Education

American Association of School Administrators  
American Federation of Teachers  
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development  
American School Counselor Association  
Center for Social and Emotional Education  
Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning  
Consortium for Entrepreneurship Education  
National Association of Elementary School Principals  
National Association of Secondary School Principals  
National Association of State Directors of Special Education  
National Center for Learning and Citizenship  
National Commission on Teaching and America's Future  
National Education Association  
National PTA  
National Schools Boards Association  
National Service-Learning Partnership at the Academy for Educational Development  
National Staff Development Council  
Rockland Teachers' Center Institute  
School Social Work Association of America

### Family Engagement and Support

Center for Parent Leadership at the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence  
Child Welfare League of America  
National Center for Family Literacy  
National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education  
The Alliance for Children and Families

### Health and Mental Health

American Public Health Association  
American School Health Association  
National Alliance of Pupil Services Organizations

National Assembly on School-Based Health Care  
National Association of School Psychologists  
National Human Services Assembly  
School Mental Health Project/Center for Mental Health in Schools, UCLA  
Society of State Directors of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation

### Higher Education

Center for Community School Partnerships, School of Education, University of California, Davis  
Center for School Mental Health, University of Maryland School of Medicine  
John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities, Stanford University  
The Netter Center for Community Partnerships, University of Pennsylvania  
University Assisted Community Schools, University of Tennessee

### Local and State Organizations

Baltimore City Schools  
Baltimore Community School Connections  
Bay Area Partnership for Children and Youth  
Beatrice Caffrey Youth Service, Inc. (Chicago)  
Boys and Girls Club of Chicago  
Brighton Park Neighborhood Council  
Chicago Public Schools  
Chicago Youth Centers  
Cincinnati Public Schools  
Cincinnati Public Schools Community Learning Centers  
Colorado Foundation for Families and Children  
Community Agencies Corp of NJ  
Community Schools Collaboration (King County, WA)  
Community Service Council of Greater Tulsa  
Family Connection of Easton, Inc.  
Federation for Community Schools—Illinois  
Full-Service Schools Roundtable—Boston  
Jane Addams Hull House Association (Chicago)  
Lincoln Community Learning Centers  
Lincoln Public Schools (Nebraska)  
Local Investment Commission  
Metropolitan Family Services  
Montgomery County (Linkages to Learning)  
Multnomah County (Oregon)  
Multnomah County Department of County Human Services  
Nebraska Children and Families Foundation  
Ohio Department of Education  
Oregon Commission on Children and Families  
Philadelphia Education Fund  
Polk Bros. Foundation  
Rhode Island Afterschool Plus Alliance  
Rockland 21C Collaborative for Children and Youth (NY)  
San Mateo County Community Schools Initiative

Save Our Schools—New Orleans Louisiana School & Community Network—Lancaster, PA  
Schools and Community Organized to Promote Excellence  
Silicon Valley Community Foundation  
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center  
Strive, LLC (Ohio)  
Tellin' Stories  
The San Francisco Foundation  
Tulsa Area Community Schools Initiative  
Union Public Schools—Tulsa, OK  
United Way of the Greater Lehigh Valley, PA  
Urban Gateways: Center for Arts Education Youth Guidance (Chicago)

### Local Government

National League of Cities

### National Community School Networks

Children's Aid Society  
Communities in Schools  
National Community Education Association  
The School of the 21st Century, Yale University  
Youth Development Institute—Beacon Schools

### Policy, Training, and Advocacy

American Youth Policy Forum  
Child and Family Policy Center  
Educational Development Center  
EPIC Every Person Influences Children  
First Focus  
Foundations, Inc.  
Institute for Educational Leadership  
National Center on Time and Learning  
National Child Labor Committee  
Phelps-Stokes Fund  
The Campaign for Educational Equity at Teachers College, Columbia University  
The Finance Project  
The Progressive States Network

### Youth Development and Afterschool

Academy for Educational Development  
After School Alliance  
America's Promise Alliance  
Beatrice Caffrey Youth Service Inc.  
Big Brothers Big Sisters of America  
Camp Fire USA  
Developmental Studies Center  
Forum for Youth Investment  
National AfterSchool Association  
National Collaboration for Youth  
National Youth Leadership Council  
The After-School Corporation  
The Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development  
YMCA of the USA

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