

A Shared Vision for Education Reform

The anticipated reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) offers an opportunity for renewed discussion and vision on the future of public education. Parent, student, community member, and educator perspectives are crucial to understanding current challenges in education and to envisioning models that reflect a shared vision for the *purpose* of educating our students.

In California, a diverse alliance of parent, community, arts education, racial justice, educator, and other interested advocacy groups have maintained ongoing collaboration and communication in envisioning educational models that prepare every student for success in life. While each organization maintains distinct priorities for education reform, we have also reached clear consensus that existing federal structures have had the unintended effect of restricting innovation in teaching and learning and limiting pedagogical strategies that are critical to student success.

As each organization works to achieve specific priorities in education reform, we recognize our own efforts and those of our allies contribute to advancing a comprehensive vision and framework that is rooted in the desire to prepare every student for success in life.

We believe effective reform of federal, state, and local education structures must address five critical needs:

ARTS EDUCATION AND ARTS-INTEGRATED LEARNING: Arts and arts-integrated education foster deeper learning through teaching students to apply knowledge and make meaning of the material, rather than just memorizing and repeating data. A complete education uses the arts to engage children directly in their learning and build high-order skills that will serve them throughout their lives, including communication, creativity, innovation, self-discipline, persistence, problem solving, critical thought, confidence and self-esteem.

Arts learning also helps communities solve challenges confronting children, teachers and our schools. Arts learning presents opportunities for integrating culturally responsive teaching strategies which help teachers meet the learning needs and uncover the potential of every student. The arts also help bring parents and the community into the school and facilitate cross cultural understanding. Participation in the arts also increases student feelings of engagement and interest in school, with measurable improvements in student attendance and behavior.

BALANCED ASSESSMENTS THAT VALUE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT GROWTH AND COMPREHENSIVE EFFORTS TO BUILD QUALITY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS: Assessment systems must meet the primary goal of providing educators, students, parents and communities with the necessary information to evaluate and strengthen teaching and learning. This requires performance-based assessments in all content areas that allow individual students to demonstrate what they are learning and what they can do with that knowledge. Such assessments should be embedded in the curriculum and utilize multiple sources of evidence.

In addition to measuring individual student growth, assessment systems that evaluate the performance of schools, educators, and local education agencies must account for the overall quality of the learning environment provided for each student. This requires qualitative assessments that evaluate: the breadth and depth of learning opportunities made available to every student; efforts to facilitate parent and community engagement and empowerment; structures to ensure professional collaboration among educators and administrators to ensure continuity in each student's learning trajectory.

EQUITABLE FUNDING AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT MODELS THAT VALUE INNOVATION AND QUALITY: State and Federal systems intended to strengthen teaching and learning must support parents and educators in building stronger schools. In communities identified for additional support, state and federal oversight models must recognize existing efforts to strengthen teaching and learning and amplify those models in a manner that reinforces local capacity and agency to maintain effective schools. Additionally, interventions must focus on strengthening local programs that improve the overall quality of the learning environment provided for each student, rather than narrowing the curriculum and further restricting learning opportunities for children attending under-resourced schools.

PARENT, STUDENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: Efforts to create successful schools must include authentic, accessible opportunities for parents and communities to share their experiences and understanding with educators and collaborate toward a shared vision for learning that values and builds on the unique assets and knowledge that students bring from home.

EDUCATOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES: To sustain high-quality classroom performance, educators must be supported through professional learning communities with the necessary resources to utilize student assessment systems to evaluate and strengthen teaching and learning and be responsible for student growth. This must include time for collaboration among parents, community, teachers and administrators to ground performance-based assessment in an appreciation of children's unique individual and cultural assets as well as the college, career, and citizenship goals that make education relevant for each child.

