

# A ROADMAP TO A JUST REOPENING & JUST SCHOOLS

A COMMUNITY-CENTERED VISION  
FOR NEW YORK'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
POST COVID-19



PUBLIC POLICY AND  
EDUCATION FUND OF NEW YORK

*AaQgEe*  
Alliance for Quality Education

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**The Alliance for Quality Education** is a coalition mobilizing communities across the state to keep New York true to its promise of ensuring a high-quality public school education to all students regardless of zip code. Combining its legislative and policy expertise with grassroots organizing, AQE advances proven-to-work strategies that lead to student success and echoes a powerful public demand for a high-quality public school education for all of New York's students.

**The Public Policy Education Fund** was founded in 1986 to address critical social, economic, racial and environmental issues facing low and moderate income New York State residents. Our areas of work have included health care, education, after-school programs, voter participation, economic development and consumer issues. PPEF uses many tools in its work, including grassroots organizing, research and policy development, public education on a wide range of policy issues, and community outreach.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our communities have long suffered from the consequences of systemic racism. The chronic underfunding of our public schools and the perpetuation of the school-to-prison pipeline, the lack of investment in our communities, police brutality, and in the last few months, the COVID-19 pandemic all disproportionately affects Black, Brown, Indigenous, and low income families. While to us this is not news, the pandemic illuminated all the inequities that existed for decades. In response to the pandemic, Governor Cuomo announced a partnership with privatizing forces to re-imagine schools. The Alliance for Quality Education (AQE) and the Public Policy and Education Fund (PPEF) set out to create a *Roadmap to a Just Reopening and to Just Schools* to ensure that the voices of parents, young people, community members and educators are heard loud and clear.

There is no way to have just schools without *adequate and equitable funding*. What this means practically, and even before the pandemic, is that our public education system needs to be fully funded. Governor Cuomo for far too long—since he was elected in office in 2011—has underfunded schools that educate majority Black, Brown, and low income students and depend the most on state aid. He has attempted to ignore the constitutional obligation the state has to provide every student in New York State with “a sound basic education,” by trying to eliminate the Foundation Aid formula. And, he has balanced the state budget on the back of the students he has an obligation to educate. The mere fact that he, and our state leaders, are more concerned with the reopening of restaurants, bars and malls illustrate in no uncertain terms that profits matter more than children. Over the last three months the Governor has been adamantly against raising any revenue by increasing the income tax on the ultra rich even by one percentage point, which would yield enough revenue to stave off cuts to public schools. The choice he has made, with our legislative leaders standing idly by allowing him to make it, is to gut the safety net and the public education system. It is time now for our state to take a bold stand and put our children’s future above millionaires’ and billionaires’ profits.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A JUST REOPENING OF SCHOOLS IN SEPTEMBER

- Ensure the health and safety of our students and school and district personnel by having adequate cleaning supplies, face masks and shields, enough space to practice social distancing and enough personnel to keep in line with the Center for Disease Control and Department of Health group size recommendations (maximum 15 children and students).
- Ensure that the pre-K-12 education system is adequately resourced by fully funding Foundation Aid and full day pre-K. Implement revenue raising measures to stave off cuts that not only gut our education system but jeopardize the health and safety of our youngest New Yorkers.

- Apply to the U.S. Department of Education for a waiver of testing requirements, and suspend all testing so that school can focus on teaching and learning without the high stakes and the stigma that testing carries. Instead, accountability should focus on meeting the needs of all students, including the youngest in preschool and pre-K, and focus on the well-being and development of the whole child.
- Ensure that educators at all levels of education have the training they need to be able to teach remotely and address trauma. Students must have access to internet and technology, and families must have the resources they need to help children to learn in a remote learning environment. All teaching, remote, blended or in person, must be developmentally appropriate and address students' needs with special consideration of the needs of special education, English Language Learners and Multilingual Learners, immigrant, and at risk students.
- Require coordination between agencies, school districts, pre-K and child care providers to ensure that all measures implemented are in alignment with each other and promote the health, safety, and flourishing of children and their families.

## **HIGHLIGHTS OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR JUST SCHOOLS**

We want what works. Research from leading scientists in a number of fields is converging a great deal about how children develop, how they learn, and how their surroundings either nourish or limit the expression of their fullest potential. The basic idea of “whole child” education – that success means meeting the full array of students’ learning and developmental needs – is uncontroversial. The concept is widely accepted in education and other fields, backed by ample research, and supported by simple common sense. In fact, families and caregivers have been saying this for years.

Our roadmap to just schools is simple. It is based on:

- Positive **RELATIONSHIPS** that help students flourish;
- Safe and welcoming **ENVIRONMENT** enables schools to work best;
- **TEACHING** that is **DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE**,engaging and helps students learn to the maximum of their ability;
- **COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH** to **LEARNING SUPPORTS** for addressing the needs of the whole child: our schools must address students’ individual needs for academic, health, and social and emotional support;
- **STUDENT-CENTERED** approach: educators must intentionally support the development of critical skills, mindsets, and aspirations of students.

That these conditions are not typically present in our highest-need schools means that we need to rethink our educational system. Our Black and Brown communities are assets, the source of much of what is good in our schools, cities, states, and country. “They” are “us”; our future, our strength, depends on our collective success. Supporting schools to actually meet the needs of each and every child can deliver the transformative impact that we need and that the people are demanding in protests across the country. We need to use what we know to advance educational equity and improve outcomes for all children. We cannot go back to what was not working before. We must reimagine and build a system that serves each and every student.

The pandemic illuminated the inequities and the systemic and educational racism that existed in our education system for decades. Reopening schools in a safe, healthy and just manner should only be the beginning of our journey to just schools. Our public education system, starting from pre-K all the way to 12th grade, needs to be adequately resourced in order to meet the needs of students. Where it is safe, it is important that our students go back to school buildings where they can learn and allow their families to continue to make a living. Privatization forces have already shown their intentions in promoting school models that eliminate the public from our education system, especially as they prey on Black, Brown, low income and vulnerable communities. Our early education system must also be adequately funded, with enough coordination with the P-12 system to ensure continuity of care and learning. For this to happen, we need bold leadership that clearly shows that our children are our priority. The state must raise revenue to adequately and fully fund our education system. The time is now.

# A ROADMAP TO A JUST REOPENING & JUST SCHOOLS

## A COMMUNITY-CENTERED VISION FOR NEW YORK'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS POST COVID-19

### INTRODUCTION

#### WHY IS A ROADMAP TO A JUST REOPENING NECESSARY

Our communities are suffering; the health, finances, and well-being of low-income communities of color were already at risk before COVID-19 sickened our families, closed our schools and businesses, and further threatened our economic future. Black and Brown bodies have been suffering from police brutality and the school-to-prison pipeline before the videotaped killing of unarmed Black people on the street by police became such a regular occurrence that outrage brought thousands of people into the streets for sustained and ongoing protests even in the midst of a still-spreading health crisis. We are still in the streets protesting against state sanctioned violence and the systemic racism that has plagued our communities for too long. We want justice. We want action.

In response to the pandemic crisis, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, after shutting down schools for the rest of the year, compiled a *Reimagine Education Advisory Council* to help create a safe reopening of schools. When he announced the creation of the council, the Governor touted the support of the Gates Foundation to "reimagine schools" in New York State, something that raised enormous concern given Gates' past attempts to privatize public schools. While there are experts from different school districts and educators on the council, there are no parents from New York City and no young people. The process the advisory council is to follow has yet to be announced and guidance has yet to be released.

At the same time, the New York State Board of Regents has conducted four regional meetings across the state, each of which included approximately three hundred participants. The Alliance for Quality Education (AQE) was proud to participate in all four of those regional meetings, being one of a handful of parent representative groups. Even though we appreciate the effort put forth by the Regents and the New York State Education Department (NYSED) and the thoughtful and transparent process they followed, we still maintain that the voices of more parents and young people should be included.

For the reasons above, we underwent a process to center the voice of parents, community members, young people, early education and education professionals in the forefront of reopening and reimagining our schools. We held ten virtual visioning sessions across the state. Parents, community members, young people and educators were convened in Buffalo, Rochester, Mohawk Valley, Hudson Valley, Capital Region, Long Island, and New York City, where we had four sessions.

When we say “*Nothing about us without us*,” we mean the way forward has to put first the voices and experiences of our communities, the people most impacted by the vast inequities in our system. Our communities are ready to channel our anger and frustration into action and to work to improve opportunities for our children. The only way this works is through us.

Our basic demands are clear, reasonable, unsurprising, and based in the basic expectation of equity. Justice in our moment demands equity – racial equity. What we want to see for our schools upon re-entry – whether to a school building or online – and beyond, to and through the following school years, is what already exists for children of wealth and privilege. We want what has been kept from us for too long, and what exists in many high-wealth, majority-white suburban school districts: the conditions that the scientific community has already established as necessary to support the cognitive development of our children and their social and emotional well-being.

There is no way to have just schools without *adequate and equitable funding*.

What this means practically, and even before the pandemic, is that our public education system needs to be fully funded. Governor Cuomo for far too long—since he was elected in office in 2011—has underfunded schools that educate majority Black, Brown, and low income students and depend the most on state aid. He has attempted to ignore the constitutional obligation the state has to provide every student in New York State with “a sound basic education,” by trying to eliminate the Foundation Aid formula. And, he has balanced the state budget on the back of the students he has an obligation to educate. The mere fact that he, and our state leaders, are more concerned with the reopening of restaurants, bars and malls illustrate in no uncertain terms that profits matter more than children. Over the last three months the Governor has been adamantly against raising any revenue by increasing the income tax on the ultra rich even by one percentage point, which would yield enough revenue to stave off cuts to public schools. The choice he has made, with our legislative leaders standing idly by allowing him to make it, is to gut the safety net and the public education system. It is time now for our state to take a bold stand and put our children’s future above millionaires’ and billionaires’ profits.

## OUR PROCESS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

What follows are the findings and conclusions from a series of community conversations organized by AQE and the Public Policy and Education Fund (PPEF). These community conversations asked students, families, caregivers, educators, and community members about the impact of COVID-19 on their lives and what they want to see in the schools that serve their children.

This document incorporates their feedback into a roadmap of needed reforms for policies, systems, and practices, and makes clear demands of practitioners, legislators, policymakers, and the support of philanthropists. The basic conclusion is clear – particularly in this moment of crisis – our future demands an education system that meets the needs of the “whole child” and delivers on promises of equity.

***The Roadmap to a Just Reopening and to Just Schools is separated in two sections: the immediate short term recommendations for school reopening, and the vision of public schools based on justice and equity.***

### PART ONE

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A JUST SCHOOL REOPENING IN SEPTEMBER 2020

The recommendations below were submitted to the State Board of Regents Reopening Task Force. First and foremost for the upcoming school year, the Board of Regents must seek a waiver from federal testing requirements from the U.S. Department of Education (US ED) and suspend state testing for accountability and replace it with developmental and formative assessments. This would enable educators and students to address trauma, allow for healing, and address learning loss without the constraints and pressure of high stakes tests. Instead, accountability should focus on meeting the needs of all students, including the youngest in preschool and pre-K, and focus on the well-being and development of the whole child.

### BUDGET AND FINANCE

1. The State needs to fully fund public schools with adequate resources in order to enable them to meet students' needs. We urge the Board of Regents and NYSED to make a bold statement on the matter in their guidance to districts and in all public documents.

2. The state has to consider flexibility in grants and allowing the increased blending of funding streams so that districts are better able to serve the “whole child.” Given the fiscal and reporting flexibility provided by US ED to NYSED, New York should use available funds under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), as well as a share of any carry-over federal funds from the previous fiscal year, to support community schools, particularly in highly-impacted Black and Brown communities.
3. As the state and districts face budget cuts, ensure that any cuts are being made with equity in mind. Funds should be repurposed to support the whole child by reinforcing positive school climates and relationships and by investing in resource specialists, counselors, psychologists, social workers, and related staff. Resources should be diverted from programs that do not have a proven record of addressing students’ social, emotional and academic needs, such as School Resource Officers (SROs) and DARE.

## HEALTH AND SAFETY & SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

4. Every school building must have adequate cleaning personnel and supplies to ensure that during this pandemic everyone in the building is safe from unsanitary elements. Every school needs to have hygienic protocols in order to keep students and staff safe. These should be made public to parents, students and the school community at large.
5. Younger students, in preschool, pre-K or K-6, must be supplied with clear mask shields in order to facilitate non-verbal cues and learning interactions.
6. The health, safety, and well-being of the children and adults in schools is deeply interconnected. School districts must provide support for stress and trauma, including improving access to the people who have expertise in these areas, such as social workers and mental health services. Our students and teachers, especially during this time of increased distress, need access to trained social workers, grief counselors, and psychologists. All providers should be available either via tele-visits, home visits or in the school building.
  - a. The first month of school should be devoted to building connections and relationships centered on healing and dealing with trauma for all.
  - b. Comprehensive Sex Education must be taught at every school in order to address issues of consent and safe practice, especially since students will have more free time if they are not in school.
7. Prior to COVID-19, the student support team in each school was only available to students who were exhibiting behavior that necessitated that interaction. After COVID-19, this need will not only be increased by the students who already had those interactions, but it will need to be made more freely available to all students. In addition to the student support team professionals, students will need access to grief counselors to address loss of loved ones in the home, community and school. In addition, all school personnel, including bus drivers, lunch aids and custodians, need to receive trauma informed training to be prepared to address the needs of students.

8. Districts should be encouraged to keep children (in P-12) in cohorts with the same teachers as much as possible, to build on existing teacher and peer relationships and to limit exposure to larger groups and greater risk of exposure to Covid-19, as the American Association of Pediatrics recommends. This could be especially helpful for preschoolers who were impacted by the shutdown this spring, helping them return to familiar and consistent relationships and teachers identify progress, learning issues and address trauma and other needs.
9. Regardless of the current COVID-19 pandemic, the pandemic of racism has been ongoing for decades. As such, the state must urge, if not require all school districts, early education programs and higher education to implement anti-racism training for teachers, school staff and support personnel and school administrators. Everyone who interacts with children must be trained and steeped in how to undo educational and institutional racism. We can no longer wait.
10. Encourage strategies that maximize access to full-day pre-K. Districts should be expected to maintain existing full-day programs through a variety of strategies, including realignment of service delivery with community-based partner. NYSED should encourage school districts to explore expanded partnerships with Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) to meet this goal.
11. In their plans to reopen schools, including plans to stagger student attendance and/or to provide remote learning, school districts should prioritize serving students with disabilities, English Language Learners (ELLs), students with interrupted/inconsistent formal education (SIFE), homeless students and students in temporary housing, youth in foster care, and families with special medical needs.
  - a. Specifically with respect to early education, encourage school districts to make use of the space that may already exist in community, such as museums, libraries, recreation centers and parks in order to provide socially distant, developmentally appropriate instruction and create more space in public school buildings.
  - b. Allow for flexibility in meeting the needs of children who may not be able to attend in person, especially those children with health issues, and allow districts to add several distance learners to classes that are primarily meeting in person. These children could be added to the larger group via creative use of zoom, with online engagement and synchronous learning for the entire group on a regular basis.
12. All bus drivers and lunch aids must receive training in helping address students' needs. As students return to the school building, everyone must have the ability to recognize the signs of trauma, and at the very least, not add to them, but rather help heal.
13. The state must consider prioritizing transportation for students who have no alternative for the interim, particularly . Especially transportation for homeless students and students with unstable housing, and must do so in a safe way.
14. Every school has to have the appropriate personnel to address all students' needs, regardless of having face-to-face instruction or remote learning.

## SPECIAL EDUCATION

15. Regardless of format of instruction and support, the educational rights of students with disabilities must be preserved and enforced. Students with disabilities must be prioritized and offered the best possible instruction and kept safe. For instance, if the best format of instruction and support for a student with disabilities is in-person, then that must be accommodated with all the necessary precautions. There should be no compromise or attempt by the state to relax the requirements on school districts to meet students with disabilities individual educational plans and their needs in general.

## BILINGUAL EDUCATION/ MULTILINGUAL & BILINGUAL LEARNERS

16. Bilingual education and programs and services for ELLs and Multilingual Learners (MLLs) must continue. The academic supports that are necessary for students to maintain and improve academically must continue in the format that works best for students.
17. NYSED should mandate that as districts design their reopening plans and consider staggering students or doing partial remote learning, ELLs, SIFE students, students with disabilities, and students in temporary housing should be given priority for in-person instruction—while giving the option to families who may have medical issues or other preferences. And obviously ensuring the health of our students.
18. NYSED should mandate that Multilingual and ENL staff should not be laid off. If they are going to be repurposed, they should only be allowed to do that if they will actually serve ELLs or LEP families. The bilingual teacher/educator shortage was already one of the two worst in the country and in some places the ELL staff have been the most affected. For example, in Buffalo, some of the biggest cuts have been to the ELL department and many of the multilingual teaching aids have been laid off. Which is really unfortunate, since they were often the best suited to connect with families.<sup>1</sup>
19. There is also a real need for more guidance on the steps for assessments for newcomers in their ELL identification process. Big 5 districts are going to struggle to do all of this work when schools reopen, so they should have more flexibility to do some of these things remotely and efficiently. Generally, clear guidelines need to be made since we are hearing that districts are making it up as they go.

## DIGITAL EQUITY AND ACCESS

20. NYSED must provide the flexibility of using different funding streams and mandate that all school districts provide a 1-on-1 access to both devices (hardware) and the internet access that students need as the basis for remote learning.
  - a. Technical assistance must be available to all districts operating pre-K and K-12 programs.

- b. Additionally, families must receive training and support on how to access the school tools in order to successfully engage in learning.
  - c. Teachers must also receive the necessary training to be able to deliver instruction that is engaging, satisfying, successful and effective to students. A clear set of expectations about what online instruction should look like, must be set.
  - d. Younger students, preschool, pre-K and elementary school students, students with disabilities and ELLs/MLLs must be given priority in face-to-face instruction in a safe manner.
21. Consider greater alignment and interagency collaboration in order to make use of other technology to facilitate both social distancing and access to instruction. Use of libraries, higher education institutions, or community centers must be facilitated and encouraged.

## A ROADMAP TO A MORE JUST FUTURE FOR NEW YORK'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

We want what works. Research from leading scientists in a number of fields is converging a great deal about how children develop, how they learn, and how their surroundings either nourish or limit the expression of their fullest potential.<sup>2</sup> The basic idea of “whole child” education – that success means meeting the full array of students’ learning and developmental needs – is uncontroversial. The concept is widely accepted in education and other fields, backed by ample research, and supported by simple common sense. In fact, families and caregivers have been saying this for years.

What this means in “real life” is shocking only because it is so simple and straightforward.<sup>3</sup> We want:

- Positive **RELATIONSHIPS** that help students flourish;
- Safe and welcoming **ENVIRONMENT** enables schools to work best;
- **TEACHING** that is **DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE**, engaging and helps students learn to the maximum of their ability;
- **COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH** to **LEARNING SUPPORTS** or addressing the needs of the whole child: our schools must address students’ individual needs for academic, health, and social and emotional support;
- **STUDENT-CENTERED** approach: educators must intentionally support the development of critical skills, mindsets, and aspirations of students.

That these conditions are not typically present in our highest-need schools means that we need to rethink our educational system. Our Black and Brown communities are assets, the source of much of what is good in our schools, cities, states, and country. “They” are “us”; our future, our strength, depends on our collective success. Supporting schools to actually meet the needs of each and every child can deliver the transformative impact that we need and that the people are demanding in protests across the country. We need to use what we know to advance educational equity and improve outcomes for all children. We cannot go back to what was not working before. We must reimagine and build a system that serves each and every student.

Students and families are demanding justice and educational equity. The science backs up their demands and so we have organized the Roadmap according to the basic principles of the science of learning and development. A “whole child” approach means that each of the areas of focus articulated below must all be tended to, must all be developed.

## POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS THAT HELP STUDENTS FLOURISH

1. **In school reopening and on an ongoing basis, ensure a focus on strong connections and well-being.** There needs to be activities dedicated to two kinds of relationship-building: peer-to-peer/student-to-student relationships and educator-student relationships. This is important for both in-person and virtual learning. Students need consistent live interaction with their teachers and classmates to remain fully engaged in their education and to meet social-emotional developmental milestones. Children can work together; people appreciate and value one another and students have people they can depend on for support. Ensure there are positive, dependable, sustained adult-child relationships. Particularly for adolescents, peer-to-peer relationships are critically important.

### RESOURCES

[6 Reasons Why We Need Relationship-Centered Schools](#) <sup>4</sup>

[The Power of Relationships in Schools](#) <sup>5</sup>

[Social Media Toolkit: The Promise of Adolescence: Realizing Opportunity for All Youth](#) <sup>6</sup>

2. **Build teacher capacity to establish and nurture relationships with each child’s family.** The ability to create, nurture, and sustain relationships is a teachable skill and needs to be called out as an essential tool in the teacher toolbox. Teachers and school staff should receive training in relationship-building. As part of this training, teachers should meet one-on-one with each family to establish an individualized education plan for each and every student. Schools must support educators and caregivers with the training and resources they need to support children, including for learning sessions that will be synchronous and independent, in-person and across distances.

Particularly given the demands of distance learning, teachers need support and training to effectively support families with appropriate activities to enhance learning.

RESOURCES

[The Dual Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships](#) <sup>7</sup>

[Mindset Shifts and Parent Teacher Home Visits](#) <sup>8</sup>

3. **Encourage and support family engagement in learning.** Families should feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and concerns to school staff. In order to adequately support their children, families need access to their study materials and grades. Schools must ensure that they are providing all students and families with timely access to translation and interpretation services.

## A SAFE AND WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT ENABLES SCHOOLS TO WORK BEST

Schools work best when they are environments that foster a sense of belonging, safety, and inclusiveness, with meaningful partnerships with students, families, and caregivers.

1. **The Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education Framework that New York State created must be fully funded and implemented by all school districts.**

RESOURCES

[Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework](#) <sup>9</sup>

2. **Create a supportive and nurturing learning environment.** A welcoming and nurturing learning environment positively represents every student's culture and embraces them all. Students perform better academically when they feel comfortable and supported in their school environment. Practices that make schools "harder," like making students walk through a metal detector, should be replaced with practices that help create an environment of trust and compassion. Take special care to consider how students perceive and react to the impact of social distancing, any "screening" for social-emotional issues, and/or academic assessments. Students, no matter what their background, bring assets to learning and they must not be treated as liabilities or problems to be solved.

3. **Provide a learning and physical environment that represents and honors the cultural background of students.** This includes considering the name and/or mascot of the school, as well as resources and learning materials, and the actions of school staff. The physical condition of school facilities sends an implicit message to students about how they are valued; clear disparities in the quality of facilities between and among schools sends a similar message about the comparative value of the people in those buildings.
4. **Ensure that all staff understand and engage in culturally responsive practices.** Provide staff development, coaching, instruction and curriculum development opportunities to incorporate culturally responsive framework that the state has created<sup>10</sup>, and model these values in all decision making.

## RESOURCES

[97 Things White People can do for Racial Justice](#) <sup>11</sup>

[Strategies for White Educators Who Seek to Be Anti-Racist](#) <sup>12</sup>

5. **Recruit and retain Black and Brown teachers, school leaders, and educators.** Students and families need to see themselves in their schools. School and district administrators must dedicate resources and capacity to attracting, supporting, and retaining educators and staff of color, including those who live in the school community. When collaborating with community-based organizations (CBOs) to provide necessary staffing levels to support safe and distanced in-person learning environments, intentionally bring together school and community organization staff. CBO staff often reflect the racial and socioeconomic makeup of the community more closely than school staff. Fostering deep and sustained CBO staff involvement presents an opportunity to develop potential future teacher candidates of color.

## RESOURCES

[#COVID19PBL Educators Connecting Across the Distance and Exhibiting Anti-Racist Values](#) <sup>13</sup>

[There Aren't Enough Black Teachers in the US — and We Desperately Need to Change That](#) <sup>14</sup>

6. **Rethink school discipline and address disparities.** Black, Latinx, Indigenous students, and students with disabilities receive disproportionately high rates of discipline in schools. School staff must work with the students, families, and caregivers in these communities to examine the root causes of existing disparities and articulate plans to address those root causes and timely eliminate those disparities. Eliminate all forms of punitive behavior management strategies and exclusionary discipline practices such as detention, suspension and expulsion. Replace punitive practices with systems of support for stress and trauma, and with positive behavior interventions and rehabilitative and restorative justice.

Model School Code on Education and Dignity <sup>15</sup>

Bringing Restorative Practices to Your School <sup>16</sup>

Implementing Restorative Practices in the Classroom <sup>17</sup>

7. **Eliminate all police from schools and end all contracts between law enforcement and schools.** Research shows that having police on campus does not make schools safer and that providing training for school-based police officers does not mitigate the school-to-prison pipeline. Instead, funds should be repurposed to support the whole child by reinforcing positive school climates and relationships. Ideas include investing in resource specialists, counselors, psychologists, social workers, mentors, and related staff. Even further, schools should consider training members of the greater school community to serve in a variety of school safety and support roles.

Dismantling the School-to-Prison Pipeline: Tools for Change <sup>18</sup>

Unconditional Education Partnership <sup>19</sup>

8. **Increase meaningful participation by families in decision-making at the school and district level.** Taking a comprehensive approach to the participation of families in all educational planning and decision-making activities means addressing the cultural aspects of participation like inclusiveness, transparency, and cultural sensitivity; the administrative aspects like scheduling meetings when families can participate and ensuring families have needed internet and technology access; and accessibility concerns like adequate translation and interpretation supports.

## TEACHING THAT IS DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE, ENGAGING & HELPS STUDENTS LEARN TO THE MAXIMUM OF THEIR ABILITY

Teaching is impactful when structured and sequenced in thoughtful ways, with testing used to measure student progress and improve and modify practices.

1. The coordination of these efforts and balancing of these interests is particularly important in under-resourced schools serving low-income and communities of color. Given pre-existing educational disparities, this means it will be critical in these settings to double down on a developmental approach that consciously focuses on skill building and avoids remediation. Ensure that the Arts, Music and Physical Education are part of the daily curriculum at schools as they are subjects that promote healing and ensure high attendance.

2. **Support teachers in developing individualized learning plans for every student, in consultation with families and caregivers and students.** Schools and teachers need to consult with families and caregivers of children in elementary and middle school to co-develop personalized academic plans for all students that consider the strengths of the child as well as the concerns of the family member(s) or caregiver(s) that will be supporting the child at home. This applies as well to the caregivers of students in high school. The plans need to set clear and realistic expectations of what families can do to support their child's academic and social-emotional development. Outreach to families should prioritize students with special needs and those who are performing below grade level.
3. **End tracking and meritocracy systems.** Separating students by academic ability often has a racially discriminatory impact and perpetuates inequities in our education system. Outdated notions of ability and meritocracy should be re-examined and replaced with assessments and strategies that aim to help students progress in their learning, rather than ranking them.

## RESOURCES

[What is Competency-Based Learning?](#) <sup>20</sup>

4. **Organize learning plans around developmental and formative assessments.** Enable educators and students to address trauma, allow for healing, and focus on learning loss without the constraints and pressure of high stakes tests. Provide relevant training and support for teachers, including guidance on working in teams to develop and use assessments strategically. Provide relevant training for principals to support teacher professional learning communities in assessment and improvement activities.

## RESOURCES

[Why Should We Allow Students to Retake Assessments?](#) <sup>21</sup>

[Learning as We Go: Principles for Effective Assessment During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) <sup>22</sup>

## COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO LEARNING SUPPORTS

Our schools must have systems that are responsive when they address students' individual needs for academic, health, and social and emotional support.

1. **Ensure that the Community School strategy and model continues to receive the resources and support necessary to continue to be implemented and expanded in other buildings.** The strategy addresses the needs of the whole child and has been successful where done right.
  - a. **Encourage school districts to implement community schools and provide the resources and assistance to do so.**

- 2. Prioritize staffing decisions that provide the greatest support, teaching expertise, and high-quality resources for the students with greatest need.** Develop staffing plans that allow for maximum individualized and “in-person” support, including: adequate one-on-one time with teachers, “office hours” for students and families, support for student work in smaller groups, opportunities for students to make contact outside of “class” hours. Work with CBOs to increase staffing capacity.
- 3. Be responsive to students’ needs for technology access and adaptive materials. Guarantee that all students have access to the internet and assistive devices and software.** Our most vulnerable students often do not have reliable access to the internet and/or the devices they need to successfully participate in distance learning. To successfully engage in distance learning, students with disabilities need access to the assistive technology they would have in a physical classroom setting.

RESOURCES

Evidence-Based Guidance for How Schools can Respond to a National Mental Health Crisis in the Wake of COVID-19 <sup>23</sup>

- 4. Provide systems of support for stress and trauma, including improving access to the people who have expertise in these areas, such as social workers and mental health services.** Our students and teachers, especially during this time of increased distress, need access to trained social workers, grief counselors, and psychologists. All providers should be available either via tele-visits, home visits or in the school building.

RESOURCES

From Response to Reopening: State Efforts to Elevate Social and Emotional Learning During the Pandemic <sup>24</sup>

- 5. Ensure that teachers are equipped to play their role in supporting students’ social and emotional development** by providing training, coaching and ongoing support in related matters such as: the basic findings of the science of learning and development, the relationship between social and emotional and cognitive development; asset-based classroom management strategies; trauma-informed practices.

RESOURCES

Building Partnerships in Support of Where, When, & How Learning Happens <sup>25</sup>

6. **Ensure children’s basic needs are met, including through collaborations with allied organizations.** A student cannot focus on their studies if they are lacking basic necessities like food and shelter. Schools should ensure that students and their families are connected with the agencies and service providers that can meet their needs, including physical health care.
7. **Prioritize the academic, health, social and emotional needs of the most vulnerable students.** In their plans to reopen schools, including plans to stagger student attendance and/or to provide remote learning, school districts should prioritize serving students with disabilities, English Language Learners (ELLs), students with interrupted/ inconsistent formal education (SIFE), homeless students and students in temporary housing, youth in foster care, and families with special medical needs.

## RESOURCES

Resource Library: the Educating All Learners Alliance <sup>26</sup>

8. **Ensure that students with disabilities have their needs met according to civil rights laws.** These obligations remain in place even during the pandemic. Provide oversight and technical assistance to aid with compliance.
9. **Develop stronger systems for meeting students’ language access needs, including improved support for bilingual education programs and increased training for second-language identification and assessment.** Avoid laying off multilingual and English as a New Language (ENL) staff. In the event these staff positions are to be repurposed, they must be repurposed in a way that they will specifically serve ELLs and/or limited English-proficient (LEP) families.

## STUDENT-CENTERED APPROACH

Educators must intentionally support the development of critical skills, mindsets, and aspirations of students.

1. **Support needed changes to curriculum and instruction that are culturally responsive.** Require a curriculum that is historically accurate and written by authors of various racial backgrounds. Most students do not get comprehensive and accurate information about our country’s history. This leads to lack of understanding of why racial achievement and other gaps exist. Schools should be required to use historically accurate textbooks.

## RESOURCES

Zinn Education Project <sup>27</sup>

Supporting Students to Be Independent Learners: State and District Actions for the Pandemic Era <sup>28</sup>

2. **Support educators in making needed changes to curriculum and instruction so that they more effectively promote critical thinking, skill development and student agency in learning.** Improvements to curriculum and instruction should foster increased student agency, self-directed learning, and the building of “21st Century skills” like collaboration, communication, and creative problem-solving.

RESOURCES

Video: Youth Speak 2020: How we Feel <sup>29</sup>

Mindset Scholars Network <sup>30</sup>

Decades of Scientific Research Started a Growth Mindset Revolution <sup>31</sup>

8 Principles of Deeper Learning <sup>32</sup>

What is Competency-Based Learning? <sup>33</sup>

3. **Support needed changes to curriculum and instruction that support overall development.** The curriculum should lift up the histories and experiences of Black and Brown students through interactive classes and experiences like art, music, virtual museum tours, and physical education. Classes should help students to build life skills and include topics like: financial literacy, community gardening, civic engagement, STEM classes, sex education, meditation, and yoga.
4. **Provide better support for transition into college, career, and workforce.** Schools must do a better job of providing vulnerable students with the knowledge and resources necessary to take rigorous courses, and to more effectively make transitions to college, career, and the workforce.

## EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION & CHILDCARE PROVIDERS

Early childhood education, including pre-K has a large impact on a child’s prospects for future success. Without our early childhood educators, essential workers and other caregivers will not be able to return to work. It is integral that we support our early childhood educators for both our children and economy.

1. **Full day pre-K is most impactful for learning.** It minimizes the moving of children from place to place, which supports health and safety protocols and provides more support for children and their families. The state should discourage reverting to half-day pre-K, and only after districts demonstrate there are no community partners, with capacity, expertise and additional funding to continue full-day programs.

2. **Provide support and funding for full day pre-K programs, early childhood educators and childcare providers.** The money provided to the early childhood field thus far has not met their needs. Lower enrollment numbers and compliance cleaning and remodeling costs are putting this essential service at risk. Federal and state government must provide early childhood educators with increased daycare rates, additional stimulus funding, and easily accessible grants to stay in business and provide childcare to our communities.
3. **Ensure coordination and support between government agencies and early childhood educators.** Adapting to new COVID-19 regulations can be difficult. Government agencies, like the Department of Health and Department of Education, need to partner with early childhood educators to help them navigate the numerous regulations and help them not live in fear of violation. The agencies must also engage with early childhood educators, especially residential day care providers, to better understand how to make regulations more realistic and appropriate for their working conditions and to learn from the months of experience they have ensuring safety while remaining open.
4. **Coordinate regional efforts to get childcare providers supplies.** Due to high demand, cleaning and safety materials prices have increased and supplies are limited. There should be regional coordinated efforts to ensure that all early childcare providers have access to the supplies they need at cost.

## CONCLUSION

The pandemic illuminated the inequities and the systemic and educational racism that existed in our education system for decades. Reopening schools in a safe, healthy and just manner should only be the beginning of our journey to just schools. Our public education system, starting from pre-K all the way to 12th grade, needs to be adequately resourced in order to meet the needs of students. Our early education system must also be adequately funded, with enough coordination with the P-12 system to ensure continuity of care and learning. For this to happen, we need bold leadership that clearly shows that our children are our priority. The state must raise revenue to adequately and fully fund our education system. The time is now.

# A CALL TO ACTION FOR PHILANTHROPY

The way we finance and operate public schools is bound up in deeply-rooted racial and socioeconomic inequities. We know families with wealth, political connections, and ample resources prosper; a few, like the corporations rescued by the federal government during the Great Recession, are “too big to fail,” or “too important to risk.” The basic American lie is that all rise or fall as a consequence of their own effort. Many of us have strained for years to bear that lie; our current national circumstances have made it too burdensome a weight to carry any longer.

We offer, keeping in mind that much of the modern-day wealth enjoyed by philanthropy has a historical basis in chattel slavery and racial oppression, that the urgent question is not whether this wealth can be redeemed, but instead whether it will be spent to address long-standing structural and institutional inequities and disinvestment in the public sphere. Charitable funds have been, and will be, used to address discrete areas of intense need, to “patch holes” in the American educational quilt. But hole patching will only get us so far with a garment that is fundamentally threadbare.

Looming cuts to district and state budgets pose an almost existential threat to the districts and schools most heavily reliant on state aid. These are the places that cannot afford to raise their taxes to pay for better schools, that cannot rely on home equity as a financial lifeline, that are home to the majority of our Black and Brown and low-income communities. These communities, our communities, were not only vulnerable prior to the pandemic, they have been for years explicitly targeted by the systemic racism and structural inequities that are the fabric of the American education system.

Is there any reason to be surprised that political help for our communities has not been forthcoming? While the interests of the donor class have been well-served by their Congressional allies, federal aid for public schools has been limited in scope and even more limited in impact. This is where the role of philanthropy and related public-private partnerships comes into clearer focus.

Given the historical pattern of disinvestment in our schools, as well as the rapidly growing inequities in our public school system, an approach that prioritizes resource adequacy and resource equity is best positioned to serve the interests of our neediest students, meet the needs of our most undercompensated teachers, and save and improve our most underfunded schools. This approach to resource equity covers a number of factors that directly impact the student experience, such as teachers and teaching quality, curriculum, and family academic engagement, and also that indirectly impact students, including school funding, school leadership quality, and diverse and inclusive schools.

Given the largely racially and socioeconomically segregated student enrollments in our schools, the basic principles of the science of learning and development provide a way to target funds to advance racial equity within the broader context of resource equity. Funding practices and policies that advance those basic principles—relationships; context and environment; a developmental approach to teaching; a comprehensive approach to learning supports; student agency in learning—is the way to most sustainably support Black and Brown and low-income students, and to establish positive changes that are both transformational and sustainable.

Within this context, general operating principles for philanthropic investment should include:

- Updating traditional understandings of “evidence-based” research to include greater consideration of excellent models, particularly those driven by collaborative efforts with community organizations, that have existed for years in Black and Brown communities
- Supporting the work of Black-led organizations and organizations led by people of color and redesigning funding practices to help more communities of color take better advantage of philanthropic dollars; this might include providing more support for general operating funds (vs. program-specific) and reducing the application and reporting requirements that keep out many smaller organizations
- Ensuring that future investments around social and emotional well-being and the science of learning and development are not “normed” according to the behavior of white communities
- Prioritizing long-term investments versus short-term gains; supporting grantees for longer grantmaking cycles
- Operating with a strong ethos of collaboration and sharing power with organizations and the communities they serve

More specifically, to help advance the reimagining work articulated in this Roadmap, as well as other re-imagining work happening in Black and Brown communities across the country, areas for discrete investment include:

- Funding facilities and infrastructure maintenance and improvement, particularly in communities hardest-hit by the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Funding planning time for all educators, school staff, adults, and students around school reopening
- Funding professional learning opportunities on the science of learning that integrates “whole child” social and emotional and cognitive development.

# ENDNOTES

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- 25 The Aspen Institute, Building Partnerships in Support of Where, When, & How Learning Happens (2018).
- 26 This resource library includes guidance for educators, tools to help with technology and access, and practical examples from the field. The Alliance is a network of national education organizations that have come together to ensure equity for all learners, to help ensure the continuity of special education services during remote instruction, and to spotlight best practices for schools and educators.
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