

PARTNERSHIP
FOR THE
FUTURE of
LEARNING

POWERING A BREAKTHROUGH FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

TWO YEAR NETWORK POLICY AGENDA

JUNE 2025

About the Partnership

The Partnership for the Future of Learning protects, strengthens, and advances education equity and meaningful learning—and supports the policies and practices that get us there. Launched in 2015, the Partnership has grown into a robust and generative social impact network of education and social justice leaders who share a deep commitment to an equitable, high-quality public education system. The network includes organizers, advocates, policy analysts, communicators, researchers, students, caregivers and parents, educators, funders, and system and union leaders.

Acknowledgements

This Two Year Policy Agenda was developed through a participatory and iterative process of consultations with partners across the network from March through June 2025. Much gratitude to the many individuals who completed the network survey, attended workshopping sessions, reviewed drafts, and shared their work and insights to inform the analysis and priorities presented in this document to date. Thank you in advance to the Network Assembly attendees for their willingness to think deeply with us in action planning.





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Introduction

The Two Year Network Policy Agenda provides a roadmap for proactive, coordinated, and aligned actions to protect public schools and lays the groundwork for longer-term strengthening and rebuilding to realize the Network's vision of public education.

Our Vision for Public Education



Meaningful Learning, Strengthening Democracy

The central role of public education is to prepare children and youth for fulfilling lives — ready for further learning opportunities and a wide range of social and economic endeavors in a rapidly changing world. It supports students' development as people and equips them to engage with different viewpoints, build caring relationships, make informed decisions, and contribute thoughtfully to a free and democratic society in which we all thrive.

As the term "democracy" becomes increasingly politicized, it is important to **clearly define** what we mean by it. **Democracy**, in the context of public schools, means ensuring individuals have a voice and representation in decisions that impact their lives. At the school level, this translates to students having agency in making choices about what and how they learn, building collaborative relationships among and between administrators, educators, students, and families, and establishing inclusive decision-making processes. More broadly, it means the active participation and representation of students, families, and community members in shaping school priorities and practices, engaging with school boards, legislatures, and regulatory bodies.



The Public School Obligation

While all schools should share the purpose of supporting student development, public schools bear a distinct responsibility as taxpayer-funded institutions serving the public good. A truly public education system serves *all* children no matter their station in life, learning needs, background, or beliefs. To fulfill this mission, public school systems must be connected, responsive, and accountable to students, their families, and communities.



Serving All Children

High-quality public schools exist throughout the US. Our challenge is in moving from these individual successes to successful *systems* of high-quality public schools that serve all children well and equitably, prepare them for the future, and strengthen families, communities, and democracy. This transformation requires **design principles** for the creation of high quality, inclusive systems and **standards** for ensuring these systems fulfill their obligations as public institutions.

Essential Principles

Design Principles

The Network's [*Essential Principles for a High-Quality Inclusive School System*](#) offer guidance on creating supportive and effective learning environments to help communities, agencies, educators, and partners at the local, state, tribal, federal, and national levels plan and align the organization of curriculum, teaching, technology, funding and other resources in school systems.



Standards of Publicness

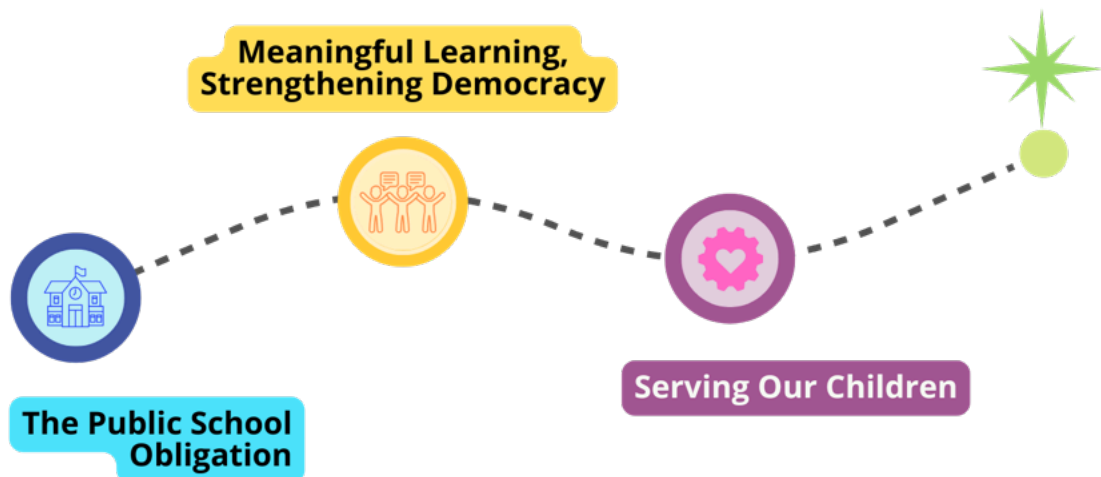
The Network's [*Framework for Strengthening Public Schools*](#) establishes 12 guiding standards to ensure that a public school system is fully and truly public. The framework is designed to support communities, educators, families, policymakers, and students by identifying the features of publicness to look for in school governance, inputs, practices, and impacts, and by offering a set of ambitious standards against which to measure and push all schools, but especially all schools receiving public funds, to improve.



A Roadmap for Action

In recent years, public education in the U.S. has weathered immense pressures—from a global pandemic and educator shortages to book bans, universal school voucher programs, ongoing student absenteeism, and expiring federal relief funds. But now it confronts an existential threat unprecedented in modern American history. The new federal administration has launched an unparalleled campaign against public schools through executive orders that touch on almost every aspect of public schooling, including curriculum content and educational materials, funding, civil rights protections, and programs supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion in schools. These actions endanger the institution of public education, and with it, the foundational idea and essential promise that every child, regardless of circumstance, deserves access to quality education.

Across the U.S., the ecosystem of those deeply committed to public schools—parents and caregivers, students, educators, community members, administrators, advocates, civil rights lawyers, legislators, and policymakers—are responding to vigorously defend and improve public education. This Two-Year Network Policy Agenda seeks to empower this ecosystem through proactive, coordinated, and aligned action that protects and strengthens our public schools and reimagines them to meet both the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.¹



¹ As a national network of diverse organizations that include educators, students, families, organizers, advocates, policy analysts, researchers, funders and others, the Partnership is guided by a theory of distributed leadership and action. The Network advances large-scale change through collective action highlighting communities engaged in building high quality, inclusive, and equitable school systems that exemplify the Network's vision of meaningful learning and democratic practice; fostering momentum and support behind these communities to grow and sustain their work; and driving shifts in policy and public narratives that encourage other communities to adopt these practices.

Pillars of Network Action

This policy agenda is organized around 3 pillars of network action. These pillars address the **why** of public education, **what** public school systems need and must do, and **how** to strengthen the connections between public school systems and communities to realize our vision.

Lifting Up the Purpose of Public Education



Protecting Access for All Students

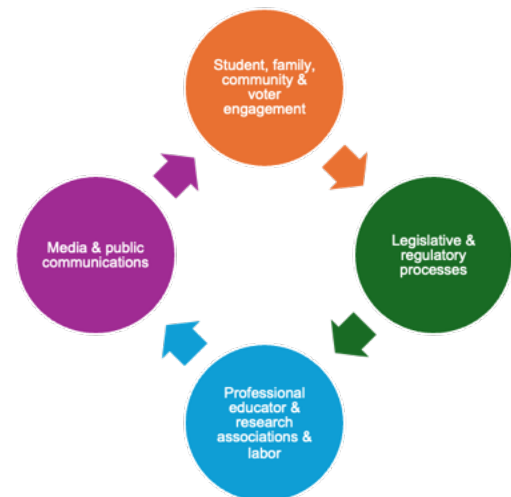


Activating Schools as Vibrant Centers for Democracy



The pillars of this policy agenda will be advanced by activity across four interlocking levers for change — a mechanism, process, or point of influence through which change can be made or amplified.

1. **Student, family, community and voter engagement**
2. **Legislative and regulatory processes**
3. **Professional educator and research associations and labor**
4. **Media and public communications**





Pillar I: Lifting Up the Purpose of Public Education

Problem: In the face of sweeping attacks on public schools, (re)building a shared public understanding of the purpose of public schools for students, families and communities and their role in sustaining and strengthening democracy is crucial. Although there continues to be strong support among parents for their children's public schools, the larger value of public education to communities and society has been

obscured by the narratives and attacks from individuals and organizations seeking to dismantle the institution. This lack of a collective understanding about why public education matters adds to the challenges public education has long faced to serve all communities well by undermining public support for the policy and practice changes necessary to better prepare students for the future.

Vision Statement: Strong public schools support students to develop the knowledge, skills, and experiences they need for fulfilling lives. This means preparing them for further study and meaningful employment and preparing them to be good neighbors who are civically engaged, curious, and empathetic critical thinkers. It also means providing a shared experience that fosters understanding of what it means to be part of a democratic society and commitment to advancing a society in which everyone thrives.

Levers for Change: Pillars of this policy agenda will be advanced by

*Student, family, community
& voter engagement*

*Legislative & regulatory
processes*

*Professional educator and
research association &
labor*

*Media & Public
Communications*

Two Year Objectives:

Objective #1.1: Advance an affirmative reframing of public education through a national storytelling campaign that mobilizes public support for public schools.

- **How will we advance this objective?** Partners across the network will collaborate to advance a shift in narrative toward a positive, future-focused view of public

schools and strengthen public understanding and support for their core purpose. This requires translating the Network's vision into accessible language for parents, lawmakers, and the broader public, demonstrating its practical application in diverse communities, and activating multiple forms of media to reach and engage key audiences.

- **Network Action:** Coordinated state-based narrative campaigns leveraging state constitutions to underscore the purpose and importance of public education.
- **Core Team Support:**
 - Develop a consistent network-wide narrative strategy and messages supporting public education
 - Produce and share narrative toolkit for aligned action
 - Create a repository of stories about local schools and why they matter via traditional and non-traditional media

◆ ◆ **Objective #1.2: Protect and spread models of meaningful learning by amplifying their effectiveness and engaging policy makers to continue and expand them in states/districts.**

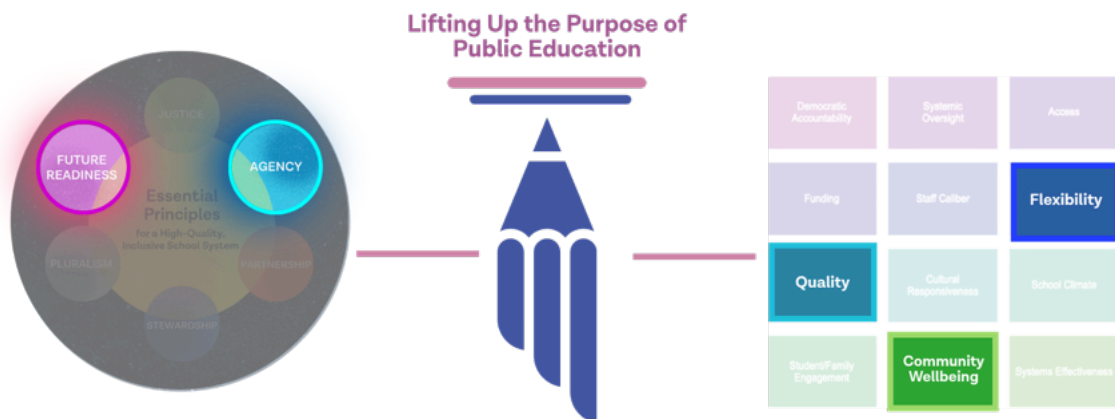
- **How will we advance this objective?** Partners from diverse communities across the country will spotlight—and the Network will amplify and support partners to advocate for—robust examples of public schooling that provide meaningful learning opportunities to all students. These models include comprehensive whole-child support through community schools, culturally responsive curricula and social emotional learning (SEL) programs, as well as school systems that are reimagining student success to encompass essential life and workplace skills in addition to traditional metrics.
- **Network Action:** Integrate data and evidence in state and local organizing campaigns.
 - **Core Team Support:** Compile and share data and evidence from and with partners on the effectiveness of key educational strategies under threat
- **Network Action:** Advocacy with local, state, and Congressional leaders.
 - **Core Team Support:** Assemble model policies and legislation developed by partners into a compendium translating the network's "publicness standards" framework into a forward-looking agenda for Congressional and executive branch action.



Objective #1.3: Grow student civic engagement experience by implementing civics course work in states.

- **How will we advance this objective?** Partners will advocate for civics education programs as a counter measure to anti-diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, advancing and positioning civics education as essential for developing democratic engagement, critical thinking, and cultural competency.
- **Network Action:** Campaigns and professional learning opportunities on civics education programs.
- **Core Team Support:**
 - Identify opportunities for partners to build and/or expand collaborations on state and local civics education campaigns
 - Draft talking points, prepare speakers

Connection to Our Essential Principles and Publicness Standards



Essential Principles (Public Education in A Strong Democracy: Our Network’s Vision, 2024)

- **Agency** - A system of high-quality public schools builds the power of students, families, educators, and communities to shape their futures. It recognizes how leadership shows up everywhere and not only in formal roles. It prioritizes the perspectives of those who most depend on public schools for high-quality education and amplifies the voices of historically under-invested groups to influence educational priorities and practice.
- **Future-Readiness** - A system of high-quality public schools cultivates innovation and adaptability. It prepares students to solve problems and navigate changing contexts, and supports educators to innovate to meet evolving societal needs.

Publicness Standards (A Framework for Strengthening Public Education, 2024)

- **Flexibility** - Public schools should be able and willing to adapt and adjust to meet the needs of their community. Incentives for flexibility, agility, and innovation should support meeting the needs of all students, the surrounding community, and the broader system in which schools are situated.
- **Quality** - Public schools should provide rigorous, academically enriching, racially just and culturally responsive, safe and restorative learning environments for all students. The learning experience should instill in students a lifelong love of learning and prepare them for the wide range of opportunities open to them throughout their adult life.
- **Community Well-Being** - Public schools should strengthen the communities in which they exist, serving as consistent, trusted places where relationships are built and maintained over time, and work to reduce school closures, community polarization, erosion of public trust, job loss and other negative impacts on local communities.



Pillar II: Protecting Access for All Students

Problem: The weaponization of federal funding programs and retreat from civil rights enforcement endangers student access to well-prepared educators, adequate resources, and the culturally responsive whole child support embedded in the Network’s vision. These moves are especially egregious in light of the reality that public education has never been fully resourced or supported to realize the promise of educational opportunity for all students. While states have

an essential role protecting against growing threats to student access and rights—particularly for students from low-income backgrounds, Black, Indigenous and other students of color, those with disabilities, multilingual learners, and LGBTQ youth—historically, state education agencies have maintained inequity through inadequate oversight of civil rights protections, special education requirements, and equal opportunity mandates, as well as through their failure to address unfair school funding systems. Additionally, as artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly integrated into learning environments, strong guardrails are essential to ensure these technologies provide meaningful opportunities benefiting all students equitably.

Vision Statement: Students learn best when they feel safe, cared for, engaged in meaningful work, and challenged to grow. Successful schools create learning experiences that are personally significant, culturally relevant, and build on student interests and strengths. They instill a lifelong joy of learning. Rather than emphasizing testing and competition, such schools foster creative thinking, develop academic knowledge and skills, cultivate social and emotional competencies, and provide a variety of ways for students to demonstrate what they know. Funding is readily available and wisely used. Educators are well prepared and supported as highly skilled facilitators of learning. Culturally responsive counselors and trauma-informed strategies build belonging, physical and psychological safety, and shared investment in the well-being of the school community. School facilities are healthy environments and conducive to learning. School leaders leverage technology and vital resources to enhance learning, protect privacy, and ensure every student has what they need.

Levers for Change: Pillars of this policy agenda will be advanced by

*Student, family, community
& voter engagement*

*Legislative & regulatory
processes*

*Professional educator and
research association &
labor*

*Media & Public
Communications*

◆ ◆ Two Year Objectives:

Objective #2.1: Counter the weaponization of federal funding and oversight through a national initiative to align messaging by partners in states and localities.

- **How will we advance this objective?** Partners will highlight, and the Network will amplify, the negative impacts on communities from federal funding threats and reduced federal capacity to administer programs, protect students' civil rights, and conduct research.
- **Network Action:** Coordinated state and local narrative and advocacy campaigns by partners.
- **Core Team Support:**
 - Produce and share talking points, fact sheets, and other data on the impact of federal programming shifts at the state and community level
 - Training for partners on how to understand the impact of federal policies on states/districts

- Create a repository of stories to support advocacy and litigation and help partners find legal resources

◆ **Objective #2.2: Spread effective state and local access and equity protections by amplifying and strengthening existing policies in states.**

- **How will we advance this objective?** Partners will collaborate to identify, and the Network facilitate, compile and share for partner advocacy, examples of states with strong infrastructures and equity protections and what it took to build them, as well as of how schools and districts that are committed to advancing equity are sustaining their work in the face of opposition from other levels of government.
- **Network Action:** Advocacy, litigation, and grassroots organizing campaigns.
- **Core Team Support:**
 - Support partners to identify key intervention points by state
 - Collect and share examples of states taking effective action
 - Assemble and disseminate a compendium of model state policy and legislation on equity and access protections for all schools receiving public dollars
 - Facilitate and share a narrative playbook on protecting equitable access

◆ ◆ **Objective #2.3: Support school systems in navigating the transformative nature of artificial intelligence by equipping partners to advocate effectively in this rapidly changing terrain.**

- **How will we advance this objective?** The Network will develop and advocate for related guardrails to address a range of potential countervailing factors (e.g., unequal access, privacy rights, the elimination of educators), while also curating curriculum and training models and convening learning opportunities on how educators can leverage the benefits of AI as a powerful boost to creativity and tailored learning opportunities and instill the practice of critical thinking.
- **Network Action:** Identify and advocate for risk-mitigating frameworks; Assemble and share opportunities for learning and skills-building on how to utilize AI in learning.
- **Core Team Support:**
 - Facilitate access to training and learning opportunities on AI to build network readiness to engage in rapid-based advocacy
 - Compile and disseminate a 'Look See' tool to support partners in assessing AI-related policies and legislation

Connection to Our Essential Principles and Publicness Standards



Essential Principles (Public Education in A Strong Democracy: Our Network’s Vision, 2024)

- **Justice** - A system of high-quality public schools creates fair and welcoming environments. It goes beyond acknowledging historical and current injustices to addressing them with a liberatory practice based in healing and restoration. It bases decisions about staffing, curriculum, teaching, and assessment on valuing and supporting every student to succeed.
- **Partnership** - A system of high-quality public schools fosters collaboration, transparency, and responsiveness. It values student input and invites co-creation in the classroom and in the school, and involves students, families, caregivers, educators, and community organizations in shared decision-making. It encourages communication and the flow of clear, useful information, and addresses the concerns of students, families, and educators.
- **Pluralism** - A system of high-quality public schools embraces diverse perspectives and experiences, creates settings for sharing and learning across groups, and enables belonging to develop. It brings people together in ways that honor their full humanity, foster dialogue and deep listening, build relational trust, and support communities to articulate and work toward a shared vision.

Publicness Standards (A Framework for Strengthening Public Education, 2024)

- **Systemic Oversight** - Public schools should be held to consistent standards for staffing, climate and performance, and ensure all students are taught in environments free from discrimination in adherence with federal and state civil rights laws, with particular focus on communities that are often overlooked, such as students with disabilities and those whose native language is not English. Districts and communities should be the primary decision makers in opening or closing public schools.
- **Access** - Public schools should provide equal access to a quality education for children that is safe, offers challenging academics, and provides supportive measures for the mental and physical wellness of all students and staff. Access to education requires attention to the civil and educational rights of everyone in the school community, avoiding

- marginalization based on race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, income levels, immigration status, multilingual learner status, religious beliefs, national ancestry, caste, and geography.
- **Funding-** Public schools should be equitably and adequately funded to support the student populations they serve. Funding should be transparent and predictable, aligned with student needs, and ameliorate gaps and disparities among schools. This requires addressing the longstanding pain point of competition over funding between charters and typical public schools and finding additional resources rather than forcing schools to compete over scarce, limited funds.
- **Staff Caliber-** Public schools should pursue cultural, racial, economic, LGBTQ+, disability, and gender diversity in their faculty, staff and leadership, and have the resources to recruit, prepare, and support talented staff regardless of geographic location. Faculty, staff and leadership should be professionally-prepared, supported, respected and respectful, and representative of the communities they serve.
- **Cultural Responsiveness-** Public schools should incorporate the knowledge, relationships, and histories of every community into the learning environment for students. They should establish mechanisms for seeking out and learning about their surrounding communities and the families and students served so that they are proactive in meeting evolving needs over time.
- **School Climate-** Public schools should pursue cultural, racial, economic, LGBTQ+, disability, and gender diversity in their student bodies and actively cultivate a sense of connection and belonging that draws students into the school community, honoring diverse learning needs and styles. Policies and practices should celebrate diversity as a strength, build understanding and shared experience within the school community, and avoid within-school stratification between groups.



Pillar III: Activating Schools as Vibrant Centers of Democracy

Problem: The conflicts and misinformation about public schools in recent years threaten to undermine parent and community support for schools and, more broadly, to weaken public trust in government institutions. In many communities, however, these pressures have sparked increased civic engagement, with students, parents, and community members showing up at local school board meetings and state public hearings to ask critical questions and advocate forcefully for their schools. While this activism is welcome, the recent controversy surrounding public schools point to a deeper, enduring challenge: building schools and school systems that are genuinely connected and responsive to and supported by the diverse communities they serve. Realizing the Network's vision of democratic schools requires reimagining school governance and accountability —i.e., creating systems rooted in relationships and shared vision that foster mutual accountability between schools, districts, families, and communities for student success.

Vision Statement: A system of high-quality public schools operates with inclusive and participatory democracy in its daily functions. It upholds the perspectives of those whose voices are often marginalized in the educational process and helps schools to do the same. It respects teachers, administrators, and staff as highly skilled professionals with voice in educational decisions. It draws student perspectives into the design of learning experiences and integrates parents, caregivers, and the broader community into the process of setting systemwide and school-level priorities and learning practices. And, it joins community efforts to dismantle the structural barriers to family wellbeing and community health.

Levers for Change: Pillars of this policy agenda will be advanced by

*Student, family, community
& voter engagement*

*Legislative & regulatory
processes*

*Professional educator and
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*Media & Public
Communications*

Two Year Objectives:

◆ **Objective #3.1: Spread models of robust democratic participation in school and district governance by supporting and amplifying participatory co-governance initiatives in districts/states.**

- **How will we advance this objective?** The Network will identify, spotlight, and disseminate examples of families, community members, and educators collaborating on public school governance in new ways, such as the ongoing Public School Strong campaign to engage public school families, educators, and school board members and build new strategic alliances. This also includes lifting up community-based school design models and district-wide initiatives that create meaningful space for young people, families, educators, and other community leaders to participate in policy decisions and co-create programs to meet community needs.
- **Network Action:** Develop, facilitate, and expand collaborative student, family, educator, and community-led governance projects.
- **Core Team Support:**
 - Convene a call series to highlight and share co-governance/leadership models created by partners for network-wide learning.

- Promote training and learning opportunities on how to engage in school and state board policymaking processes.

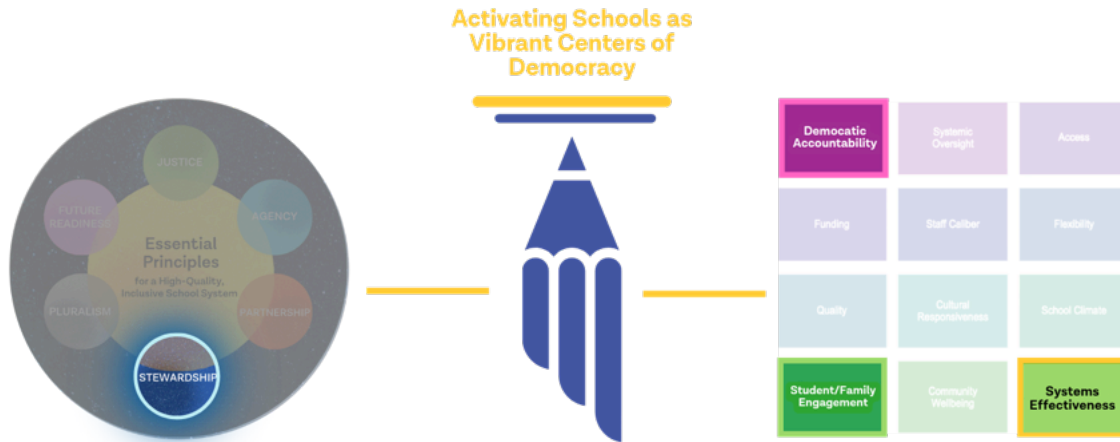
◆ **Objective #3.2: Reimagine accountability measures that capture student growth and support school improvement by fostering innovation in districts.**

- **How will we advance this objective?** The Network will gather and distribute innovative accountability measures that encourage states to fill growing data collection gaps with metrics that accurately reflect what and how students learn and the conditions for learning to support schools and communities to assess and prioritize student learning needs as the foundation for school improvement and a healthy school environment.
- **Network Action:** Identify and support districts to develop and implement accountability models rooted in the network's essential principles and publicness standards.
- **Core Team Support:**
 - Convene a breakthrough conversation series on school accountability
 - Lift up emerging models for network learning and exploration

◆ ◆ **Objective #3.3: Grow the pipeline and infrastructure for democratic participation in public education through grassroots youth and community organizing campaigns.**

- **How will we advance this objective?** Partners will advocate for, and the Network will amplify, the expansion of voting rights and participation in EduRaces, such as expanding existing efforts to extend voting rights to 16 and 17-year old youth, and to create new pathways for community members to engage in the political process.
- **Network Action:** State and local advocacy on accountability, voting, and student voice and representation.
- **Core Team Support:** Share model policies, examples, and messaging guidance for student, family, and community action

Connection to Our Essential Principles and Publicness Standards



Essential Principles (Public Education in A Strong Democracy: Our Network’s Vision, 2024)

- **Stewardship** - A system of high-quality public schools promotes collective investment in—and action for—school and student success. It fosters authentic multi-generational relationships, aligns priorities with community values and needs, and builds reciprocity so that everyone sees their role and responsibility in ensuring equity and continual improvement. In turn, it is supported and resourced by families, community members, state agencies, and government leaders.

Publicness Standards (A Framework for Strengthening Public Education, 2024)

- **Democratic Accountability** - Public schools and the entities that govern them should be inclusive of and transparent, responsive and ultimately answerable to the communities they serve.
- **Student and Family Engagement** - Public schools should provide opportunities for students and families to inform and collaborate on educational priorities and practice, and proactively address the barriers to participation for different families. Learning environments should center student voices and support students in building positive relationships with educators to meet their academic and socioemotional needs. Caregivers should be invited and supported to build trust, open communication and with faculty, staff, and leadership in pursuit of student learning and success.
- **Systemic Effectiveness** - Public schools should strengthen the local, state and tribal education systems in which they exist by operating in cooperation, not in competition, with other schools. Capacity-building processes and norms should be in place to support schools to share ideas, policies, and practices and strengthen school quality, including among schools that provide learning environments customized for particular student interests or needs (e.g., on STEM or supporting students with disabilities). All financial transactions and contracts should be transparent to the public. Laws governing the bidding process should be consistent across school systems within states.



POWERING A BREAKTHROUGH IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

Two Year Network Policy Agenda

Conclusion

Our purpose in creating the Two Year Policy Agenda is to build a roadmap for the network to mobilize in the near term. This agenda is offered to guide collective action by network partners activate the ecosystem of stakeholders to protect and strengthen public schools and move close to achieving our shared vision for public education. As we move to finalize this agenda, we will continue to seek feedback to ensure alignment with partner priorities and maximize the impact of our collective efforts. We are eager to hear from you!