



PARTNERSHIP
FOR THE
**FUTURE of
LEARNING**

POWERING A **BREAKTHROUGH** FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

TWO YEAR NETWORK POLICY AGENDA

SEPTEMBER 2025



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Introduction

The Partnership for the Future of Learning protects, strengthens, and advances education equity and meaningful learning — and supports the policies and practices that help all school systems to ensure that every child is prepared for success in life.

Launched in 2015, the Partnership has grown into a robust network of education and social justice leaders who share a deep commitment to a high quality, inclusive, and equitable public education system. The network includes nearly 900 organizations and individuals — organizers, advocates, policy analysts, communicators, researchers, students, caregivers and parents, educators, funders, and system and union leaders.

In spring 2025, in the face of these sweeping efforts to dismantle and privatize public education in the United States, the network community came together to develop a roadmap for collective action to protect public schools and lay the groundwork for longer-term strengthening and rebuilding the institution.

This Two-Year Network Policy Agenda lays out our network’s vision for public education and the steps we believe are essential to achieve it. It is meant to inspire, inform, and guide actions by people and organizations across our network — and beyond — to uphold this public resource and, in doing so, support its transformation into the school that every child and family deserves.



Our Vision for Public Education

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.



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.



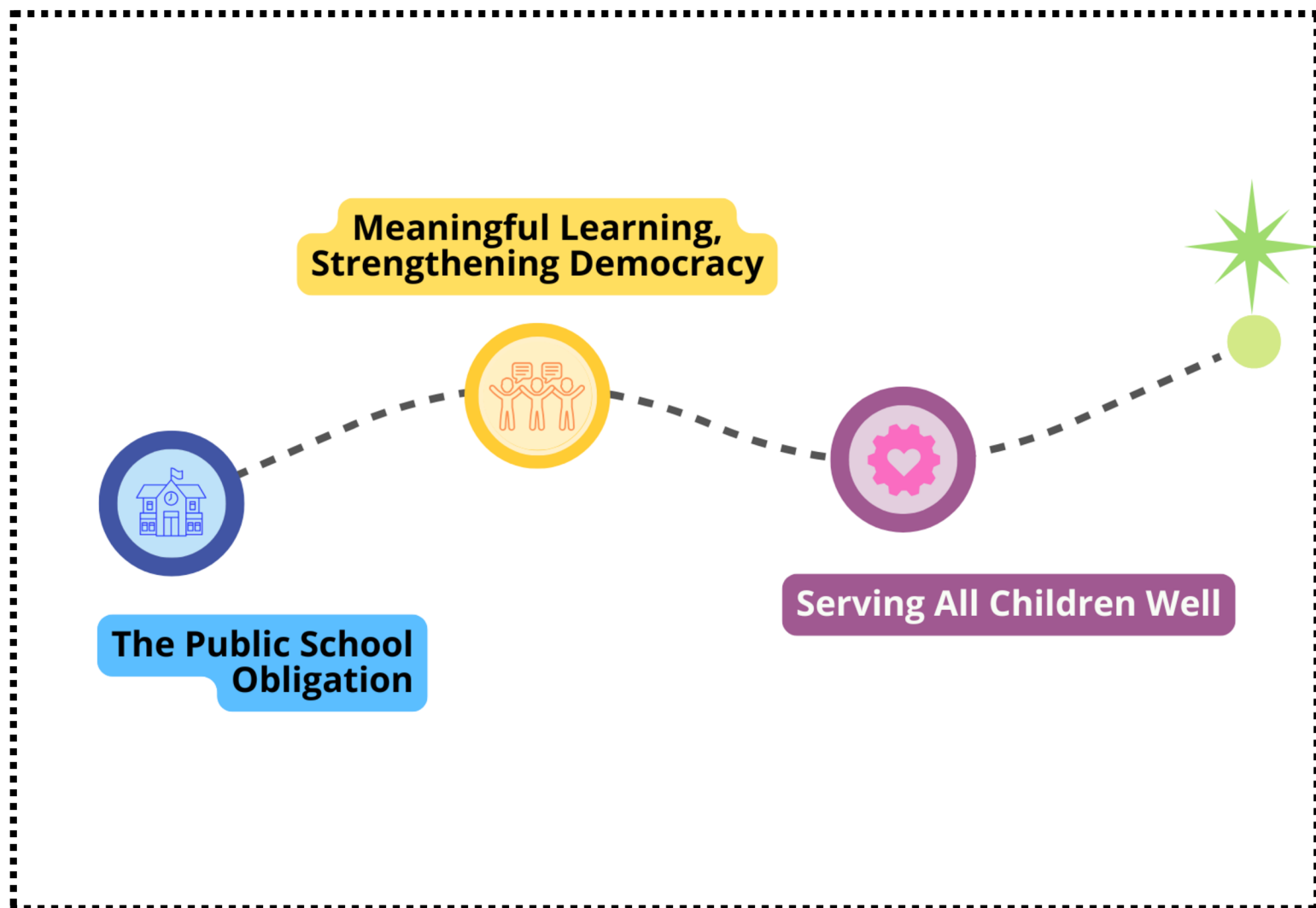
Serving All Children Well

High-quality public schools exist throughout the U.S. 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 a set of essential design principles guiding the creation of high quality, inclusive systems and standards for ensuring these systems fulfill their obligations as public institutions.



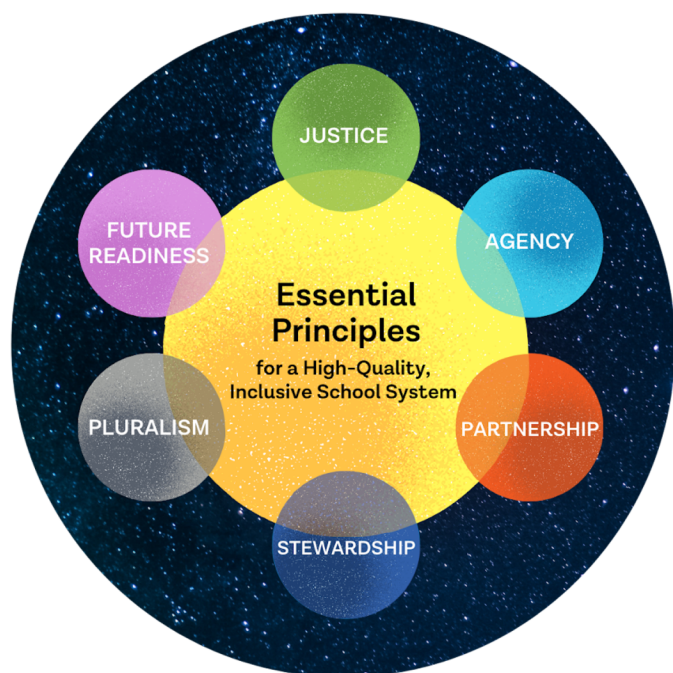


A Roadmap for Action



As the term “democracy” becomes increasingly politicized, it is important to be clear about 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. In schools, this translates to students having agency in making choices about what and how they learn, building collaborative relationships among 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, and engaging with school boards, legislatures, and regulatory bodies.

Tools for Transformation



The Network's **Essential Principles for a High-Quality Inclusive School System** offers guidance for curriculum, teaching, technology, funding, and other resources to create supportive, effective learning environments.



The Network's **Framework for Strengthening Public Schools** establishes 12 guiding standards to support educators, communities, and policymakers in ensuring that a public school system is fully and truly public.





Three Pillars of Policy Action

This policy agenda is organized around three pillars that 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





Pillar I: Lifting up the Purpose of Public Education

Problem: Sweeping attacks on public schools by individuals and organizations seeking to undermine public education obscure the purpose of public schools for students, families, and communities and their central role in sustaining and strengthening democracy.

Vision: Public education is vital today, tomorrow, and every day. Strong public schools support students to develop the knowledge, skills, and experiences they need for fulfilling lives. This means preparing them for further study, 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.

Actions:

1. Champion a positive vision for public education.
2. Protect and spread proven models of meaningful learning, like community schools and social emotional learning (SEL).
3. Expand student civic learning and engagement opportunities.

Tools for Transformation: Network Essential Principles and Publicness Standards



Democratic Accountability	Systemic Strategies	Access
Funding	Self-Care	Flexibility
Quality	Cultural Responsiveness	School Climate
Student/Family Engagement	Community Wellbeing	Systemic Effectiveness



Pillar II: Protecting Access for All Students

Problem: The retreat from civil rights enforcement and the politicization of federal funding jeopardize students' access to qualified educators, adequate resources, and the range of support needed to foster their healthy development educational success.

Vision: Equitable access to high-quality, inclusive public schools is the foundation for educational success. Students thrive when they feel safe, valued, and engaged in meaningful, challenging work — and have access to educational environments that provide these things. Successful schools offer culturally relevant learning experiences that spark curiosity, build on student strengths, and foster lifelong learning. They promote academic growth, creative thinking, and social-emotional development. They are funding adequately to provide healthy school environments, well-supported educators, and access to counselors and trauma-informed supports that build belonging and safety. Technology and other vital resources are used to enhance learning, protect privacy, and ensure every student has what they need to succeed.

Actions:

1. Demonstrate the harms of federal funding cuts and the weaponized civil rights oversight on public schools.
2. Strengthen state and local protections for equitable access for all students.
3. Support school systems to navigate AI to safeguard students and enhance meaningful learning.

Tools for Transformation: Network Essential Principles and Publicness Standards





Pillar III: Activating Schools as Vibrant Centers of Democracy

Problem: The conflicts and misinformation about public schools in recent years threatens community trust in and family support for public schools, while eroding confidence in public institutions more broadly.

Vision: A high-quality public school system is inclusive and participatory. It centers relationships, builds shared purpose, and fosters mutual responsibility for student success. This means listening to voices that are too often left out — especially students, families, and communities — and making sure those perspectives shape decisions. It values teachers, staff, and school leaders as trusted professionals with a say in how schools run. It actively involves students in designing their learning, and partners with parents, caregivers, and communities to set priorities, improve school practices, and tackle the barriers to family well-being so that every child has the opportunity to thrive.

Actions:

1. Spread participatory governance models.
2. Promote holistic accountability metrics for student growth and school improvement.
3. Build pathways for youth, family, and community participation in public education.

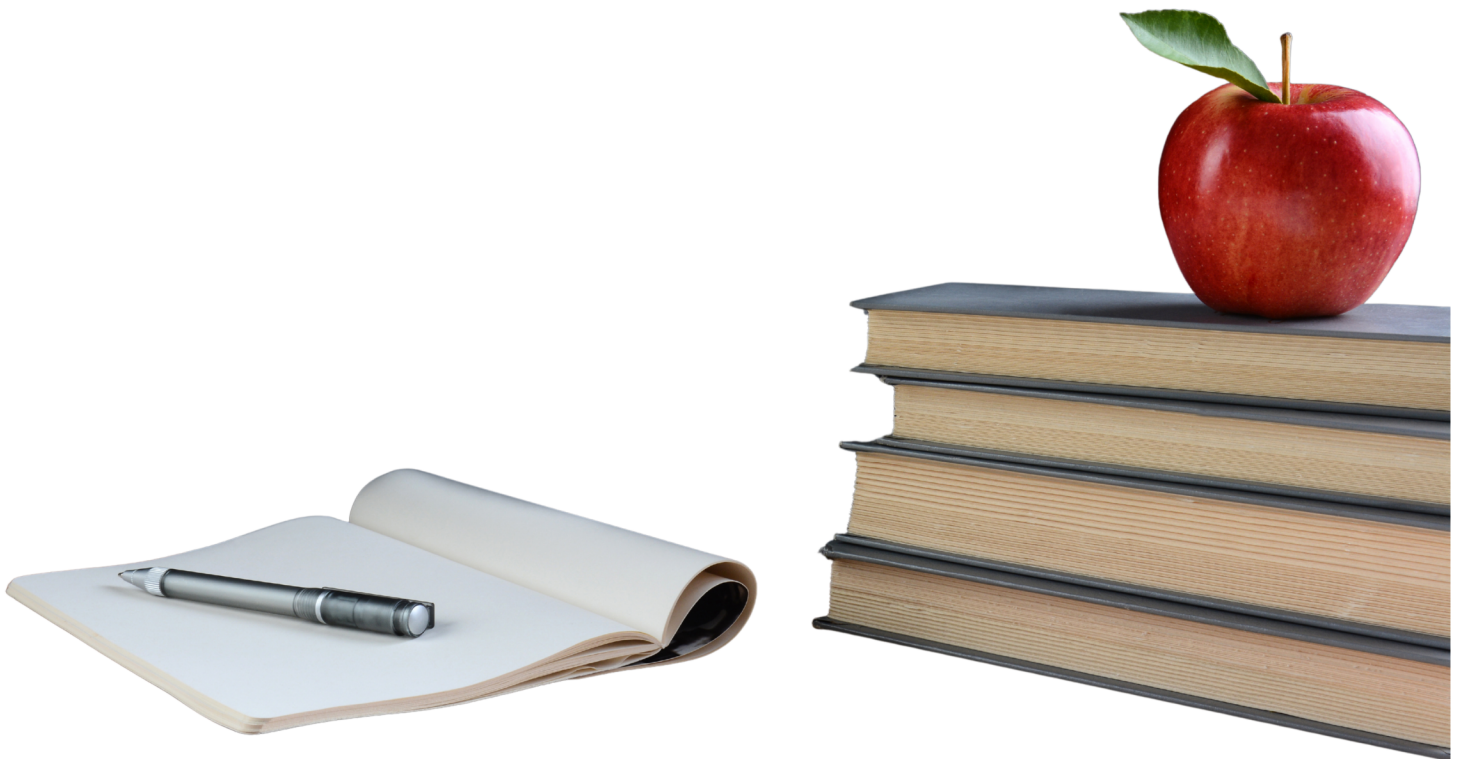
Tools for Transformation: Network Essential Principles and Publicness Standards




Conclusion

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 working together to vigorously protect 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 for our communities and democracy.



Glossary: Essential Principles

- 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.
 
- 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.
 
- 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.
 
- 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.
 
- Stewardship:** A system of high-quality public schools ensures the long-term health and sustainability of the public education system. It recognizes the responsibility of the public education system to the community and the future.
 
- 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.
 

Glossary: Publicness Standards

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. 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.

5. 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.

6. 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.

Glossary: Publicness Standards

7. 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.

8. 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.

9. 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.

10. STUDENT/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.

11. 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.

12. SYSTEMS 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.