

PUBLIC EDUCATION, DEMOCRACY, AND THE ROLE OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT: A DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES

Education Deans for Justice and Equity

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National Education Policy Center

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As deans of colleges and schools of education we are committed to a school system that serves all children and youth, providing them with richly engaging, challenging, and supported opportunities to learn. We are equally committed to research-based policy and practice, designing the most effective and just approaches based on critical analyses of past efforts. We are therefore seriously concerned by recent rhetoric of the incoming administration that has already led to increased bullying, violence, and fear in classrooms across the country. The United States can do better, and the incoming administration and Congress have a critical and urgent role to play in healing our country by making good on the promises of public education.

U.S. public education policy should:

1. Uphold the role of public schools as a central institution in the strengthening of our democracy.

Americans share a widespread vision of public education as a universal public good for every child, regardless of background or circumstance. This requires that schools be able to teach, value, and inspire each and every student as we strive towards the highest personal, academic, and social goals, including but extending far beyond readiness for college and career. Students are not merely commodities or consumers, and when we treat education as a competitive marketplace fueled by privatization we set up a system that ensures that some win while many others lose. We urge you to invest in education as a public good and to affirm that every student deserves the very best that our country has to offer.

2. Protect the human and civil rights of all children and youth, especially those from historically marginalized communities.

The federal government has historically played a leading role in advancing educational access and equity, as with the passage and enforcement of civil rights laws, targeted funding to address poverty and resource inequities, and appropriate supports for English-language learners and students with disabilities. But today opportunity gaps remain shockingly large. Americans also have a growing awareness of the unique challenges faced by students across the spectrum of diversity, including LGBTQ youth, Muslim youth, and children of undocumented immigrants or who themselves are undocumented. We urge you to strengthen the role of the federal government to support and advocate for the children and youth who are most vulnerable or targeted.

3. Develop and implement policies, laws, and reform initiatives by building on a democratic vision for public education and on sound educational research.

Our children suffer when we deny that educational inequities exist and when we refuse to invest sufficient time, resources, and effort toward holistic and systemic solutions. The

U.S. educational system is plagued with oversimplified policies and reform initiatives that were developed and imposed without support of a compelling body of rigorous research, or even with a track record of failure. We urge you to build on the ample evidence from the high-quality research that exists about policies and practices that can be effective for improving learning and addressing educational inequities.

4. Support and partner with colleges and schools of education to advance these goals.

Public schools are successful when they are broadly supported and when they work collectively with others. These partners include families, communities, organizations, and agencies, as well as the colleges and schools of education that prepare many of the professionals working in and with schools (including teachers, health professionals, counselors, leaders, and researchers). Colleges and schools of education, like K-12 public schools, play a vital role in strengthening our democracy, but they are often plagued with regulations and reform initiatives that lack sound research bases and that result in even greater inequities in public schools. We urge you to develop and support policies and resources that advance our public mission.

We are working individually and collectively to highlight and advance these goals, and we stand ready to collaborate with you to do the same.

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