

# **NEPC Review: Let's Get Ready! Educating All Americans for Success (National Governors Association, July 2025)**



Reviewed by:

Ryan Pflieger

October 2025

**National Education Policy Center**

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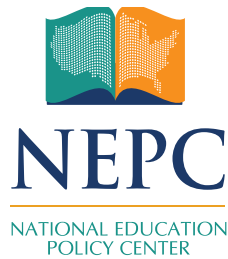
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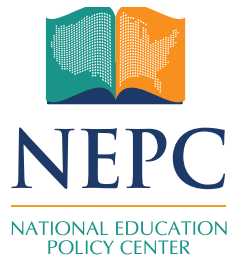
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### Summary

*Let's Get Ready!*, a recent National Governors Association report, calls for schools to be stronger engines of economic competitiveness. The report urges governors to build public dashboards to track outcomes and align schools with workforce needs. It identifies four “readiness” areas—academic skills, job preparation, civic participation, and lifelong well-being—and justifies each in terms of future earnings and employer value. Its recommendations would reshape school funding, rewarding or penalizing programs based on graduates’ income. While the report usefully calls for moving beyond a narrow focus on test scores, it consistently frames basic goals—including civic engagement and well-being—through an economic lens. The dashboard governance model it promotes could reduce local democratic control and prioritize workforce training over democratic citizenship, broad human development, and children’s well-being. Further, many of its claims and recommendations are poorly grounded, relying heavily on CEO testimonials and elite convenings rather than broadly accepted forms of research. The report ignores the extensive body of research into similar accountability schemes, which cautions that high-stakes rewards and punishments fail to improve outcomes and will instead narrow curriculum and harm teaching. Its simplistic portrayal of schools and student learning as central levers for solving economic problems is not well-founded. In fact, by treating students and teachers as the cause of economic injustice rather than as its victims, this report diverts attention from structural reforms that could actually address poverty and wage stagnation. It offers little useful guidance for improving schools.



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## I. Introduction

With democracy increasingly fragile and deep racial and economic inequality persisting, schools remain central battlegrounds in a struggle to reshape America. For centuries, reformers have issued reports presenting schools as the solution to the nation's problems, including global threats to American dominance, technological change, workforce shortages, and a lack of shared economic prosperity. Over the last 40 years a dominant wave of reforms has secured structural changes to schools that mimic the competition and logic of capitalist markets and emphasize school accountability and efficiency. A recent report, *Let's Get Ready! Educating All Americans for Success*,<sup>1</sup> follows in this tradition, offering recommendations for how state governors should lead school reform. Its primary goal is to improve economic outcomes through data-based accountability systems.

The report, produced under the chairmanship of Colorado Governor Jared Polis for the National Governors Association (NGA), continues the NGA's persistent initiatives tying education to economic competitiveness and labor market preparation.<sup>2</sup> Given the powerful actors involved (e.g., governors and CEOs), and sponsorship for five governors to institute the report's recommendations,<sup>3</sup> its influence could be substantial. If implemented, the report's policy package could change governance, finance, and day-to-day education practice, with schools financially rewarded or punished based on the income earnings of students. This makes close review of the report essential.

## **II. Findings and Conclusions of the Report**

Numerous claims, conclusions, and recommendations appear throughout the report. They are grouped here into three major categories to facilitate analysis: declaring educational goals, measuring education, and centralizing government operations and authority. The report encourages state governors to:

### **A. Declare educational goals**

The report concludes that “individual preparedness and economic competitiveness” are educational goals that every state wants and the title phrase “Let’s Get Ready” means preparing students for these goals. This includes “empowering individuals with the skills, knowledge, and competencies they need to thrive after high school, and building our states’ and nation’s economic competitiveness.”<sup>4</sup> The report defines readiness with four “essential elements”: academic foundations, workforce preparedness, civic engagement, and lifelong well-being. An appendix includes example metrics in each of these four areas (e.g., math proficiency in 3rd grade, participation in work-based learning, positive behavior, and social awareness).

### **B. Measure students**

Measurement can and should serve as the main route to achieving the educational goals defined by each state.<sup>5</sup> The report calls for establishing public dashboards in each state “that increases visibility, accountability, and focus on the state’s education and workforce goals.”<sup>6</sup> The report focuses on education, schools, learning, and students (e.g., attendance, literacy, and using technology for instruction), but also discusses cross-agency coordination and includes measures of child well-being that are not traditional measures of schooling (e.g., access to affordable housing and health insurance coverage). A central concern is a “measurement mismatch”—the idea that current indicators (e.g., test scores and graduation rates) fail to capture readiness for life and civic participation, and most importantly, for work.

### **C. Centralize government operations and authority**

Governors should work to eliminate government silos. This would include appointing dedicated people to coordinate across agencies, consolidating programs, “engendering public investment through the use of the bully pulpit,” and “blur[ring]” K-12/higher ed/workforce lines.<sup>7</sup> The report contends that “governors are in the best position to provide a tangible return on investments in education, and to hold schools and systems accountable.”<sup>8</sup> Government agencies, local school districts, teachers, and community groups are positioned as needing to align with governors’ visions. A section devoted to developing a “more effective federal-state partnership in education” calls for governors to use monitoring and accountability to align agencies and

districts with their visions, especially if the current federal administration diminishes these activities.<sup>9</sup>

### **III. The Report's Rationale for Its Findings and Conclusions**

The report cites competitiveness, AI, low test scores, declining social mobility, and workforce mismatches and shortages to justify shifting what states measure toward “readiness.” The recommendation for dashboards and changes in measurement is premised on the idea that what is currently measured does not represent a full picture of “the elements of readiness that we value most.”<sup>10</sup>

Three of the main categories of goals (academics, civics, and lifelong learning) are justified in non-economic terms like thriving in personal lives and very general goals like “to improve student learning.” Yet, these elements, plus workforce preparation as a standalone goal, are each justified in economic terms like: “education-to-career pathways,” “future earnings,” “delivering measurable value to their employers,” and alignment with “workforce needs.” Even civic goals (e.g., “engagement in community and civic society”) are presented to drive “economic gains.”<sup>11</sup> *Let's Get Ready* suggests that each of its example metrics “matters for economic mobility” and presents a dashboard prototype connected to an “Education-to-Workforce Indicator Framework.”<sup>12</sup> The report portrays school systems, and by extension students and teachers, as a solution to economic problems.<sup>13</sup>

### **IV. The Report's Use of Research Literature**

The report draws on eight convenings and cites think-tank products (e.g., Urban Institute, TNTP), but links often point to program descriptions rather than evaluations.<sup>14</sup> Overall, the evidence cited offers little support for the report's central claims.<sup>15</sup> The gaps are most visible in two areas: economic outcomes and accountability. Although (as described below) extensive literatures exist in both these areas, the report does not call on them.

#### **Economic Outcomes and the Goals of Schooling**

The report cites evidence created by organizations that focus on skill shortages and how education is not fulfilling economic needs (e.g., the Center on Education and the Workforce and the Urban Institute), yet omits key trends and bodies of evidence that would facilitate evaluation of the claim that schools should focus more on economic outcomes. One such body of evidence is skeptical that the nation's economic woes are caused by school quality or that the country will educate its way out of poverty, unemployment, unfulfilling jobs, low wages, or global economic threats to competi-

tiveness.<sup>16</sup> Evidence suggests education alone does not determine wages or mobility; macro policy levers (e.g., minimum wage laws, taxes, labor law) could matter more.<sup>17</sup>

There are many non-educational ways to influence wages, poverty, and economic inequality that the report does not consider. For example, while schooling incentives may reduce the Black–White earnings gap by 5%, wage subsidies or eliminating discrimination could have much larger effects.<sup>18</sup> Wages are also shaped directly by policies such as minimum wage laws,<sup>19</sup> progressive and wealth taxes,<sup>20</sup> and the strength of unions.<sup>21</sup> Monetary poverty can be reduced quickly and directly through income support programs.<sup>22</sup> By not weighing the economic impact of these alternatives against education (or considering how they might be reflected in its dashboard framework), the report misses the opportunity to critically assess its claim that schools should focus more on delivering economic outcomes.<sup>23</sup>

For over a century, scholars have criticized the increasing reliance on education as a tool for social mobility and workforce development, and analyzed the relative merits of and tensions between competing visions of the purpose of education such as civic participation, workforce preparation, and individual social mobility.<sup>24</sup> Others have noted several deep threats to the educational endeavor when economic goals take on the kind of ultimate position promoted by the report.<sup>25</sup>

### **Measurement-Based Accountability**

The report recommends creating new data systems to hold schools accountable for outcomes, including proposals to “connect funding to outcomes” and ensure “aligned actions by downstream actors.” Given this emphasis, it would have been useful to engage with the large body of research on accountability, which has been debated for over 30 years.<sup>26</sup>

Researchers have found that high-stakes school accountability and data tracking from earlier reforms, such as No Child Left Behind, failed to significantly improve average achievement and narrow achievement gaps.<sup>27</sup> Researchers also found that high-stakes accountability systems narrowed the focus to test-based metrics and relied on problematic sanctions like school closure, rather than providing resources or helpful guidance.<sup>28</sup> Shifting from test scores to economic outcomes risks repeating this problem, narrowing curriculum toward distant workforce goals rather than a diverse set of educational aims.<sup>29</sup>

The dashboards the report proposes function as centralized management controls—primarily in the hands of governors—that may undermine the quality of learning by deprofessionalizing and deskilling teachers.<sup>30</sup> The report offers high-stakes metrics (e.g., it suggests tying funding to the indicators), which can corrupt the metrics themselves and be counterproductive. Measurement with penalties creates perverse incentives to optimize the metrics rather than improve education. Responses

to these incentives can take the form of teaching to the test, gaming enrollment and reporting, and chasing superficially higher scores that do not reflect real improvements in schooling. Metrics on dashboards (as opposed to thoughtful essays, reports, and deliberations) can misleadingly be interpreted as causation instead of correlation.<sup>31</sup> Alternatives include holding the powerful accountable for adequately resourcing schools and fostering deliberation among staff, parents, and community members about educational problems and solutions.<sup>32</sup> More balanced systems—combining outcomes with supports and professional judgment—may be more effective.<sup>33</sup> Although the report gestures toward broadening measures beyond test scores, it does not engage with the broader research on measurement-based and high-stakes accountability.

## **V. Review of the Report's Methods**

The report is not a systematic study, does not employ any transparent research method, and relies on elite convenings and quotations.<sup>34</sup> Although it claims to highlight the voices of students and educators, the quotes and paraphrases in the report come from CEOs, politicians, and organizational leaders; direct or secondary evidence of student and educator perspectives and experiences are largely absent.<sup>35</sup> A recent critique of the *Let's Get Ready* initiative found that many of the quoted experts and program leaders, as well as members of the project team, come from a neoliberal and corporate milieu backed by billionaire-funded philanthropies that have long promoted “technology-related solutions, school choice, data-driven accountability, and other neoliberal market-based reforms.”<sup>36</sup> The series of convenings described as informing the report included elected politicians talking with elite policymakers, CEOs, and a subset of economists and psychologists.<sup>37</sup> The “case study” of Colorado’s initiatives, such as a new measure of the financial return to higher education<sup>38</sup> and \$10 million spent on an online math platform, is actually just a list and description of recent reforms in Colorado.<sup>39</sup>

## **VI. Review of the Validity of the Findings and Conclusions**

The report rests on faulty assumptions that weaken its conclusion about the need for schools to focus on economic outcomes. It portrays schools, students, teachers, and a lack of data as the primary causes and solutions to complex economic problems, such as low mobility, while neglecting the larger social and policy forces that drive these outcomes. It also focuses on a subset of economic problems and neglects wealth inequality, plutocracy, businesses that pay low wages, employment discrimination, low union power, and undemocratic workplaces.<sup>40</sup> It obscures alternative solutions—like social welfare programs and wage and employment policies—that may have greater direct impact on families.

The accountability, technocratic measurement, and leadership-by-dashboard combination offered in the report has been a long-standing feature of reform and is already a central part of schooling. An alternative—providing resources and expanding policies and practices that bodies of research find close opportunity gaps—has not been seriously tried. The report stresses how funds are spent over whether more are needed.<sup>41</sup> The lag between outcomes measured and actionable feedback makes much data of little use to teachers<sup>42</sup> and the report promotes measurement as a means to secure the desired outcomes without evidence of the power of measurement itself.<sup>43</sup>

Dashboard governance and “data-driven decision making” can transform political discussions from democratic deliberations about the contested and strategic goals of schooling to mere operational discussions and shift power from a large number of everyday participants (families and teachers) to a small number of elites (governors, senior bureaucrats, and business leaders) who control the dashboards.<sup>44</sup> Alternatives to simple dashboard governance, such as qualitative assessments and school visits from qualified teams, may provide a more helpful approach to accountability.<sup>45</sup> Holistic and balanced approaches to accountability would hold schools accountable for the portion of variance in outcomes that are under their control, and other sectors and players accountable for their much larger portion of variance. The report does shift a bit from NCLB’s emphasis on test score outcomes, but this shift in focus to later-in-life economic outcomes that are even more distant from the direct control of schools may reduce the likelihood that the approach will produce the intended results.

Governors have a role in leading state agencies. But education has traditionally been a local affair with locally elected school boards in charge of curriculum, hiring, and how classroom teaching unfolds. School districts and teachers are positioned by the report as downstream implementers of pre-set targets, rather than as professionals exercising judgment.<sup>46</sup> Greater corporate and gubernatorial control could reduce local autonomy and take tools for successful teaching and learning out of the hands of workers in schools.

## **VII. Usefulness of the Report for Guidance of Policy and Practice**

The report usefully acknowledges the need “to go beyond surface-level metrics” and the role of childhood socioeconomic conditions on educational opportunity. Yet the report’s ultimate focus on aligning all outcomes—including civic and well-being aims—with economic competitiveness undermines its usefulness. For a report that focuses on measurement-as-reform, it misses many opportunities to use large bodies of relevant evidence to inform useful policy. The historical record and scientific research discussed above suggests that if the main recommendations of the report

were implemented, they could harm children while also failing to solve important problems with schools and the economy. By advancing simplistic dashboard-based accountability, the report promotes a technocratic, narrow vision of schooling—likely to falter as similar projects have in the past, and overlooking more democratic, evidence-based alternatives.

## Notes and References

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- 1 National Governors Association. (2025, July). *Let's get ready! Educating all Americans for success*. Retrieved August 15, 2025, from <https://www.nga.org/letsgetready/>
- 2 NGA initiatives and their architects have significantly influenced education policy and focused on economic outcomes consistently over time. For example, a 2011 NGA report was titled *Complete to Compete*, and a 2014 report was *America Works: Education and Training for Tomorrow's Jobs*. In 1986, the NGA, with future President Bill Clinton as a co-chair, called for better ways to measure students and create school report cards. Schools should be held "accountable for the results" in hopes of tackling unemployment, and countering threats to a high standard of living. And the report declared, "Better schools mean better jobs." Note that two other governors worked on the 1986 report and later became influential U.S. Secretaries of Education (Lamar Alexander and Richard Riley). The NGA and contributors to the report were leaders in one of the most influential standards-based accountability reforms in recent decades: the Common Core State Standards.  
  
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Hoffman, L. & Reindl, T. (2011). *Complete to compete: Improving postsecondary attainment among adults* (NGA Chair's Initiative). National Governors Association Center for Best Practices. Retrieved August 31, 2025, from <https://www.nga.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/1102POSTSECONDARYATTAINMENT.pdf>  
  
Groves, G. (2014). *America Works: Education and training for tomorrow's jobs: Achieving better results for individuals, employers, and the economy. An action guide for governors*. NGA Center for Best Practices. Retrieved August 28, 2025, from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED583262.pdf>  
  
Hargreaves, A. & Braun, H. (2013). *Data-driven improvement and accountability*. Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center. Retrieved August 28, 2025, from <http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/data-driven-improvement-accountability/>
- 3 The report states that the "NGA is partnering with technical assistance experts to lead a cohort of Governors" to improve measures and establish dashboards "grounded in the examples from the roadmap." In the NGA video linked below, Gov. Polis said that three foundations are providing technical support for at least five governors "to implement the roadmap's action items," including "the public dashboard piece, the accountability piece."  
  
National Governors Association. (2025, July). *Let's get ready! Educating all Americans for success* (p. 37). Retrieved August 15, 2025, from <https://www.nga.org/letsgetready/>  
  
National Governors Association. (2025, July). *2025 Summer meeting – Let's get ready! A roadmap for governors* [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved August 15, 2025, from <https://youtu.be/o8XdjrZ8s74?si=A9PaTokIQqWQ2Osg&t=515>
- 4 National Governors Association. (2025, July). *Let's get ready! Educating all Americans for success* (p. 28). Retrieved August 15, 2025, from <https://www.nga.org/letsgetready/>
- 5 Three sections in the report focus on measurement, notably of outcomes, and dashboards: "define a vision and assess how your state is measuring it," "build systems and infrastructure to measure

outcomes,” and “maintain focus on outcomes with a public dashboard.”

- 6 National Governors Association. (2025, July). *Let's get ready! Educating qll Americans for success* (p. 33). Retrieved August 15, 2025, from <https://www.nga.org/letsgetready/>
- 7 National Governors Association. (2025, July). *Let's get ready! Educating qll Americans for success* (p. 30). Retrieved August 15, 2025, from <https://www.nga.org/letsgetready/>
- 8 National Governors Association. (2025, July). *Let's get ready! Educating qll Americans for success* (p. 2). Retrieved August 15, 2025, from <https://www.nga.org/letsgetready/>
- 9 National Governors Association. (2025, July). *Let's get ready! Educating qll Americans for success* (p. 34). Retrieved August 15, 2025, from <https://www.nga.org/letsgetready/>
- 10 National Governors Association. (2025, July). *Let's get ready! Educating qll Americans for success* (p. 28). Retrieved August 15, 2025, from <https://www.nga.org/letsgetready/>
- 11 National Governors Association. (2025, July). *Let's get ready! Educating qll Americans for success* (p. 18). Retrieved August 15, 2025, from <https://www.nga.org/letsgetready/>
- 12 National Governors Association. (2025, July). *Let's get ready! Educating qll Americans for success* (p. 41). Retrieved August 15, 2025, from <https://www.nga.org/letsgetready/>
- 13 National Governors Association. (2025, July). *Let's get ready! Educating qll Americans for success* (p. 13). Retrieved August 15, 2025, from <https://www.nga.org/letsgetready/>
- 14 The report draws on eight convenings of the Let's Get Ready initiative, at least one report commissioned by the initiative, and includes mention of several studies, infographics, frameworks, and news reports across a large range of subjects. The range of subjects includes how learning feels relevant to boys, instructional materials, AI-Powered learning environments, and career and technical education.

National Governors Association. (2025, July). *Let's get ready! Educating qll Americans for success* (pp. 8, 10, 12, 13, 46). Retrieved August 15, 2025, from <https://www.nga.org/letsgetready/>

- 15 There was no mention of how the reports cited in the report were identified, and no indication that the process involved a systematic search of research databases, suggestions from the report's funders, or an exercise in point-of-view cherry-picking. When made available, many of the links to research come from groups like the Urban Institute, the New Teacher Project, Burning Glass Institute, Strada, and Transcend. With some important exceptions, many of the groups have a financial interest in the claims they make; the kind of educational reform vision they promote is the kind of product they sell. There are several dozens of links to descriptions of initiatives, programs, and policies, but these point to the initiatives themselves rather than research about or evaluations of them. For example, in a section about alternative teacher preparation programs, the leader of Success Academy Charter Schools describes teacher training provided by her operation, but no mention of the extensive literature on alternative teacher preparation is provided, so we learn little of how alternative routes to teaching may be associated with differences and problems in teacher preparation. There is a link to Certiport, which is a subsidiary of the for-profit global corporation Pearson that contributed to *Let's Get Ready*, that includes an online store where you can, for example, purchase an exam to be certified as a Microsoft Office Specialist. *Let's Get Ready* offers this link in a section that discusses “access to industry-recognized certification exams,” but the section does not include an evaluation of Certiport offerings or even analyses of broader related

subjects like the worth of purchasing industry-related exams or credentials.

National Governors Association. (2025, July). *Let's get ready! Educating all Americans for success* (pp. 16). Retrieved August 15, 2025, from <https://www.nga.org/letsgetready/>

- 16 Bowles, S. & Gintis, H. (1976). *Schooling in capitalist America: Educational reform and the contradictions of economic life*. New York, NY: Basic Books.  
  
Marsh, J. (2011). *Class dismissed: Why we cannot teach or learn our way out of inequality*. New York, NY: Monthly Review Press.  
  
Rothstein, R., Jacobsen, R., & Wilder, T. (2008). *Grading education: Getting accountability right*. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute.
- 17 A few relevant research findings are worth considering. Worker productivity, partly a function of the application of skills acquired through schooling, has increased quite dramatically from 1979 to 2025 (+86%) while workers' wages haven't kept pace (+32%). There is also a large body of evidence on what influences wages and estimates of schooling combined with so-called ability (or "human capital" which can be a function of what students bring to school and what they learn outside of school) explains one-third of the variation in wages within the US. Years of schooling may explain a proportion of the variance in wages due to human capital, school quality some proportion, and then *reform* of education likely some even smaller proportion.  
  
Economic Policy Institute. (2025, May 15). *The productivity-pay gap*. Retrieved August 28, 2025, from <https://www.epi.org/productivity-pay-gap/>  
  
Bowles, S., Gintis, H. & Osborne, M. (2001). The determinants of earnings: A behavioral approach. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 39, 1137–1176. Retrieved September 12, 2025, from <https://doi.org/10.1257/jel.39.4.1137>  
  
Deming, D.J. (2022). Four facts about human capital. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 36(3), 75–102.
- 18 Keane, M.P. & Wolpin, K.I. (2000). Eliminating race differences in school attainment and labor market success. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 18(4), 614–652.
- 19 Vogel found that minimum wages influence not just wages, but also the college degree premium: as real minimum wages decreased in the 1980s, the college premium increased. This suggests that the higher "education pays" story cannot be comprehensively told without accounting for the influence of non-educational policies like minimum wage laws.  
  
Vogel, J. (2025). The race between education, technology, and the minimum wage. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 140(3), 1857–1899. Retrieved September 12, 2025, from <https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjaf014>  
  
Cengiz, D., Dube, A., Lindner, A., & Zipperer, B. (2019). The effect of minimum wages on low-wage jobs. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 134(3), 1405–1454.
- 20 Saez, E. & Zucman, G. (2019). Progressive wealth taxation. *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, 2019(2), 437–533.
- 21 Fortin, N.M., Lemieux, T., & Lloyd, N. (2022). *Right-to-work laws, unionization, and wage setting*. National Bureau of Economic Research. Retrieved August 28, 2025, from <https://doi.org/>

org/10.3386/w30098

Fang, T. & Hartley, J. (2022). Evolution of union wages and determinants. In K.F. Zimmermann (Ed.), *Handbook of Labor, Human Resources and Population Economics* (pp. 1–40). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Mishel, L. & Bivens, J. (2021). *Identifying the policy levers generating wage suppression and wage inequality*. Economic Policy Institute. Retrieved September 12, 2025, from <https://www.epi.org/unequalpower/publications/wage-suppression-inequality/>

- 22 A lack of money, which is a core component of poverty, is solved most directly by providing people money. There is strong evidence that social security, child tax credits, and recurring basic-income–style payments can substantially reduce monetary poverty. This claim is not simplistic but rather clarifying: it refocuses debate away from paternalistic cultural explanations for poverty and toward concrete remedies. Since an overwhelming majority of those with inadequate incomes are nonworkers (children, the elderly, people with disabilities, students, and unpaid caregivers) the claim that work (or improved education-to-work pathways) will solve “money problems” is an unhelpful diversion.

Berman, M. (2024). A rising tide that lifts all boats: Long-term effects of the Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend on poverty. *Poverty & Public Policy*, 16(2), 126–145. Retrieved September 12, from <https://doi.org/10.1002/pop4.398>

Romig, K. (2025, January 21). *Social Security lifts more people above the poverty line than any other program*. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Retrieved September 12, 2025, from <https://www.cbpp.org/research/social-security/social-security-lifts-more-people-above-the-poverty-line-than-any-other>

Burns, K., Fox, L.E., & Wilson, D. (2022, September 13). *Child poverty fell to record low 5.2% in 2021*. U.S. Census Bureau. Retrieved September 11, 2025, from <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/09/record-drop-in-child-poverty.html>

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- 23 Relatedly, the economic focus of the report is only partially consistent with what surveys and historical accounts suggest Americans want from schools. Americans do indeed want schools to be sites of job preparation, but that is not the only goal desired.
- 24 Apple, M.W. (1982). *Education and power*. Boston, MA: Routledge.

Cuban, L. (2007). *The blackboard and the bottom line: Why schools can't be businesses*. Harvard University Press.

Labaree, D.F. (1997). Public goods, private goods: The American struggle over educational goals. *American Educational Research Journal*, 34(1), 39–81.

Kantor, H. & Lowe, R. (2013). Educationalizing the welfare state and privatizing education: The evolution of social policy since the New Deal. In P.L. Carter & K. Welner (Eds.), *Closing the opportunity gap: What America must do to give every child an even chance* (pp. 25–39). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Kliebard, H. (1999). *Schooled to work: Vocationalism and the American curriculum, 1876–1946*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

- 25 Scholars note that dominant economic goals 1) contradict public, democratic, and civic purposes and even conservative humanist approaches; 2) can disrupt learning itself, especially as it focuses children's attention on a extrinsic outcomes in the distant future; 3) subordinate schools to market demands rather than equipping students to critique them, including developing students critical capacities to understand ways workplaces are often undemocratic; and 4) sideline the practices of those who aim to use education to illuminate and ameliorate long-standing social problems like racism and oppression. In the report's prioritization of economic outcomes and the needs of employers, it does not engage with the many competing goals of education that are readily available in many basic primers of education. Finally, the report neglects to reference the large body of research that suggests schools are already oriented toward economic outcomes, including in curriculum, governance, and organization.

A core claim in the report is that the goal of education should be future-orientated: the report is focused on making students "ready." The "ready" is defined primarily in terms of economic futures. The report argues that leaders should have an economic focus on *outcomes* by defining "a vision for how students can progress through a learning pathway, from early childhood to career." The future is specifically defined as beyond childhood and after school, with mention of "life after graduation," "life beyond high school," and "life outside the classroom." The report advocates for outcomes that are individual (e.g., mobility and wages) and collective (economic competitiveness and collective economic power), and that will serve employers (with supposed problems such as workforce mismatches, lack of workforce readiness, and worker shortages); yet all are future oriented.

More than a century ago, John Dewey offered a progressive vision for education, arguing that education will be unsuccessful if disproportionately oriented towards the future and lacking relevance to the present lives of children. There are many current advocates of this kind of position, including Jonathan Kozol who wrote, "Childhood is not merely basic training for utilitarian adulthood. It should have some claims upon our mercy, not for its future value to the economic interests of competitive societies but for its present value as a perishable piece of life itself." In addition to this debate, contemporary empirical evidence suggests that students learn more in situations with intrinsic goals (e.g., personal growth) than in those with extrinsic goals (e.g., money).

Anderson, E. (2017). *Private government: How employers rule our lives (and why we don't talk about it)*. Princeton University Press.

Cuban, L. (2007). *The blackboard and the bottom line: Why schools can't be businesses*. Harvard University Press.

Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education*. New York, NY: The Macmillan Company.

Grubb, N. & Lazerson, M. (2004). *The education gospel: The economic power of schooling*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Gutmann, A. (1999). *Democratic education: Revised edition*. Princeton University Press.

Kozol, J. (2005). *The shame of the nation: The restoration of apartheid schooling in America*. New York, NY: Crown, p. 53.

- Oakeshott, M. (1990). Learning and teaching. In T. Fuller (Ed.), *The voice of liberal learning: Michael Oakeshott on education* (pp. 43–62). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Rothstein, R. & Jacobsen, R. (2006). The goals of education. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 88(4), 264–272.
- Vansteenkiste, M., Simons, J., Lens, W., Sheldon, K.M., & Deci, E.L. (2004). Motivating learning, performance, and persistence: the synergistic effects of intrinsic goal contents and autonomy-supportive contexts. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 87(2), 246.
- Spring, J. (2008). *American education* (13th ed.). Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.
- 26 Spady, W.G. (1994). *Outcome-based education: Critical issues and answers*. Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators. Retrieved August 28, 2025, from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED380910.pdf>
- 27 Lee and Reeves (2012) report educational improvement was associated not with what *Let's Get Ready* foregrounds, but other factors: “Improving average achievement as well as narrowing achievement gaps was associated with long-term statewide instructional capacity and teacher resources rather than short-term NCLB implementation fidelity, rigor of standards, and state agency’s capacity for data tracking and intervention.”
- Lee, J. & Reeves, T. (2012). Revisiting the impact of NCLB high-stakes school accountability, capacity, and resources: State NAEP 1990–2009 reading and math achievement gaps and trends. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 34(2), 209–231. Retrieved September 12, 2025, from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3102/0162373711431604>
- Croft, S.J., Roberts, M.A., & Stenhouse, V.L. (2015). The perfect storm of education reform: High-stakes testing and teacher evaluation. *Social Justice*, 42(1), 70–92. Retrieved September 12, 2025, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24871313>
- 28 Hargreaves, A. & Braun, H. (2013). *Data-driven improvement and accountability*. Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center. Retrieved August 28, 2025, from <http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/data-driven-improvement-accountability/>
- 29 Positioning *economic* outcomes as the ultimate justification and using it as an accountability metric can narrow the curriculum again to a specialized education aimed at a hard-to-hit target of future workforce needs. Consider that the 2021-22 NGA chair’s main initiative was focused on expanding computer science education to prepare children for computer science jobs, titled “K-12 Computer Science Education.” That report claimed “jobs that require computer science skills and knowledge will only continue to grow during the 21st century.” However, possibly due to change in so-called artificial intelligence, recent analyses found high unemployment rates for computer science graduates. One article reports, “employment for software developers aged 22-25 declined by nearly 20% compared to its peak in late 2022” and another concludes “computer science majors have long been sold a dream that doesn’t match reality.” According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics several, although not all, categories of computer science employment are predicted to decline over the next decade: “employment of computer programmers is projected to decline 6 percent from 2024 to 2034.”
- Blake, S. (2025, May 23). A popular college major has one of the highest unemployment rates (Computer science). *Newsweek*. Retrieved September 12, 2025, from <https://www.newsweek.com/>

computer-science-popular-college-major-has-one-highest-unemployment-rates-2076514

Brynjolfsson, E., Chandar, B., & Chen, R. (2025, August 26). *Canaries in the coal mine? Six facts about the recent employment effects of artificial intelligence* (Stanford Digital Economy Lab Working Paper). Stanford Digital Economy Lab. Retrieved September 12, 2025, from [https://digitaleconomy.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Canaries\\_BrynjolfssonChandarChen.pdf](https://digitaleconomy.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Canaries_BrynjolfssonChandarChen.pdf)

Bureau of Labor Statistics (n.d.). U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Outlook Handbook, Computer Programmers. Retrieved August 28, 2025, from <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/computer-and-information-technology/computer-programmers.htm>

Horowitch, R. (2025, June 21). The computer-science bubble is bursting. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved September 12, 2025, from <https://www.theatlantic.com/economy/archive/2025/06/computer-science-bubble-ai/683242/>

Pfleger, R. (2014). Myth 43: Our nation's economy is suffering because our education system is not producing enough scientists, engineers, and mathematicians. In Berliner, D.C., Glass, G.V. & Associates. *50 myths & lies that threaten America's public schools* (pp. 417–440). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

30 McNeil, L.M. (2013). *Contradictions of control: School structure and school knowledge*. Routledge.

31 Simple indicators, like the “career pathway concentration” suggested by the report to be included in dashboards, risk confusing who participates with what the program actually causes. Students who participate in a sequence of coursework that connects directly to a career path may be more inclined toward financial reward and predisposed to pursue corporate careers in the highest-paying industries. Students selecting into these programs may be those who already have stronger academic preparation, socioeconomic resources, social networks, or school supports. As a result, while career pathways may correlate with higher income, it is not necessarily the cause of that income. Some of the evidence about career pathways and similar programs that the report links to does include analyses that may be useful in informing policy, but this is in part because they go beyond a dashboard of simple indicators.

The same problem arises with other indicators included in the report's prototype dashboard, such as academic test scores or median income after graduation. Without accounting for who takes the tests, enrolls in certain courses, or pursues certain career paths, the measures should not be treated as causal. So a dashboard that finds a school, state, or program with average low incomes cannot be simplistically taken as evidence of the success of a school, state, or program. The alternative—and this is key—is to use evidence generated from strong research designs that attempt to parse out the causal effects of education and programs. When this kind of research is foregrounded, widely circulated claims like ‘college graduates earn millions more than high school graduates’ become far less compelling, such as when Hendricks and Leukhina found that 74% of the lifetime earnings gaps between college and high school graduates was due to selection, leaving only about one-quarter as a causal effect of college. The more careful causal research suggests that the actual effect of schooling on lifetime earnings, while positive, is much smaller than such sweeping averages imply. The movement to employ “value-added” measures was partially in response to this correlation-causation problem, and the report positively mentions “school-based value-add.” Yet, the examples

of indicators throughout the report, including the more than 25 metrics in Appendix B, are simple descriptive measurements like math proficiency, high school graduation, and industry-recognized credentials.

Hendricks, L. & Leukhina, O. (2018). The return to college: selection and dropout risk. *International Economic Review*, 59(3), 1077-1102.

- 32 Howe, K.R. & Meens, D.E. (2012). *Democracy left behind: How recent education reforms undermine local school governance and democratic education*. Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center. Retrieved September 12, 2025, from <http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/democracy-left-behind>
- 33 Rothstein, R., Jacobsen, R., & Wilder, T. (2008). *Grading education: Getting accountability right*. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute.
- York, A., Welner, K., & Kelley, L.M. (Eds.). (2023). *Schools of opportunity: 10 research-based models of equity in action*. Teachers College Press.
- 34 The report is not the product of a methodical study that included a transparent set of practices to draw conclusions. The report did not claim to fit into, nor could I identify a research method that guided the report such as systematic literature review, critical policy analysis, philosophical or historical deep dive, to say nothing of an empirical method like quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods approaches.
- 35 The report includes, “An analysis conducted by the Urban Institute’s Student Upward Mobility Initiative (SUMI) concluded that parents, educators, and employers are largely on the same page when it comes to the additional skills and competencies, they want to see from high school graduates.” But strong analyses suggest that defining success for school reforms is rather more contentious across groups than full of consensus among them (e.g., Cuban, 2007).

The short linked report does not provide evidence for agreement across these groups or even what parents and educators want. One of its linked studies (now we are going 2 links past Let’s Get Ready!) pieces of evidence is specifically about career readiness and it primarily includes surveys of employers, not educators or parents (<https://www.naceweb.org/uploadedFiles/files/2022/resources/2022-nace-career-readiness-development-and-validation.pdf>). Another link did not discuss parents or educators, and didn’t seem to survey people at all about school (<https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-sector/our-insights/defining-the-skills-citizens-will-need-in-the-future-world-of-work>). Yet another link was to a survey of what employers report (<https://www.aacu.org/research/fulfilling-the-american-dream-liberal-education-and-the-future-of-work>). Another link (<https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2025/>) was explicitly presenting the perspectives of “leading global employers” and did not mention even what employers wanted from schools, much less did it include any mention of what parents and educators want. One linked report was to a scan of state’s “portraits of a graduate,” which did discuss school goals, but no systematic study of what parents and educators want was included, although links within this report may have been relevant (<https://casel.org/portraits-of-a-graduate-2024/>).

Also note that the way surveys, specifically surveys about school goals, are conducted influences the results and provide different types of information.

Cuban, L. (2007). *The blackboard and the bottom line: Why schools can’t be businesses*. Harvard

University Press.

Elan, S.M., Rose, L.C., & Gallup, A.M. (1996). The 28th annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll of the public's attitudes toward the public schools. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 78(1), 41–59. Retrieved September 12, 2025, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20405704>

Including educator, student, parent, community, and worker voices could improve the process used to generate report. Some examples of systematic research of what broad cross-sections of Americans want from schools include:

Rothstein, R. & Jacobsen, R. (2006). The goals of education. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 88(4), 264–272.

Rothstein, R., Jacobsen, R., & Wilder, T. (2008). *Grading education: Getting accountability right*. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute.

- 36 DeGuire, M. (2025, August 5). *Polis downplays many benefits of education as he promotes corporate-backed job preparedness*. Colorado Newsline. Retrieved September 12, 2025, from <https://coloradonewsline.com/2025/08/05/polis-downplays-education-job-preparedness/>
- 37 Note that these convenings were not focus-groups with educators, interviews with children or parents, in-depth case-studies of particular locations or programs, or surveys of people involved in the daily practice of education. These kinds of primary data sources were not included in the report.
- National Governors Association. (2025, July). *Let's get ready! Educating qll Americans for success* (p. 38). Retrieved August 15, 2025, from <https://www.nga.org/letsgetready/>
- 38 The report describes a new metric intended to “assess the return on investment in postsecondary education by examining whether credentials lead to meaningful wage gains.” An earnings-based return on investment (ROI) measure implicitly treats wages as a proxy for credential value, but this ignores fundamental political and economic structures: the return to a degree depends on the wages paid in the occupations the degree leads to. For example, teachers increasingly earn lower wages than other similarly educated workers. (Note that Colorado has the highest relative teacher wage penalty according to one recent study. Teachers there make 35.9% less than other comparable college-educated workers). A measure of return on investment for graduates from schools of education and disciplines that produce teachers would position these higher education schools and disciplines as having low relative value, despite the importance of the profession. Higher teacher pay would increase the measured financial return of education degrees. Given the report does not engage with compensation policy, the ROI metric risks misrepresenting the societal value of education. The same concern applies for other wage-based metrics the report positions as needed to inform school reforms.
- Allegretto, S. (2022). The teacher pay penalty has hit a new high: Trends in teacher wages and compensation through 2021. *Economic Policy Institute*.
- 39 Some core features of a case study, most notably detailed investigations with contextualized data, are absent from the report. The list of supposed accomplishments is lacking analysis of what the accomplishments entailed, how they were achieved, and how they were evaluated.
- 40 If schools are held accountable to feeding the labor market, they may be less likely to pose questions to students about whether capitalism produces inequality or whether associations like the NGA serve democratic interests or plutocratic ones.

- 41 National Governors Association. (2025, July). *Let's get ready! Educating qll Americans for success* (p. 31). Retrieved August 15, 2025, from <https://www.nga.org/letsgetready/>
- 42 The report calls for timely data, but this is infeasible for many of the metrics offered in the report. For example, imagine a teacher receives data that their 2nd grade students from 20 years ago, who are now approx. 27 and may have worked for several years, have below average income earnings (the report suggests using economic mobility, which may require an even longer timeframe to measure earnings across generations). How is that teacher going to improve their practice with those data? High school and college teachers could receive slightly more timely data, but even then, it is not clear from those data what a teacher should do differently.
- 43 Correlation (or even causation) between two conditions is not the same as whether measurement of one of those conditions is the cause of the other. A basic assumption of the report is that measurement and dashboards—the primary action called for in the report—will cause improvement, but no evidence for this is provided.
- 44 “Data-Driven Decision Making” can easily shift from wisely using evidence to a simplistic “datafication” where students and schools become datapoints to be meta-managed by people in a distant control room. There is an international trend toward governing by dashboard. Dashboards are often used in business intelligence operations to facilitate top-down compliance, from the CEO to the worker.
- Bartlett, J. & Tkacz, N. (2017). *Governance by dashboard*. Demos.
- Gorur, R. & Arnold, B. (2021). Governing by dashboard: Reconfiguring education governance in the global south. In *Digital disruption in teaching and testing* (pp. 166-181). Routledge.
- 45 Bae, S. (2018). Redesigning systems of school accountability: A multiple measures approach to accountability and support. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 26(8). Retrieved September 12, 2025, from <http://dx.doi.org/10.14507/epaa.26.2920>
- 46 Governors can use budgets to “encourage school districts to adopt it and classroom teachers to embrace it,” the “it” being the priorities laid out by governors.
- National Governors Association. (2025, July). *Let's get ready! Educating qll Americans for success* (p. 31). Retrieved August 15, 2025, from <https://www.nga.org/letsgetready/>