

The Future of K-12 Education

A Guide for Public Discussion

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Questions to Consider

What do we want education to achieve for individuals? And for society?

What are—or should be—its goals?

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Which of these might be most important? Why?

With the above list (those goals) in mind, what skills or content knowledge should education focus on?

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What factors matter most in achieving the right educational outcomes?

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And how might public policy be used to affect these in a positive way?

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Finally, who should be in charge of K-12 education?

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Questions to Consider - *continued*

What do we want education to achieve for individuals? And for society? What are—or should be—its goals?

- Equip people with skills to live as independent adults
- Ensure economic growth and national wealth
- Provide economic opportunity for individuals
- Create jobs
- Promote individualism (choice, autonomy)
- Encourage morality (decency, respect, responsibility, compassion, sense of limits)
- Support democracy (competent citizens, community, participation)

Which of these might be most important? Why?

With the above list (those goals) in mind, what skills or content knowledge should education focus on?

- Academic skills (the three Rs, science)
- Self-awareness
- Discipline, maturity
- Creativity
- Learning to learn



Questions to Consider – *continued*

What factors matter most in achieving the right educational outcomes?

- Individual child's talents
- Parents/family background
- Peers
- Wider social setting
- Organization of schools
- Teachers
- Using the right educational approach
- Adequate funding

And how might public policy be used to affect these in a positive way?

Finally, who should be in charge of K-12 education?

- Educational experts (teachers, administrators, academics)
- Those funding it (taxpayers, those who pay private tuition, corporate donors)
- Local school authorities such as school boards
- Higher levels of government (state, federal)
- Involved citizens/ residents
- Groups with the biggest stake in education (parents, corporations, unions, community leaders)

Back to the Basics

Quick Version

There's really nothing wrong with the basic approach to education in the United States. We just need to do what we've always done, but get back on course. We need to get back to the basics. That means sticking to core subjects and being stricter about everything, from discipline to standards to monitoring a school's performance.



What's Behind It

Education is critical to one's development as a functioning adult, from working to voting, from parenting to becoming members of the larger community. Schooling needs to equip students with the minimum content knowledge and skills to fulfill all of these roles—this means the three Rs (reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic). But it also means helping people foster social skills, such as teamwork and communication. Finally, it means sorting students into groups: those who should go on to college and those who should pursue vocational training.



The United States is adept at instituting all of these practices. So what's called for is continued reform, not wholesale or radical changes.

What It Might Do

This possibility actively pursues the following to make sure that education in the United States gives all students a solid foundation for life:

- **Back to basics (getting rid of frill subjects, even some expensive extracurriculars)**
- **Clear performance standards for students, schools, teachers, and districts (state or national)**
- **Better performance monitoring**
- **Help for underperforming students, schools, teachers, and districts**
- **Better integration of high school education, as well as for higher education and vocational training**



Notes

Free Individuals

Quick Version

Education may be important economically, but its biggest challenge is balancing individual differences; its biggest responsibility is ensuring that adults are capable of exercising individual choice. This calls for a policy that emphasizes customization and encourages students to think for themselves.

What's Behind It

Education shouldn't produce cookie-cutter graduates—however well they can cope with everyday life or the increasing demands of a fast-paced, modern economy. Children enter the educational system with different talents and temperaments, including different learning styles. Inevitably, they leave it that way, too, no matter how much effort is put into equalizing opportunity. Meanwhile, isn't the very point of education to allow people to make their own way, not only in their careers, but also in every aspect of life? If anything, education in the United States needs to be more flexible and less conformist.



What It Might Do

This possibility encourages the development of skills that will allow students to think and act for themselves, as well as pursue their own career paths. It encourages the following:

- **Offering a wider variety of subjects, even a customized learning plan for each student**
- **Limiting or eliminating non-public influences on subject selection and content**
- **Relying much more on information technology to widen educational options**
- **Deemphasizing school buildings as settings and increasing the use of alternative settings**
- **Helping teachers direct, coordinate, and guide students' educational progress**
- **Reaching out to external (lay) mentors to supplement formal curriculums**



Notes

Real Public Education

Quick Version

Making public education truly public would mean making it not just “for” the public, but also “of” and “by” the public, too. Public schools could be places where community members come together to forge a common “public” identity. What better place to do that than in an institution that encourages young people to become members of their local, state, and national communities?



What's Behind It

The United States may have invented “public education,” but do people really feel like the schools are *theirs*? To what extent do public schools provide citizens with an opportunity to explore

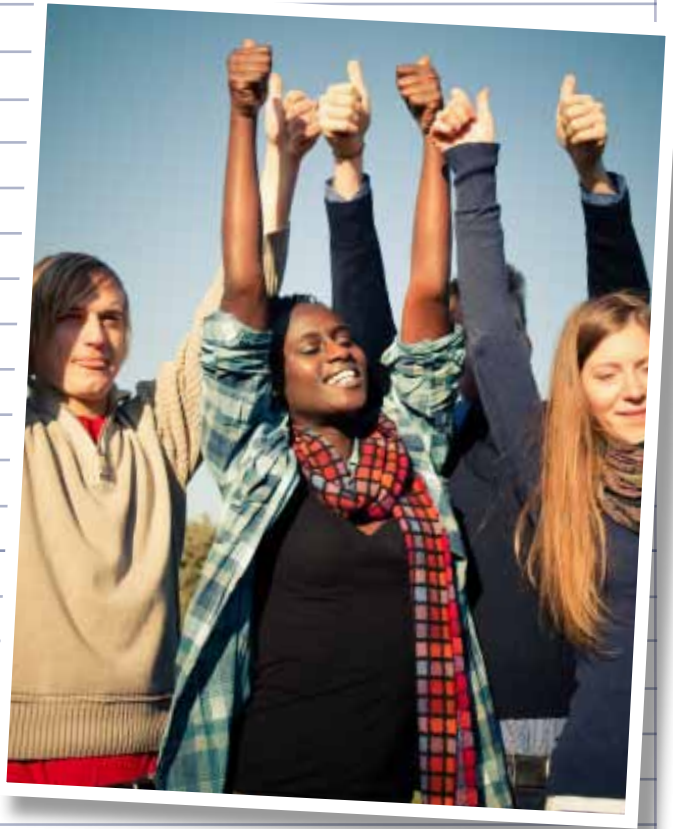
concerns and to solve problems? As for the graduates, don't schools need to equip them with the skills and knowledge to become involved citizens? Schools can be places where the community participates actively in educating its children—and where children participate in the larger community. Citizens wouldn't just “hire” schools, they'd be part of them. And students wouldn't just learn about their community, they'd help contribute to it. Schools would be places where people of all ages practice democracy by discussing and acting on common concerns.



What It Might Do

This possibility promotes significant student involvement in their respective communities through the following:

- **Encouraging young people to develop citizenship knowledge and skills**
 - How government works
 - Teamwork and conflict management
- **Seeking out direct citizen input into organizing and running neighborhood and district schools**
- **Greatly expanding volunteer involvement in schools to promote practical education and career mentoring and guidance**



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