A Nation of Promise:
Building an Education System That Delivers for Every Student



More than 40 years ago, the United States made an important promise to our nation's students:

"All, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost."

Those words, published in a 1983 U.S. Department of Education report, *A Nation at Risk*, were rooted in the belief that educational opportunity is the cornerstone of economic mobility, democratic participation, and a thriving civic society. They also echoed ideals that generations of Americans have worked to make real. In this country, Black, Latino, Native, and Asian Americans, as well as those with disabilities and from low-income backgrounds, have marched, fought, and died to extend the promise of public education to every student, not just a fortunate few.

More than four decades later, school doors and university gates may be open, but the "utmost" promise remains unfulfilled.

The education of traditionally underserved students still depends too often on their race, ZIP code, family income, disability status, or the language they speak at home. Yet we know that every student can succeed when provided access to excellent teaching, meaningful opportunities, and the support they deserve.

Delivering on our promise is about more than education. It's about whether every student can pursue a meaningful career, achieve economic security, participate fully in civic life, and shape their own future. When students succeed, American families become more secure, communities grow stronger, our workforce becomes more competitive, and our democracy becomes more resilient.

The stakes could not be higher.

Today, there is an eighth grader whose family is desperately trying to break the cycle of poverty. He sits in a classroom where teacher turnover is the norm. His math class is taught by someone who is trained in another subject. He raises his hand for help, but too often goes unseen. Without the support he deserves, his brilliance is overlooked and his potential goes unrealized.

Meanwhile, a first-generation college student of color works two jobs because her Pell Grant no longer covers her tuition and basic needs. One unexpected medical bill or car repair could force her to abandon the degree she has worked so hard to pursue.



These students represent millions of young people whose opportunities are constrained not by talent or ambition, but by systems that have failed to provide them with the support they need to succeed.

In 1983, we were a nation at risk. Today, we are a nation in crisis, and the gap between America's promise and reality is visible everywhere: in a literacy crisis that leaves too many students behind before they reach high school; in a college affordability crisis that forces students to choose between debt and opportunity; and in persistent inequities that determine who has access to outstanding teachers, advanced coursework, and pathways to rewarding careers.

The good news is that these crises are neither inevitable nor insurmountable. As the U.S. Department of Education is being dismantled, students of color and those from traditionally underserved backgrounds are being abandoned under the banner of "returning education to the states." However, our elected leaders have an opportunity and an obligation to build a system that delivers on the nation's promise to all students by advancing policies that expand opportunity rather than limit it.

Across the country, educators, schools, communities, and policymakers are already working to fulfill that promise by demonstrating what's possible when students receive the investments and supports they need. The challenge before us is finding the courage to make those investments and supports available to every student.

A Nation of Promise is our blueprint for doing just that.

Grounded in evidence and shaped by the lived experiences of the students we serve, it outlines a practical policy agenda for elected leaders and candidates that expands opportunity from early childhood through postsecondary education and into meaningful careers. It's written for leaders who believe that education should live up to its highest purpose and are ready to turn that belief into action.

The greatest legacy today's policymakers can leave is a nation where every student receives an excellent education, learns to read and do math well, discovers their voice, feels safe and celebrated, and is guided through affordable postsecondary pathways that prepare them for college, careers, civic life, and lifelong success.

By crafting policies and laws that tear down barriers and widen futures, policymakers can change the trajectory of students, families, communities, and the country.

Becoming *A Nation of Promise* is not an impossible dream. It is an attainable future that requires leadership, sustained investment, and an unwavering belief in the limitless potential of every student.

A promise was made. Now, it's time to deliver. That is our commitment. This is our agenda. And we believe that, with everything at stake, it must be yours too.

Let's get to work.

Denise Forte
President & CEO, EdTrust

A Nation of Promise: Introduction

Public education in the United States should prepare every student for meaningful work, lifelong learning, economic security, and active participation in civic life. Yet for far too many students — especially students of color, students from rural and low-income communities, multilingual students, and students with disabilities — that promise remains out of reach.

The most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results reveal that about two-thirds of K-12 students are not reading or doing math at grade level. And, in traditionally underserved communities, students are even less likely to be proficient.

These outcomes are *not* the result of students' ability or potential. They are the product of systemic failures and decades of policy choices that have left too many schools underfunded, too many classrooms staffed by inexperienced and undertrained educators, and too many students without the academic, financial, and social supports and resources they need to thrive.

We see similar problems in higher education and career-preparation programs. Students from low-income backgrounds lack access to informed college and career advising and face basic-needs insecurity due to rising costs and dwindling financial aid. Three in five college students experience food or housing insecurity, while many struggle to afford college without taking on unmanageable debt or working hours that undermine their academic success. In some cases, these challenges lead students to quit higher education altogether. And recent federal policy changes further threaten to make bachelor's, graduate, and professional degrees less affordable for many students, particularly those from low-income backgrounds.

A Nation of Promise offers a better path forward.

Grounded in six priorities of promise, it presents a comprehensive federal policy agenda to help lawmakers and candidates build an education system that expands opportunity for every student from early childhood through postsecondary education and into the workforce.

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Together, these priorities will create the conditions for every student to thrive:

1. **Unlock the Promise for Every Student:** Every student develops the skills to become a capable and confident reader, writer, and mathematician.
2. **Share the Promise With Every Student:** Every student's needs and aspirations are known, and shared responsibility leads to their success.
3. **Protect Every Student's Promise:** Every student is safe, supported, and seen.
4. **Deliver on the Promise to Every Student:** Every student is taught by well-prepared, supported, and diverse educators.
5. **Carry the Promise Into College, Career, and Life:** Every student is on a pathway to a fulfilling career and meaningful participation in civic life.
6. **Fund the Promise for Every Student:** Every student has access to high-quality education and workforce training, no matter their family's income or ZIP code.

While no single policy can fulfill America's educational promise, these interconnected priorities provide a roadmap for transforming public P-12 and postsecondary education into a system that unlocks talent, expands opportunity, promotes economic mobility, and fosters democratic participation for every student in the U.S., regardless of race, income, disability, immigration status, language, or ZIP code, ensuring that educational equity, opportunity, and justice are all within their reach.



Priority 1: Unlock the Promise for Every Student

Every student develops the skills to become a capable and confident reader, writer, and mathematician.

Education systems must provide the foundational skills every student needs to access meaningful learning opportunities and thrive throughout their lives. This means reading and math skills to empower them to interact with the world, pursue their interests, tackle new challenges, and participate in their communities, the economy, and our democracy. A Nation of Promise helps every student become a strong reader, writer, and mathematician. We must accept nothing less than helping every student reach their full potential, and that starts with literacy and math.

How We Get There

Give Students a Head Start

- Every child participates in high-quality early childhood education that supports their academic, social, and emotional development and prepares them for a strong start in school.
- Every student develops a strong foundation in literacy and math beginning in the early years and continues building knowledge, skills, and identities as readers, writers, and mathematicians throughout their education.

Teach Students the Way They Learn

- Every student receives high-quality literacy and math instruction aligned with what evidence consistently tells us about how students learn.
- Students learn from well-prepared educators, high-quality instructional materials, and instruction that builds their knowledge, responds to their individual needs, and feels relevant to their interests and lived experiences.
- State and district leaders and educators have access to clear, actionable information about how effective instruction can support students' literacy and math development, and have the resources needed to translate this research into classroom practice at scale.
- Strong personal relationships with educators that benefit student learning are supported and enhanced by emerging technologies.

Keep Students on Track

- Families and educators have timely, meaningful information about student progress so they can recognize and respond when students need additional support.
- When students have difficulty in a subject, they receive timely, evidence-based supports — such as targeted, intensive tutoring — that complement strong classroom instruction, and schools are equipped with the resources they need to ensure every student makes progress.

The Policies

Give Students a Head Start

- **Guarantee high-quality universal pre-K:** Increase federal investments in early childhood education via the Preschool Development Grants Birth through Five and increase investments in Head Start so states can expand access to and quality of universal pre-K. This reduces the burden on families and student-parents, and ensures all students who enter public schools are ready to learn.
- **Strengthen the early learning workforce:** Increase federal investments in the preparation, compensation, and retention of early childhood educators, so expanding access does not come at the expense of quality.

Teach Students the Way They Learn

- **Champion literacy and math instruction as a national priority:** Pass legislation to strengthen grants that help states to promote strong literacy and math instruction (e.g., the Comprehensive Literacy State Development program) and that require alignment with evidence about how students develop reading and mathematics skills across all grades and subjects. Proven supports and resources include curriculum-aligned professional learning, instructional coaches, and the adoption of high-quality instructional materials.
- **Allow AI only when it enhances learning:** Fund the development of high-quality, developmentally appropriate artificial intelligence (AI) tools for teachers and students with clear guardrails to address bias and protect student privacy and well-being. Investments should ensure that policies, practices, and tools are co-designed with communities to meet real educational needs and foster, not replace, opportunities for students to learn and build positive relationships with adults and peers. Prioritize equitable access to these technologies and support for educators and students to develop AI literacy skills, alongside research and development to identify promising practices for AI implementation.
- **Shed light on school learning conditions:** Release and disaggregate federal data sources, such as the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), to illuminate school learning conditions — including those that impede students' ability to develop in reading and math or increase risk for chronic absences.
- **Translate research into classroom practice:** Strengthen the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) and the federal education research and technical assistance infrastructure to commission new research on literacy and math instruction and supports, with a focus on student groups that are underrepresented in existing research, including multilingual learners. Help states and districts translate new and existing research into effective classroom practice and scale approaches that improve student outcomes.

Ensure all students who enter public schools are ready to learn

Keep Students on Track

- **Build a national tutor network:** Create a national corps of tutors by investing in partnerships with community organizations and postsecondary institutions that place tutors in under-resourced schools, where they provide academic support aligned with classroom instruction.
- **Fund transformational instruction and interventions:** Build the capacity of federal regional and content support centers to help state and district leaders adopt and implement universal screeners and other assessments in ways that limit testing time. This provides educators with the skills and knowledge needed to use data to identify and support students who need additional help mastering literacy and math content.
- **Require timely and honest information on student progress:** Require that the results of statewide assessments be released by the end of the current school year. Provide guidance and technical assistance about how to report results in ways that are accessible and understandable for students, families, and educators — including on students' final report cards — so they can work together to build on students' strengths and address learning needs.



THE PROMISE'S THROUGHLINE: MASTERY IN LITERACY AND MATH

The first priority in this agenda, "Unlock the Promise," seeks to ensure every student develops the skills to become a capable and confident reader, writer, and mathematician. But literacy and math are so much more than a single priority; they are critical to the success of every educational goal in this agenda.

A student who cannot read fluently or reason mathematically is cut off from the content and skills needed to build knowledge of the world around them, thereby limiting access to advanced coursework, postsecondary opportunities, career pathways, and full participation in civic life. Today, about two-thirds of K-12 students are not reading or doing math at grade level — and these disparities are widest for the students this agenda is built to support.

The consequences go well beyond K-12 education. According to a College Board survey of university faculty, more than 75% of faculty report that incoming first-year students are less prepared in critical thinking and analysis skills than pre-COVID cohorts. An increasing number of college students also say they feel academically underprepared for college coursework, leading many to enroll in remedial courses that cost valuable time, money, and momentum.

Getting every student to grade-level mastery is possible, but no single program, promise, or funding stream can accomplish it alone. Grade-level literacy and math aren't the responsibility of a single teacher, school, or budget item; they are the shared responsibility of the entire system.

The priority to Unlock the Promise is not enough. Success requires a coordinated effort across the other priorities of *A Nation of Promise*:

Share the Promise With Every Student: No student struggling to read or do math goes unseen — enabling educators to quickly identify students who are falling behind in reading or math and building structures that empower all stakeholders to hold each other accountable for getting them to grade-level proficiency.

Protect Every Student's Promise: Students are present and ready to learn. Providing wraparound supports, mental health resources, and positive school climates reduces the barriers driving chronic absenteeism. When students are consistently in the classroom, they can receive the resources and instruction to master reading and math.

Deliver on the Promise to Every Student: Teachers are trained and equipped to align their instruction to how students learn, and every child can develop strong literacy and mathematical reasoning skills.

Carry the Promise Into College, Career, and Life: Make learning rigorous and relevant for every student. Connect evidence-based literacy and math instruction to students' interests and future goals, so they are prepared for advanced coursework, postsecondary education, and fulfilling careers.

Fund the Promise for Every Student: Direct resources to where they're needed most. States can make strong literacy and math instruction a reality in every school with equitable, targeted funding that ensures students have access to well-trained teachers, rigorous curricula, and effective interventions.

Priority 2: Share the Promise With Every Student

In our vision, every student's needs and aspirations are known, and shared responsibility leads to their success.

From preschool through college, and job training into careers, we must design our education systems to recognize our students' potential, identify and provide the supports they need to succeed, and challenge them to meet high expectations. *A Nation of Promise* demands that our students have the chance to learn with rigor, feel belonging with their school communities, and never be allowed to fall through the cracks.

How We Get There

Know Every Student

- Students who struggle to meet academic standards are identified early — not after they've already fallen behind — because families, teachers, school counselors, and administrators are working together, informed by a shared, up-to-date picture of student needs.
- Students receive the support they need because state and district leaders understand the value of investing in their students and can see opportunities and deploy resources where they will matter most.

Support Every School; Support Every Student

- Students attend schools that do not shoulder challenges alone. Each public school is connected to a system of targeted resources and supports. Every level of the system, not just the school, is responsible for student success.
- Families and communities — particularly those traditionally excluded from public resources — can see exactly how their school's resources are being used and have a meaningful seat at the table when decisions are made.

Provide Value for Every Postsecondary Student

- When students are ready to choose a postsecondary education or workforce training program, they have navigational support to compare programs based on cost, completion rates, and graduate earnings before enrolling — because the data is publicly accessible and advisors are equipped to support students' decision-making.
- If a program fails to deliver on its promise, students have a real path to financial recourse, and postsecondary programs that consistently leave graduates with unaffordable debt and poor job prospects face real consequences.

Every level of the system, not just the school, is responsible for student success

The Policies

Know Every Student

- **Fund data systems that work:** Improve the Department of Education's capacity to publicly report data in a timely and accessible manner and to provide oversight and support for state and local reporting — by restoring and expanding staff capacity within the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and across the Department, modernizing data collection and processing procedures, and setting ambitious yet achievable reporting deadlines — so communities have up-to-date information on how systems are serving all students.
- **Connect the dots; close the gaps:** Increase investments in statewide longitudinal and early warning data systems, with a focus on improving data quality and timeliness; building and strengthening connections across P-12, postsecondary, and workforce systems; and linking data on school conditions, student outcomes, and employment. This will enable students and families to make informed choices about education pathways and allow leaders to move beyond identifying inequitable outcomes to addressing resource gaps to fully meet student needs.
    - *Technology-enabled insights:* Create a data innovation grant program and create a new federal technical assistance center on AI to enhance the Department of Education's capacity to support state, district, and postsecondary leaders to use AI and other technological innovations responsibly — with strong guardrails to protect students — to more effectively use and report data about student opportunities and outcomes.

Support Every School; Support Every Student

- **Transform schools through shared responsibility:** Enact clear federal school improvement requirements designed to build coherent structures of supports, backed by adequate funding, that help states develop and sustain systems to deliver on high expectations for all students. Systems should hold everyone and every entity responsible for acting on data that honestly identifies opportunity gaps, so students receive targeted, differentiated, and evidence-based supports that ensure they succeed.
- **Empower communities and families to build together:** Invest in state-led innovations, such as more actionable reporting of assessment results and improved district budgeting processes, that provide accessible data on student and school outcomes and resource use. This will empower traditionally excluded families and communities to understand how resources are being used to ensure all students meet high expectations and thrive, thereby enabling meaningful, collaborative decision-making.

Provide Value for Every Postsecondary Student

- **Collect data that supports decision-making:** Pass legislation that would allow the federal government to collect disaggregated student-level data on enrollment, affordability, completion, and post-enrollment outcomes like earnings and employment, so students can make informed choices.
- **Deliver credentials that pay off:** Build on the federal framework for postsecondary program earnings by amending federal law and adding elements that capture whether certificate and degree programs are accessible, affordable, and driving strong student outcomes — with programs that do not deliver good outcomes for students losing access to federal loans and grants.

- **Set real standards; real enforcement**: Develop a strengthened accreditation rule that reinstates safeguards against inexperienced and politicized accreditors and requires accreditors to set and enforce program-level standards for student access and success, with meaningful enforcement against institutions that fail to deliver for students or student groups — upholding their role as gatekeepers to federal funding.
- **Ensure justice for defrauded students:** Develop strengthened federal borrower defense and closed school loan discharge protections, so students defrauded by low-quality programs can obtain financial recourse.



Priority 3: Protect Every Student's Promise

In our vision, every student is safe, supported, and seen.

A Nation of Promise must look beyond the classroom. Creating a sense of security and belonging for our students in the classroom means meeting their basic needs, protecting their mental health, connecting them to trusted advisors and mentors, and keeping them engaged and on pace to reach their goals.

How We Get There

Foster Safety and Belonging

- All students are consistently ready to learn because they attend schools and postsecondary institutions where they feel safe, welcome, and respected, and where their individual needs are valued and met throughout and beyond their education and workforce training.
- Schools and postsecondary institutions have adequate ratios of culturally competent support staff who represent student backgrounds and identities, so every student gets the academic, social, and emotional support they need.
- When students struggle with conflict or behavior, schools focus on identifying and addressing root causes, working together to restore the community rather than removing students from the classroom — and never using physical punishment.

Fulfill Basic Needs

- Students can attend and engage in their classes because they receive the necessary social, emotional, and financial support through a connected team of social workers, advisors, benefits navigators, and community partnership coordinators who work together and use proven approaches.
- Traditionally underserved students — such as students from low- and middle-income families, students of color, and student-parents — are able to complete their degree, certificate, or apprenticeship debt-free and without worrying about meeting their basic needs (e.g., housing, food, and childcare).
- Students have access to federal and state student aid and public benefits through a one-stop shop, where a dedicated navigator guides them through the process free from red tape.

When we invest in a strong, diverse, and well-supported educator workforce, every student benefits

The Policies

Foster Safety and Belonging

- **Surround students with support:** Increase federal funding for training, recruiting, and retaining school counselors, social workers, and psychologists, both within schools and through community-based partnerships with expertise in engaging and mentoring underserved youth. These investments should focus on increasing schools' capacity to support students' mental health, providing college and career counseling, and using culturally affirming, trauma-informed practices to increase student attendance, engagement, and sense of belonging.
- **Build belonging, not barriers:** Pass a national ban on corporal punishment and redirect federal school safety investments toward approaches that foster supportive school environments, including restorative justice strategies.
- **Require campus climate assessments:** Change federal law to require all postsecondary institutions to conduct campus climate assessments that evaluate an institution's historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion of traditionally underserved students, mental health and well-being, climate, and student belonging.
- **Defend every student's civil rights:** Restore and expand federal and regional offices of the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and direct staff capacity toward their intended role of advancing civil rights protections for students of color, women and girls, LGBTQ+ students, pregnant and parenting students, and students with disabilities.

Fulfill Basic Needs

- **Build support around every student:** Revive and strengthen the Full-Service Community Schools Program and federal Equity Assistance Centers to support states in developing high-quality community schools and other models that include expanded roles for social workers, family liaisons, and community partnership coordinators to meet students' holistic needs.
- **Scale what keeps students enrolled:** Increase federal funding for evidence-based interventions like emergency aid and basic needs grants and personalized advising, which increase retention and completion in postsecondary education and workforce training.
- **Eliminate financial barriers for students:** Expand and streamline existing public benefits and grant programs to reduce postsecondary students' out-of-pocket costs for basic needs, such as food, housing, childcare, healthcare, internet/technology access, and transportation.

Educators who reflect and understand the communities they serve are better equipped to recognize and nurture each student's strengths and talents, helping them reach their full potential

Priority 4: Deliver on the Promise to Every Student

In our vision, every student is taught by well-prepared, supported, and diverse educators.

A Nation of Promise depends on a system of people committed to every student. Teachers, professors, school counselors, and education leaders are the individuals who help turn potential into opportunity and opportunity into success. When we invest in a strong, diverse, and well-supported educator workforce, every student benefits. Educators who reflect and understand the communities they serve are better equipped to recognize and nurture each student's strengths and talents, helping them reach their full potential. They see possibility where others see obstacles and refuse to let race, income, language, or disability define a student's future.

How We Get There

Grow the Pipeline

- Students are taught by educators and faculty who reflect the diversity of their communities and use evidence-based, culturally responsive instructional practices.
- Students struggling with literacy and math receive consistent, high-quality academic support and intervention, including high-quality tutoring from diverse tutors who may become teachers.
- All students can access holistic supports because schools — especially high-need schools, community colleges, and minority-serving institutions — have enough support staff (i.e., tutors, school counselors, social workers, and advisors) to meet the needs of their students.

Strengthen the Profession

- All students — including those from traditionally underserved communities — have high-quality, diverse teachers because the education profession, including faculty pipelines, attracts and retains talented, diverse individuals through sustainable career pathways, supportive work environments, and competitive compensation.
- Students have multiple adults focused on supporting their success because educators work collaboratively — with roles designed around their strengths and expertise rather than outdated, isolating models of teaching — and leaders foster a supportive environment.

The Policies

Grow the Pipeline

- **Grow the teacher pipeline through tutoring:** Create a national corps of tutors by investing in partnerships that place them in under-resourced schools to build a natural pipeline of aspiring educators where they are needed most while providing students with necessary academic supports.
- **Clear the path to teaching:** Expand training and apprenticeship pathways into the teaching profession by investing in K-12 teacher preparation programs that focus on evidence-based instructional practices for reading and math, as well as programs that invest in a strong early childhood workforce. These programs prioritize diversity, provide residencies and mentorship, pay candidates a living wage, and target placements in schools with the greatest need.

- **Build strong faculty pipelines**: Increase federal funding for undergraduate and graduate research opportunities that provide the necessary academic training to help aspiring academics and researchers transition into faculty careers, prioritizing those focused on training P-12 educators and support staff.

Strengthen the Profession

- **Prepare leaders to transform schools:** Invest in the expansion of training programs that develop school leaders into top-notch instructional leaders. These programs should target high-need schools and focus on helping administrators support teachers and lead through transformational change.
- **Build stronger teams; reach every student:** Create grants that provide seed funding for schools and districts to innovate and scale collaborative staffing models and compensation incentives that support and retain teachers, while providing students with more personalized instruction.
- **Fund technology that puts students first:** Reinstate Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) with dedicated capacity to support state and district leaders to build educators' knowledge and skills to leverage AI and other technology to support student-centered instructional practices while protecting student privacy and mitigating bias.



Priority 5: Carry the Promise Into College, Career, and Life

In our vision, every student is on a pathway to a fulfilling career and meaningful participation in civic life.

In *A Nation of Promise*, education is the foundation upon which good careers, economic security, and meaningful participation in communities and democracy are built. Every student should leave school walking tall with a sense of purpose and possibility.

That's why every student should have opportunities to explore careers, earn college credit, and connect classroom learning to the real world to prepare them for their postsecondary pathway. No matter their chosen path, students should graduate high school with strong reading, writing, math, and critical-thinking skills, and every student should have the navigational support to choose a postsecondary pathway — whether immediately following high school or later in their career — that fits their goals and leads to social and economic mobility.

How We Get There

Jumpstart Students' Futures

- Students participate in advanced coursework, allowing them to access a wide array of pathways.
- Middle and high school students have meaningful college- and career-connected learning — such as working with local employers and using the latest innovative technology — that allows them to explore career opportunities and prepare them for opportunities after high school.
- Schools serve as community hubs where students build civic engagement and social-emotional skills through sustained, community-based learning experiences.

Support Informed Decisions

- Students and families can easily access actionable information about their options after high school and have navigational support to make informed decisions — including which student groups have been successful in each program — whether that be a two- or four-year degree, certificate, apprenticeship, or credential they can build on over time.
- Students have information about how to stack or transfer their credits as they progress through their postsecondary journey.
- Students and families understand the real cost of their chosen path and know how to access financial aid and other public benefits to cover those costs without incurring debt.

Remove Barriers to Success

- All postsecondary students participate in high-quality, paid and/or credit-bearing work-based learning opportunities built into their programs to support completion and strong career preparation.

- Adult learners have accessible paths to reenter and complete high-quality credential programs even after substantial time away from formal education.
- Learners who are incarcerated have access to high-quality education options both during incarceration and after release.

The Policies

Jumpstart Students' Futures

- **Expand advanced coursework access:** Increase federal funding to support P-12 and postsecondary partnerships and automatic enrollment policies that expand access to advanced coursework — such as dual enrollment, AP/IB, and early college — and require states to report on student access to and successful completion of these courses.
- **Connect classrooms to careers:** Provide federal funding to redesign middle and high schools to explicitly connect students' learning to college and career pathways — such as employer partnerships, work-based learning, youth apprenticeships, and high-quality career and technical education (CTE) programs. These programs deepen student engagement and postsecondary readiness.

Support Informed Decisions

- **Guide every student toward success:** Invest in school counselors and college and career advisors who provide students and families with easy-to-understand information about all postsecondary options, including student success outcomes, graduation and employment rates, and financial aid access.
- **Clear the path to degrees and credentials:** Use federal funding to incentivize states to expand policies that streamline and advance access to postsecondary credentials (e.g., dual enrollment, early college, automatic college enrollment, and policies that facilitate credit transfer).

Remove Barriers to Success

- **Integrate relevant work into degree programs:** Provide new funding or leverage existing funding to institutions and employer partnerships to integrate structured, career-relevant work experience into postsecondary academic programs, so students are better prepared for the workforce.
- **Turn real skills into real progress:** Leverage federal student aid, such as Workforce Pell Grants, to require better data on student outcomes to ensure short-term workforce training programs are high quality and lead to postsecondary credentials that actually help students get hired and earn a living wage.
- **Give justice-impacted students a second chance:** Ensure access to high-quality, affordable postsecondary education for students impacted by the criminal legal system — both during and after incarceration — by increasing Pell Grant funding and providing robust support for prison education programs to fully meet learners' needs.

Priority 6: Fund the Promise for Every Student

In our vision, every student has access to high-quality education and workforce training, no matter their family's income or ZIP code.

Every student has talent, potential, and promise, and we will be *A Nation of Promise* when each student has access to a great education and a pathway to opportunity — regardless of their race, income, neighborhood, disability, or immigration status. That's why funding should follow students' needs, not local property values. When we invest where students need support most, we're not just investing in students' futures; we are investing in America.

Fair investments create welcoming schools with modern technology, engaging learning environments, excellent teachers, strong after-school programs, advanced coursework, and real-world career experiences that prepare students for what's next.

A Nation of Promise makes college and career training affordable. Crushing debt should not be a prerequisite to pursuing dreams. Beyond affordable tuition, students need support for housing, food, transportation, and other everyday costs that too often stand between talented young people and the opportunities they've earned.

How We Get There

Provide Equitable Funding

- Students from low-income communities and students of color have access to high-quality educational opportunities that enhance learning, classrooms with well-trained teachers, and rigorous curricula that reflect students' interests and identities.
- Students with disabilities are equitably identified and receive the specialized services, accommodations, and support they're legally entitled to.
- Multilingual students have access to qualified bilingual educators who provide the language instruction and opportunities they need to thrive in school.

Make Students' Futures Affordable

- Students from low- and middle-income families are guaranteed postsecondary affordability through financial aid that ensures the full cost of attendance is never a barrier to completing their degree, certificate, or apprenticeship.
- If students do take out student loans, they have peace of mind knowing that transparent, affordable repayment options are available that won't limit their ability to invest in their future.

The Policies

Provide Equitable Funding

- **Pay for federal education promises:** Support the unique needs of traditionally underserved students by increasing overall Title I funding, while making it more targeted to districts with the most need, and increasing school improvement funding so more federal dollars support students from low-income backgrounds, students of color, students with disabilities, and multilingual students.
- **Fund schools by need, not by ZIP code:** Use federal grants to incentivize states to implement fair, progressive tax and funding policies that increase overall education resources and direct them to the highest-need students. Prioritize federal education funds for schools serving students in under-resourced communities.
- **Level the playing field for under-resourced institutions**: Update the Higher Education Act to increase funding for under-resourced institutions, such as minority-serving institutions and community colleges, which have been consistently underfunded for decades.

Make Students' Futures Affordable

- **End degree debt traps:** Congress should create a federal-state partnership that increases public investment in high-quality public postsecondary education and workforce training. This partnership should guarantee affordability through debt-free options for low- and middle-income families, lower costs for everyone, and simplify the transfer of earned credits.
- **Provide meaningful financial aid:** Congress should amend federal law to protect and expand the Pell Grant, our nation's most important higher education grant program, and incentivize states to move away from merit-based aid to need-based aid.
- **Protect debt-free futures:** Improve the structure of, and access to, affordable repayment plans and debt relief pathways, so student borrowers can secure their futures, unburdened by debt.

