



State Policy Priorities and Recommendations

March 2022

The Aurora Institute has worked with policymakers, practitioners, educators, researchers, and community members to develop the following state policy priorities and recommendations to foster educational equity, justice, and academic excellence for generations to come. We believe these policies will enable our education system to transition away from an industrial age “one-size-fits all” model in which educators unilaterally deliver instruction to a student-centered learning model that supports student agency, builds knowledge, and prioritizes competencies over seat-time. This vision of the future will require a concerted effort toward student-centered policies and rethinking how teaching and learning should take place to support lifelong learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Establish a Statewide
Profile of a Graduate

Modernize State
Education Funding

Advance Racial Equity
in Education

Increase Educator
Workforce Diversity

Modernize the Educator
Workforce

Advance
Competency-Based
Education Policies

Establish
Innovation Zones

Invest in COVID-19
Learning Recovery

Transform Systems of
Assessments

Rethink Next Generation
Accountability

Expand Access to
Broadband

Create Competency-
Based Pathways Across
K-12, Higher
Education, Career and
Technical Education, and
the Workforce

ESTABLISH A STATEWIDE PROFILE OF A GRADUATE

States should set a clear and modernized vision for what students need to know and be able to do upon graduating by developing a “Profile of a Graduate.” A Profile of a Graduate, also known as a Portrait of a Graduate, outlines the academic knowledge, skills, and experiences each learner needs to excel in college and the workforce.

State Policy Recommendations

- Engage communities and diverse stakeholders to develop a vision to modernize and redefine holistic graduation requirements based on what students need to know and be able to do to succeed in the future.
- Develop a statewide “Profile of a Graduate” for K–12 education describing the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that students need for college, careers, and civic life.



MODERNIZE STATE EDUCATION FUNDING

K–12 education funding across the United States is complex, highly variable, and inequitable. Funding systems should account for student demographics and socioeconomic status, as well as historical disinvestments to specific student subgroups, and address the impact of variation in local tax revenues based on community wealth to more effectively allocate resources to serve all students.

State Policy Recommendations

- Develop new formulas for equitable resource allocation, including metrics that weight funding distributions based on race and income (such as a Family Income Index), and/or the proportional share of students living in poverty and/or students of color enrolled in each school across the state.
- Invest funds to ensure every student has access to modern educational opportunities, powerful personalized learning, additional instructional supports, early childhood programs, paid work-based learning experiences, and a high-quality teacher workforce.
- Create and engage with a working group of diverse experts and education and community leaders to study innovative approaches to equitable school funding formulas from other states and countries.



Photo: Allison Shelley/The Verbatim Agency for EDUimages

ADVANCE RACIAL EQUITY IN EDUCATION

For over a century, students of color, especially Black and Brown students, have fared worse in almost every traditional educational measure of success compared to their white peers. Research on the learning sciences, however, shows us that all students can achieve at high levels and that learning happens on a continuum. It is critical that states address academic and opportunity gaps early and ensure that all students have access to a holistic, well-rounded education that supports whole-child development.

State Policy Recommendations

- Develop an education equity task force to address the unique needs of students of color and other historically underserved students.
- Incorporate anti-racist, culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and restorative practices in professional development for all educators, school leaders, educator paraprofessionals, and administrators.
- Establish new or reallocate existing state funds to individual schools with high percentages of low-income students to support learning and whole child support services.



INCREASE EDUCATOR WORKFORCE DIVERSITY

Recruiting and retaining a more racially diverse educator workforce is essential to improve student outcomes and address prior injustices that prevented educators of color from teaching. The latest research shows that a diverse educator workforce improves academic outcomes and wellbeing for all students.

State Policy Recommendations

- Increase investment in recruiting, training, retaining, and promoting Black, Indigenous, and other teachers of color through scholarship and loan forgiveness programs, as well as Grow Your Own Pathway grants.
- Provide direct capacity and technical assistance to districts with diversity-focused recruitment and retention strategies.
- Provide support, resources, and training for school leaders to create or enhance culturally inclusive work settings.
- Increase the salaries of educators to provide a living wage and attract a more diverse workforce.



MODERNIZE THE EDUCATOR WORKFORCE

States should invest in competency-based educator professional learning systems to build educator capacity for student-centered learning. This will require changing how systems recruit new educators, redesigning preservice preparation, rethinking professional development, and implementing competency-based frameworks to ensure educators have the skills, supports, and resources to implement student-centered education models.

State Policy Recommendations

- Convene a statewide task force on modernizing teaching and professional learning.
- Remodel teacher licensure and credentialing based on mastery, including competency-based pathways through micro-credentials.
- Support statewide and regional communities of innovative practice across systems and schools.
- Prioritize educator preparation and development for building the knowledge and skills teachers need to lead in competency-based, student-centered learning.



ADVANCE COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION POLICIES

The prevailing traditional, one-size-fits-all K–12 education model does not meet the unique academic and holistic needs of all learners. All states can support competency-based education policies and innovative learning by prioritizing flexibility, funding, and research. It is important for states to shift their role from solely focusing on compliance toward taking an active role in advancing innovation and catalyzing change.

State Policy Recommendations

- Establish competency-based education task forces with diverse stakeholders.
- Create and launch competency-based pilots that allow educators and schools to innovate new teaching and learning approaches tied to a state vision of student success.
- Redefine credits based on mastery of learning, rather than seat-time; award credits based on demonstration of knowledge, skills, and competencies.
- Build greater knowledge about how districts and schools are designing and implementing competency-based systems with embedded equity strategies to fully meet the needs of historically underserved students.
- Create competency-based pathways to graduation.



ESTABLISH INNOVATION ZONES

Innovation Zones are a powerful strategy states should use to create space for new student-centered learning designs and education transformation without restrictions from outdated state regulations. The state, in turn, can take advantage of the short-term waivers to examine those policies to address underlying policy barriers in the long-term and advance enabling conditions for new, innovative learning models.

State Policy Recommendations

- Authorize the state board or state department of education to create statewide Innovation Zones with allocated state funding to support or expand local innovation and flexibility toward student-centered learning.
- Prioritize flexibility from state statutes, regulations, and requirements that impose barriers to advance student-centered learning, such as removing seat-time policies.
- Evaluate how Innovation Zones have improved outcomes for 21st-century learners and advanced needed policy changes at the district or state levels.



INVEST IN COVID-19 LEARNING RECOVERY

COVID-19 continues to exacerbate decades-old academic and opportunity disparities.¹ States should use this critical juncture to accelerate redesign of learning models, catalyze reinvention of the education system, and support innovations that can transform education systems to ensure that every student has a successful and prosperous future.

State Policy Recommendations

- Establish COVID-19 recovery task forces to address how education systems need to be transformed and establish short and long-term achievement and whole-child support goals for students and communities disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.
- Explore global best practices for education systems change and continuity of learning.
- Establish distinct, but equally rigorous, pathways to graduation to ensure students gain the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to be successful in postsecondary and career.



¹ <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/20210608-impacts-of-covid19.pdf>

TRANSFORM SYSTEMS OF ASSESSMENTS

States must redesign their systems of assessments to align with current research on how students learn best, provide evidence of deeper student learning, build capacity for valid and reliable assessments of student learning, and ensure student outcomes include demonstrations of enduring learning. States should support appropriate use of assessments to improve teaching and learning and coherence by aligning assessments to enable student-centered learning. Student progress through K–12 should be determined using evidence that demonstrates their knowledge and skills through meaningful learning activities and provides actionable, real-time information to students and their families.

State Policy Recommendations

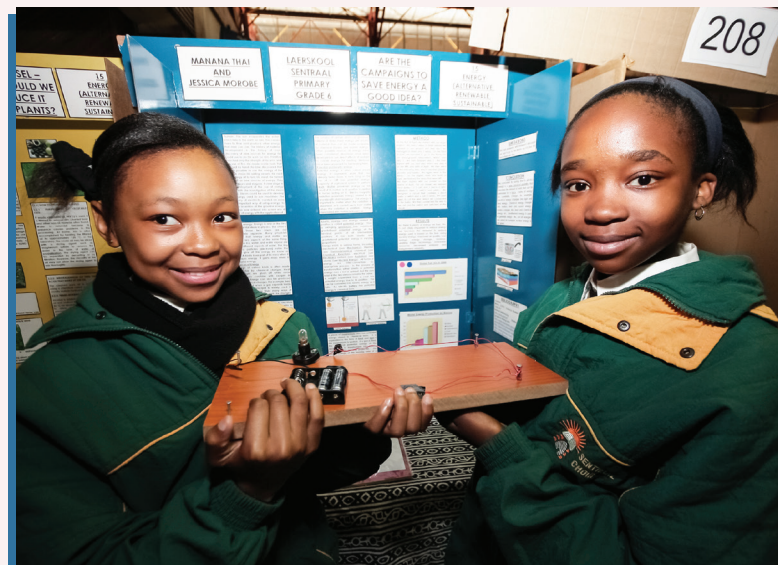
- Create a model of continuous improvement for redesigning assessments by collaborating with willing districts and schools to pilot new, innovative systems of assessments that align with competency-based learning.
- Engage practitioners and leaders from K–12 education, industry, and higher education to create a process, resources, and recommendations to support the development of mastery-based performance assessments across K–12 that demonstrate student readiness to graduate.
- Design culturally responsive assessment practices in partnership with communities where every student can see themselves in the assessment experience.
- Build assessment literacy for educators, practitioners, students, parents, state and local policymakers, and community members.

RETHINK NEXT GENERATION ACCOUNTABILITY

The current accountability framework is not guiding states towards an education system that is fit for purpose for our youth in today’s changing world. States need a new take on the purpose of accountability, who is accountable, for what, and how it will drive a modern vision of high-quality learning for all. States should work with all levels of the system to rethink accountability and improve quality to expand learning opportunities focused on student-centered learning systems and research on how students learn best.

State Policy Recommendations

- Examine the purpose of K–12 education and how accountability, evaluation, and quality assurance methods need to be modernized to support high-quality, student-centered teaching and learning.
- Support student-centered accountability pilots and invest in communities leading new accountability models with reciprocity, transparency, and equity.



EXPAND ACCESS TO BROADBAND

Student access to technology and the internet is a requirement and equity imperative to prepare students to succeed in the 21st century and is only possible through comprehensive broadband infrastructure. States can leverage and consolidate buying power for broadband and telecommunications services by examining telecom and Internet service provider access, availability, and contracts with the goal of securing multiple vendor partners to expand access statewide and allowing local governments and nonprofits to access this increased purchasing power.

State Policy Recommendations

- Ensure use of all existing federal resources, such as the Federal Communications Commission Universal Service Fund, U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Utilities Service eConnectivity, U.S. Department of Commerce National Telecommunications and Information Administration's BroadbandUSA and the Minority Broadband Initiative, to improve the digital infrastructure across the state to homes and schools.
- Complete a statewide needs assessment to inventory home access for devices and high-speed internet connections using broadband and use that information to attain universal access to high-quality broadband.



Photo: Allison Shelley for EDUImages

CREATE COMPETENCY-BASED PATHWAYS ACROSS K-12, HIGHER EDUCATION, CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION, AND THE WORKFORCE

States should redesign our education systems to build competency-based pathways across K-12 education, college, and careers to better align educational opportunities for students with a promise for success in the future. To do so, state leaders should set a vision, rethink governance, and bring together government, education, and business leaders to help create coherent systems locally, regionally, and statewide for education and training that are competency-based. Competency-based pathways recognize learning that happens inside and outside of schools, in the workforce, and in communities. In the end, each student will own their own secure, comprehensive learner record mapping their knowledge, skills, and credentials over a lifetime.

State Policy Recommendations

- Create a cross-sector governance structure to facilitate planning and implementation of competency-based pathways and lifelong learning.
- Create a statewide vision for a lifelong, continuous system of learning to ensure all youth have pathways to prosperity.
- Align systems of early learning, K-12 education, career and technical education, higher education, and workforce training by creating competency-based pathways and certifications, including micro-credentials.
- Focus on building competency-based systems with recognition and validation of prior learning experiences, including enabling anywhere, anytime learning.



A New Dawn for
Every Learner

The mission of the Aurora Institute is to drive the transformation of education systems and accelerate the advancement of breakthrough policies and practices to ensure high-quality learning for all.

Aurora Institute works with state policymakers to enable innovative education systems to prepare all students for a lifetime of success. Please contact Aurora's Center for Policy:

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