

Chapter 5: Education

For much of the 20th century, a cornerstone of the American Dream has been the belief that, with hard work, all adults should be able to lift themselves and their families out of poverty. But over the last several decades, it has become clear that achieving the American Dream now takes both hard work and a good education—good enough to command a job that pays a non-poverty wage. The education level of adult heads of households has been increasingly associated with their income as the income gap between the well-educated and the less educated has grown steadily over the last four decades (see Chapter 2, Figure 9).

Not only is the income gap by educational attainment growing, we've also seen a growing educational achievement gap by family income for children (see Chapter 2, Figure 10). For these and many other reasons, a conservative/progressive consensus on how to reduce poverty and increase opportunity must tackle the question of how to reduce the growing gap in educational achievement between children from wealthy and poor families. That means not just closing a gap in years of schooling, but in cognitive academic skills and social-emotional skills as well.

The partisan political and cultural wars in education have been as fierce as in any domain of American life. Our group won't try to broker a truce between progressives and conservatives on all features of the education policy wars. Nor do we aspire to analyze and critique the entire education system. But we have reached a consensus on several policy proposals that are consistent with our shared values of opportunity, responsibility and security. If these policies were implemented, they would help the poorest children and thereby reduce the growing education gap.

These are our four recommendations:

- 1) Increase public investment in two underfunded stages of education: preschool and postsecondary;
- 2) Educate the whole child to promote social-emotional as well as academic skills;
- 3) Modernize the organization and accountability of education; and
- 4) Close resource gaps to reduce education gaps.

In combination, we believe these four recommendations will help children on the bottom rungs of the economic ladder improve their educational achievement and attainment and thereby reduce the income gap in education.

INCREASE INVESTMENTS IN TWO UNDERFUNDED STAGES OF EDUCATION

Early childhood and postsecondary education are priorities for 21st century education policy. The scientific research is clear: learning and brain development are inextricably linked. They both begin in the womb and continue at a rapid pace until at least the middle of the third decade of life.¹³⁵ The United States makes its greatest public investments in the nation's K-12 education system.¹³⁶ But two other periods of the life cycle are also critical to learning: (a) early childhood, from conception to kindergarten; and (b) postsecondary, from the exit door of high school to the world of work. Because public investments in children's education are lower in the early childhood and postsecondary years, parents' and families' roles and resources affect learning more during these stages than they do in the K-12 years. Compared with wealthier families, low-income families are at a disadvantage in promoting their children's learning at these two stages. Education policy should do more to reduce the gap in investments in children between low-income and high-income families during the early childhood and postsecondary years.

EARLY CHILDHOOD: INFANT/TODDLER YEARS AND PRE-K

INCOME GAP IN EARLY LEARNING

One of the challenges facing education policy is that the gap in learning—specifically in cognitive-language development and in social-emotional development—opens up well before children enter preschool or the K-12 system. A nationally representative sample of 11,000 infants born in 2001 (the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study—Birth Cohort) has enabled researchers to compare the

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early learning of children in families that earn less than 200 percent of the federal poverty line to the learning of children from families with higher incomes.¹³⁷ As early as 9 months of age, low-income infants' scores are below those of their higher-income peers on measures of cognitive and social-emotional development. By 24 months, this early learning gap has at least doubled.

A number of factors associated with parents' low incomes are thought to explain this early learning and development gap. Low-income children are exposed to fewer words and have less access to cognitively stimulating materials and experiences in their homes. The toxic stress caused by economic hardship and violence can lead to harsh, abusive, disengaged, or neglectful parenting.¹³⁸

INCOME GAP IN EARLY CARE

On average, 51 percent of toddlers are cared for exclusively by their parents. The other 49 percent are cared for by relatives (18 percent), family child care (care delivered in the provider's home; 15 percent), or center-based care (16 percent) during the day. Low-income infants and toddlers are more likely to be cared for by their parents than are higher-income infants and toddlers. When they are in non-parental settings, the care they receive is often lower in quality.¹³⁹ Research indicates that both low maternal education and lower-quality non-parental care diminish toddlers' cognitive development.¹⁴⁰ In short, lower-quality care, whether in or out of the home, constrains the cognitive-language and social-emotional development of infants and toddlers in low-income homes.

These gaps in early learning and quality of care open and grow before children enter the formal K–12 education system. From these facts, we conclude that the nation must develop a robust early learning policy based on several principles. First, since the early learning and development gap appears in infancy and grows in toddlerhood, invest new resources to promote early learning as early as possible in the child's life. Second, because low income and low maternal education are such pervasive risk factors for falling behind in early cognitive and social-emotional

development, give priority in early learning policies to low-income infants and toddlers and their mothers. Third, because low-income infants and toddlers are more likely to experience lower-quality child care, and because lower-quality child care contributes to poor cognitive and social-emotional learning, target resources to improve the quality of early child care settings for low-income children. Fourth, because more than half of low-income infants and toddlers are cared for exclusively by their parents, create population-based approaches to developing and implementing early learning and development services and initiatives that don't rely on child care programs (because they cover a minority of children) or schools (because they come too late in the game).

In response to these facts, our group has agreed that the nation would benefit from focusing on three policy initiatives. These three initiatives are scientifically sound, scalable within the current institutional infrastructure, relatively affordable even as universal strategies, and likely to be cost-effective.

First, the nation should use its universally available network of pediatric primary and preventive care practices to mount evidence-based parenting and early child development interventions. Thanks in large part to expansions of federal and state health insurance coverage of children, nearly all infants and toddlers have access to basic health care and are now taken to a schedule of 10–12 well-baby visits over the first three years of life.¹⁴¹ Consequently, pediatricians and other health service professionals have developed low-cost, evidence-based approaches to supplement pediatric visits with parent-child interventions that can promote early cognitive-language and social-emotional development.¹⁴² The largest such initiative is "Reach Out and Read," which currently enrolls millions of low-income parents and their infants and toddlers. Reach Out and Read has stimulated new programs like VIP (Video Interaction Project) that have been rigorously evaluated and found to improve young children's language and social-emotional development.¹⁴³

Second, the federal government and the states should build on the recent bipartisan reauthorization of the

Child Care and Development Block Grant to continue to improve the quality of child care for low-income working parents. As we noted earlier, the quality of child care is vital to whether poor children keep up with their better-off peers in early learning. If child care quality is low, the early learning gap between low-income children and their upper income peers grows. If child care quality is high, many young children from low-income families can be prevented from falling further behind.

Third, the states should expand access to high-quality preschool education. Over the last several decades, state governments have invested more in public preschool programs.¹⁴⁴ Some states' programs are high on access but low on quality (e.g., Wisconsin, Texas, and

POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Education in the years after high school graduation but before the attainment of a job that pays better than poverty wages also suffers from underfunding, especially for students from low-income families. College enrollment rates have risen considerably over the last 50 years for all socioeconomic groups, including the poor, but enrollment gaps between the poor and the affluent have nonetheless increased. In addition, students from low-income families mostly attend community colleges and the lower tier of public four-year colleges. The educational outcomes that low-income students achieve remain disappointing. Their dropout rates are extremely high and far above those of their middle- and upper-income coun-



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Florida). Other states' programs are high in quality but low on access (e.g., North Carolina, New Jersey, Washington, and Kentucky). Two states have led the way in expanding access to high-quality care: Georgia and Oklahoma. Evidence suggests that their initiatives have both increased preschool enrollment rates in the short run and improved children's test scores in elementary and middle school in the longer run. Some analysts question whether high-quality preschool education and care is really scalable at acceptable costs to states. We propose that part of the strategy of expanding high-quality programs is for the federal government and the states to conduct experimental studies of how these programs can be expanded without sacrificing quality. The studies should focus on the technical aspects of successful scaling of quality programs as well as the costs of expanding them.

terparts. Unfortunately, many students, especially those who drop out before completing their degrees, are accumulating a great deal of debt when they attend college, only to find it difficult to service that debt, in large part because they can't find well-paying jobs.¹⁴⁵

The fact that low-income college students have poor outcomes can be at least partly explained by their weaker academic preparation in the K–12 years, their limited knowledge of the higher education system, and family pressures to generate income while enrolled (especially if they are single parents). But these students are also hurt by their greater concentration in lower-quality colleges, which have relatively fewer resources as well, and by the rising costs of higher education.¹⁴⁶ Some analysts emphasize that the academic performance of many low-income (or first-generation) students is limited both by their personal decisions regarding course work

and study habits and by their poor preparation for college work; others emphasize the limited opportunities and higher costs that would-be students face in trying to attend the best schools.¹⁴⁷ Still other analysts note that even the best-prepared high school graduates from poorer communities lack the information and encouragement they need to apply to top schools,¹⁴⁸ and good students from such communities are more likely to drop out of college for social and other reasons. Given these facts, all agree that higher education in its current form is failing to achieve its promise for low-income youth and adults.

Consistent with this interpretation, students' completion rates at lower-quality colleges and their subsequent earnings also appear limited by weak incentives for the institutions to provide more information and to offer courses that are more likely to lead to good jobs. For example, low-income students get very little academic or career counseling before or during college, and very little guidance about choosing courses and majors that lead to labor market rewards. One prominent researcher has compared community colleges to a "shapeless river" in which students float along without structures to guide them.¹⁴⁹ Colleges have only modest incentives to provide enhanced services, such as selection of courses and career guidance, and little incentive to expand teaching capacity in high-demand areas. This is true because the institutions get subsidies based on "seat time" per student, rather than for achieving successful outcomes. Further, instructors and equipment in many high-demand fields (like health technology, advanced manufacturing or nursing) make them the most expensive for colleges to provide. Thus new public resources invested in the community college system should be accompanied by careful targeting and accountability to make sure that the new money is effective in improving outcomes for low-income students.

To ensure that the new resources and accountability successfully translate into better student outcomes, it would be wise to emulate some important and proven models for community (and other) colleges. One such model is the Accelerating Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) at the City University of New York, which has been rigorously

evaluated. ASAP requires participating students—who are mostly taking developmental (remedial) classes and who usually graduate in very low numbers—to attend college full-time. They receive a range of academic supports while attending for free. The program nearly doubled student graduation rates over a three-year period, from 22 to 40 percent.¹⁵⁰ States could provide technical assistance to colleges that wish to implement some version of this program, or other successful programs.

EDUCATE THE WHOLE CHILD TO PROMOTE SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT AS WELL AS ACADEMIC SKILLS

Increasingly, economists, employers and corporate leaders are recognizing how vital "soft skills" are to success in the labor market and to the nation's productivity.¹⁵¹ In an information and service economy, a variety of what some researchers (mistakenly) call "non-cognitive traits" are especially important. These include workplace skills such as the ability to follow directions and take feedback from supervisors, cooperate with co-workers, and focus on tasks and complete them on time. They also include more personal skills like managing one's own feelings and making responsible decisions about one's personal life. These and other characteristics influence people's educational attainment, employment and earnings as much as or more than academic achievement as measured by standardized achievement tests.¹⁵² In education policy and practice, these soft skills go by many names, most commonly social-emotional learning (SEL) or character development.¹⁵³

The key to teaching SEL in school is to rebuild the trusting ties to competent adults that students should bring from home. Only then can behavior improve and academic learning begin. This may be the key to making low-income schools work.¹⁵⁴ At its best, early childhood education teaches SEL as much as anything academic. One reason some charter schools, like the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP), are especially effective is that they focus above all on establishing order, clear academic standards, more time on task, and high expectations from teachers. As students adjust to those demands, they learn how they

are supposed to behave. Thus, social-emotional learning occurs, and then academic learning occurs. This combination of outcomes allows KIPP and similar schools to produce students who score well on standardized tests and have high graduation rates.¹⁵⁵

But despite their importance to education, employment, and family life, the major educational and school reforms of the K–12 system over the last few decades have not focused sufficiently on the socio-emotional factors that are crucial to learning. Though most teachers believe that schools have a fundamental responsibility to educate the whole child, education policy has focused disproportionately on high-stakes accountability strategies based on results from standardized academic achievement tests. We believe that the education gap can't be closed unless and until schools commit to and become skilled at educating the whole child.

Fortunately, the U.S. has been a hotbed of small-scale experimentation in school-based approaches to promoting children's social-emotional learning. A 2011 study reviewed over 200 studies that involved more than 200,000 children. It found that school-based SEL programs, implemented by teachers in primary, middle and



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secondary schools not only improved children's SEL skills, but also improved their mental health/behavioral problems and their standardized achievement test scores.¹⁵⁶ In short, we have a robust evidence-based approach to help close the cognitive/academic and social/emotional gaps in learning. What we need now are policies to scale up high-quality, evidence-based SEL programs and to make them a fundamental part of the education of all kids, but especially children who need it the most—low-income children who will fall further behind without it.

We recommend three policies to advance SEL. First, the federal government should provide resources for state and local education authorities to implement and scale evidence-based social-emotional learning practices and policies. Since 2011, several such pieces of legislation have been introduced (e.g., HR 2437, the Academic, Social and Emotional Learning Act of 2011; HR 3989, the Student Success Act of 2012; and HR 1875, the Academic, Social and Emotional Learning Act of 2013) to provide such resources. Whether as standalone legislation or as part of reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), federal legislation is critical to advance evidence-based SEL in America's schools.¹⁵⁷

Second, all states should implement high-quality social-emotional standards that cover the period from preschool through high school. If social-emotional learning is a fundamental responsibility of schools, then logically we need learning standards to guide instruction that promotes SEL. A recent National Research Council report¹⁵⁸ recommended the development of learning standards to promote intrapersonal, interpersonal and cognitive skills. Free-standing preschool standards for SEL exist in all states, but only three—Illinois, Kansas and Pennsylvania—have adopted comprehensive SEL standards with age-appropriate benchmarks for their entire K–12 system. We need dramatically more progress in state SEL standards. To educate the whole child, all states should develop and implement clear, comprehensive SEL standards with age-appropriate benchmarks for preschool through high school.¹⁵⁹

Third, the federal government and the states should establish centers of excellence that can provide training and technical assistance to school districts in implementing evidence-based approaches to social-emotional learning. Training and continuous support are necessary to ensure that instructional leaders at the district and school levels, as well as teachers, understand SEL standards and can implement evidence-based programs and practices with fidelity. SEL requires the same level of support to provide high-quality, effective instruction as does literacy and numeracy.

In conclusion, federal legislation, state standards, and training and technical assistance resources for districts and schools can help to scale up evidence-based approaches to SEL and put education of the whole child at the center of education reforms. Complementing academic learning with effective SEL policies is key to our strategy to reduce the education gap.

MODERNIZING THE ORGANIZATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY OF EDUCATION

The condition of the K–12 education system underscores the themes and challenges we’ve raised. Although high school completion rates are improving, only 82 percent of black Americans and 79 percent of Hispanics complete high school, compared with 89 percent of whites.¹⁶⁰ Within these broad demographic patterns, there are deep differences between schools in low and high poverty neighborhoods in their academic offerings, extracurricular activities, and outcomes.¹⁶¹ Moreover, a generation or two ago someone with a high school diploma could generally make it up the economic ladder to the middle class; today a quality postsecondary education is necessary to achieve that goal.¹⁶² Much of higher education is failing to provide the skills young people need, completion rates for blacks and other minorities are low, and, higher education is slow to introduce affordable new ways to provide the skills students need to succeed in the workforce. Many college graduates can’t find full-time work in their field, while employers grumble that graduates they hire are ill-equipped for the workplace.

Robert Putnam and others have raised another important issue about American schools. Schools are a product of the community in which they are located as well as potential engines for upward economic mobility for the children from that community.¹⁶³ The social and economic conditions of many poor neighborhoods affect the organizational culture and effectiveness of the schools themselves and thus the schools’ capability to offset the rising attainment and income gaps.

In short, there are many reasons to be concerned about whether the education system at all levels is preparing young people, especially those from poorer neighborhoods, for future success. To improve the educational system, we need policies that stimulate greater innovation in the organization and delivery systems of education and that foster rigorous accountability for new and existing approaches. Fortunately, American education encompasses a great deal of creativity. Our challenge is to spur innovation and customization to drive the system, especially for the benefit of the young people who face the greatest challenges.

HELP SCHOOLS SERVE AS COMMUNITY HUBS (K–12 EDUCATION)

They can be hubs to coordinate a range of services for children and, often, the wider community. The school setting should support a “two-generation” model that reinforces positive development for parents as well as their children.¹⁶⁴ Within poorer communities especially, this means seeing the school as a hub for a range of health, social, and other services in addition to teaching. For very young children, combining development of skills in early childhood with strategies to improve the home and community environment is key to the cognitive/language and social/emotional skills children need for success. Then, from pre-K through high school, we need similar approaches that bring parents and a range of services into the school, and that feature a multi-professional team to assist both parents and children within the school building.



Evaluation is a vital and underused tool for developing good education policy. We believe the new norm should be to scale up evidence-based approaches only.

The community school movement, as well as some innovative charter schools such as the KIPP system, the Dunbar Learning Complex in Atlanta, and Baltimore's Henderson-Hopkins school, take this two-generational hub approach. In the school, a team of teachers, health professionals, and social workers addresses children's social and health needs as well as their education. These schools also use a combination of requirements and inducements—for instance, day care for infants—to persuade parents to take part in on-site job training and parenting classes.¹⁶⁵

Although these approaches are promising, we don't know enough about either their effectiveness or the key factors behind the results they do produce. For instance, one analysis of the Harlem Children's Zone found that the Zone's charter schools showed reasonable success, but that the wraparound social services didn't have a significant impact on the children's educational achievement.¹⁶⁶ On the other hand, another study found that offering students a range of social service and other supports can contribute to academic progress.¹⁶⁷

So although we argue for experimenting with this promising approach, we also argue that experiments need to be carefully evaluated, with both trial evaluations to guide the experiments themselves and more rigorous evaluations before any approach is replicated and scaled up. Integrated approaches can be expensive and complicated, even if they yield long-term savings in health, social service and even crime costs in addition to improving children's prospects. To identify the long-term benefits and

encourage the strategy, states, counties, and school districts need budgeting and accounting tools that let money be moved across program boundaries so that it can be spent where it does the most good.

In setting up such tools, states need to collect budget and longitudinal outcomes data to permit rigorous evaluations of team approaches. The evaluations should include longitudinal data on how high school graduates perform in college and in the workforce, to provide feedback for improvements at the high school level. Fortunately, such data are becoming more available. Forty-five states have received federal grants to develop statewide longitudinal data systems under the National Center for Education Statistics' Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems Grant Program. Most have linked K-12 and postsecondary information; some have also linked employment and health information. Meanwhile, the nonprofit National Clearinghouse can provide enrollment and degree information to high schools and to researchers.

Evaluation is a vital and underused tool for developing good education policy. We believe the new norm should be to scale up evidence-based approaches only. No approach, even those we think are as promising as community schools, should be copied just because it's innovative. To carry out such evaluations, states, counties, and school districts need to collect longitudinal outcomes data. We also need more experimental evaluations of various teaching and learning approaches. Meanwhile, traditional approaches to education must also be subject to the same degree of evaluation and analysis.¹⁶⁸

ENCOURAGE CUSTOMIZATION AND INNOVATION TO ACHIEVE HIGH STANDARDS

If schools are to offer children the best opportunities and help them overcome their challenges, education needs to be customized for each child.¹⁶⁹ More affluent and engaged parents routinely supplement their child's regular education with a wide range of other activities, from after-school music lessons to summer programs, while private tutors and counselors help deal with weaknesses and give children from well-off families an edge in college admission. Meanwhile, parents in poorer households also lack not only the financial resources but the information and professional networks to choose the best supplemental education for their children.¹⁷⁰

To encourage customization and pedagogical innovation, we urge states and localities to enact legislation to widen the use of innovative approaches to school organization. Several approaches look promising. Evaluations of charter schools, for instance, indicate that the best among them can have significant impacts both on school performance and on long-term attainment and earnings. A recent study by Mathematica Policy Research, using longitudinal data for charters in Chicago and Florida, found large increases in the probability that children would both gain a high school diploma and attend college. In the Florida case, Mathematica also found significant increases in earnings of charter school graduates compared with graduates of other high schools.¹⁷¹ Another Mathematica analysis of the KIPP schools found substantial impacts on achievement, which were apparently associated in part with changes in student behavior patterns.¹⁷² New York City's Small High Schools of Choice are also associated with markedly higher graduation rates for disadvantaged students of color, according to a recent study by MDRC.¹⁷³ Moreover, students attending these high schools are much more likely to go on to postsecondary institutions. And the Career Academies we discussed in Chapter 4 have been a successful element of school reform for more than three decades. Evaluations of these schools indicate that they significantly boost students' post-school earnings and family stability, compared with a control group.¹⁷⁴

We also find that when school systems train and retain good teachers, they produce significantly better results. That's hardly a surprise, but research also suggests that effective teachers are associated not just with better test scores but also with improvements in adult earnings, reduced probability of out-of-wedlock childbearing, and social improvements in neighborhoods.¹⁷⁵ Moreover, research suggests that high-quality teachers can potentially be identified quite early in their careers and that quality is not closely related to teaching credentials.¹⁷⁶ Hence taking steps to attract and train teachers, assess them early in their careers, and weed out those who don't show the potential for quality will likely have a significant impact on students' performance in school and later success in life.

Though we encourage innovation and customization, neither is an alternative to a robust core curriculum in our schools. An effective core curriculum gives each child alternative methods of achieving the standards, both academic and social-emotional, and it permits variations and additions to help each child make the best use of her talents. We share some of the concerns about the Common Core standards, such as the excessive use of testing and undue restrictions on teacher flexibility, but we still believe that these standards can provide an improved foundation for primary and secondary education. We also believe that progress in adopting evidence-based curricula for social-emotional learning and character development will support students in the self-regulation and persistence they need to achieve deeper learning and meet revised academic standards.

REFORMS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The good news about higher education is that change is already taking place. From elite private institutions to the average state university and community college, administrators are gradually seeking ways to slow cost increases and to respond to the opportunities and challenges of online education and of new institutions with innovative business models.¹⁷⁷ What we need now is a policy framework to accelerate changes that will help higher education

transform more rapidly into a more effective vehicle for promoting equal opportunity and economic mobility.

Additional resources will need to be spent to improve higher education and employment outcomes for low-income students. But these resources need to be carefully targeted on support services like counseling and child care that will likely improve outcomes for the poor, including reducing their dropout rates. We also need resources for models like ASAP that have been proven to work. Combining these targeted resources with new accountability measures—such as requiring states to base their public subsidies for colleges at least partly on students' education and employment outcomes—will ensure that the new resources are spent effectively. (We further developed these ideas about accountability in Chapter 4.)

Another essential step to improve workforce preparation is to supplement traditional accreditation with other methods of measuring quality, and to establish these alternative measures as criteria for federal student aid. At best, the current process only gives students or their parents an indication that an entire institution meets certain quality measures, which in turn allows students from that school to qualify for federal aid. But accrediting an institution doesn't mean that individual courses are of good quality, or are relevant for the workplace after graduation. Further, accreditation perversely serves to protect traditional business models—it's costly, time-consuming, and uncertain for new ventures to undergo the accreditation process.

We propose administrative and congressional action to provide alternative ways for institutions and courses to qualify as acceptable for student aid. One possibility would be a fast-track federal accreditation system for online schools and other innovative models, as the Obama Administration is considering. Another would be to give states greater authority to provide a speedier track to federal accreditation. Yet another would be for the federal government to recognize competency-based credentialing of courses as the equivalent of accreditation.

Inadequate information on institutions' graduation rates and their students' post-graduation income has caused millions to choose colleges and courses unwisely and to incur avoidable debt. For students from more modest backgrounds, with fewer networks and less access to useable information, unwise decisions are common and damaging.

The Administration has taken important steps to provide basic information on college performance to help guide students and their parents. The National Center for Educational Statistics¹⁷⁸ provides basic information on institutions, such as typical costs of attendance, loan default rates, and graduation rates. This service supplements private "scorecards," such as those compiled by *US News & World Report* and *Forbes*. The federal scorecard should offer more complete information, including more details on employment patterns after graduation. But we also caution against seeing a federal scorecard as the definitive rating. In addition to the danger that a rating system could become ossified and reflect traditional visions of quality, increasingly sophisticated private ratings are emerging, such as tools to identify the true "value added" of a college.¹⁷⁹ For this reason, we recommend that the federal government open its rating platform to multiple scorecards that meet standards of integrity but reflect differing views of quality.

FOSTERING APPRENTICESHIPS AND OTHER PARTNERSHIPS

The changing nature of the workplace and needed workforce skills make the traditional distinctions between forms of higher education much less relevant today. Indeed, the fact that so many university graduates have an incomplete skill set underscores the need for institutions of higher education to provide a range of employment-related experiences, such as temporary workplace training programs (known as "externships"). As we pointed out earlier, our economy increasingly requires a range of social-emotional skills and work-related experiences and training along with academic courses.

We encourage states and the federal government to expand apprenticeships and other forms of work-related learning at both the college and high school level. Some states, such as South Carolina, have already taken a strong lead in fostering college-business partnerships, as have some European-based companies from countries with a long tradition of partnerships and apprenticeships, such as Germany.¹⁸⁰ Promising proposals that are under discussion include state tax incentives and a strengthened national apprenticeship program.¹⁸¹

It is widely thought in the United States that partnerships of this kind are suited only for students who are not quite up to university level work. Such thinking is a mistake, as the employment problems faced by many university graduates indicate. In fact, the university of the future seems likely to be a blend of experiences and forms of learning, from online courses to workplace-based blended courses to traditional residential courses.

CLOSE RESOURCE GAPS

INCREASE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO LOW-INCOME STUDENTS

Since the release of the Coleman Report in 1966, the evidence has been mounting that, after the socioeconomic status of students' families, the largest in-school influence on students' academic achievement is the socioeconomic status of their classmates.¹⁸² But a growing number of low-income children are segregated from middle-class schoolmates. Socioeconomic segregation has been growing in U.S. public schools: The proportion of children attending schools where 75 percent of students

are eligible for reduced-price or free lunch grew from 10 percent in 2000 to 17 percent in 2008.¹⁸³ The proportion of students in high-poverty schools is greatest in urban areas (40 percent) but significant in suburban and rural areas as well (13 percent and 10 percent, respectively).¹⁸⁴

Higher proportions of middle-class schoolmates expose children to advantages like their larger and richer vocabularies, higher levels of engagement in productive activities, and lower levels of behavioral problems. Schools with higher proportions of middle-class peers confer two other major advantages: engaged parents who are more active in the life of the school, and better teachers who are attracted to work in higher-functioning schools.

We propose extending the concept of "resource gaps" beyond differences among schools in per pupil expenditures to include the critical resources of classmates, their parents, and the schools' teachers. When resources are understood in this manner, socioeconomic integration of schools becomes an important policy tool to increase education resources to low-income children. Indeed, education analysts on the left,¹⁸⁵ and more recently on the right,¹⁸⁶ see powerful evidence that, on the policy level, socioeconomic integration of schools can have clear population-level effects, improving the academic achievement of low-income children without hurting the achievement of middle-income children. But the key to both helping the low-income children and not hurting middle-income children is to maintain a numerical and cultural majority of middle-class students.¹⁸⁷

In light of the limited success of the Bush Administration's "No Child Left Behind" policy and the Obama

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Administration's "Race to the Top," we endorse an alternative strategy: breaking up concentrations of school poverty by encouraging voluntary school choice that promotes socioeconomic integration—and, as a desirable byproduct, more racial integration. Richard Kahlenberg, a major proponent of socioeconomic integration of schools, describes several strategies to do so that have been implemented by 80 districts serving 4 million students. These include: changing incentive structures so that high-performing schools are motivated to actively recruit low-income students rather than passively resist transfers; promoting public school choice across districts; and increasing funding for magnet schools in high-poverty urban areas.¹⁸⁸ More recently, proposals have come forward to expand charter schools as a way to increase socioeconomic integration.¹⁸⁹

Thus, despite the evidence that some individual high-poverty schools can be turned around, the best evidence for a strategy that is effective, scalable, and supported by reformers on the left and right is school socioeconomic integration via public school choice. But we still have much to learn about how best to integrate schools socioeconomically and how best to improve children's academic and social-emotional learning via such integration. Thus, we also propose an expanded and rigorous program of research on the impact of various strategies for socioeconomic integration so that we can address lingering concerns.

INCREASE AID AND FOCUS IT ON THE POOR

Today a college or college-equivalent education (such as apprenticeship and certification) has become the basic credential for a middle class life in America, just as a high school diploma was in the past. So we believe that quality postsecondary education should be affordable for Americans—just as the country committed to making high school affordable. This doesn't mean we must assure access to a traditional four-year residential education, which is not the best choice for everyone. But it does mean that we'll need increased public investments in the postsecondary education of low-income students to ensure equal opportunity and to close the income-based

education gap. A high-quality postsecondary education that is appropriate for today's workplace can encompass a range of courses and experiences, such as certificates and two-year degrees. Moreover, with the competition and customization we support, we believe the general cost of higher education in America will moderate, and perhaps even fall, making the commitment affordable to the nation.

Higher education should provide an opportunity for those near the bottom of the economic ladder to catch up, rather than—as is the case today—help those who already have family and economic advantages pull further ahead. For this reason, federal student aid should aim to make an adequate level of quality postsecondary education truly affordable for those who lack the means to acquire higher education without accumulating unreasonable debt.

While public support for low-income students is inadequate and often poorly spent, we don't believe, when subsidized loans and other forms of finance are included, that the higher education sector as a whole is underfunded. But too much public support goes to students from middle- and upper-income households who don't need it to manage the cost of an education that will yield a significant return on their investment. Thus we favor tapering down future public support for students from wealthier families. We recognize that this broad restructuring of public support for higher education will be controversial among some middle-class and affluent families, and it will take time and be difficult to accomplish. For this reason, we don't believe support for students in need should be contingent on the success of the broader reform we propose.

CONCLUSION

Like our proposals on work and family, our proposals for education strive to draw on and advance the values of opportunity, responsibility and security. Policy proposals like ours, which aim to help poor children improve their academic achievement and educational attainment, are designed to expand educational opportunity in the short run and economic opportunity in the long run. Strategic

investments in early childhood and postsecondary education for low-income children, improving low-income children's social-emotional learning and thereby their academic learning, modernizing the organization and accountability of U.S. schools (especially schools that serve low-income children), and reducing education resource gaps all hold great promise for increasing low-income children's opportunity to attain a high-quality education.

Our proposals are also founded on and seek to strengthen responsibility—both the responsibility of students and parents themselves and of local schools. Parents have a responsibility to educate their own children, which includes teaching them life skills and overseeing their progress through formal schooling. Children, as they get older, assume a larger share of responsibility for academic effort and achievement. But given the enormous gaps in opportunity and resources that we have documented throughout this report, schools, communities, and governments have an urgent responsibility to do far more to help low-income parents and students. Increasing public investments in two underfunded stages of education acknowledges greater government responsibility to level the playing field for low-income children. In the 21st century, our policies must recognize that education begins at birth and continues into the twenties. Government has the responsibility to improve low-income children's

access to quality early childhood and postsecondary education. Educating the whole child acknowledges the public education system's responsibility to address the "non-cognitive" constraints on academic learning, educational attainment, and future life chances. Our proposals to expand the responsibilities of schools, communities, and governments in these ways seek to complement, not to substitute for, parents' primary responsibilities. Closing the resource gaps between low-income and middle-income children by promoting voluntary socioeconomic integration of schools acknowledges the responsibility of local districts and states to provide a positive learning environment for all students, regardless of the income and social status of children's families and neighborhoods.

Perhaps most important, our proposals aspire to enhance the security of low-income children and their families. The economic security of low-income parents will improve if the nation makes quality early childhood and postsecondary education more broadly accessible and effective. Not only students, but parents and teachers, will become more personally secure when evidence-based social-emotional learning programs and practices make schools safer and more supportive learning environments. And increasing the resources available to low-income children via voluntary socioeconomic integration of schools can reduce the insecurities born of structural inequalities.