



Institute on Race, Power
and Political Economy

New Imperatives in American Learning, Civic Education & Employment Equity:

Advancing the Common Good
Through Expanded Racial &
Economic Justice

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Precis

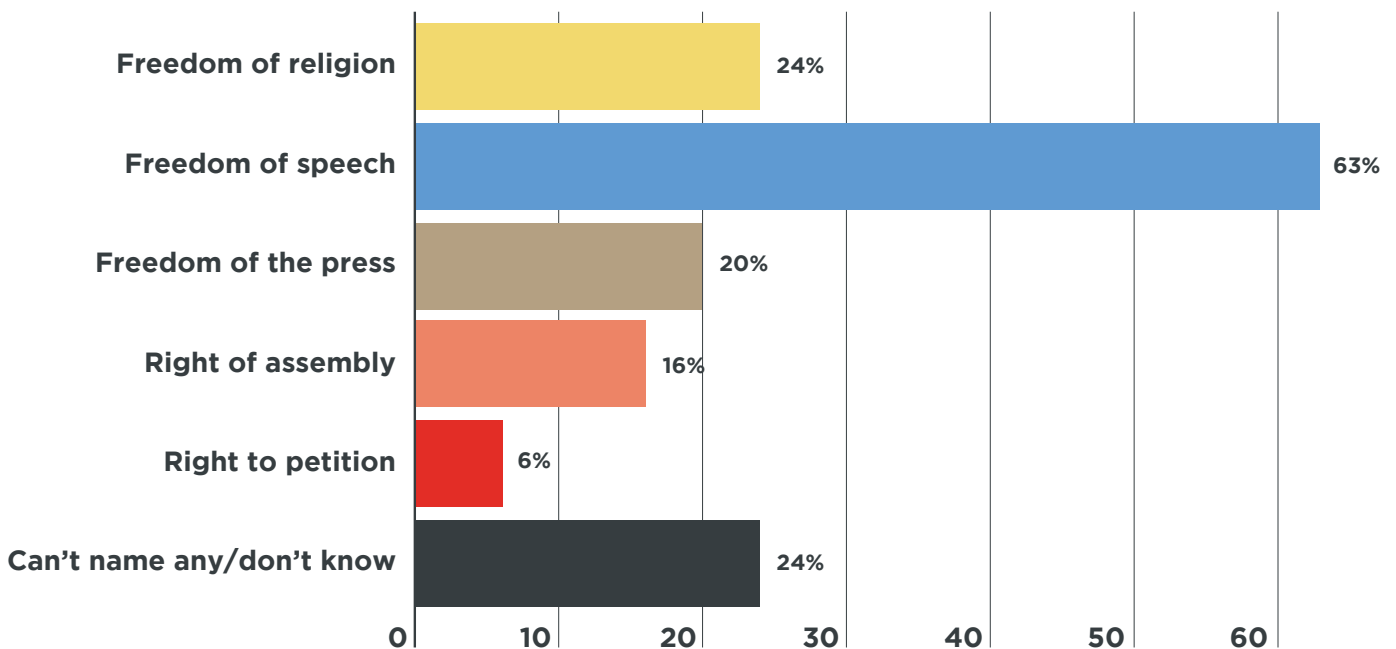
This paper is part of a multi-media series of conversations and examinations intended to assess the need for new approaches to American human capital formation and community building. We examine these important topics with an eye to their racial and economic justice dimensions. This work is essential to strengthen our democracy and to promote more equitable economic development and prosperity sharing across the nation at a time of growing racial and economic division. We focus aspirationally on the need to advance a next generation of racial and economic justice reforms, building on more inclusive modalities of education and training, community engagement, and allied efforts to better align our nation's largely disconnected systems of public instruction, civics education, and workforce preparation. We see these closely-related, but still largely siloed domains—school, civic life, and the world of work—as the essential foundations upon which, ultimately, the healthy functioning of our larger democracy and political economy rests.

The series and paper are thus intended to encourage expanded policy and stakeholder initiatives designed to produce more inclusive and integrated systems approaches to American learning, civics, and employment opportunity. Ultimately, we frame the case for moving in this direction as an essential step in forging new pathways towards a more unified civic culture and a more winning national industrial policy. What follows here is intended to serve as an introduction and context setter for our allied reporting in other media. The paper is complemented by listings of model programs and approaches that can and should be scaled for broader national application, as well as reading and reference materials that will be of practical value to followers of this work. In addition, much of the content that we feature here is informed by a series of recorded webinars and virtual discussions that we completed during late 2022 with over 25 of the nation's leading experts in education, civic culture, and workforce equity. Hyperlinks to all of our sources are embedded throughout the text below. While we do not pretend that our review was exhaustive or inclusive of every consideration pertinent to the space, we are confident that interested leaders and policy practitioners in education, civics, and workforce equity will be well-served to seriously consider our proposed starting points for action.

Introduction

In the first decades of the 21st century, the United States finds itself at a fundamental crossroads regarding its commitments to democracy, racial justice, and shared prosperity. After two centuries of striving (however imperfectly) to be an international beacon in these areas, our nation is facing significant challenges and persistent racial inequities in key policy and investment domains closely associated with our proclaimed democratic values and economic interests. This is especially true for public education, civic literacy, and employment opportunity and mobility. We focus here on the need to advance a next generation of racial and economic justice reforms in these areas, building on more inclusive modalities of education and training, community engagement, and allied efforts to better align our nation’s largely disconnected systems of public instruction, civics education, and workforce preparation. We see these closely-related, but still largely siloed domains—school, civic life, and the world of work—as the essential foundations upon which, ultimately, the healthy functioning of our larger democracy and political economy rests. Indeed, these are the core centers of American human capital formation (the process of building our nation’s collective knowledge, talent, and skill) and community building (our investment of leadership and resources for the Common Good).

PERCENT OF AMERICANS ABLE TO NAME FIRST AMENDMENT RIGHTS
Findings from 2022 Annenberg Constitution Day Civics Survey



Source: Annenberg Public Policy Center
Graphic: Adapted from [Governing](#)

Without more responsible, well-informed citizens who are armed with basic and critical thinking skills, more active public participation in constructive community problem solving, and more globally competitive and inclusive workforce opportunities, our democracy and political economy are certain to face still deeper challenges in the future to come. This can only be avoided through active and intentional efforts by concerned leaders and citizens to chart a better path forward. All things considered it is an especially opportune time for this to happen. While our society, economy, and politics have all transformed markedly over the past century, surprisingly little has changed relative to the basic footprint or outputs of American classroom teaching; and insufficient or disconnected investments in modern [civics instruction](#) and [worker training programs](#) leading to [good jobs](#)—especially for historically discriminated [youth and workers of color](#), have contributed to a significant dampening of U.S. democratic practice, social harmony, and human capital formation.

[Growing rancor and division](#) in U.S. democracy and political discourse—much of it rooted in the nation’s changing racial and class composition—has been well-documented over the past several years. And, according to researchers at the leading business strategy and consulting firm [McKinsey & Co.](#), persistent racial exclusion in the economy is now costing America between \$2-\$3 trillion in lost annual GDP. Nevertheless, despite the nation’s

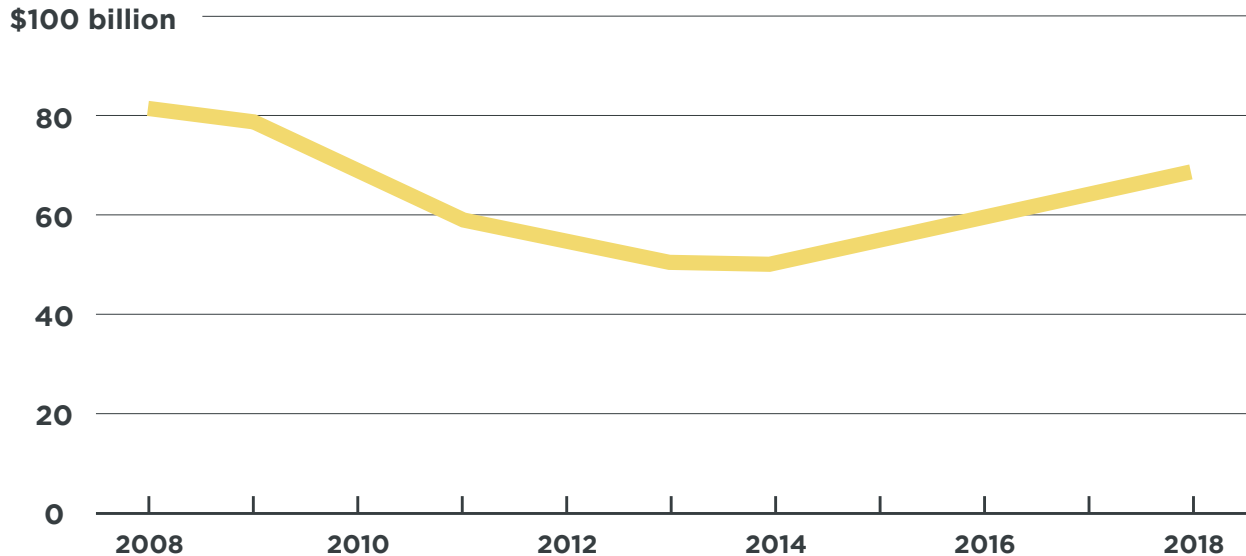
continuing, rapid racial diversification and growing foreign competition, the United States of America has entered the 21st century without any kind of integrated national strategy related to capturing our current lost human capital through active improvements in our systems of learning, civic engagement, and employment equity. In the absence of such a strategy, much is being lost. Even with a relatively strong economy following the massive disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic, growing international conflict, and associated supply chain and inflationary pressures, we face serious challenges on important fronts: other nations are [outperforming](#) us in key areas of educational achievement; highly racialized incidences of [economic insecurity and poverty](#) have become more entrenched across the nation; and our [social fabric](#) and [political cohesion](#) have become dangerously tattered during recent years.

In response, new ideas and institutional arrangements, new models and strategies in application, and new approaches in funding are all badly-needed. Now more than ever, the U.S. needs to develop a more coherent, inclusive, and mutually-reinforcing policy, practice, and investment framework in support of a more informed and constructively-engaged polity, and a more inclusive, competitive, and world-class workforce. This article speaks aspirationally to the kind of new thinking, policies, and investments that can help create a more winning approach in the decades to come.

Our extensive expert consultations (video recordings available [here](#)) reveal that transformative concepts and innovations are evolving at various levels of development and geography across much of our country. Their broader application would better serve the national interest by helping to standardize proven best practices that expand the public participation, benefits, and contributions of historically-excluded groups. But, to maximize the scaling and societal benefits of such efforts, supporting supplemental investments, major reforms, and strong federal leadership will be required.

SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE SPENDING DOWN BILLIONS OVER A DECADE

For public K-12 schools, adjusted for inflation



Source: CBPP analysis of U.S. Census 2018 public elementary-secondary education finance data
Graphic: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities | CBPP.ORG

The Context

During the last century, notwithstanding egregious incidents of [racial inequality and exclusion](#) throughout, our [nation benefited significantly](#) from relatively robust and unified investments in public education, civic engagement, and job training and placement. These investments helped to make our nation more productive and prosperous. They also helped to create the conditions for [increased racial inclusion and opportunity](#) in American economy and politics, and the prospect of greater social harmony and prosperity sharing across the national landscape. A large part of the equation was the increased engagement of national political leaders in efforts to advance racial and economic opportunity. During the period beginning with the Great Depression and ending in the 1980s, for example, [federal expenditures](#) and policy initiatives in K-12 and higher education, in civic literacy, and in public works employment were unprecedentedly high. Important swaths of these expenditures,

coupled with important post-WWII civil rights legislation, [significantly reduced poverty](#) in America and enabled students, families, and workers of color (and poor Americans generally) to achieve historic [upward mobility](#) during the 1960s and 1970s.

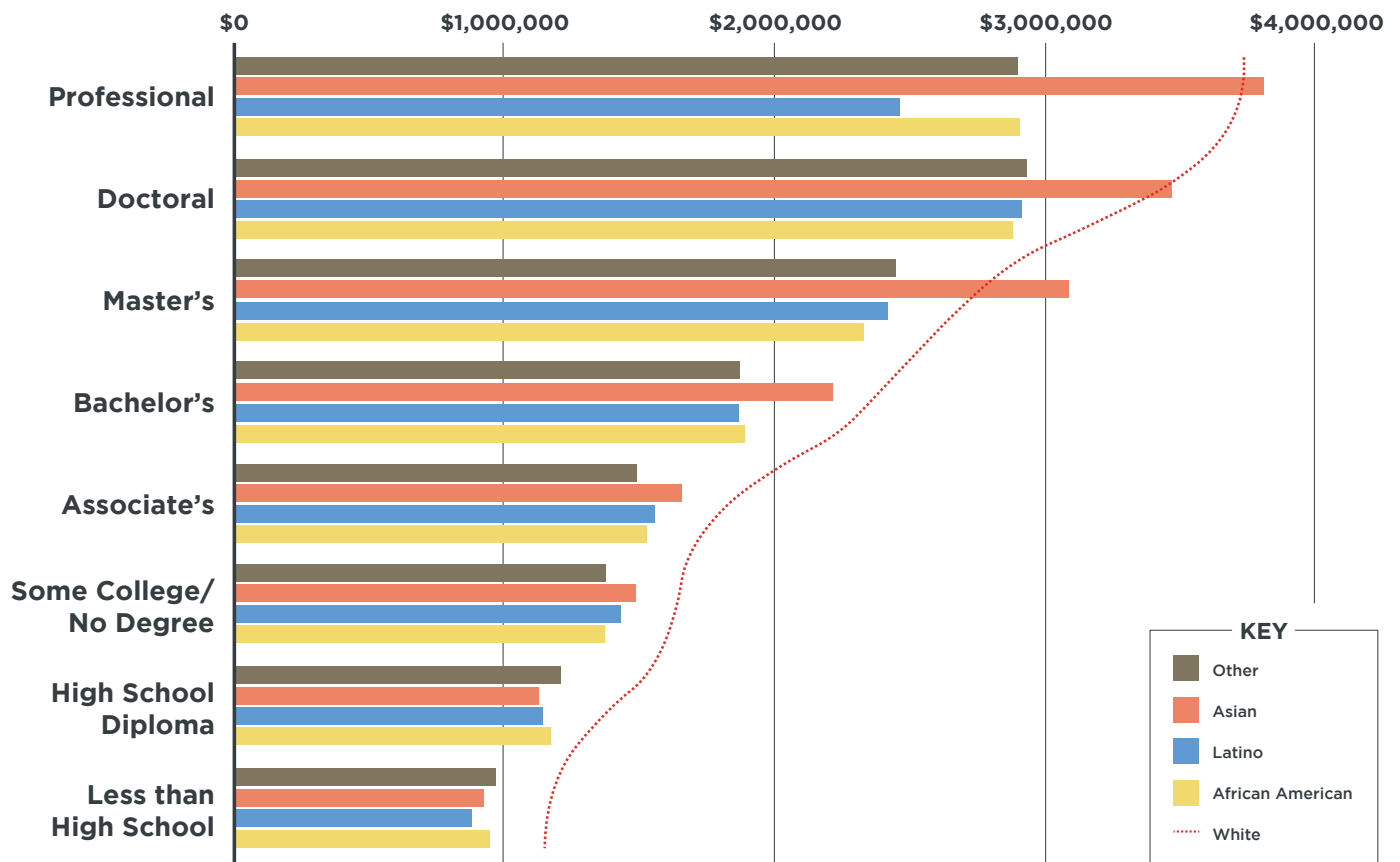
However, in our more recent history, we have underspent and under-produced relative to our nation's [investments](#) in these and other essential centers of gravity. According to the [Center for American Progress](#), for example, following the Great Recession that began in December 2007, U.S. per-student education revenues plummeted and did not return to pre-recession levels for about eight years. The recovery in per-student revenues was even slower in high-poverty districts. In addition, the public sector data sharing platform *Governance* has recently reported that [present investment levels](#) in U.S. K-12 civics education average only about 5 cents annually per student, as opposed to average per capita annual student spending of about \$50 for STEM education. And important recent reporting by credible news outlets like National Public Radio has revealed a growing [need for increased investment in youth summer jobs](#) and related employment training opportunities in cities and regions like Metropolitan St. Louis, MO.

Owing largely to these trends, our nation has become far [less stable](#) and [unified](#) during recent years; and Americans at large—but especially Americans of color—have lost ground

in many important areas of [economic](#) and [political](#) security. [Racial disparities](#) in education and employment, health, housing, and other domains remain wide across the nation. The [racial wealth gap](#) in America remains large and intractable. And [racially-motivated violence](#) and political hostility by White Americans against people and communities of color has been on the uptick. Indeed, a disturbing [rise of White Supremacy](#) has manifestly swept the nation over recent years, accompanied by growing calls for anti-democratic and racially exclusionary policies. The combined impact of such trends with America's long history of racial bias and violence has left our nation today a highly charged and [divided](#) one. Indeed, increasing inter-group, economic, ideological, and regional divisions have greatly [complicated](#) the landscape for consensus building, prosperity sharing, and community building across the United States.

Given these realities, looking to the future, one must question whether the U.S. can hope to remain a global leader in the advancement of democracy, multiculturalism, and opportunity enhancement; or if it will instead devolve further towards racially-exclusive, unequal, and anti-democratic impulses. What systemic innovations and reforms will be required in the future, to ensure that America continues to strive towards its ideals as a land of opportunity and inclusion? What emerging policies, programs, and proposals are available to build on, that demonstrate a better, more inclusive way forward for

LIFETIME EARNINGS BY RACE/ETHNICITY, 2009 DOLLARS



Graphic: Adapted from thesocietypages.org

American education, civic culture, and employment equity? These are the essential questions that we seek to address here.

A large part of the equation is the historical grounding of American learning, civics education, and employment mobility in highly [decentralized](#), state- and regionally-driven systems of policy making, practice, and finance. In a world that is increasingly multicultural, integrated, digital, and competitive, the rooting of American education, civics, and jobs policy in local and regional bodies, rather than the federal government, seems strikingly at odds with the bigger picture imperatives of the international political economy. Multiple domestic forces sweeping our nation further suggest the need for a much larger federal funding and orchestrating role. Simply stated, the ever-growing number and complexity of challenges facing local and state leaders in the education, civics, and employment spheres today are such that a bigger picture view and response than is presently in play seems logically necessary to address the scope and scale of the problems. To be sure, America's evolving challenges in the fields of learning, civic engagement, and work are large and daunting in the early 21st century: [soaring costs](#) and [student loan debt](#); persistent [unequal school financing](#) and quality along lines of race and class; the relative absence of [standards](#) regarding the factual

teaching of U.S. history and civics; the [expanding politicization](#) of local and state school boards on issues like COVID-19 prevention, evidence-based education, and race and gender rights; [growing violence](#) in schools and society; [lingering disconnects](#) between the worlds of school, work, and society; increasing [uncertainty](#) across the U.S. and global economy; and the still-too-often [siloed](#) interactions of institutional systems and leaders whose efforts bear on the issues—all of these thorny problems have combined to create unprecedented challenges for public schooling, civil discourse, and economic mobility in America.

These concerning developments, coupled with growing international competition, recent supply chain disruptions, and related stresses on our economy and democracy have reintroduced the compelling need for a [national industrial policy](#)—particularly one that puts society’s most excluded people, communities, and workers at the center of federal investment. Dating back to the early 1980s, in response to efforts to advocate for a more unified national economic and trade strategy by leading progressive economists (like former U.S. labor secretary [Robert Reich](#)), American policy leaders have debated but largely resisted the impulse to seek a stronger federal role in shaping American economic investment. Rather, U.S. public leadership has, until only very recently, erred hard on the side of supply side economics and anti-government neoliberalism. But, over the past two years, the Biden administration and slim majorities of Democrats in the U.S. House and Senate have passed major new legislative measures that, together, provide the basis for a significant rethink in this connection. Indeed, through passage of national legislative measures like the Biden [Infrastructure Bill](#), [CHIPS](#), and the [Inflation Reduction Act](#), federal leaders have laid the foundation for the most significant restructuring of the American economy and workforce since the post-WWII era of the 1950s, when American leaders made massive new investments in education, highway construction, and the NASA space program. The implications and opportunities built into this moment are thus huge relative to the possibility of creating a more coherent, far-reaching, and inclusive federal strategic approach to how we educate, train, and employ our nation’s emerging youth and worker populations—and especially our nation’s growing cohort of young students and workers of color.

Methodologies & Disclaimers

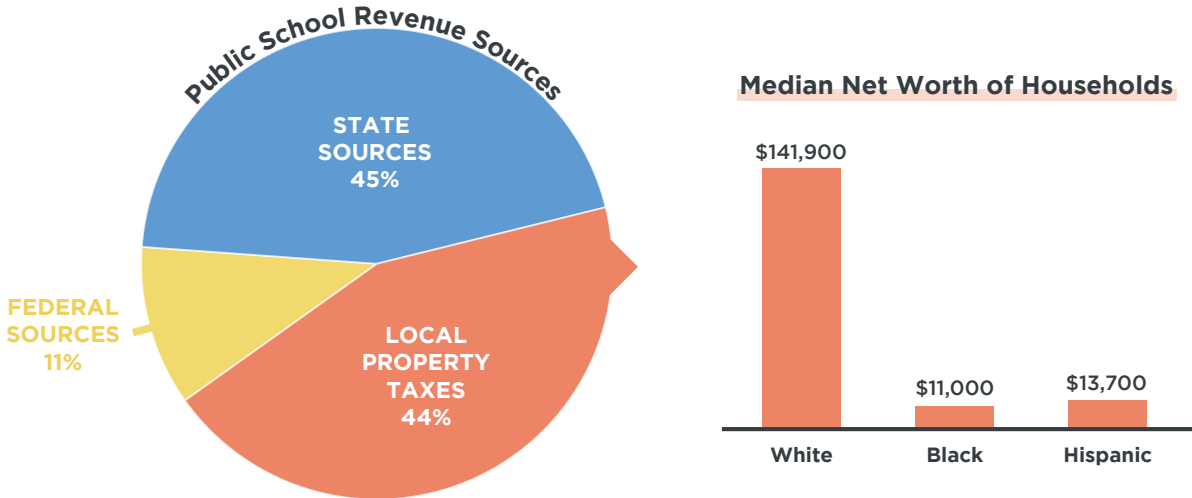
Our assertions here are based on extensive research and consultative reviews that we recently completed, drawing on public, scholarly, and journalistic reporting from various sources, including (among others): official government studies and reports; articles from leading research and scholarly centers; and coverage of the issues in major media ranging from leading dailies like the *New York Times* to widely-followed news media sites, like CNN.com. (Cited sources are included throughout this text via

hyperlinks; and a recommended reading and reference list is additionally included here as [Appendix A](#) and [Works Cited](#).) We also secured select testimonies that we invited from more than 25 of the nation’s leading experts in various fields, ranging from K-12 to higher education, and from business and philanthropy to media and journalism. (A full listing of our interviewees with video links to various webinars and virtual discussions featuring their comments and reflections is included here as [Appendix B](#).) While all of these sources—and especially our expert interviewees—helped significantly to inform our analysis and recommendations here, we take full responsibility for the findings and prescriptions offered throughout, with no representation or suggestion that our informants and advisors (or the important organizations they represent) necessarily endorse our positions.

Analysis & Essential Findings

Data and feedback derived from the many credible sources we tapped to produce this report reveal that there is an urgent need for national leadership to address the issues, and that time is of the essence to move us in a better direction. Altogether, the information derived from these sources strongly suggests that emboldened federal policies and investments in education, civic literacy, and good jobs programs are the essential tools we need to deploy in order to create a more racially and economically equitable society, a more vibrant democracy, and a more sustainable and successful American future. These observations are hardly novel. Over recent years, numerous important leadership and advocacy efforts have emerged speaking to the need for renewed focus on and investment in [public education](#), [civics](#), and [workforce development](#). And, in the nearly half century since the Reagan presidency, various national administrations have attempted to address education and related workforce

PERSISTENT DISPARITIES IN SCHOOL SPENDING BY RACE

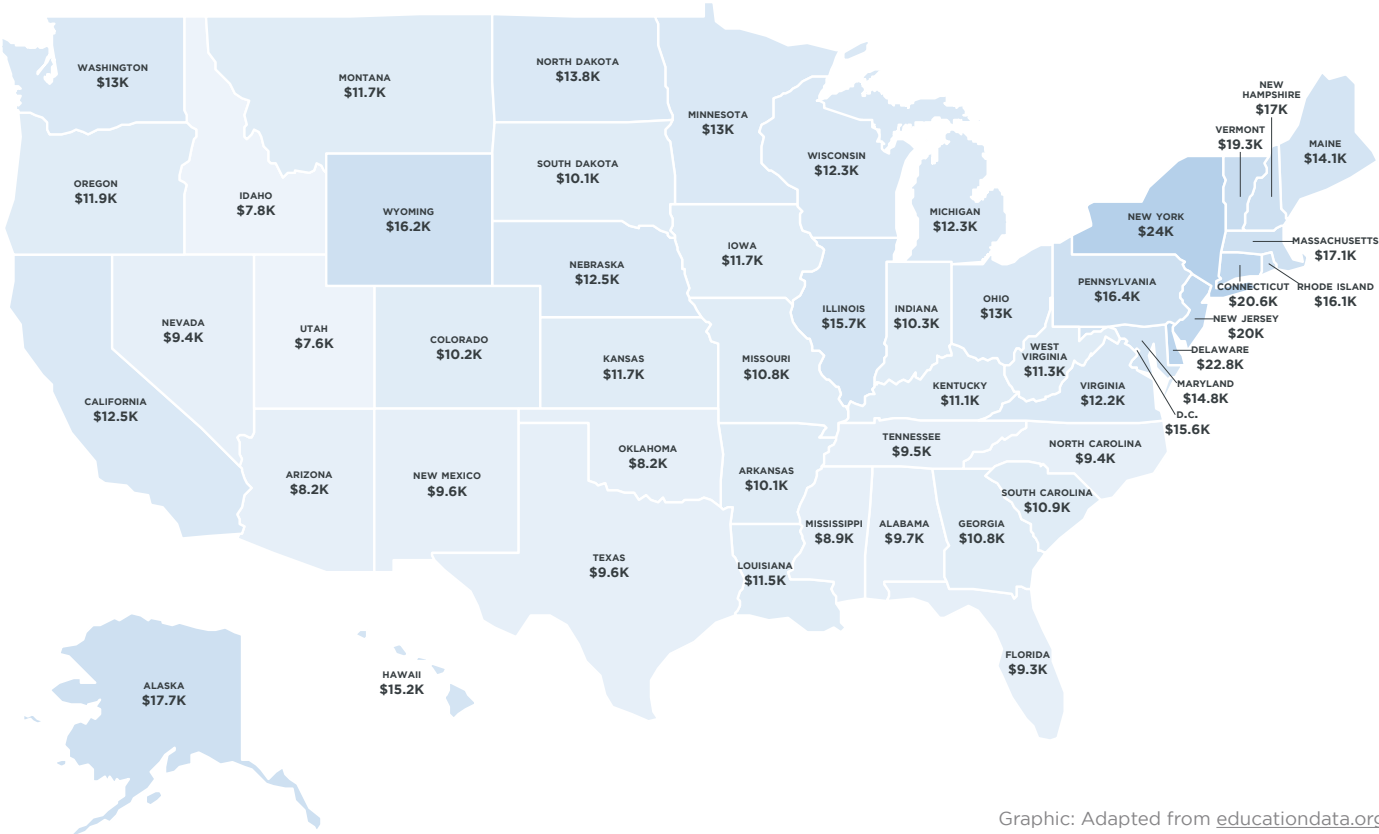


Graphic: Adapted from topmastersineducation.com

preparation deficits resulting in new federal funding and standards, ranging from the [Goals 2000: Educate America Act](#), initiated under the George H.W. Bush White House and adapted by the Clinton administration, to [No Child Left Behind](#) under George W. Bush and the Obama-era [Every Student Succeeds Act](#). Unfortunately, none of these efforts have adequately placed racial and economic justice, or greater alignment across sectors and institutions, at the core of their analyses or prescriptions for change. Our reporting here is intended to help correct this gap in the public discourse at a time when the racial and economic justice imperatives to do so are both compelling and increasing.

Presently, U.S. education, civics, and job training policy and financing operate largely in highly siloed and decentralized frameworks of state and local school authorities, regional workforce boards, and, to varying degrees, an array of allied partners from business and civil society. Despite a long modern tradition of [U.S. law](#) upholding equal minority education and language rights (from *Brown v. Board of Education* to *Lau v. Nichols*), school integration, financing, and equity remain highly uneven across the nation, with schools hosting large populations of students of color being grossly underfinanced and underserved compared to their White counterparts; and regions varying widely in their per pupil spending. According to recent reporting by Linda Darling-Hammond in [Forbes](#), based on Rutgers University-based Education Law Center

PUBLIC SCHOOL SPENDING PER STUDENT



Graphic: Adapted from educationdata.org

research, for example, [the top-spending states commit about three times](#) more to education than the lowest-spending states; and, in many states, [the wealthiest districts spend two to three times](#) what the poorest districts can spend per pupil. Such disparities bake systemic racial and economic inequality into the equation of virtually every state and local school system in the nation.

Given America's [rapidly expanding racial diversity](#) and the growing racial wealth divide, continuing to advance learning, civics, and employment training and placement in such an inequitable and disaggregated way increasingly weakens our capacity to compete globally on the basis of optimal talent and human capital deployment. At the same time, it precludes the economic security and mobility of much of our expanding youth and young adult populations of color; and it further [degrades](#) the health and future prospects of our democracy and civic culture. We can and must do better in these connections if the U.S. is to remain competitive as a world leader in innovation, economic vitality, prosperity sharing, and democratic governance. To get the job done, we need to focus much greater effort on devising and adopting a clear national strategy—with supporting goals—covering school-based instruction, civics education, and workforce preparation and equity—one that unifies our currently decentralized and disconnected systems in more integrated and complementary efforts, and one that offers more equitable instructional content and investment to help balance the playing field for

communities, students, and workers of color.

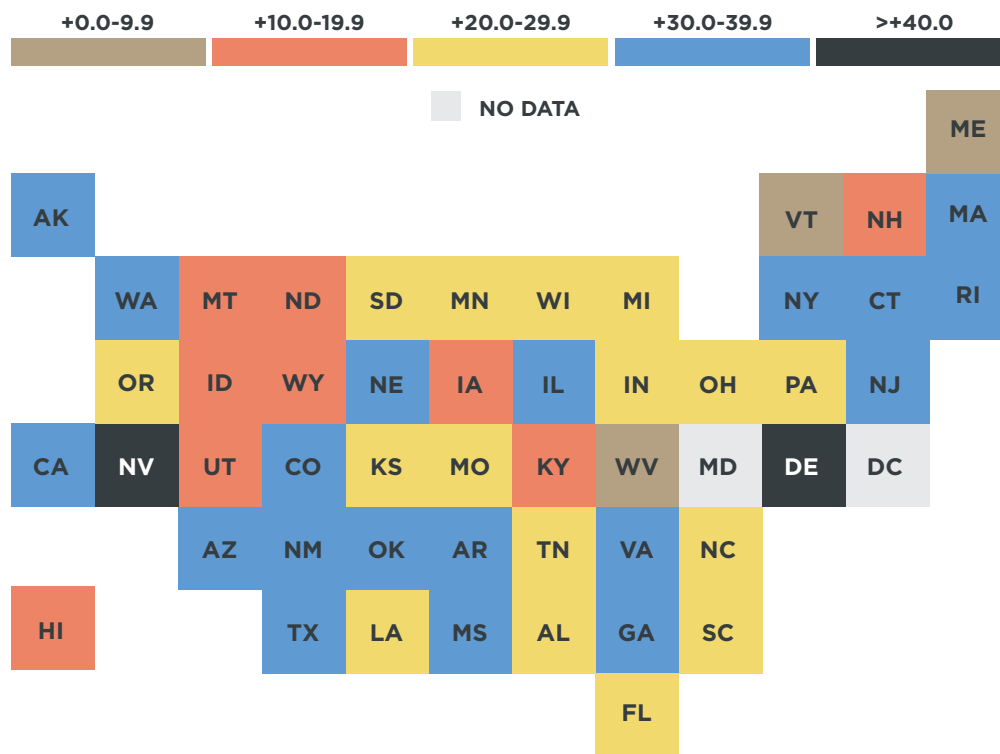
Presently, where issues of racial and economic equity are concerned, the U.S. presently lacks national standards regulating the content of classroom teaching in areas like civics, history, and social studies. That's because K-12 education in the United States has historically been the responsibility of locally-elected school boards that are governed by state laws and regulations bearing on what happens in the classroom. Sadly, over the years, the state-centric governance of public education has significantly mitigated efforts by communities of color and other discriminated populations to achieve educational and workforce equity in numerous, conservative states. Indeed, recent years have seen [growing efforts](#) in such jurisdictions to [significantly regulate teaching content](#) in these areas in ways that effectively preclude introducing facts, evidence, and honest dialog where doing so could create discomfort for conservative White elected officials, activists, students, and/or families. As a result, students across the nation are exposed to increasingly uneven opportunities to learn the essential basics of our nation's formation and founding principles, its lived history, and its evolving requirements as an increasingly multicultural democracy. In addition, education professionals from administrators and principals to teachers and school librarians are [leaving the space in large numbers](#)—most in response to the fatigue of recent years contending with growing political rancor

and demands, school and community violence, and the COVID-19 pandemic, which—along with stagnant compensation and rising inflation—have combined to radically diminish workplace quality and incentives in our schools.

Increasing investments in education professionals, enhanced teaching technologies, and school safety is as essential as ever—especially for those working in communities and schools with large student and family populations of color. These are the places where the growing majority of our future leaders, professionals, and workers will be produced and upon which so much of our future will depend, both from a political and an economic leadership standpoint. In this context, the urgency of not only maintaining, but also expanding the representation of teachers and administrators of color cannot be overstated. Presently, for example, less than 2 percent of K-12 teachers in American public schools are [Black men](#) (who overall comprise about three times that amount—or roughly 6 percent—of the total U.S. population). [Recent research shows](#) that students of color do better on average in classroom attendance, grading, and course completion when they have meaningful access to teachers and school personnel of

THROUGHOUT THE U.S., PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE WHITE THAN THEIR STUDENTS

Percentage Point Difference in White Teachers and Students, Based on the 2017-18 School Year



Note: Percentage distribution based on students for whom race and ethnicity was reported, which may be less than the total number of students in the state. Teachers include both full-time and part-time teachers.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics

Graphic: Adapted from [Pew Research Center](#)

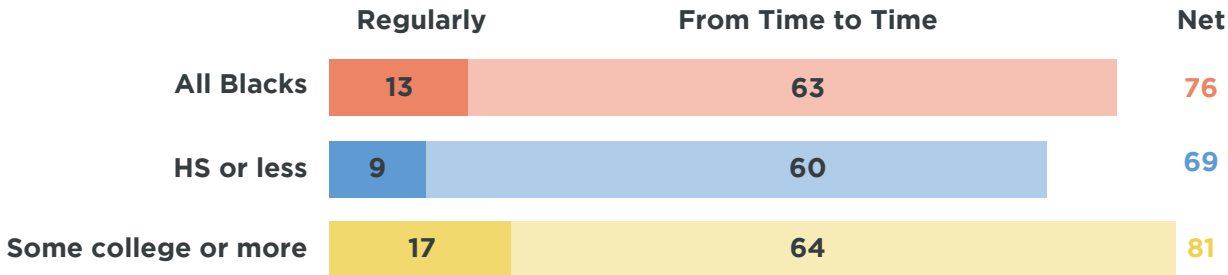
color; and that White students in those same school settings are also positively affected by increases in teacher and school personnel diversity. Prioritizing the [diversification](#) of school teachers, administrators, and para-professionals is especially important in the current passage, given that only about 20 percent of the nation's extant public school teacher force is of color, while a majority of public school students (fully 53 percent) are now non-White.

Another fundamental challenge that bears on creating a more unified and mutually-reinforcing system of learning, civic education, and workforce equity is the general dislocation between schools, society, and employers across the American landscape. In the absence of more prescriptive national policy standards, shared goals, and reinforcing institutional incentives, so much of our current focus and investment is rooted in particularized efforts that are too often isolated from other essential segments of the educational, civic, and workforce development pipeline. Owing to this disaggregated reality, unnecessary [inefficiencies, redundancies, and dislocations](#) are considerable across the education-training landscape. Schools, their students, and their personnel alike are thus experiencing growing levels of need for external supports that strengthen connections and economies across the school-to-work-to-society continuum.

More and more, schools are beset by extracurricular pressures and threats—from poverty to political discord to community and family violence. They are thus increasingly called to support parents and students in need of enhanced personal and food security, subsidized child and after school care, increased health and psychological assistance, and bolstered career counseling and guidance on the best ways to make a meaningful life for themselves. In these circumstances, it is becoming more and more clear that stronger [cross-institutional and cross-sector partnerships](#) are required to help accelerate young people's healthy and productive formation, their opportunities to actively engage in community service and problem solving, and their ability to successfully navigate complex systems and career advancement challenges in their formative years. In some places, sporadic efforts in these directions are occurring. School partnerships with local [corporations](#), [health clinics](#), and youth-serving organizations like the [YMCA](#) and the [Girl Scouts](#) are growing in incidence and demand across the country. Given the nation's fast-changing demographics, partnerships and the enhanced wrap-around services they make possible are especially important for at-risk youth of color who are poor, living in foster care, or homeless. Similarly, supporting [Opportunity Youth](#) and first-generation college students to succeed at the next level beyond their secondary school studies is an increasingly important imperative for our nation and its various education and training organizations.

Efforts more fully to center such youth and the schools or allied certification programs they attend in a more mutually-supportive ecosystem that includes leading social services providers, civic organizations, and employers are more [needed and vital](#) than ever. This is not only because they lend themselves to [better outcomes](#) for affected students and youth at a time when education and training are so critically important to our nation’s emerging next generations; but also because they are essential means of building on [what little still remains](#) of the public Commons in America; for, speaking frankly, other than the military—and, to a lesser extent, select labor unions, interfaith communities, and community sports programs, public schools and job training programs are among the lone remaining spaces in our society where the broad diversity of our population in all of its racial and class dimensions is called to co-exist and co-create as a matter of course. Given this reality, it would be a major dereliction of duty for American political, business, and civic leaders to forego opportunities to build now on the increasingly singular point of entry for needed investments in the Common Good that U.S. education and training institutions are uniquely equipped to make possible.

BLACKS EXPERIENCING RACIAL DISCRIMINATION BY EDUCATION LEVEL



Note: Blacks include those who only report being one race and are non-Hispanic. “Some college or more” includes those who have an associate’s, bachelor’s or advanced degree and those who have attended college but did not obtain a degree. “High school or less” refers to those who have a high school diploma or its equivalent and those who did not complete high school.
 Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 22-Feb. 5, 2019.
 Graphic: Adapted from [Pew Research Center](#)

Last but not least, recent decades have seen a significant reduction of public school investments in areas like arts and culture education, which to so many of our young people across the nation are essential centers of gravity relative to their identities, passions, and values. At a time when so much ground all around us is being redefined—often not in the best ways—by the grind of technology, the vagaries of the global economy, and the blare of modern media, it is vitally important that young people—and especially traditionally excluded youth of color—be afforded expanded space to explore their personal, social, and civic opinions through constructive engagement in expressive endeavors such as are uniquely made available through art and creativity. It turns out that students not only show greater learning interest in these subjects, but also that early exposure to creative content and processes has beneficial impacts on young people’s development and longer term alignment with democratic and

communal values. Researchers at the [Brookings Institution](#), for example, have recently reported findings showing the importance of young Americans being exposed to creativity and the arts for the health and vitality of our democratic culture, through higher incidences of civic engagement and reduced intergroup bias.

Deeper investment in creative spaces of study being made more broadly available to young students, and especially low-income students of color, would help to resuscitate our nation's traditional outlook on the essential purpose of education in America not just being all about the economic proposition of securing a job and/or sustaining a career for mere material gain or economic security. Rather, it would additionally position responsible engagement in society and the civic culture of our democracy, along with the value of learning for the pure sake of expanding knowledge and personal development, as desired outputs. With each passing year, we are being reminded and shown that economic growth and mobility in the absence of valuing our shared humanity, along with corresponding notions of community, safety, human rights, and prosperity sharing, is a recipe for disaster. Our democracy, the Common Good, and our collective fate as a nation and planet hinge increasingly on our ability to balance the past decades' focus on material gains with complementary attention to the moral imperatives of our growing human and ecological crises.

Ideas & Recommendations for a Better Way Forward

In order to meaningfully and comprehensively address the many issues and imperatives that are at the heart of our focus here, we recommend various reforms in policy, funding, and approach that we believe would dramatically improve learning, civic discourse, and employment equity in America. Many of our ideas and recommendations are aspirational and will require a significant change in public thinking and more progressive political leadership across the country for them to become practically actionable. But we think such proposals are worthy and essential to take seriously, and to begin working on in a more earnest and collective way, effective immediately. During recent years, as our nation has evolved in its multicultural composition and political culture, it has consistently defied conventional odds by demonstrating far more progressive impulses than public polls and surveys have previously revealed.

Despite facing significant initial political opposition, for example, advocates in areas ranging from [same sex marriage rights](#) to [same day voter registration](#) and from [cannabis legalization to a \\$15 living wage](#) have achieved major wins across the nation. Indeed, both progressive and conservative jurisdictions alike have adopted legal regimes in each of these spaces over the past decade. With regard to same

sex marriage, dramatic shifts in public opinion ultimately facilitated legal action that has now liberalized federal law. Comparable outcomes in the other areas mentioned above are increasingly likely with each passing year. With collective persistence and proper organizing support on the political left, we are thus confident that the kinds of innovations and reforms we enumerate here below are likely to meet a similar positive fate in the future still to come. This is the power of democracy in action, even against the backdrop of robust and stubborn resistance in certain quarters.

While we do not pretend that our ideas and recommendations are exhaustive, we are confident that serious institutional and leadership efforts in these directions across a broad swath of American institutional life would lead us to discernibly better outcomes. We are hardly alone in this assertion. Important voices have emerged in recent years whose calls to action [echo](#) or otherwise [reinforce](#) our suggestions; so, there is no pretense that ours are original ideas or concepts. But, as referenced here throughout, what is required now is far more racially-inclusive, unified, cross-institutional and cross-sector action, to make these ideas and concepts standard policy priorities and best practices across the entire landscape of American life.

Dramatically Expand the Federal Government's Policy Stake and Role

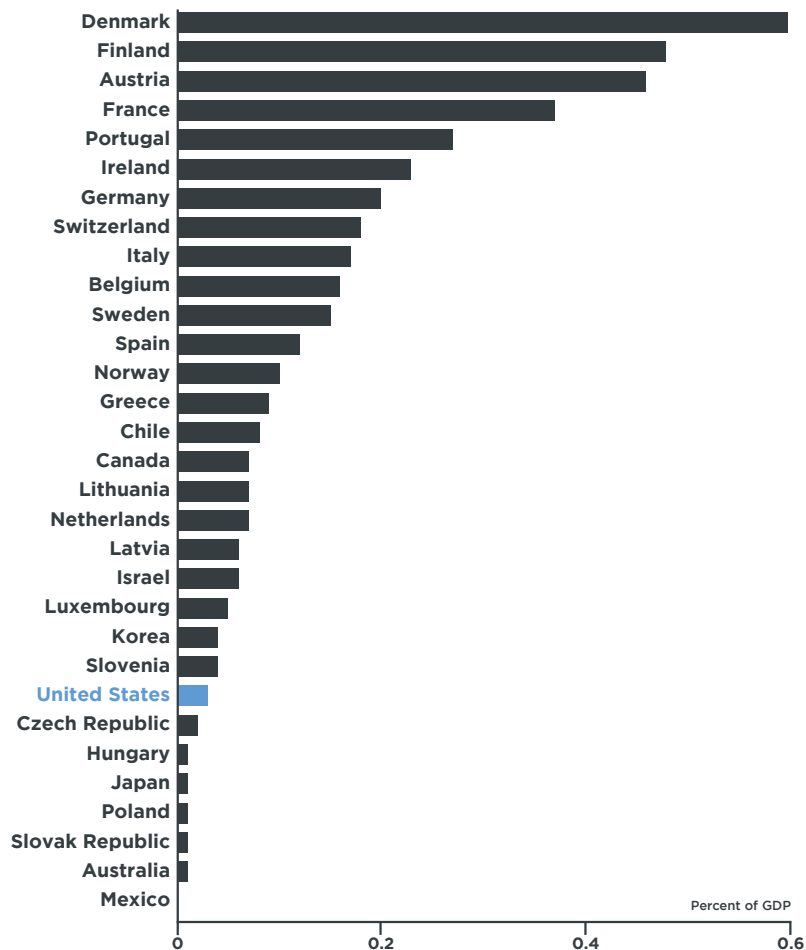
- Enact national legislation creating new federal rights to cost-free child care, pre-school, and K-14 public schooling, fact-based civics education, and guaranteed employment training and placement opportunities
- Develop and implement a national goals policy framework to support more integrated and mutually-reinforcing investments in inclusive learning, civics education, and workforce equity
- Empanel a nonpartisan national commission of leaders from education, civil society, and the business community to create standard curricula and teaching guidelines for K-12 schools that preclude local efforts to forestall the accurate, factual teaching and discussion of U.S. racial and economic history

Support Major New National Investments in the Space

- Commit to major new national investments in support of more inclusive and integrated education, civics, and workforce training programs
- Embed new funding commitments and formulas for such work in the federal budget
- Attach federal funding to the states based on their success in integrating new federal standards and achieving improved outcomes for the nation's most underserved students and schools
- Utilize the federal contracting system to incent large employers to unify more strategically around this work, in close partnership and collaboration with local school, civic, and workforce professionals

U.S. VERSUS OECD PUBLIC SPENDING ON NATIONAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

When it comes to funding development programs, the U.S. ranks near the bottom among OECD countries.



Note: Data from 2015

Source: OECD

Graphic: Adapted from Peter D'Amato, [The Hechinger Report](#) & Jiachuan Wu, NBC News

Establish and Meet Ambitious National Goals for Increased Student Academic and Workplace Success

- Develop and track performance towards stretch national goals to better serve all students and workers-in-training, but especially low-income and minority students and workers
- Emphasize grade level math and reading attainment, on-time graduation, and successful transition to quality post-K-12 education and/or training
- Focus more attention on increasingly essential skills-building and competency enhancements for students at all levels in areas ranging from leadership and communications to group problem-solving and consensus-building

Prioritize Equitable School Finance Reforms

- Advocate for state and federal school finance reforms in support of massive reinvestment in the nation's most diverse and economically-challenged districts
- Consider new models in U.S. school funding that are significantly less dependent on local property taxation, building on dramatically increased Title I federal funding
- Provide multi-year funding to particularly needy, cash-strapped districts, to help build-in added continuity and certainty relative to their planning and positioning to achieve better outcomes for the students and families they serve

Increase Incentives for Stakeholder Alignment

- Increase performance-based federal incentives to align and integrate efforts across segments, institutions, and sectors
- Build on new tax credits, grant eligibility requirements, and other prospective local revenue enhancements for states and localities, partner institutions, and leading education and training practitioners
- Recognize and reward schools and districts in especially-challenged, low-income communities that are able to demonstrate discernible improvements in student performance and outcomes through expanded alignment and integration of their teaching, civic education, and workforce development functions

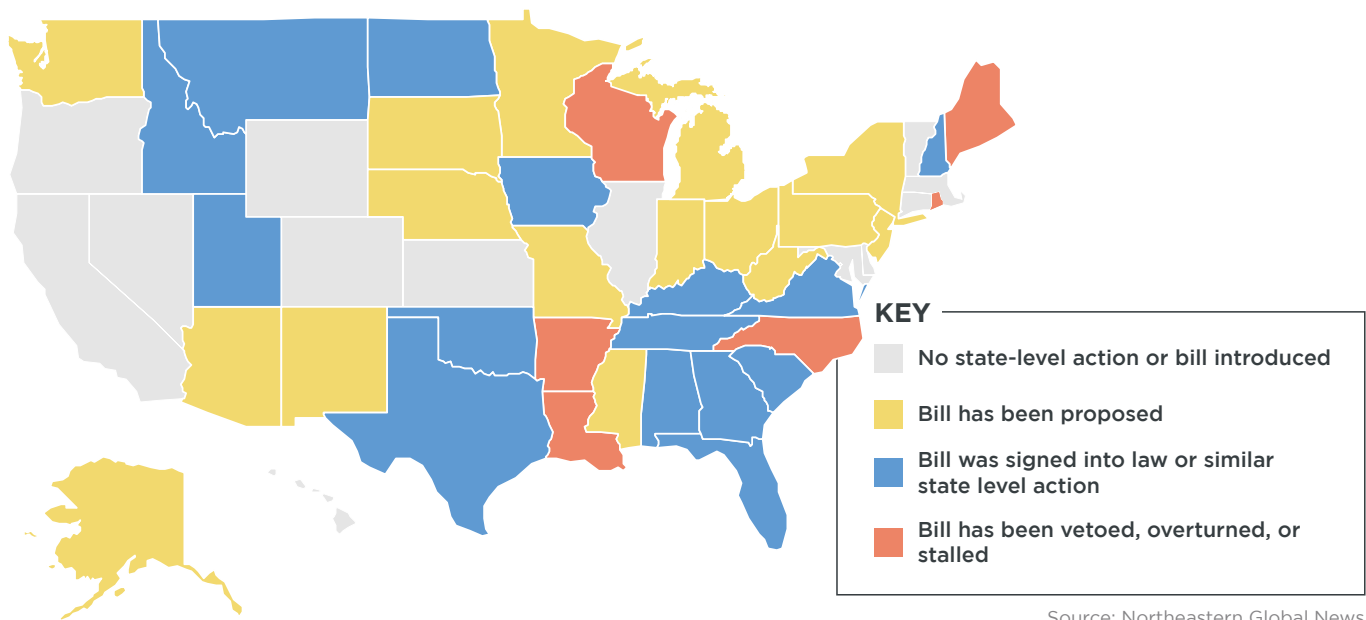
Build on Proven Successes and Emerging Innovations

- Prioritize efforts to build on and scale policy innovations from across the nation
- Focus on expanding proven models, from community and magnet schools to dual enrollment (of high school students in community colleges) offerings, and from career academies to project-based learning programs
- Employ rigorous impact assessments and analyses to identify best practices and transferable lessons for broader application and scaling

Expand Community Partnerships and Supports

- Encourage school partnerships with anchor institutional leaders in business, employment training, and placement, health/mental health, housing, youth services, and other key areas of practical and socio-emotional need
- Establish schools and training centers as hubs of mutual support for students and their families, as well as engaged professionals in business, labor, and higher education
- Build on winning examples provided during recent years by the community schools movement, as well as more broad-based federal initiatives like the [Promise Neighborhoods Program](#)

STATES WITH LAWS OR PROPOSED REGULATIONS TO BAN BOOKS FROM CLASSROOMS AND LIBRARIES



Reinvest in Arts and Culture Education

- Prioritize [new investments in school-based arts and culture](#) curricula that help American youth, and especially youth of color, to learn and express themselves in ways that are more meaningful to them and engaging
- Focus on creative projects that help participating students of diverse backgrounds to constructively explore their respective ideas about society, history, and the bases of our shared humanity
- Engage creative culture professionals more fully in classroom, as well as community-based arts projects that engage youth, build their confidence and skills, and encourage teamwork and joint problem solving

Emphasize New Applied Learning and Community Building Opportunities

- Focus on apprenticeships, public service internships, and collaborative community building activities—especially efforts involving traditionally hard-to-reach youth of color
- Support Opportunity Youth and first-generation college degree seekers with learn-and-earn opportunities through structured and well-paid work-study programs that connect them to industry and civic leaders

Increase Pay and Benefits for Teachers and Allied Professionals Working in Our Most Underserved Schools and Communities

- Increase incentives in training, pay, and benefits for educators, job trainers, and allied professionals working in and around the nation's most challenged school and community settings

- Invest more significantly in high quality training programs that enhance school personnel’s resources and competencies to address racial and economic justice issues in schools
- Apply special effort and compensation to attract more teachers and school administrators of color to significant jobs in education, civics, and workforce development, and especially qualified minority males

Invest in Allied Policy Innovations That Increase the Economic Security of Families and Communities of Color

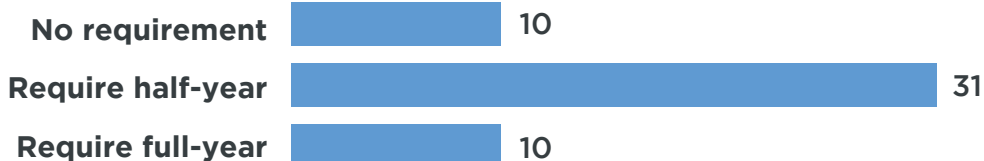
- Help disadvantaged students, workers, and families of color to achieve greater economic security and opportunity that enhances their success prospects at school and at the workplace
- Emphasize new investments in guaranteed income and jobs programs, as well as longer term, low-income community asset-building efforts, like publicly-supported [Baby Bonds](#) programs

Encourage More Active Civic Engagement in Young Americans

- Offer opportunities and space in schools for students to register to vote
- Offer students extracurricular credit for civic and community volunteering
- Promote external ‘meet and greet’ events and field trips for students interested in learning more about the worlds of business, government, and civic affairs

NUMBER OF STATES WITH CIVIC EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Civics Course Requirements



Community Service Requirements



Totals include the District of Columbia.

Sources: “The State of Civics Education,” [Center for American Progress](#). February 21, 2018.; [Baylor University School of Education’s online Doctor of Education in Learning and Organizational Change](#).

Conclusion

Our recent assessment of the issues strongly suggests that our nation is at a critical juncture in which our ability to achieve long-espoused national commitments to more inclusive public education, more active and informed civic engagement, and more strategic investments in job preparation and placement are hanging in the balance. Recent experience suggests that if nothing is done to address the issues sincerely, comprehensively, and quickly, American democracy, social harmony, and prosperity-sharing are likely to further suffer—possibly to a point of no return. This is not hyperbole, but rather an informed assertion and concern that [many observers](#) across the nation and world increasingly share. That being the case, there can be no more vital or opportune moment to re-imagine the landscape of modern U.S. learning, civic education, and workforce development with an eye to making it fundamentally more strategic, inclusive, and high-performing. What is called for, in effect, is the formulation of a new 21st Century national industrial policy that centers a more unified education, civics, and workforce equity strategy at its core. American leaders of the past—however imperfectly—did as much in their times, when domestic and global circumstances required them to do so.

From the earliest years of our nation’s formation, [American leaders](#) in politics and industry committed themselves to supporting a strong, universal public education system. While the initial impulse to do so was surely related to the nation’s need for able and literate workers to fuel U.S. economic development, it is also true that America’s fledgling democracy required an active and informed citizenry; and that the nation’s ever-expanding immigrant populations required acculturation in order to succeed in and contribute further to our land. Furthermore, there has always been a strong strand in U.S. civic and cultural life that sees public education as an essential investment in each individual’s personal development, awareness, and success. As the nation formed, therefore, various impulses played a role in establishing the case for supporting early government investments in human capital formation and deployment. Public education was America’s response to these circumstances. In later iterations, beginning in the early 20th century, U.S. public schooling became a compulsory institutional passage point, both for essential skills-building in support of business and industry, and for unifying our increasingly diverse population around shared notions of our democratic values, rights, and responsibilities.

During the 1930s and through the WWII years, notwithstanding deep, continuing pockets of *de jure* and *de facto* [racial exclusion](#), American public education provided a framework of shared knowledge and values that enabled our nation to unify and endure through both the massive global economic and political crises of the times. During the 1950s and 1960s, U.S. schools, universities, and employers were compelled to

consider new ways to advance American enterprise, intellectual capital, and workforce capacity—increasingly (though, ultimately, insufficiently) with an eye to the need for corrective measures designed to enable racial minorities, women, and other historically marginalized groups to achieve equal rights and outcomes in American education, in the workplace, and in society and the economy at large. In response, during subsequent decades, [massive new investments](#) in American education and the formation of [private industry councils](#) and, then, [workforce investment boards](#) established a more robust framework for better meeting the nation’s worker training needs.

During more recent years, however, the United States has retrenched in important respects from its prior, historical commitments in the education, civics, and employment equity arena. And conservative White leaders have increasingly put in question our society’s continuing [commitment to democratic governance and pluralism](#). These and larger trends in the national and global political economy have resulted in new structural barriers for people and communities of color, not only in education and the workplace, but also in connection with key centers of gravity that bear on household and community economic security and well-being, such as: access to [capital](#); affordable [housing](#) and [healthcare](#); safe [food](#) and drinking [water](#); quality [transportation](#); and fair [voting](#) rights. If we are to survive this painful passage in our national journey intact, with the opportunity to improve and perfect our increasingly multicultural union, major new leadership, funding, and reforms will be required, especially in relation to how we educate and prepare America’s growing youth populations of color, how we encourage supporting adults and institutions to rally around them, and how we invest our resources in their future success as students, active civic participants, and workers. While this report does not pretend to offer solutions for every aspect of the challenge, we are confident that focusing first on the reform framework we propose is an essential step on the path to a better future for our increasingly multicultural and globally-impacted nation.

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APPENDIX A: FURTHER READING

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Exemplary Organizations in Civic Education, Workforce Development, and Community Engagement

- Life Learning Academy (SF) <https://lifelearningacademysf.org/>
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- Groundswell (NY) <https://www.groundswell.nyc/>
- Ashe Cultural Arts Center (LA) <https://www.ashenola.org/>
- La Plazita Institute (NM) <http://laplazitainstitute.org/>
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- Generation Citizen (NY) <https://generationcitizen.org/>
- Annenberg Public Policy Center - Student Voices (PA) <https://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/political-communication/student-voices/>
- iCivics (MA) <https://www.icivics.org/>
- Digital Civics Toolkit (National) <https://www.digitalcivicstoolkit.org/>
- National Skills Coalition (D.C.) <https://nationalskillscoalition.org/>
- Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (IN) <https://www.cael.org/>
- Center for Racial Justice in Education (NY) <https://centerracialjustice.org/>
- Facing History and Ourselves (MA) <https://www.facinghistory.org/>
- Broader, Bolder Approach to Education (National) <https://www.boldapproach.org/>
- Southern Poverty Law Center - Learning for Justice <https://www.splcenter.org/learning-for-justice>
- Citizen University (WA) <https://citizenuniversity.us/>

APPENDIX B

Webinars

Visit racepowerpolicy.org/new-imperatives to view the recordings for the following webinars.

Panel 1: *New Models and Frameworks for Racial Equity in Education and Employment*, October 26th, 2022

- [Eve A. Stotland](#), Program Director, Education and Justice, New York Community Trust
- [Eric Abrams](#), Chief Inclusion Officer, Stanford Graduate School of Education
- [Dr. Ofronama Biu](#), Senior Research Associate, Urban Institute and Research Affiliate, Institute on Race, Power and Political Economy

Panel 2: *New Approaches in Civic Education and Creative Culture for The Common Good*, November 2nd, 2022

- [Dr. Rahsaan Harris](#), CEO, Citizens Committee for New York City (New York, NY)
- [Dr. Angie Kim](#), President & CEO, Center for Cultural Innovation (Los Angeles)
- [Srinija Srinivasan](#), Co-Founder, Loove and Trustee, Stanford University (Palo Alto, CA)

Panel 3: *New Perspectives on Inclusive Education and Economy*, November 10th, 2022

- [Dr. Eduardo Padron](#), President Emeritus, Miami-Dade College (Miami, FL)
- [Dr. Prudence Carter](#), Sarah and Joseph Jr. Dowling Professor of Sociology at Brown University (Providence, RI)

Panel 4: *Book Bans and the Conservative Critique of Critical Race Theory: What's Really Going On?* November 16, 2022

- Tim Komatsu, Research Assistant, Institute on Race, Power and Political Economy (New York, NY)
- [Dr. Sheryl Evans Davis](#), Director, City of San Francisco Human Rights Commission (proposed) (San Francisco, CA)
- [Dr. Nicolás Kanellos](#), Brown Foundation Professor of Hispanic Studies and Founding Director, Arte Publico Press, University of Houston (Houston, TX)

Panel 5: *New Opportunities for Economic Agency: The Future of Inclusive Workforce Development, Policy and Practice, November 22, 2022*

- [Aimee Durfee](#), Director of Workforce Innovation, CenterState CEO (Syracuse, NY)
- [Jack Mills](#), Executive Vice President, The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) (Boston, MA)
- [Juan Salazar](#), Director of Local Policy and Community Engagement, Facebook (Menlo Park, CA)

Recorded Interviews

Visit racepowerpolicy.org/new-imperatives to view the recordings for the following interviews.

- Frances Padilla, Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut
- Jim Fong, Rogue Valley Workforce Development Corp
- Eloy Ortiz Oakley, College Futures
- Van Ton-Quinlivan, Futuro Health
- Paul Bachleitner, Northwest Area Foundation
- Sherry Smith Arca, Berkeley Community Scholars
- Michael Aghahowa, American Artist
- Louis Freedberg, Advancing Education Success Initiative
- Tina Gridiron, ACT
- Jim Larimore, EdSAFE AI Alliance
- Alicia Modestino & Carrie Maultsby-Lute, Northeastern University
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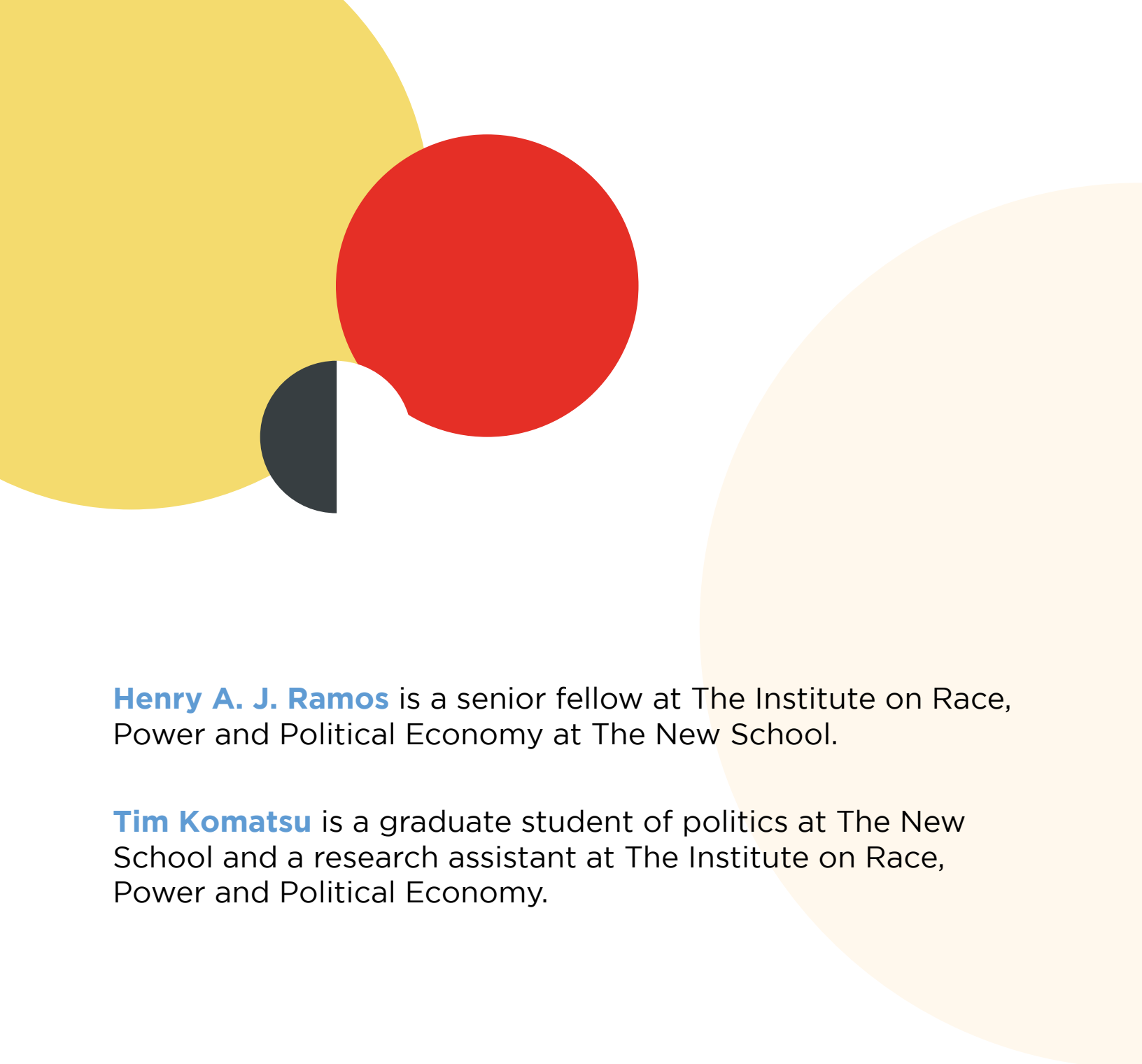
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