



VITAL CONDITIONS

Lifelong Learning

The vital condition of Lifelong Learning is about a good education for all. An education that ensures young people, regardless of background or ability, are set up for success, and have the opportunities to reach their full potential. An education that launches them into meaningful careers in which they can continue learning and growing.

Lifelong Learning is an indispensable, vital condition that we all depend on for our health and well-being. From birth, we are developing and learning. Supportive learning environments from early childhood set children on a path that maximizes their capacity to learn, and positively shapes their social and behavioral development. Exposure to high quality education that is supportive and adaptive to students' needs is requisite for all students to reach important educational milestones, and achieve their full potential. A solid preK-12 education launches young people into productive futures wherein they may pursue higher education, trades, ongoing and community-based education and advance their lives and livelihoods through the power of learning.

Education is an engine of social mobility with implications for health and well-being that extend across the life-course. Higher income, better health, and increased opportunity tracks with higher levels of education. Disparities in access to education and educational attainment persist, and are perpetuated across generations.

Continuing influence of past legacies

Achievement gap: More students are graduating high school, and a greater proportion of Millennials are entering the workforce with college degrees than previous generations. Despite gains in recent decades, gaps persist in educational achievement that disadvantage students from low income backgrounds and communities of color.

Education standards: The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, the Nation's omnibus education law, seeks to ensure equal access to quality education for all. Its highly controversial reauthorization in 2002 as the No Child Left Behind Act set a goal that all students would perform at grade level on state tests, and brought test-based school accountability to scale across the United States. Evidence suggests that NCLB brought about improvements to mathematics achievement of younger students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, but has not affected student achievement in reading. Replacing NCLB in 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act rolled back much of the federal government's big footprint in education policy, and gave more flexibility to states in designing school accountability systems, and teacher certification and evaluation.

Early childhood: Since its founding in 1965, Head Start (and later Early Head Start) has played a critical role in providing early education to disadvantaged 3- to 5-year-old children across the United States. Growing evidence demonstrates the importance of early learning in helping to narrow learning and achievement gaps.

Segregation: For much of American history, schools were segregated by race. Segregation led to gross disparities in funding, and quality of schools. Although *Brown v. the Board of Education* outlawed segregation in schools in 1954, and progress to desegregate was made, segregation persists and by many measures is worsening. Racial and economic segregation in schools perpetuates achievement gaps and disparate access to opportunities.

Discrimination: Several civil rights laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability and age. Although these laws brought about significant progress, discrimination in education persists, and effects of ongoing, intergenerational discrimination continue to harm and profoundly disadvantage certain communities.

Current conditions

In 2016, **4 in 10 Millennials** had at least a Bachelor's degree, and nearly **50% of Millennial women** had a Bachelor's degree.¹

In the 1970s, about half of high school graduates went on to college where grants covered about 80% of costs. Now about **two-thirds of high school graduates** go to college, and only **40% of tuition costs** are covered by grants.²

32 million adults in the U.S. cannot read, and half can't read a book written at an eighth-grade level.³

About **two-thirds** of U.S. children are not proficient readers by the end of third grade, the majority of whom (80%) come from low income families.⁴

About **1 in 6 public schools** do not meet state standards for student achievement.⁵

Per pupil spending varies widely between states – for instance children in Vermont receive nearly **three times the funds** as children in Utah even when adjusted for cost differences.⁶

3 million students are kept out of school with Out of School Suspensions each year – disproportionately male students of color, and students with disabilities.⁷

¹Current Population Survey; ²Best Colleges Online; ³National Institute of Literacy; ⁴Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development; ⁵National Institute of Drug Abuse; ⁶The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading; ⁷National Center for Education Statistics

Education funding: In the United States, a large proportion of funding for public K-12 education is provided through local taxes, generating gross disparities in education funding between well and less well-off communities. While states and the federal government have increased contributions to offset this regressive effect, many states decreased their education spending during the Great Recession and continue to operate with inadequate funding levels.

Federal aid for students: Federal aid for students through mechanisms like Pell Grants, the G.I. Bill, and the Higher Education Act have been instrumental in helping millions of students attend college. However, with more students going to college than ever before there is less financial aid to go around – one of the factors in skyrocketing tuition costs.

Discipline: Students of color, especially male students, and students with learning disabilities are vulnerable to disproportionate and discriminatory applications of discipline, including suspensions, expulsions and criminalization of minor infractions or behaviors that should be handled by schools. Disciplinary actions that push students out of school prevent learning, heighten disconnection, accelerate drop out, and feed the school-to-prison pipeline.

Major forces shaping current and future priorities

Healthy schools: Schools and school districts are stepping up to address health equity. They are expanding: food and feeding programs; health, dental, mental health, counseling and social services; and policies, programs, practices and infrastructure that increase physical activity.

Safe and supportive school environments: Alarming trends including student injuries and deaths in mass school shootings, and online harassment and cyber bullying are bringing increased public attention to issues of school safety.

Disability accommodations: Students with disabilities have the right to a free and appropriate public education and are assured special education and related services under U.S. law. Accommodations and supports, such as Individualized Education Programs, continue to be important tools to ensure a good education for all.

Personalized learning: Personalized learning is a major movement in education that tailors and aligns instruction and supports to student needs and learning profiles, often through technologies. Project-based learning, blended learning, and community-based learning are other emergent strategies to engage students through authentic, personalized learning experiences.

Technology: Technology is reshaping the future of education. It is revolutionizing instruction and learning inside and outside of classrooms. Federal and state governments have sought to increase high speed internet access to schools, and provide online resources for students and teachers. Online schooling at all levels has become more commonplace. Technology is increasing access to information, learning opportunities, and tools for learners of all ages. Despite its promise to advance teaching and learning, questions about efficacy of education technologies and challenges to their equitable implementation loom.

Shaping the workforce of tomorrow: Today's students are tomorrow's workforce, and that workforce should have the capacity, and be equipped to meet society's needs for overall well-being. Strategic investments in education can be channeled to shape the workforce, helping to adapt to the changing nature of work, and address professional and skills shortages.

Teaching workforce: Employment practices in the education sector affect the quality of education students receive. Educators at all levels, from early childhood to university, face issues of inadequate compensation, employment instability, and other poor practices that devalue our educators, and deprive students of their best educations.

Rising costs of higher education: Since the 1970s, college tuition costs have increased at a faster rate than inflation. In recent years, soaring costs have accompanied rising enrollment, reductions in financial aid, and mounting student debt.

What are important priorities or ways to ensure a positive legacy?

There are infinite opportunities to make progress, across every sphere of influence.
Here are just a few that could yield great benefits:

1. Fund schools at levels sufficient for them to provide good education for all students and a healthy school environment
2. Advance Schools as places where students can get things they need for success in their educations – including free/reduced price breakfast and lunch, Summer Food, mental health counseling, medical and dental services
3. Rethink discipline in schools in order to reduce disproportionate impacts to young men of color and students with disabilities
4. Dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline and end the mass incarceration of youth
5. Turn the tide of the student debt crisis by finding solutions for those with student debt