



# Talking Points

## Big problems need big solutions

- America is in a national education and economic crisis — and the two are inter-related.
- The answer is not in playing the “blame game.” Society shares responsibility to provide children the opportunity for a quality education because we all have a stake in their success.
- Far from being first in the world in math and science, the United States ranked thirty- fifth out of the top forty countries in math — right between Azerbaijan and Croatia. In science, the United States ranked twenty- ninth out of forty, sandwiched between Latvia and Lithuania.
- Tinkering at the margins by looking at the success of individual charter schools, for example, will not fix our national crisis. Other countries, which surpass the United States in test scores and college completion, made big fixes in a relatively short amount of time. But they did it by focusing on system reforms, not one school at a time.



## We need bolder and broader approaches to provide all students an opportunity to learn

- The education crisis our nation faces extends beyond fixing individual schools. If we address our Big Problems with Big Solutions, we remain globally competitive. If not, our nation’s future looks dim.
- Ultimately, federal accountability is needed to ensure that all students in all states have a fair and substantive opportunity to learn. State remedies have not been sufficient to address the deep inequities in educational opportunity found both within and across states.
- A federal role is essential to ensure all students are guaranteed a fair and substantive opportunity to learn as a civil right.
- In 1930, following the economic crash, President Hoover declined to meet the nation’s Big Challenges with a Big Solutions agenda. Instead, he encouraged localities to develop their own solutions. The national unemployment rate ballooned from 8% to 23% until President Franklin Roosevelt took office and developed policy solutions with a greater force and changed the course of history.

- Every several decades, our country is faced with a choice of whether we will be a nation united or divided. The Civil War ended slavery. The 30's Great Depression introduced social supports. The 50's and 60's tackled segregation. Today, we must address education and opportunity. If we continue to offer solutions that separate people and states, we will be a nation divided and a nation at risk.
- Our country's future is at the crossroad of opportunity for all or progress for a few. The path we take is critical. The answer is not in a lottery, nor Superman, but in solutions that give all our children an opportunity to learn and creates one America.

### **Systemic solutions must involve universal access to research-proven resources**

- In New Jersey, after the Abbott decision — which equalized resources for all New Jersey's schools — graduation and achievement scores for all students rose, based on national standards.
- To close the opportunity gap, every student in America must have access to four basic things:
  - ✓ All children should have the opportunity to go to pre-school and all-day kindergarten. We've known for years that this works, so why not guarantee it to all our children? A child who starts school ready to learn and is literate by third grade has lasting positive outcomes.
  - ✓ All children should have the opportunity to be taught by experienced and highly effective teachers.
  - ✓ All children should have classes that will prepare them for college and career.
  - ✓ All children should have the tools and help they need to learn, including good libraries, computers, small classrooms, guidance counselors, mentors and tutors.

### **Charters alone are an inadequate solution for the size of this problem — they will leave most kids behind**

- Charters have a place in our educational landscape, but they only educate 4% of U.S. children. The fastest growing system of charters is in New York, with 22% growth and only educates 2% (21,000) of New York City's over one million students. To expand this program nationally would take roughly 150 years to meet all our students' needs.



- Charter schools are often touted as the “Silver Bullet,” but these efforts have produced mixed results, at best. They do not (and will not) eliminate the funding disparities between well-resourced and poorly-resourced schools. According to one recent and highly regarded study, only 17% of charter schools do better than regular public schools and 36% do significantly worse.
- We don’t need a “Superman” nor a few “Super Schools,” we need “Super Systems” capable of rescuing tens of thousands of young people each year.

## **Education is a civil right**

- All students have a right to an opportunity to learn, not as a matter of competition or location, but as a civil and human right.
- It can’t depend on a lottery. We must guarantee all students access to high quality early education, highly effective teachers, college and work-preparatory curricula and equitable instructional resources like good school libraries and small classes. A right without a clear map of what that right protects is an empty statement.



## **Zip codes should not determine the quality of a child’s education**

- All children should have the opportunity to get a good education — regardless of where they live.



## **Funding education based on property taxes creates inequities**

- We are the only industrialized nation that uses property tax to fund its school system and the consequences are devastating. In America, zip codes determine educational opportunity. We must strive to bring more equity to the public school system, including exploring alternatives to property tax financing.
- Educational resources are distributed inequitably across and within states, for example:
  - ✓ Average per student expenditure, by state, varies from \$6,000 in Utah to \$18,000 in New Jersey.
  - ✓ In Connecticut, per student expenditure by district varies from \$4,000 to \$31,000; in Texas it varies from \$3,000 to \$28,000.

## Blaming teachers won't solve this problem

- Teachers are so important to our students' success we must find a way to stop the blame game and instead focus on supports that will improve the quality and effectiveness of our teaching force.
- Teachers want their students to be successful, but often are not granted appropriate planning time or on-going professional development, and too often are asked to teach out of their subject area.
- Every school should match new and less experienced teachers with mentor teachers to guide their skills development and evaluate their effectiveness.
- If teachers and unions were the problem, schools and students in non-union "right to work" states in the South would do better, but that is not the case.



## Opportunity gap vs. achievement gap

- For the past two decades, the nation has focused on standards and testing to close student achievement gaps; however, if we had been as committed to reducing the opportunity gap from the onset we would not see the achievement gap as stark as it is today.
- Originally the Standards Movement was known as Opportunity to Learn Standards.
- Students living in poverty and from historically disadvantaged groups have only half the opportunity to attend schools with adequate educational resources than other students.
- There is only a 15% chance that a Black student will be able to attend a well-resourced, high-performing school. There is only a 17% chance for a Latino student or a student from a poor family.
- There is a 42% chance that a Black student will find his or herself assigned to a poorly-resourced, low-performing school. Thirty-five percent of Latinos and 34% of poor students are in these drop-out factories.
- We should not, cannot and must not be satisfied with a 50% opportunity rate. If we told corporate America that 50% of their product would fail, they would retool, rethink or remove themselves from the market.
- We must use the current opportunities, particularly those available under ARRA, to ensure our schools retool, rethink and refocus resources, ensuring every student has equal access to a high-quality public education. Not doing so has dire consequences with immense long-term implications.



## Ultimately, federal accountability is needed to ensure that all students in all states have a fair and substantive opportunity to learn

- State remedies have not been sufficient to address the deep inequities in educational opportunity found both within and across states. A federal role is essential to ensure all students are guaranteed a fair and substantive opportunity to learn as a civil right.
- In 1930, following the economic crash, President Hoover declined to meet the nation's Big Challenges with a Big Solutions agenda. Instead, he encouraged localities to develop their own solutions. The national unemployment rate ballooned from 8% to 23% until President Franklin Roosevelt took office and developed policy solutions with a greater force and changed the course of history.



## There are enormous economic consequences for failing to provide an opportunity to learn

- The costs to the nation of educational inequity are enormous. Each year they are:
  - ✓ \$82 billion in lost lifetime earnings
  - ✓ \$37 million in decreased tax revenue
  - ✓ \$12 billion in losses due to poor health
  - ✓ \$8 billion in losses due to increased crime rates
- The potential return on the investment needed to give every child an equal opportunity to learn is 250%.
- There is a direct correlation between not completing high school and one's chances for going to prison. To interrupt this devastating cycle we need to make sure those neighborhoods and communities most vulnerable get the most support. We can either invest in student supports and mentors now or, at a much higher cost, parole officers later.
- If the U.S. is to be globally competitive, we need college graduates, not prison inmates.

## The national policy debates must engage key community voices, including parents, young people and teachers

- Parents and youth have a lot to say about what works and what does not. They are an essential part of shaping education reform that directly affects their lives. We must strive to ensure their voices are heard by policy makers and not left out of the echo chamber of 24-hour news cycles.
- In the past ten to fifteen years, the parent and youth education organizing movements across the country have grown and they have also created some of the best solutions to the failure of schools in their communities. Parents in the South Bronx created New York's Lead Teacher program, in Chicago they created Grow Your Own, and in Sacramento, the Home Visiting program. The Annenberg Institute for School Reform's research shows that schools are stronger and have better outcomes when the community is engaged.
- Public services like health care, housing and social security help children from disadvantaged backgrounds do well in school. Any large system needs strategic, robust and knowledgeable leadership to support and connect schools with communities.



For more information about the Opportunity To learn Campaign,  
go to [www.otlcampaign.org](http://www.otlcampaign.org)

