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*Parents are sending a message loud and clear: we want better, more accurate information about our kids.*

## Listen to the parents

Parents have been kept in the dark about how far behind their kids are in school. The latest results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) are devastating for our students, including many who are just starting high school and don't have time to waste.

We all agree the stakes have never been higher. The Covid-19 pandemic widened educational and economic inequality.

As the mother of five boys who struggled during school closures, and as we continue to navigate today's education system, worries about their future trajectories are never far from my mind. As the president of the National Parents Union (NPU), I spent the last three years in constant communication with families nationwide. Parents are sending a message loud and clear: we want better, more accurate information about our kids.

[NPU conducts a monthly nationwide poll of parents](#) about their children's educational and life experiences and what it means for them long-term.

The more parents learn about the state of education, the more concerned they become and for good reason: the kids are not alright. Parents widely agree that America's education system is in despair.

- [81% of parents](#) label it a major problem that students are still behind academically, according to the Nation's Report Card, including 34% who say it's a crisis.
- [76% of parents](#) agree the mental health challenges among children is a major problem, including 34% who say it's a crisis.
- [71% of parents](#) believe America's education system needs to be overhauled.

We want policymakers to acknowledge the pandemic's impact on our children's learning and development, and comprehensively address the challenges facing our education system to ensure students fully recover with pathways to economic mobility. Elected leaders and education decision-makers must move past culture wars, rhetoric, and finger-pointing with legislation and policies that reflect the reimagined experience parents want for their kids.

Policymakers can contribute to a more equitable, resilient education system with some practical solutions. These proposals are based on [lessons learned](#) over decades and innovative approaches developed during the pandemic. They are aligned with what parents want for their children.

## FIRST, GIVE PARENTS A SEAT AT THE TABLE

Parents should be partners with schools from the beginning: participating in strategic planning, budgeting, leadership changes, and contract negotiations. It's not enough to ask them for permission after decisions have already been made. Only collaboratively can we create a path forward.

After our heroic leadership as facilitators of our own children's educations and powerful partners in school reopening and recovery, we expect to continue to be involved in decision-making and want a say in how education will be reimagined. Over the past few years, we established greater transparency and communication with policymakers about strategies for addressing today's challenges. We must continue to deepen these efforts.

As the clock runs down on billions in financial aid, we need to examine what is working and what isn't. We're looking at an abrupt funding stop and deep cuts beginning in the 2024-25 school year and our most vulnerable students will suffer when the fiscal cliff hits. This is the moment to rethink how we teach and finance education.

Parents want [increased funding to support direct interventions](#), such as tutoring and academic support programs, as well as additional educational and mental health support.

## ENTER A NEW AGE OF HONESTY AND TRANSPARENCY

Policymakers and educators need to welcome a new age of honesty and transparency with parents, families, and communities. Assessment data plays a critical role in driving student progress by providing educators with a clear picture of learning and identifying areas for additional interventions and investments.

- [54% of parents](#) would like their child's teachers to discuss their child's performance and progress with them more often.

Data helps teachers individualize instruction and ensure all students reach their full potential. Tracking student progress over time allows educators to identify patterns in student learning and adjust instructional strategies as needed. We must also be flexible to change when plans do not yield the results our children deserve.

## OFFER DIVERSE PATHWAYS

With all of its complex challenges, the pandemic also provided the opportunity to create more flexibility in the education system. It highlighted the limitations of traditional classroom-based learning and the need for alternative approaches. Now we are hungry for more options for remote learning, hybrid learning models, and other approaches that will accommodate the diverse needs of children and families.

- [84% of parents](#) want to have a personalized pathway plan for their child, outlining classes they could take in K-12 to help them achieve their individual career or college goals.



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Any expectation that families will continue to conform to an outdated school model holds us all back. The path forward is clear for parents.

- [58% of parents](#) said K-12 schools should change the way they teach students reading and math to line up with what the newest research says is best practice.
- [57%](#) say schools should do more to have school schedules and calendars reflect research on how and when kids learn best.
- [56%](#) say schools should do more to provide opportunities for additional learning time, such as after-school or summer academic programs.

## URGENT SUPPORT FOR TEENS

Our teens need more support to ensure they aren't simply pushed out before we've adequately prepared them to launch.

- [64% of parents](#) say schools should do more to ensure college-bound students and students who choose different pathways have equally good opportunities to prepare for their future while in high school.

Many of our youth have lost out on important opportunities including internships, job shadowing, or other career-related experiences over the last several years. They struggle with depleted family resources and basic needs, preventing them from pursuing postsecondary education and training opportunities.

- [More than two-thirds of American families \(69%\)](#) support student loan relief as a tactic for economic mobility.

Will families still be willing to take on unending debt to pay for tuition in our colleges and universities as a good investment for our children in the future? Multiple recent surveys suggest they won't.

Increased access to alternative opportunities for students to gain valuable career experience—including virtual internships, work-based and skills-based learning opportunities, adult education programs, vocational training, and more—will help prepare students for the future.

## PRIORITIZE MENTAL HEALTH

In addition to academic support, parents want policymakers to prioritize students' mental health and social-emotional well-being.

- [64% of parents](#) believe policymakers need to prioritize addressing their children's mental health needs.

The pandemic took a toll on our students' mental health, increasing rates of anxiety, depression, and other mental health concerns. We want to see more funding and long-term investments in school-based mental health and social-emotional resources.

## NEEDED: TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE

We must put an end to petty political fights, institutional racism, an antiquated status quo, and policies that prioritize adults over kids and instead collaboratively address the transformational changes our children and families need. NPU will continue to work with lawmakers on key priorities to improve the quality of life for families across the country. Now is the moment for elected leaders and education decision-makers to act with bold urgency and a renewed commitment to courageous conversations about how our nation's schools can truly change—systematically and thoroughly. Parents will be watching.

