

Mississippi Whole Child Equity Project



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The work begins with taking practical steps.

Section 1

Introduction



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The Mississippi Community of Practice seeks successful educational and life outcomes for every child and youth in the state of Mississippi. This, we believe, depends on the availability and access to a broad array of services and supports within the home, school, and community in which young people are born, develop, and live, and learn.

In this resource, you will find information, tools, and other resources to support policymaking and systems level practice change in education and related sectors in the state of MS.

What is Whole Child Equity?

The term “Whole Child Equity” (WCE) describes a set of circumstances where all children have timely access to the full range of opportunities, resources, and support that they need to thrive. To advance WCE requires us to address factors that affect young people’s health, wellbeing, and quality of life, such as economic stability, education access and quality, healthcare access and quality, neighborhood and built environment, and positive social and community context. This means having practices and policies that closely follow what science tells us about what children and youth need, in all areas, to realize their full potential.

For example, a “whole child equity” approach considers brain development and malleability when designing and implementing a cross-sectoral approach to prevent or mitigate the effects of adversity and chronic stress. This approach recognizes the interconnectedness of all aspects of learning and development – physical, social, emotional, cognitive, academic – and considers the profoundly negative impacts of structural disadvantages on student success, particularly on youth from marginalized and underserved communities of color.

The work begins with taking practical steps to modernize the design and implementation of policies and practices in education and the broader ecosystem of child and youth-serving sectors. The Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) represent the priority areas of focus in improving the environments around students and their families. The aim is to ensure asset-based, supportive, and sustainable conditions that lead to successful education and life outcomes for every young person.

Equity and Scientific Principles of Learning and Development

Section 1

Introduction

As a community of practice, we have agreed that equity for students and youth in Mississippi requires that the schools and communities with the greatest need receive the greatest share of resources.

To achieve greater access, opportunity, and support for underserved and under-resourced communities, and to provide the necessary resources to address the full range of students' needs, requires deliberately pushing back at structures that promote inequity.

This requires collaborative action to advance the following five principles of the science of learning and development:¹

1. Positive developmental relationships
2. Environments filled with safety and belonging
3. Rich learning experiences and knowledge development
4. Development of skills, habits, and mindsets
5. Integrated support systems.

Purpose of the Community of Practice

To unite a broad and diverse coalition of stakeholders to advocate for a policy and practice agenda that provides a holistic and equitable education for every student in Mississippi. The Community of Practice will ensure that the principles of equity and science of learning and development are central to its work in achieving successful outcomes for children and youth.

Broad Community of Practice Objectives

To achieve greater collective understanding of education and related issues in Mississippi, articulate shared goals, and determine shared work for impact on policy and practice.



¹ Adapted from Design Principles for Schools: Putting the Science of Learning and Development Into Action. SoLD Alliance. August 2021.

AT A GLANCE



For some children, adverse experiences like poverty, structural racism, and chronic stress can act as barriers to success.



ScienceSays

Adverse experiences, often associated with class, poverty, race, ethnicity, disability, or zip code, can affect brain development and impede a child's ability to learn and succeed academically.



But these effects don't have to be permanent.

During early childhood and adolescence, the brain is increasingly adapting and changing based on experiences and environments.

Children need supportive environments in and out of school that ...



Meet unique learning and development needs



Address academic, cognitive, social, emotional, identity, and health dimensions



Develop deep, positive relationships between peers and caring adults



Engage parents or guardians in child's academic and social development and progress



Provide access to comprehensive health services, including physical and mental health



Meet basic needs (safe places to sleep, nutrition)

Supporting students, no matter where they are, requires a **WHOLE CHILD** approach.

The Whole Child Equity Project will culminate in a portfolio of whole child approaches that include:



State and Local Policy Design



Guidance for Educators



Integrated Services

Whole Child Equity Systems in Action

By partnering with a small set of school districts and communities, the Whole Child Equity Project can design, implement, assess, and refine sustainable strategies for integrating the latest brain and development science into the education system before taking them to scale.



Understanding how students develop both in brain and body

Section 2

Background: Science of Learning and Adolescence

Adolescence is a dynamic stage of development that holds great promise for unlocking the full potential of all youth. Adolescence starts with the onset of puberty--say around the age of 10-- and generally ends around the age of 25, consistent with socio-cultural understanding of adult responsibilities and expectations. The adolescent brain is in the second stage of critical development, the first being the early childhood years. The adolescent brain is uniquely fit to deal with the stage of life when young people explore new experiences and relationships.



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The Adolescent Brain is...



In a period of plasticity where it is increasing in specialty and efficiency; the prefrontal cortex is developing more rapidly (pruning and myelination occur)



Hypersensitive to peer and adult evaluation, to critical social issues affecting them, to their own agency as young people develop their own unique identity

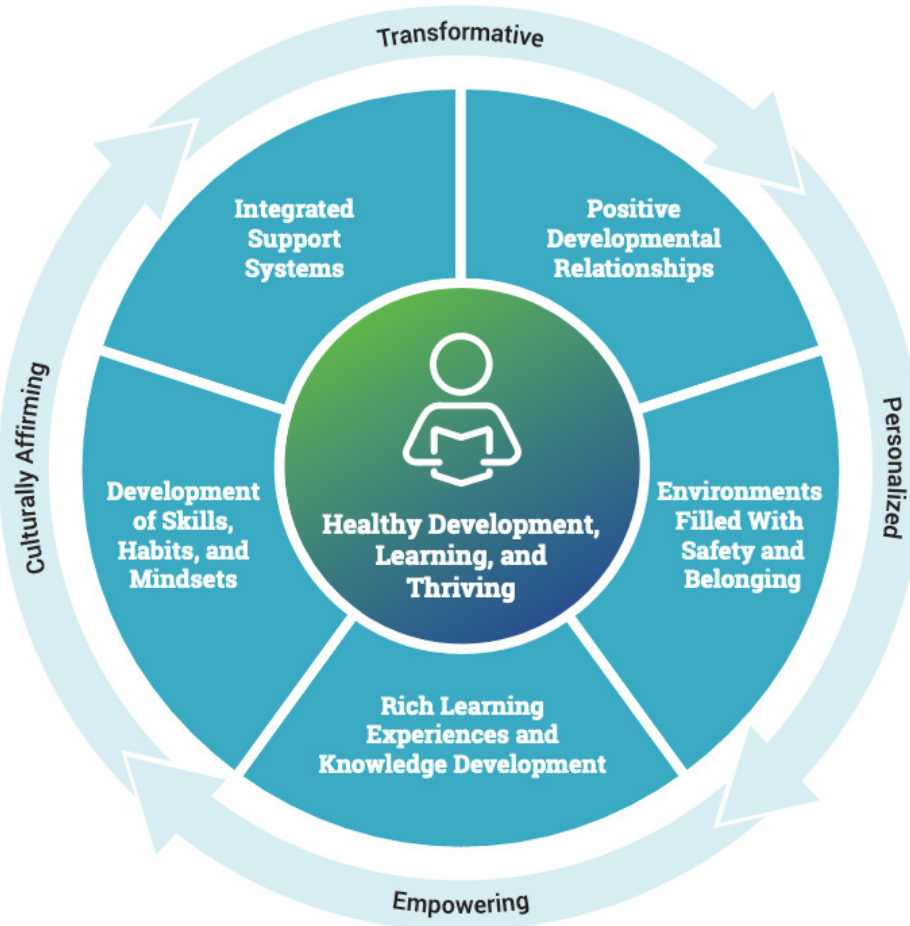


Becoming more capable of advanced cognition (reasoning, problem solving, future thinking, planning) and requires opportunities to practice

Guiding Principles of Equitable Whole Child Design

Section 2

Background: Science of Learning and Adolescence



Whole Child Equity Across Sectors

In the circle above, the five dimensions of the guiding principles for Whole Child Equity (WCE) illustrate the essential elements that support healthy development, learning, and thriving for young people. These elements must be addressed by the education system and related child-and youth-serving systems.

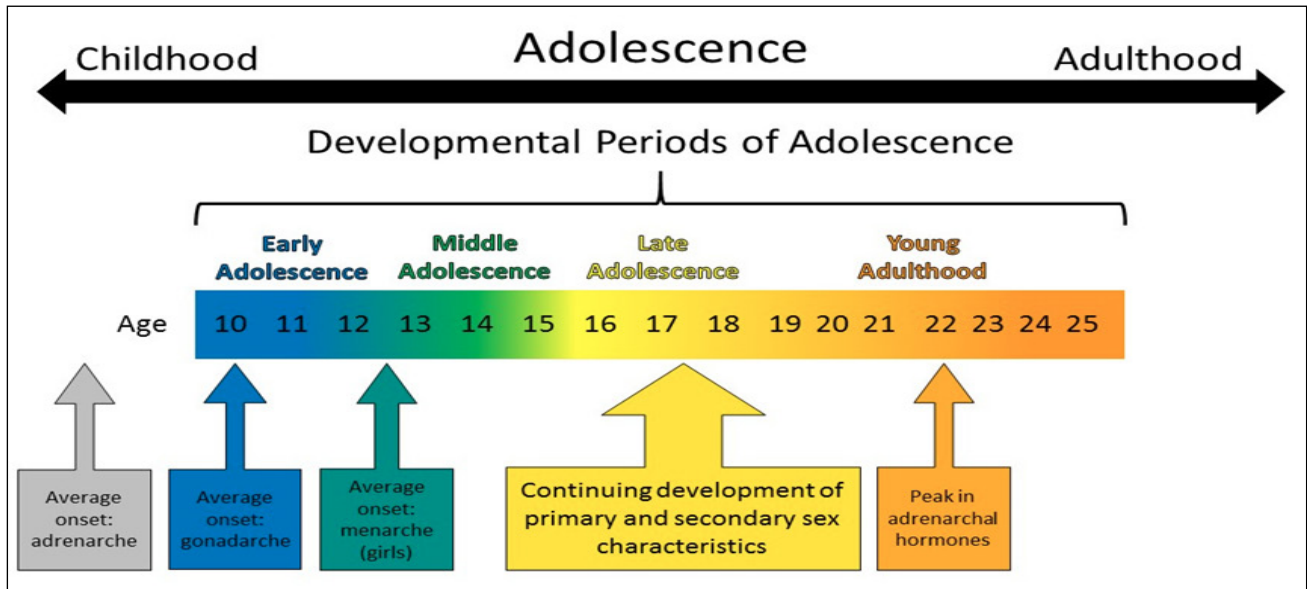
In the circle to the right, the Social Determinants of Health (SDoH) show the broad ecosystem of services that must be coordinated for all young people, according to their needs.

All of these must work together in policy and practice to ensure WCE is achieved.



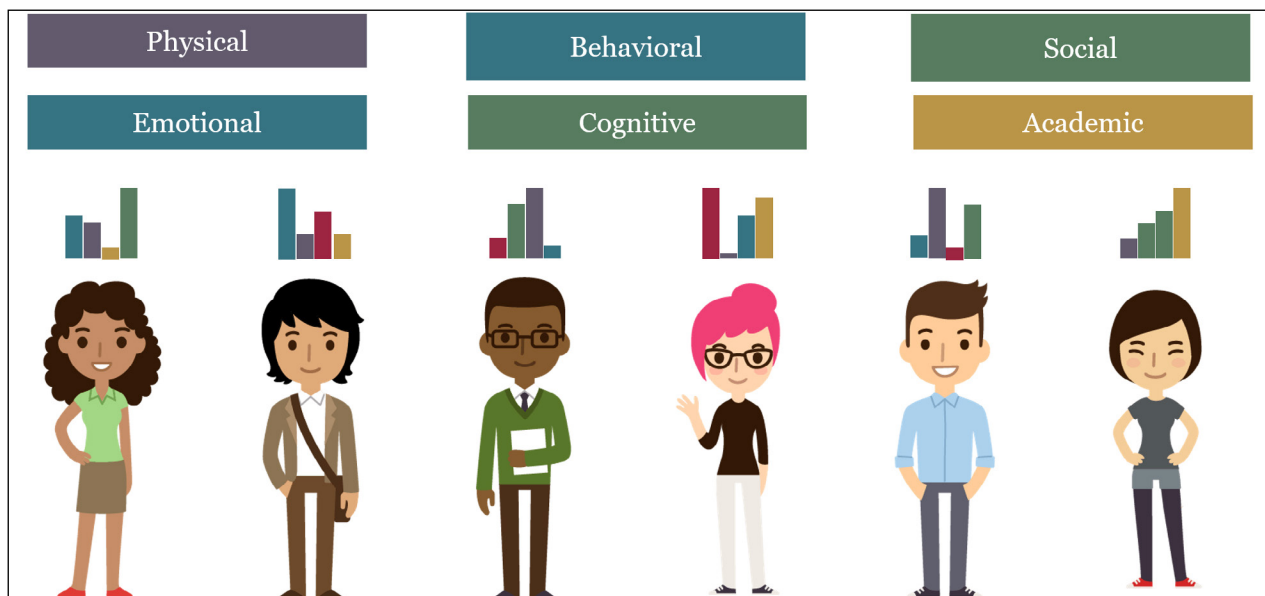
Background: Science of Learning and Adolescence

A Time of Promise: Adolescence



The Promise of Adolescence: Realizing Opportunity for All Youth, NAESM 2018

Remember Development is Multifaceted



Background: Science of Learning and Adolescence

Brains are Built for Rich Learning

Transforming from a school with ...	Toward a school with ...
transmission teaching of disconnected facts	inquiry into meaningful problems that connect areas of learning
a focus on memorization of facts and formulas	a focus on exhibitions of deeper learning
standardized materials, pacing, and modes of learning	multiple pathways for learning and demonstrating knowledge
a view that students are motivated—or not	an understanding that students are motivated by engaging tasks that are well supported
a focus on individual work; consulting with others is “cheating”	a focus on collaborative work; consulting with others is a major resource for learning
curricula and instruction rooted in a canonical view of the dominant culture	curricula and instruction that are culturally responsive, building on students’ experiences
tracking, based on the view that ability is fixed and requires differential curriculum	heterogeneous grouping, based on the understanding that ability is developed in rich learning environments

SoLD Alliance Design Principles Playbook Table 4.1: <https://k12.designprinciples.org/rich-learning-experiences-and-knowledge-development>



Data is one of the most important resources.

The maps and data in the following sections were prepared by Southern Echo and are intended to provide insight as to where needs for support are most acute and bring attention to the different kinds of support that communities may need.

Developing a nuanced picture of how people live and the access, opportunity, and support they need requires bringing together population and economic data as well as data from education, health, and other sectors.

These maps provide important information about the racial demographics, poverty rates, civic participation, and education in Mississippi's various communities. Additional data will be needed to make fully informed decisions to support thriving for all young people.

Mississippi School Districts Accountability Grade Rankings 2021 - 2022

This map reflects the Accountability Grade Rankings and Graduation Rates of 2021-2022 for Mississippi school districts assessed by the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE).

The Name of the school district is shown in **BLACK**

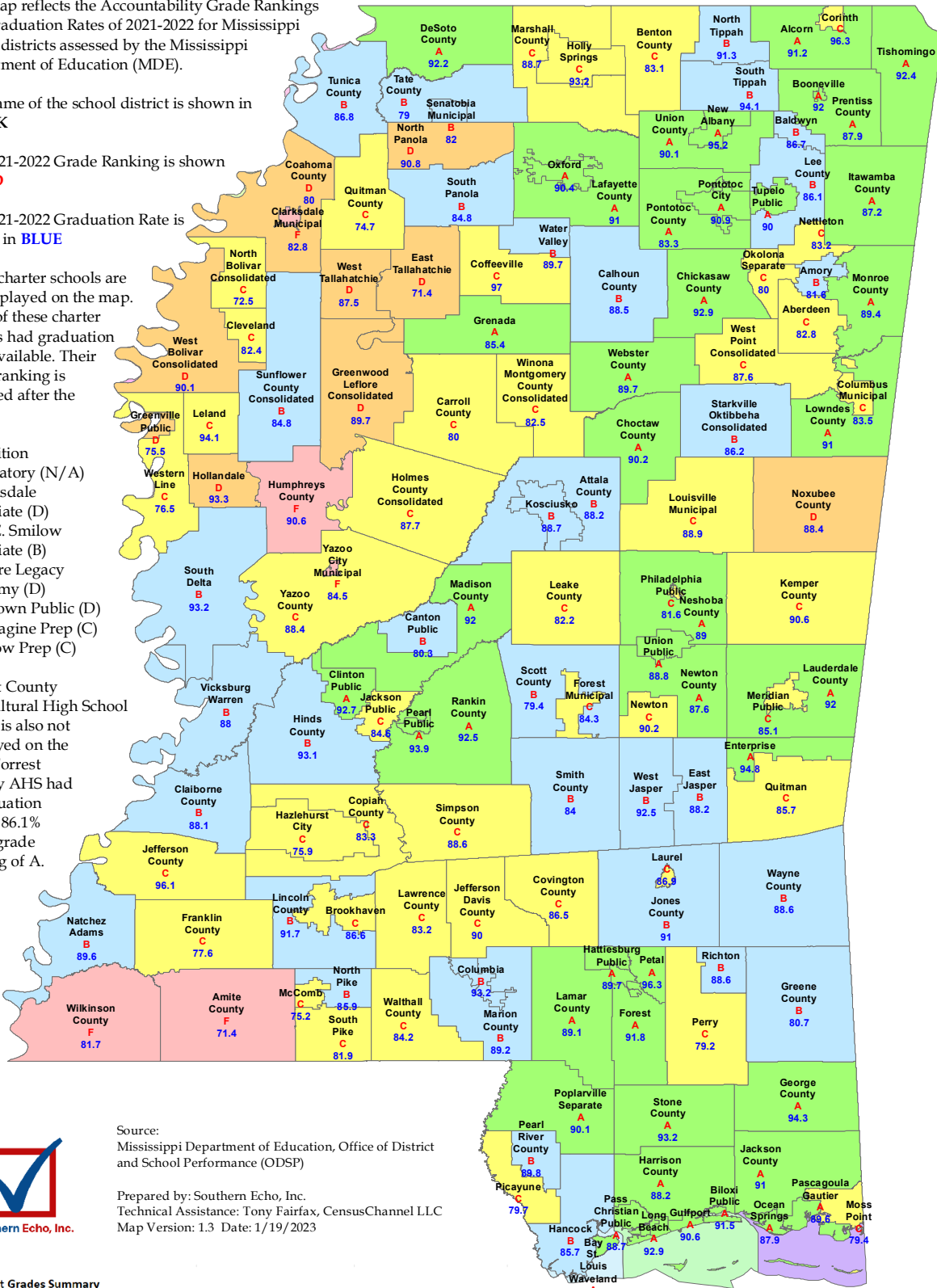
The 2021-2022 Grade Ranking is shown in **RED**

The 2021-2022 Graduation Rate is shown in **BLUE**

Seven charter schools are not displayed on the map. None of these charter schools had graduation rates available. Their grade ranking is included after the name.

- Ambition Preparatory (N/A)
- Clarksdale Collegiate (D)
- Joel E. Smilow Collegiate (B)
- Leflore Legacy Academy (D)
- Midtown Public (D)
- Reimagine Prep (C)
- Smilow Prep (C)

Forrest County Agricultural High School (AHS) is also not displayed on the map. Forrest County AHS had a graduation rate of 86.1% and a grade ranking of A.



District Grades Summary

Grade	2018 PCT	2018 Count	2019 PCT	2019 Count	2022 PCT	2022 Count
A	12.2%	18	21.4%	31	31.0%	45
B	28.6%	42	24.1%	35	24.8%	36
C	25.2%	37	24.1%	35	31.7%	46
D	19.0%	28	15.9%	23	8.3%	12
F	15.0%	22	13.1%	19	3.4%	5
N/A	0.0%	0	1.4%	2	0.7%	1
Totals	100.0%	147	100.0%	145	100.0%	145

Legend

Grade	
A	Green
B	Blue
C	Yellow
D	Orange
E	Red
F	Pink





When it comes to Policy, “Flow Like Water”

Section 4

Opportunities and Impact

The title of this section is adapted from a quote by Bruce Lee, the famous martial artist and philosopher. When Bruce Lee told people to “be water,” he was encouraging them to adjust to their circumstances in order to find ways around or even through the challenges in front of them. We believe a similar approach is useful when it comes to thinking about how to make changes to existing policies.



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People often think about “policy” as being something that happens only in terms of laws that are passed in the state legislature, but policy also refers to decisions that are made by: state agencies and departments; local government leaders including mayors, aldermen and boards of supervisors; education leaders including school boards, superintendents, and principals.

Civic engagement and community organizing have big roles to play in driving policy changes in all of these sectors, and in pushing for a more coherent approach among leaders in all sectors to support Whole Child Equity and thriving.

Four Ways to advance equitable, science-aligned policy



MISSISSIPPI

The Graduation Effect: Every Student's Potential to Impact a Community

What are the short- and long-term benefits to Mississippi of a 90% high school graduation rate? The findings below are based on the Class of 2015, which reported 26,940 high school graduates—a graduation rate of 75.4%.

If Mississippi's high school graduation rate had reached **90%**



The state would have gained **5,220** additional graduates



These graduates would have earned **\$50.8 million** annually in additional income



Of these additional graduates, **52%** likely would have enrolled in higher education

Within **10** years

a new graduate in Mississippi who completes at least an associate's degree likely will earn \$13,000 more a year than a high school dropout

This additional income means more money flowing into state and local economies annually ...



\$40.2 million increase in spending



\$80.9 million increase in home sales



\$2.7 million increase in state and local taxes



\$8.8 million increase in car sales

In 2015

62% vs. **70%**
hs dropouts vs. some college+

owned a home in Mississippi¹

... leading to greater opportunities for Mississippi.

\$72.8 million

in economic growth

150

new jobs created



\$79 million in health-care cost savings to the state

In 2015

74% vs. **49%**
hs dropouts vs. hs graduates

had public health insurance or no health coverage in Mississippi²

What Can You Do to Help?

Getting more students to graduate from high school and preparing them to succeed in college and a career requires the collective effort of educators, parents, business executives, policymakers, community members, and nonprofit leaders.

1

VISIT

Visit impact.all4ed.org to learn more about the economic impact of a high school diploma. Watch short videos of people sharing their success stories about overcoming personal and educational challenges in pursuit of a high school diploma.



2

SHARE

Share this data with your state and district leaders to support the development and implementation of policies and approaches to increase high school graduation rates.



3

ADVOCATE

Advocate for high-quality programs that adequately prepare young people for their futures; allow students to earn high school and college credits simultaneously; integrate career and technical education with rigorous academics; and offer internship opportunities, real-world learning, and work-based experiences.

What the Data Represents

Annual earnings. Additional combined annual income that new graduates likely would have earned after completing high school, accounting for additional postsecondary education attainment. Though subject to other policies around equal pay, meaningful earnings empower the individual to sustain basic needs and invest in resources that can break the cycle of poverty for future generations.

Economic growth. Annual increase in gross state/regional product, which is the value of all goods and services produced within a state or local economy.

Federal, state, and local tax revenues. Average annual income gained by governments through taxation by the midpoint of new graduates' careers. By earning higher incomes and spending and investing more dollars, new graduates contribute more money to local, state, and federal tax bases. These additional tax dollars support public needs, such as sustaining national parks; restoring state and local infrastructure; and providing high-quality education, health, and social services.

Health-care cost savings. Cumulative health-care cost savings over the lifetime of new graduates. This indicator considers the cumulative number of new high school graduates who likely would not enroll in Medicaid because they have health insurance through a personal or employer-provided insurance plan. Consequently, when young people graduate from high school, society benefits from projected savings that result from workers' improved productivity at work, decreased health problems, and freedom from pain and suffering caused by untreated illness and disease.

Increased auto sales. Additional dollars spent on vehicle purchases—new or pre-owned—by new high school graduates in the average year given their increased wages. While the amount these high school graduates spend when buying a car is important, equally important is the mobility these graduates gain that allows them to seek work (and potentially better work) beyond their immediate neighborhoods.

Increased home sales. Cumulative increase in dollars spent on home purchases by new high school graduates by the midpoint of their careers. This is based on average mortgage values in the state or local market. Money spent on home purchases fuels the economy as well as the tax base that local governments use to fund schools and other public services. Homeownership, a proxy for housing stability, also is shown to raise educational outcomes for students from low-income families as student mobility between schools decreases.³

Increased spending. Likely amount of combined additional annual disposable income available to new graduates given their increased wages. This figure is based on state and local consumption trends. Consumer spending benefits both the individual and collective economies. Since high school graduates earn higher salaries than high school dropouts, they can spend more on shelter, food, childcare, and education for themselves and their families. Collectively, spending drives innovation and progress, creates jobs, and has the potential to promote growth of local small businesses.

New jobs. Cumulative number of additional jobs likely to be created by increased spending and investment by new graduates by the midpoint of their careers. New jobs contribute to greater opportunities and lower rates of unemployment in a state or local economy.

¹ Data about homeownership among high school graduates and dropouts obtained from U.S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder website, <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml> (accessed August 28, 2017).

² Data about health insurance coverage among high school graduates and dropouts obtained from U.S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder website, <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml> (accessed August 28, 2017).

³ National Association of Realtors®, *Social Benefits of Homeownership and Stable Housing* (Chicago: Author, 2012), <https://www.nar.realtor/reports/social-benefits-of-homeownership-and-stable-housing>.

The above projections were generated by the Alliance for Excellent Education using an economic model developed by Economic Modeling Specialists, Inc. and updated by Tripp Umbach, all through generous support from State Farm®.

The Alliance for Excellent Education is a Washington, DC–based national policy, practice, and advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that all students, particularly those traditionally underserved, graduate from high school ready for success in college, work, and citizenship. www.all4ed.org

What Does An Engaged Community Look Like?

The whole school community must be involved in and lead education policy implementation efforts. Use this set of community goals to get started with a vision of what meaningful engagement looks like to you!

“Imagine this: A community comes together to set a vision for its public schools. In local libraries, neighborhood associations, school cafeterias, and places of worship, families sit down together and share their hopes and dreams for their children... Together they talk about what they love about their schools and what they’re worried about. They articulate their long-term vision for success — not just for their school or school system, but also for their young people.”

- Read more at TNTP.org/Walking-Together

1. Communities Build Trust

School communities must *deliberately build* trust in order to support student success and dignity.

A system of trust includes:



2. Community Participation is Inclusive

Those who are involved in administration and decision-making must **reflect the political, racial, income/wealth, language, gender, sexual orientation, and cultural diversity** of the school community that they serve.

Ensure that:

- Administrators invite participation
- Community members take leadership roles
- Processes are transparent
- All community members collaborate with compassion
- There is time made for feedback

Ask Yourself:

- ? How can I speak up, and make my voice heard?
- ? How can I lift up the voices of those whose, thus far, have been left out?

What Does An Engaged Community Look Like?

3. Communities Are Empowered to Engage and Lead

Meaningful engagement means sharing responsibility, power, and voice:

- All members of the school community have the right to participate in decision-making.
- To invite participation, school administrators must build shared language around programs and policy.
- Decision makers at all levels must educate themselves about the needs and assets of their communities, including race and culture.

Students, families, and advocates know their communities; their empowered participation in impactful decision-making is essential, especially when the conversation focuses on policy, budget, or strategic planning.

What does empowerment mean to you?

4. Engagement is Strategic and Responsive

Strategic Means:

- Funded
- Regularly scheduled (e.g. quarterly meetings)
- Run by competent leadership
- Connected to the strategic plan or long-term goals of the school, district, and state
- Inclusive of all stakeholders

Responsive Means:

- Guided by agendas/goals that play to the strengths of participants
- Small enough for individual voices to be heard
- Held at times and in places that make it easy for members to participate
- Connected to relevant issues facing the students and school

5. Community Members are Involved in Every Part of the Policy Process!

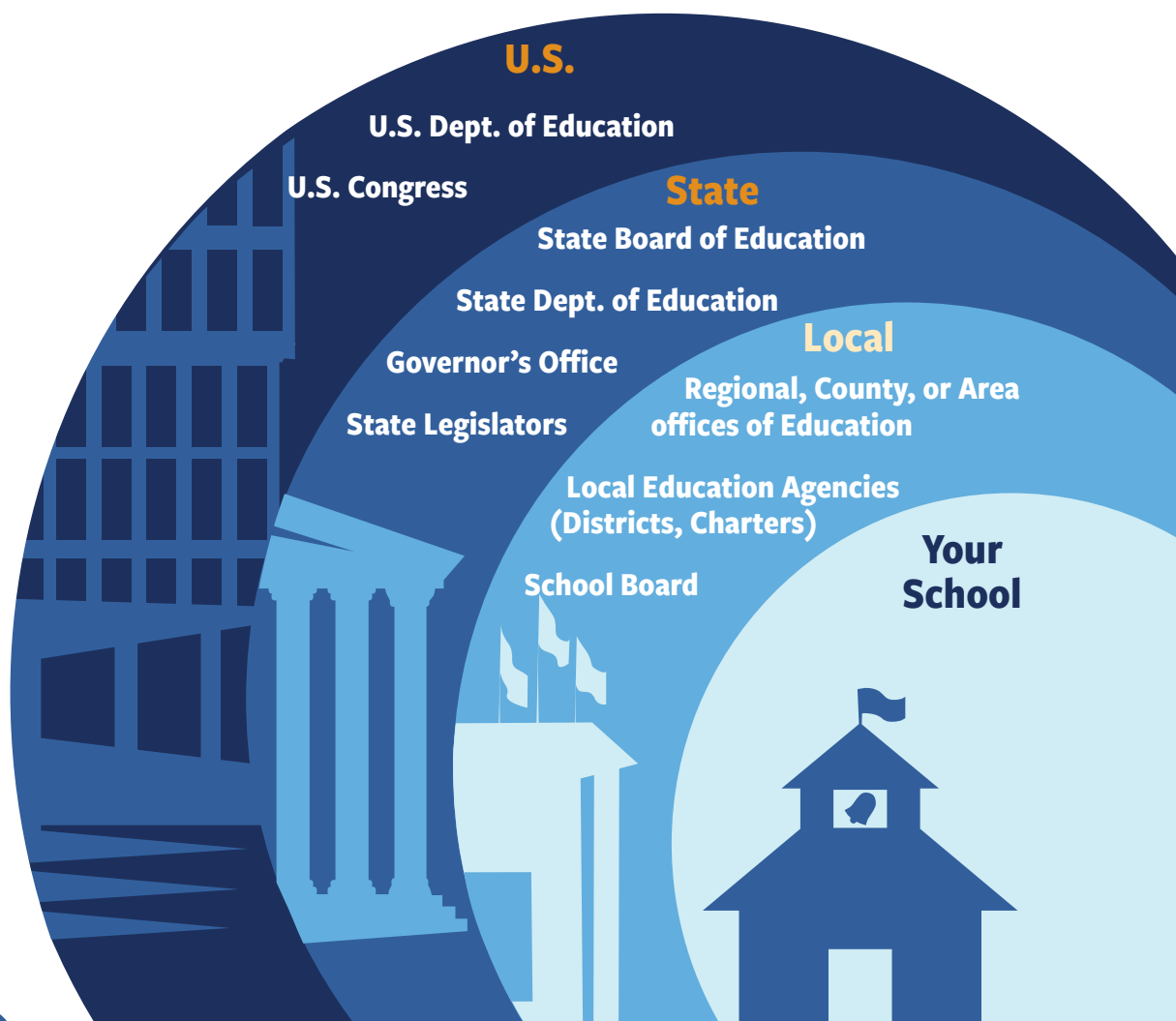
This means that school community members are involved in understanding information, planning, writing policy and fundraising, budgeting, and implementation of new policy and existing practice!

*Nothing about us
without us!*

What is one thing you can do to be involved right now?

Who Affects Policy in Education?

Use this handout as a backgrounder or meeting material for community members who are looking to better understand the governing structures that support their schools.



Check out our [Template: Letter to Decision-Makers](#) for what to say or write when you get in touch!

1. What is the issue/question that you want to talk more about?
2. What level of governance will help to solve your issue/question?
3. Who is one person or office that you will contact to help you with this issue/question? How will you contact them? Is there someone who can help you, like a peer organizer, or other trusted ally?



Template: Letter to Decision-Makers

Use this template to write to your school principal, school board member, district office staff, superintendent, or other local official. You can also use this as a script for calling by phone or writing an email.

[Recipient name & address]

Dear [recipient name]:

I am a [parent/guardian/community member] at [name of school]. I care about [my child's/ our children's] education and I want to be involved in making sure they get what they need.

In particular, I'd like to be involved in how our state and school will be handling [issue that's important to you].

This issue is important to me because [tell your story!].

As a [parent/guardian/community member], I know how important it is to be involved in helping students succeed. I look forward to hearing from you about how I can be involved.

Sincerely,

[Your name]

[Your contact information]

Open with a statement of how you are connected to the school and why

Remind them that they are required to help you participate under the law!

Talk about the issues that matter most to you! Tell your story to show why this matters to you.

Some examples:

- School discipline
- Good Teachers
- Classes that interest your child
- Afterschool programs
- Support for students with disabilities
- Support for English learners

Don't forget to give them a way to contact you!

School Leaders: Who to Talk/Write to

- School Principal
- School Board Members
- District "School Improvement" Team
- Union Representative
- District Superintendent
- Governor's Office Education Policy Director
- School Site Coordinator
- District Title I officer
- Education Nonprofit Policy Directors

Find the contact information you are looking for on your school or district's website, by calling your school administrator's office, by asking your child's teacher, or by asking a local community organization for help.





Section 5 Resources

Needs Assessment

Opportunity Institute: This resource defines the key principles of the science of adolescent learning and development and shows how they relate to district and school practices.



Planning Tool

Science of Learning and Development Alliance: The Planning Tool is designed to help users reflect, invest, and reallocate resources to create equitable, transformative learning environments.



Design Principles

Science of Learning and Development Alliance: This resource provides a framework to guide the transformation of community-based settings, illustrating how practitioners can implement structures and practices that support learning and development through its five components.



K12 Principles

Science of Learning and Development Alliance: This resource points to principles to nurture innovations and effective school models that advance this change, and provides a framework to guide the transformation of k-12 settings, illustrating how practitioners can implement structures and practices that support learning and development.



Mississippi Journals

These brief journal entries illustrate how the partnership in the Whole Child Equity project seeks to apply recent advances in our understanding of child development and brain sciences. They show how public policy – guided and shaped by knowledge about science of learning and development – has a vital role to play in improving equitable conditions in the lives of people throughout Mississippi.



“Rivers of Green”

Opportunity Institute: This policy brief examines whether states are using funds for child-serving agencies in aligned, coherent, and sustainable ways.

