EDUCATION ROADMAP
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Education Policy Roadmap was prepared by ProGov21

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The Problems & Progressive Local Solutions

Strong public schools are the cornerstone of thriving communities. Strong schools help communities attract new residents, develop skilled workforces, reduce costs associated with social service and criminal justice, reduce inequality, and prepare children for upward social mobility and success. Conversely, poor public schools entrench inequality, undermine their students’ ability to succeed, and impair property values.

Despite the importance of public schools to community wellbeing, municipal governments have little to no direct control over local schools. Instead, school districts independent of local municipal government control school policy and administration.

To build a school system that helps communities thrive, it is critical for school district officials and municipal officials to build collaborative relationships with each other and with other stakeholders, including parents, teachers unions, and community leaders.

Together, these stakeholders can support the success of individual children and the community by pursuing progressive policies like pre-K and after-school programming, ending the school-to-prison-and-deportation pipeline and combating chronic truancy, reducing hunger and providing healthy food to students, ensuring that students have safe transportation routes to school, and partnering with school districts to have local school buildings double as community and civic centers.
Available Local Levers & Targets for Reform

Inequalities formed in early education impact students for the rest of their lives. Pre-K can create a foundation for success; as a result, local governments should work to make pre-K accessible to all children by establishing universal pre-K programs. Research shows that investment in early childhood development provides economic, health, and social benefits for the individual and the community. Further, pre-K acts as a high-quality daycare alternative, making it incredibly important for families where caretakers also work (see also our Affordable Childcare roadmap). The National Institute for Early Education Research has published a guide on funding strategies that cities can use to support their pre-K programs. This resource examines strategies that cities across the country have used to fund pre-K, including parcel taxes, private donations, and sales taxes.

School programs, including pre-K, should be “seamless,” meaning that standards, curriculum, assessment, and instruction are coordinated together around the student’s entire education. Researchers and practitioners believe that a more seamless educational pipeline serve young children more effectively and helps address a range of academic, behavioral, health and family issues. Illinois State University has made public resources and data sets that demonstrate the importance of seamless education from pre-K through grade 12.

Schools should focus on developing nurturing and supportive learning environments, but too often education policies and practices focus on punishing, marginalizing, and denying young people who are struggling, funneling them into the criminal legal system. Schools should avoid, at all costs, criminalizing student behavior such as disorderly conduct or disruptive classroom behavior, and other subjective offenses. Zero tolerance policies for vague and discriminatory offenses such as willful defiance, vulgarity, tardiness, chronic absenteeism, or dress code violations should also be eliminated. These policies recast struggling children as dangerous or criminal—especially black and brown students—and can lead them directly from school into the criminal justice system. Instead, schools should practice non-punitive, culturally responsive strategies like restorative justice, mental health supports, and hiring counselors and social workers. Truancy, especially, must no longer be a gateway to incarceration. Chronically truant students are already disadvantaged by missing time in the classroom; punitive consequences create a hostile environment, making it more difficult for students to get back on the right track. Instead, school officials should work to help parents play a more active and involved role in their child’s education, and help them address issues in the home that are frequently at the root of truancy.
Community schools are public schools that reflect local priorities and assets through collaboration with families and local agencies. In addition to providing well-rounded education, community schools utilize community resources and strategic partnerships to provide health and social services and support youth development in schools. A comprehensive community school strategy is central to improving equity and reducing barriers to learning, for it provides poorly-funded schools with increased resources that are tailored to the needs of the community; these may include providing classes that aren’t taught in English, legal representation for students facing deportation, mental health services, and more.

Current Reforms & Tools to Fight for Them

Pre-Kindergarten:
Boston has funded high-quality Universal Pre-K for the Boston Public Schools district based on small class size, play-centered learning, and developing the social and emotional skills necessary for students to succeed in school. Seattle undertook a four-year demonstration phase for the Seattle Preschool Program, which utilized a four-year property tax to “provide accessible high-quality preschool services for Seattle children designed to improve their readiness for school and to support their subsequent academic achievement.” The National Institute for Early Education Research published an evaluation of this program, focusing on classroom quality and children’s learning,
finding that children in the pre-K program were better prepared to succeed academically compared children who remained with caregivers at home.

**Truancy and the School-to-Prison Pipeline:**
Universal Pre-K and Seamless K-12 only work if students are in attendance. The State of New Jersey’s Department of Education adopted a tiered approach to encouraging attendance that creates a foundation for student attendance by establishing positive relationships with students and their parents and creating a positive, supportive and engaging school environment. Strategies for students struggling with attendance are then scale through a series of more calibrated interventions.

Young people from marginalized communities are more likely to be pushed out of school and into incarceration than other students. The National Women’s Law Center has developed guides to help stop pushout for girls of color, LGBTQ girls, girls who are pregnant or parenting, girls in foster care, girls who have survived sexual violence, homeless girls, and girls who have become in the juvenile justice system. While these guides are specifically targeted towards young women, the policies they recommend will be beneficial to all students.

**School Meals:**
The Vermont School District created policy that raises the quality school meals and provides qualifying students with free breakfast and lunch not only during the school year, but also during the summer.

**Safe Routes to School:**
Muscoy, CA has some of the worst air quality in California. While 79 percent of parents in Muscoy wanted their children to walk to school, 74 percent did not allow it because of the air quality and other unsafe conditions. A community group focused worked with local elected officials to establishing safe routes to school. Local volunteers focused on creating and expanding
sidewalks, bulb outs, and bus shelters, and worked to conduct a workshop on bike and pedestrian safety improvements to and from schools.

**Community Schools:**
Through local partnerships, Hartford Community Schools began offering food assistance, mental health services, and English as a second language classes; as a result of these additional resources, student achievement increased and truancy decreased across the district. Similarly, Union Public Schools, a community school district in Oklahoma, has collaborated with Microsoft, Tulsa Symphony, the city’s local zoo and museum, and more to advance school curriculums; these increased learning opportunities helped bridge the achievement gap between low-income students and students from wealthy families. Lastly, in January 2019, United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) held a six-day strike that ultimately resulted in $12 million in funding for the development of community schools.

**Taking it to the Next Level**
When crafting progressive education policy, local policymakers must consider the intersection between education and health policy. Evidence has shown that safe and healthy students are better learners, while students vulnerable to drug-use, unhealthy diets, physical inactivity, and violence are less likely to succeed academically. In response, schools can implement programs that promote positive, healthy behaviors and reduce health risks; these may include monitoring the nutrition of foods served at school, improving physical education classes, and connecting students with caring and supportive adults. Stakeholders can also invest in school buildings to improve student health and performance; a report by The Center for Green Schools outlines how natural light, thermal control, ventilation rates, and more can disrupt students’ ability to learn.

Similarly, expanding and investing in quality child care can also drastically improve student performance. Early child care provides an academic boost to children that can better prepare them for school. However, child care is expensive and unaffordable for most families. To navigate around this issue, model cities, like Cincinnati, have provided supplemental funding to expand access to quality child care.

Furthermore, school siting greatly impacts community development by influencing land use patterns, infrastructure needs, environmental quality, and more. For example, the construction and operation of a new school may lead to heightened greenhouse emissions and increased demand for upgraded infrastructure, such as new roads and sidewalks and upgraded transit systems; thus, school siting decisions have significant costs for the local governments and taxpayers who fund these changes, and the families and individuals living in surrounding areas. As a result, school siting decisions should
incorporate good land-use policy and coordinate with other community priorities regarding housing, transportation, the environment, and more.

Education policy is also closely linked with voting rights policy. In particular, high schools can play a crucial role in improving youth voter participation through voter registration drives. High school voter registration drives register students that are eligible to vote and (in certain states) pre-register students before they turn 18. See our Voting Rights Policy Roadmap to learn more about how high schools can increase voter turnout by making voter registration easier and more accessible.

Lastly, funding schools through local property taxes can lead to inequitable school funding. While schools located in wealthy areas receive significant funding, schools in low-income areas are poorly-funded, resulting in low-quality education—this discrepancy is a major contributor to the educational achievement gap. Decisions on funding public education are largely made by state governments; see our Home Rule Policy Roadmap to learn more about how you can fight preemption to achieve local control.

Allies, Comrades, and Helpers

LAANE
A Los Angeles based policy organization working to build a new economy rooted in good jobs, thriving communities, and a healthy environment.