



IDEAS

EDUCATION

POLICY OF THE YEAR NOMINEE:

**Suspending Suspension:
An Inclusive Disciplinary
Framework to Support
Student Learning**



FOR EDUCATION 2015

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Who We Are

The Roosevelt Institute | Campus Network, the nation's largest student policy organization, engages young people in a unique form of civic participation that empowers them as leaders and promotes their ideas for change. Through coordination with political actors and community leaders, Network members design and implement solutions to the pressing issues facing their towns, counties, and states. Now boasting 120 chapters in 38 states with thousands of members, we're building a network of young people who are filling the ideas gap in communities across the country. In doing so, we're preparing a new generation of thinkers and policymakers to burst forth onto the nation's political stage.

What You're Holding

Now in its seventh year, the *10 Ideas* series promotes the most promising student-generated ideas from across our network. This journal, which includes submissions from schools located from California to Georgia to New York, stands as a testament to the depth and breadth of our network of innovators.

Our *10 Ideas* memos are selected for publication because they are smart, rigorously researched, and, most importantly, feasible. We want to see these ideas become a reality.

How You Can Join

As you explore these ideas, we encourage you to take special note of the "Next Steps" sections. Here, our authors have outlined how their ideas can move from the pages of this journal to implementation. We invite you to join our authors in the process. Contact us on our website or by tweeting with us @VivaRoosevelt using the hashtag #solve2015.

Thank you for reading and supporting student generated ideas. Together we will design the future of our communities, from towns to countries and all that lies in-between.

WELCOME!

Dear Readers,

Young people on college campuses are often asked to make phone calls, knock on doors, and campaign for existing agendas, but they're rarely asked about their own policy ideas. Since 2004, we have been working to change that norm. At its core, the Roosevelt Institute | Campus Network seeks to defy the public's expectations of young people in politics today.

Over the past 10 years, we have built an engaged, community-driven network of students who are committed to using policy to transform their cities and states now and build the foundation for a sustainable future. We believe that broader participation in the policy process will not only improve representation but produce more creative ideas with the potential for real impact.

In this year's *10 Ideas* journal, we present some of most promising and innovative ideas from students in our network. With chapters on 120 campuses in 38 states, from Los Angeles, California, to Conway, Arkansas, to New York City, we have the potential to effect policy ideas that transcend the parameters of our current national debate. Our student authors push for practical, community-focused solutions, from using pavement to improve sanitation in Louisville, Kentucky, to creating community benefit agreements for

publicly funded stadiums in Lansing, Michigan, to building workforce development programs for agricultural literacy in Athens, Georgia.

Policy matters most when we take it beyond the page and bring it to the communities and institutions that can turn it into reality. Many of the students in this year's publication have committed to pressing for impact. They're connecting with decision-makers in city halls and state capitols, armed with the power of their own ideas.

The breadth and depth of our network is reflected in the diversity of the proposals featured in this journal. We hope you'll enjoy reading them as much we did. The next generation of innovative minds and passionate advocates is here, and it's changing this country one idea at a time.

Sincerely,

Joelle Gamble

National Director

Roosevelt Institute | Campus Network



CONGRATULATIONS TO

Margaret Sturtevant

author of *Suspending Suspension: An Inclusive
Disciplinary Framework to Support Student Learning*

Nominee for Policy Of The Year

A jury of Roosevelt Institute | Campus Network members, staff, and alumni select one piece from each journal to nominate for the honor of Policy of the Year. We base our nominees off of the quality of idea, rigor of research and potential for implementation. The cover design of this journal portrays this year's nominee in visual form.

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Sensible School Start Times: An Inexpensive Policy for Achievement and Health

Nathaniel Bechhofer, George Mason University

Later school start times for students attending Fairfax County middle and high schools would enhance both academic performance and student health at costs lower than other policies with benefits of a similar magnitude.

Roughly half of U.S. middle schools start at or before 8:00 a.m., and fewer than 25 percent start at 8:30 a.m. or later;¹ Fairfax County, Virginia high schools currently all start before 7:30 a.m. A 2006 National Sleep Foundation poll found that 59 percent of middle school students and 87 percent of U.S. high school students were getting less than the recommended 8.5–9.5 hours of sleep on school nights, with an average of less than 7 hours for high school seniors.² Currently, economically disadvantaged students in Fairfax County high schools have significantly lower pass rates for statewide English assessments. The pass rate for English reading exams is 85 percent for disadvantaged students, compared to 94 percent for all students.³

Federal action for later start times was attempted in 1999 via the “Zs to As Act.” In August 2014, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) issued a policy proposal urging middle schools and high schools to begin no earlier than 8:30 a.m.⁴ Although Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) approved a recommendation for starting high schools later (between 8 and 8:10

KEY FACTS

- Later start times provide achievement gains for the disadvantaged that are approximately twice as high as those they provide for middle-class students.⁸
- Start time delays have been shown to shift student bedtimes earlier, yielding benefits of significantly increased sleep.⁹
- Teens’ biological clocks are shifted later, yet they must wake up early to attend school on time.

a.m.) beginning in the 2015–16 school year, this start time remains damaging to students’ health and accomplishments.

FCPS should adopt recent recommendations by the AAP so that high schools begin no earlier than 8:30 a.m. These guidelines should apply for students beginning high school in 2016, with all students covered by 2020. Simultaneously, student achievement metrics should be tracked to assess the Fairfax experience as a pilot program to scale up implementation in other school districts.

ANALYSIS

Typical estimates of the cost of transition find that it would cost roughly \$150 per student to provide the transportation necessary to start at 9:15 a.m.⁵ Aggregated over the 13 years a student is in the K–12 system, the total increase in transportation costs because of the increased number of required buses (as using buses multiple times a day would be less practical) would be \$1,950 over the student’s school career. Moving start times one hour later for students would increase student achievement by roughly 0.175 standard deviations on average, with even larger benefits for disadvantaged students.⁶ This increased achievement translates to about \$17,500 in increased future earnings per student.⁷

TALKING POINTS

- School districts that have implemented later start times have lower rates of depression, higher rates of self-reported motivation,¹⁰ and higher attendance.¹¹
 - Moving start times later has been shown to improve teenagers’ mental and physical health, academic achievement, and motivation.
 - The estimated benefit/cost ratio for starting school an hour later is 9:1, and that only counts the benefits of higher earnings from increased academic achievement.
-

Next Steps

Later start times should begin where implementation costs are lowest, and measures of student achievement should be gathered to assess the effects of later start times on accomplishment. To enhance potential gains, individual schools should be permitted to make start times as late as 9:15 a.m. The data gathered should then be used to help other school districts make more informed decisions about their start times for middle school and high school, with the possibility of statewide action.

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Discouraging Discriminatory College Admissions: The Case for Reporting Need-Sensitivity

Liam Grace-Flood, Wheaton College

To help applicants navigate the deceptive world of college admissions, the U.S. Department of Education College Scorecards should publish data on need-sensitive admissions.¹

Since 1975, the cost of college has tripled.² Because college is a much greater financial investment than ever before, prospective students and their families rely on college ranking sites to make sense of an otherwise confusing, yet crucial decision. In fact, colleges' performance on ranking sites is one of the biggest determinants of both the number and quality of their applicants. Because of this, colleges have a strong incentive to accept students who can afford to pay more so that the schools can invest the money from the students' tuition to improve their rankings.

While some colleges can afford to employ need-blind admissions and meet their students' "full demonstrated need," most cannot; they are left to either discriminate in their admissions so they can fully pay for their students or admit students regardless of their ability to pay. The latter practice empowers students to decide whether or not the cost of college is a worthy investment, as opposed to the former, more common policy of denying admissions to students perceived as unable to pay.

KEY FACTS

- Only 11 percent of U.S. students in the bottom income quartile earn Bachelor's degrees (versus 79 percent in the top income quartile),⁵ and the enrollment rate for low-income, academically qualified students fell from 54 percent to 40 percent from 1992 to 2004.⁶
- From 1992 to 2011, the typical amount of cumulative debt for students who borrowed doubled.
- Being on U.S. News' top 25 list leads to a college's number of applications rising between six and ten percent in the next year.⁷

Many colleges work hard to ensure equal access to education for particular minorities to support racial diversity metrics, but the greatest disparity in access to education remains between the rich and poor. Therefore, outreach to low-income students will be more effective than current campus policies attempting to increase racial diversity.

DOE scorecards should show colleges' need-sensitivity in order to help potential applicants see past the artificial inflation of financial aid metrics that some colleges have fostered. Such need-sensitive admissions will help them choose the best college for their particular financial situation. As it becomes clear how colleges really handle financial aid and students apply accordingly, colleges will have an incentive to transition away from discriminatory admissions practices.

ANALYSIS

College admissions and financial aid are two of the most intricately intertwined and complicated systems affecting America's youth. The DOE's scorecard site makes average cost, graduation rate, loan default rate, and median borrowing data available, and plans to expand those statistics in the future to include earnings of graduates.³ Including whether a college is need-sensitive will put those metrics into context, empowering low-income prospective students to apply to colleges that are more likely to serve their specific needs.

The DOE scorecards use data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, which already has the infrastructure in place to survey colleges. The cost of adding one binary question and publishing it alongside current metrics would be negligible.⁴

Other potential policies to encourage need-blind admissions, like federal mandates or tying federal aid money to performance, are

TALKING POINTS

- The greatest inequality in who is able to attend college is not based on race, gender, sexual orientation, or religious faith, but on financial status.
 - Many colleges employ discriminatory need-aware admissions, turning away lower-income students in favor of those they know will be able to pay, which artificially inflates the metrics representing how well they serve their students' financial needs.
-

much more expensive and overlook the fact that some colleges cannot afford to be need-blind. Rankings reform is the best place to start, since it is a soft but effective way of reforming college practices by better informing prospective students.

Next Steps

Including a single, effectively free, binary statistic in the still flexible and evolving DOE scorecard system should be easy. Hopefully this publication, coupled with specific outreach to the DOE College Affordability and Transparency Center, will be enough to convince them that this statistic's inclusion is valuable. Once published on one ranking site, the others, like *U.S. News*, *Forbes*, or the *Princeton Review*, will eagerly follow suit to keep pace.

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Increasing Awareness at Cornell: Diversity Courses as a Graduation Requirement

Stephanie Hahm, Cornell University

Cornell University should require undergraduates to take courses exploring ethnic, cultural, religious, and gender diversity. This requirement will engage students with conversations about diversity and prepare them for a multi-cultural society.

According to a survey by the Association of American Colleges and Universities in 2000, 62 percent of colleges had a diversity course requirement in place or were in the implementation process.¹ Fifteen years later, this number has increased as schools have realized the importance of diversity education. Research and several testimonials have shown the positive impact of this requirement. Assistant Professor Betsy Palmer from the University of Alabama found that “students are gaining content knowledge, developing more tolerant attitudes, and experiencing self-exploration as a result of their experiences in diversity-focused courses.”² This finding echoes several other observations from other schools with similar requirements.

KEY FACTS

- Only one of the seven colleges at Cornell has a diversity requirement.
- 62 percent of colleges and universities already implement a diversity course requirement.
- Diversity courses promote moral reasoning among students.

Currently, Cornell’s seven colleges each have their own unique requirements. Because of this, there is a discrepancy between which courses students must take to earn degrees. Only one college has a diversity requirement. Cornell’s principles include classical and contemporary inquiry, “thinking otherwise,” student access, and public engagement. These values articulate the university’s commitment to diversity, and its diversity requirement should be updated to reflect these ideals.³

All seven colleges should adopt the common goal of teaching students about relevant issues in U.S. society through a new two-course diversity requirement.

To avoid overwhelming students with additional requirements and prevent implementation costs, each college should substitute or rearrange its graduation requirements to accommodate this two-part diversity course series. Approved courses for this diversity requirement should span a range of topics. Any class that informs students about social, political, or economic diversity will work well. For example, Introductory Sociology, a required class for pre-med students, could count toward this new requirement.

TALKING POINTS

- Two diversity courses should be required for all Cornell undergraduates.
 - Diversity courses challenge students to look at perspectives different from their own, promoting unity and respect among students.
 - General education curricula can greatly improve intergroup relationships and campus climates.
-

ANALYSIS

Recently, Cornell's student body has reported microaggressions, racial attacks, social class conflicts, and other demographically based issues. Through resource centers and other programming, students have made efforts to educate their classmates about diversity awareness. However, these efforts are limited because of their decentralized structure. Without full backing from the institution through integration into an academic requirement, the aforementioned issues will persist.

Researchers have found that there were "statistically significant increases in student comfort levels, awareness of diversity, and understanding of diversity terms between the start of [a] Human Diversity course and the completion."⁴ Completing a course on diversity issues allows for intergroup dialogue and contributes to student awareness and conflict management.

UCLA Chancellor Gene Block stated, "There is value to an explicit class that deals with the multiple cultures in the United States... and

the conflicts.”⁵ An increasing number of colleges and universities nationwide understand the importance of these classes and the power they have to shape student perspectives.

Cornell University should require two (instead of one) diversity courses because research shows that taking one diversity course does not improve understanding or appreciation of issues relating to diversity. Students who take two diversity courses learn to appreciate the similarities and differences among people much more.⁶

Next Steps

Key partners (including academic programs, resource centers, student organizations, and the Student Assembly) should collaborate to gauge interest in moving this idea forward. They could then create legislation detailing the specific course implementation plan, which would then be communicated to the student body through marketing initiatives (effective use of social media and club meetings, etc.). After gaining the necessary support, this coalition could present the legislation to the Student Assembly and, once it is passed, mobilize a group of students to contact the deans of each college to implement said legislation.

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Cognitive Enhancement Through Multilingualism: Empowering Students Through Elementary Dual-Language Immersion

Joshua Kemp, City College of New York

New York State should incentivize early foreign language instruction through a statewide dual-language immersion education program so that elementary students may receive the benefits multilingualism provides.

During FY 2008–09, only 11 states mandated foreign language study during grades K-12. By comparison, over 22 leading nations require the study of one to three foreign languages over the same time period.¹ This disparity is exemplified in New York State (NYS), where students are only required to study another language for two years during grades K–9.² This correlates with its status as 39th in U.S. high school state graduation rates.³

As the enrollment of U.S. students in foreign language courses falls, American performance in mathematics, reading, and science on globalized tests, such as the Program for International Student Assessment, lags behind the rest of the world. The economic impact of these poor performances over the past 15 years is estimated to have decreased U.S. GDP by as much as 5 percent.² Furthermore, students in countries where foreign language study is mandatory consistently score better in their native languages than students in the U.S.⁴

Utah addressed this in 2008 by establishing its own statewide elementary dual-language immersion (DLI) program.⁵ Utah's program dedicates half of the school day to

KEY FACTS

- The number of U.S. elementary schools offering foreign language instruction in 2008 was down to one-quarter from one-third 11 years earlier.¹⁸
- In 2012, the U.S. ranked 27th in math and 20th in science out of 34 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development countries.¹⁹
- Although enrollment in foreign language classes in America rose to 18.5 percent between 2004 and 2008,²⁰ the percentage of European students learning a foreign language from 2005–2010 rose to 79.2 percent.²¹

instruction in English. This allows for double the number of students to participate for each target language teacher and requires fewer language teachers overall than competing programs.⁶ Evaluative Utah reports concluded that DLI students are more likely to read on grade level and achieve English-language and mathematical proficiency, and are less likely to be truant.

NYS should promote early foreign language education by incentivizing school districts to implement elementary DLI programs. Participating schools would still offer English-only programs for uninterested families and would be provided with DLI curricula, professional development programs, and assistance in recruiting and training immersion teachers. DLI students would be obligated to learn the same content as non-DLI students and meet the same standardized testing requirements.

ANALYSIS

Studies link language learning to pre-pubescent brain development known as the critical period of language acquisition.⁷ Early bilinguals typically have more control in executive function tasks,⁸ a higher cognitive reserve at older ages,⁹ enhanced memory,¹⁰ faster reading comprehension,¹¹ higher math scores,¹² and easier acquisition of a third language.¹³

A NYS incentive-based elementary DLI program is fiscally feasible, costing only \$100 per student per year.¹⁴ Utah began its first year by allocating \$270,000, but demand was so high Utah now allocates \$2 million annually — only 0.05 percent of its FY 2014 Public Education budget.¹⁵ NYS could allocate more than 0.05 percent of its School Aid budget to address predicted demand. This funding would stem from NYS School Aid money already allocated for the reimbursement of bilingual education expenses, supplemented by federal education funding.¹⁶ Utah's precedent means that NYS could also apply for Language Flagship and STARTALK funding.¹⁷

TALKING POINTS

- Many schools are cutting funding to foreign language programs due to recession-based budget cuts and the No Child Left Behind Act's emphasis on math, science, and English.²²
 - A DLI program would address a fundamental disparity in the NYS education system by providing early foreign language education during the critical period for language acquisition before puberty.²³
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Next Steps

An advocacy team composed of representatives such as Utah's DLI program's Gregg Roberts, NYS foreign language teachers, union representatives, and a pediatric neurologist invested in this policy must first present the proposal to schools to galvanize interest and support statewide. The proposal would be presented to Governor Cuomo's office. Cuomo's previous efforts in evaluating the efficacy of New York's educational system through the NY Education Reform Commission perfectly align with the benefits of a statewide DLI program. Cuomo would present the proposal to the NYS Department of Education in order to allocate FY 2015 School Aid toward a pilot DLI program.

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Alleviating Public School Finance Inequities: Funding According to Student Characteristics

Christine Kil, University of Georgia

Georgia should implement student-based budgeting based on student characteristics to ensure equitable, fully funded education.

Funding the U.S. public school system based on local property taxes fuels disparities in school resources between affluent and low-income communities, as the ability to raise local revenue and funding varies greatly between districts. The current property tax system to determine school funding, paired with Georgia's recent legislative failure to fully fund the required district-based amounts according to the Quality Basic Education (QBE) formula, has resulted in a shortage of resources for all 180 school districts — especially those that are low-income. The QBE formula was originally designed to be equitable and student-based, but the amount of funding it recommends for Georgia has not been fully met or adjusted for inflation since 2009.

This underfunding makes it difficult for school districts to finance their educational services. Since 2009, the majority of Georgia's school districts have not been able to fulfill the entire 180-day calendar. Underfunding has led to layoffs of nearly 9,000 teachers and the restriction of art and music classes. Georgia is currently ranked fourth in the

KEY FACTS

- In *McDaniel v. Thomas* (1981), the Georgia Supreme Court decided that the state constitution does not necessitate equitable school funding.⁸
- Tighter budgets translate into fewer assistant principals, nurses, and counselors. The lack of adult figures in schools —especially in impoverished areas—leads to challenging disciplinary issues.⁹
- Georgia counties currently receive an average of 40.73 percent of school funding from local revenue, 51.09 percent from state revenue, and 8.18 percent from federal funding.¹⁰

nation among schools with the lowest high school graduation rates. In 2013, the state's average for high school graduation rates was 71.5 percent, while the graduation rate for low-income students was 63.4 percent.¹

The Georgia Legislature should supplement the state budget using higher taxes and switch to student-based budgeting (SBB). Schools using SBB receive an equal base amount per pupil, with different bases adjusted to each grade level. This will then be supplemented for students with needs who require special services, determined by factors like socioeconomic background and disability status.² Instead of calculating funding needs based on hiring and resource costs (which is the state's current system), this plan would directly fund students' needs.³

ANALYSIS

Georgia's State Education Finance Study Commission has already put forward SBB proposals in its recommendations to the governor since 2012. A fully funded SBB formula ensures equitable allocations across affluent and low-income school districts. Full financial support enables schools to restore extra-curricular classes, update technology, and provide more personnel, such as school psychologists and nurses. If the 2014–15 budget is distributed equitably by the legislature, each district should receive an average of \$439 more per pupil.⁴

The most measurable link between investment in education and economic growth is high school graduation rates. In 2010, approximately 61,000 Georgia seniors dropped out. If 30,000 of these dropouts had graduated, the state would have seen increases of approximately \$242 million in earnings, \$475 million in home sales, \$350 million in gross state product, \$18 million in state tax

TALKING POINTS

- Local revenue supplements and more robust funding will ensure that a community's educational investments break the cycle of income inequality.
 - Communities that hone the quality of their educational services and increase the social mobility of their residents through education become more attractive to businesses.
 - The student-based budgeting funding system is transparent and ensures funding equity for students.
-

revenue, and the potential to support 2,650 new jobs.⁵ Investment in education will provide communities with highly capable workers equipped with skills honed from quality high schools and colleges. Secure sources of employment will lead to increases in tax revenue, stimulating a healthy cycle of high state revenue and full funding for education.

Next Steps

Policymakers appointed by the Georgia Department of Education (DOE) should start by deciding the base allocation for each grade level, and determine the allocations for each student need category. They can use the QBE formula's 19 weights as a starting point, which prioritizes high-need students. The DOE and the governor's budget team can consider "small district grants" for schools enrolling low numbers of students to balance operating expenses.⁶ The state should then impose higher taxes on luxury items, with each dollar gained used to fund education. Once the system is successfully switched, policymakers and experts can combine or revise specific categories and weights based on student characteristics.⁷

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Closing the Achievement Gap: Elementary Second Language Education in Philadelphia Schools

Laura Pontari, University of Georgia

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) should create a partnership between Philadelphia public universities and the School District of Philadelphia to provide second language education for elementary school students.

The School District of Philadelphia (SDP) is the eighth largest school district in America, with close to 200,000 students.¹ The SDP serves a Latino population that grew 46 percent in the past 10 years and now represents 12.3 percent of the city's total population.² Moreover, 44 percent of Philadelphia's Latino population lives in poverty, a rate almost 18 percent higher than the city average.³

Despite the new educational needs of Philadelphia's changing demographic, the SDP is severely underfinanced, and would need to increase its budget by \$770 million to meet the statewide standard for adequate education.⁴ To address its diverse population with sensitivity to district financial constraints, the SDP should use elementary second language education to improve the quality of education its students receive. Second language education has been shown to improve standardized test scores and overall graduation rates by improving students' overall brain function.⁵

The PDE should facilitate a partnership between the SDP and local public universities in Philadelphia to offer qualified college students as assistant teachers for second language education programs in

KEY FACTS

- Latino students are at a disproportionately high risk of dropping out in the SDP.¹⁵
- Second language knowledge improves standardized test scores such as the SATs, as well as state-issued standardized tests.¹⁶
- The theory of the critical period of language acquisition states that between childhood and puberty a person can acquire language to a level most similar to that of a native speaker.¹⁷

SDP. To address the needs of the rapidly increasing Latino population, the program would provide second language instruction in Spanish to elementary students from kindergarten through third grade. This program would give college students in local education programs practical experience and expose elementary students to Spanish vocabulary and basic grammar, creating a foundation for later fluency.

ANALYSIS

This policy would directly affect Latino students, who are at the highest risk of dropping out in the SDP.⁶ While all students benefit from second language education, studies show that children from minority backgrounds demonstrate the greatest proportionate increase in achievement.⁷ Moreover, bilingual education provides students with improved problem-solving skills that better prepare them for standardized testing.⁸ The implementation of an elementary bilingual education program in nearby Englewood, New Jersey was associated with a 15 percent increase in proficient student standardized test scores.⁹

This program provides greater opportunity for Latino parental involvement and inclusion through an accessible and culturally relevant curriculum.¹⁰ Research shows that parental involvement is linked to a child's academic success, and this program reduces some of the unique barriers to engagement Latino parents face with their children's education.¹¹

Furthermore, a partnership between the SDP and local universities establishes a mutually beneficial relationship. Qualified university students interested in education can gain relevant, practical work experience by providing SDP elementary schools with the necessary human capital to implement a program that would otherwise not be feasible under current budget constraints.¹²

TALKING POINTS

- Spanish is the second most commonly spoken language in the U.S., with numbers of Spanish speakers on the rise.¹⁸
 - Bilingual education programs have seen significant success across the country, most notably in the New Jersey public school system.¹⁹
 - A partnership between local universities and the SDP offers university students practical teaching experience while providing a program that would otherwise not be feasible under the current SDP budget.²⁰
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Next Steps

Because the SDP is under the jurisdiction of the State of Pennsylvania, action must be taken by the State Legislature to initiate the program.¹³ The Department of Education at each college would be responsible for developing a curriculum outlining their students' participation and requirements to receive course credit. Initially, the program would be open to education majors with a minimum of one semester of Spanish and a required background check. Temple University could be used as the preliminary higher education partner. Temple's location in North Philadelphia, one of the SDP's lowest achieving areas, provides its students with the cultural sensitivity and environmental understanding that are necessary for a successful program.¹⁴ After the first year, the program's results would be assessed to create an expansion plan for additional universities.

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Project-Based Learning in Philadelphia

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The Philadelphia School District should switch from a traditional, test-based learning model to a project-based learning model to better educate students.

Struggling to provide an adequate education to its students, the Philadelphia School District (PSD) has required state corrective action (e.g. school dissolution, school takeovers, and funding restrictions) for 10 consecutive years.¹ Federal funding has diminished, state funding has decreased, and pension and health care costs have risen.² The PSD faces an annual budget deficit and steadily rising student-to-teacher ratios. Despite gubernatorial promises to increase state funding by as much as 50 percent, overall funding is not expected to reach federal stimulus package levels due to political opposition.³ Furthermore, the PSD employs test-based learning methods for student evaluation, which are no longer appropriate for the PSD. One PSD school, the Science Leadership Academy (SLA), uses a project-based learning (PBL) model and recently made the U.S. News & World Report's "Best High Schools" list.⁴

KEY FACTS

- PBL programs boost test scores for many cultural and demographic groups within the U.S.
- More than 80 percent of SLA students are proficient or advanced in reading and mathematics.¹⁶ Less than half of Pennsylvanian students passed state tests in those areas.¹⁷
- Students and teachers report higher satisfaction levels with PBL programs when compared with traditional learning programs.¹⁸

Rather than relying on tests to assess acquired knowledge, PBL should assess students through the use of targeted projects that facilitate learning new concepts and information. Projects should expose students to a wide range of disciplinary frameworks, meet state education goals, and provide real world skills. Projects should include both group and individual components to maintain individual accountability.⁵ Ensuring individual accountability is a key

component of PBL. Examples of projects include “Census at School,” which develops statistical analysis skills; “Crossing the Border into...,” which teaches marketing and communication skills; and “El Misterio de los Mayas,” which examines the rise and fall of civilizations.⁶

ANALYSIS

Perennial low scores without significant improvement in the PSD have resulted in penalties ranging from funding cuts to school dissolution. Rather than constantly restructuring schools, the PSD should seek test score gains by switching to PBL.

In Iowa, for example, a switch to PBL in low-performing areas boosted school test scores in reading by between 15 percent and 90 percent.⁷ A Boston public school, which served predominantly minority students, placed eleventh in mathematics and seventeenth in reading out of seventy-six public schools over a six-year period after a similar switch.⁸ Results in Maine suggest that score increases are lasting and that results are not exclusive to mathematics and science.⁹ PBL participants had greater self-confidence in skills outside the classroom such as self-directed learning, problem solving, and research.¹⁰ PBL participants also reported higher levels of learning and teaching satisfaction.¹¹

TALKING POINTS

- PBL fosters critical thinking and self-directed learning skills, not just test-taking abilities.¹⁹
 - The SLA has proven that PBL can be successful in public schools, providing the PSD with a foundational model for a curriculum shift.
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Next Steps

The School Reform Commission (SRC) of Philadelphia should institute a PBL curriculum. This curriculum should focus on projects possessing four defining characteristics: realistic problems, structured group work, multi-faceted assessments, and professional learning networks.¹² The SRC should ensure that projects have defined content and identified contexts, that projects are chosen through rigorous critical analysis, that students' tasks are clearly outlined, and that teachers frequently evaluate student progress.¹³ To secure the necessary funding for implementation, the SRC should apply for grants such as the Economic Development Assistance Programs grant, which is "designed to develop initiatives that advance new ideas and creative approaches to address rapidly evolving economic conditions."¹⁴ Additionally, the SRC can apply to work with Expeditionary Learning, one of the first PBL-promoting organizations. The components they promote, which include staff training and curriculum development support, are necessary for devising a successful curriculum and to start an outreach program to garner parental support.¹⁵

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Promoting Success for English Learners: Dual-Language Immersion in Georgia

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Georgia should subsidize the implementation of magnet dual-language immersion programs in public schools to support the academic achievement of English learners.

In the last two decades, Georgia experienced unprecedented growth in immigration rates. The resultant enrollment rate of English learners (ELs) in Georgia public schools has increased by 400 percent, with nearly 90,000 new ELs enrolling annually.¹ ELs are severely academically disadvantaged because Georgia schools do not adequately support their English acquisition needs.² For example, high school ELs have lower End-of-Course-Test passing rates in all 10 tested subjects compared to their non-EL peers.³ Additionally, only 44 percent of Georgia's ELs graduate high school in four years — a rate 26 percent below the state average.⁴

Georgia currently utilizes a “pull-out” model, in which EL students are removed from traditional academic courses for a class period to be instructed in English.⁵ This places an undue burden on ELs who face the pressure of learning English while simultaneously fulfilling complex high school graduation requirements.⁶ Because they lack English proficiency, ELs often cannot enroll in courses they need to graduate.⁷ This is discouraging and furthers the tendency of English learners to become high school dropouts.⁸

To improve English proficiency rates and educational outcomes of ELs, Georgia should subsidize the implementation of dual-language immersion magnet programs in public schools.

KEY FACTS

- Only 44 percent of Georgia's ELs graduate high school in four years, a rate 26 percent below the state average.²¹
- 75 percent of high school ELs test below grade level in reading, compared to 25 percent of native English speakers.²²
- ELs in Georgia have lower End-of-Course-Test passing rates in all 10 tested subjects compared to their native English-speaking peers.²³

These magnet programs would span from elementary to high school, focusing on attracting both EL and native English-speaking applicants. To provide this diverse student body with a strong foundation in both English and Spanish, elementary schools should utilize a 50/50 immersion model, in which students are instructed for half the day in Spanish and half the day in English.⁹ In middle and high school, specific academic subject areas should be offered in Spanish, with Advanced Placement courses in Spanish language and literature being offered as well.¹⁰

ANALYSIS

Empirical evidence demonstrates that dual-language immersion is more effective at educating ELs than the traditional “pull-out” method.¹¹ Two decades of research from 23 school districts in 15 states (throughout urban, suburban, and rural settings) shows that the benefits of dual-language immersion can be generalized across various contexts.¹² For example, only four years after two Maine school districts implemented dual-language immersion programs, former ELs who previously achieved at the 31st percentile reached the 72nd.¹³ Research suggests that this success is largely because ELs are taught in both English and their native language, and are less likely to fall behind in school if their English proficiency is lacking.¹⁴

After the initial investments in purchasing resources (like non-English textbooks and the hiring of dual-language certified teachers), studies show that it does not cost more for a school to maintain a dual-language immersion program than to maintain its traditional counterpart.¹⁵ The benefits of dual-language immersion largely outweigh the costs, since English learners face better academic outcomes and both ELs and native English speakers become bilingually literate.¹⁶

TALKING POINTS

- Empirical evidence from 15 states demonstrates that dual-language immersion is a more effective model of EL English education than the traditional “pull-out” model.²⁴
 - The length of time spent in a dual-language immersion program positively correlates with overall student academic performance for ELs as well as native English speakers.²⁵
 - After startup costs, research shows that maintaining a dual-language immersion program does not cost more than maintaining its traditional counterpart.²⁶
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Next Steps

The Georgia Department of Education (GADOE) announced the implementation of dual-language immersion programs for six elementary schools starting in the 2013-2014 school year.¹⁷ The GADOE needs to support the large-scale creation of these magnet dual-language immersion programs by offering startup grants and teacher development for public schools with large EL populations of a single language—which is typically Spanish—in Georgia.¹⁸

The framework of dual-language immersion already exists, as the GADOE offers professional development and curriculum models in Spanish, French, German, Portuguese, and Chinese.¹⁹ To establish proficiency, these programs should begin with kindergarten students so they can participate for at least five continuous years.²⁰ As this initial cohort of kindergarten students continues, the program will expand every year until grade 12.

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Suspending Suspension: An Inclusive Disciplinary Framework to Support Student Learning

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To address the negative consequences of suspension, New London Public Schools should replace exclusionary disciplinary policies with an inclusive disciplinary framework.

Nationally, over 3 million children received in- or out-of-school suspensions in the 2009–2010 academic year.¹ In Connecticut, the New London Public School (NLPS) district has the fifth highest suspension and expulsion rates for middle school and thirteenth for high school.² Incidents of suspension are associated with higher school dropout rates and an increased percentage of students in the school-to-prison pipeline.³ Such practices disproportionately affect males, Black and Latino students, and those who have disabilities.⁴ To address the negative effects of suspension and its disparate use on select groups of students, the NLPS should use its funding from the Federal Project Prevent Grant to eliminate current exclusionary methods in favor of inclusive disciplinary practices.

The NLPS should: (1) develop a peer council in consultation with teachers and school administrators to develop individualized plans for students' return to the classroom after non-violent school policy violations; (2) mandate that teachers receive inclusive classroom management training, while (3)

KEY FACTS

- In the 2009–2010, over 3 million students nationwide lost instructional time due to suspension.¹²
 - 60–65 percent of suspensions in NLPS were due to nonviolent school policy violations.¹³
 - In 2010, 17 percent of Black students were suspended, as compared to only 5 percent of white students, and special education students were suspended twice as often as their peers without special education needs.¹⁴
 - The School-Wide Information System (SWIS) allows educators to review all disciplinary data for a district, compare schools, and monitor individual students. The software is available through a nonprofit organization for only \$500 a year.¹⁵
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requiring that special education students face a manifestation hearing to determine if student misbehavior was disability-related in all suspension or expulsion cases; (4) shorten the maximum length of suspension from 10 to five days; and (5) adopt a School-Wide Information System (SWIS) to identify school discipline trends and develop more effective disciplinary strategies.

ANALYSIS

While inclusive disciplinary practices are successfully used in many Connecticut public schools, no district applies these five policies together; thus, they fail to systematically address factors contributing to suspension.⁵ Applying these policies comprehensively tackles suspension at the classroom, school, and district levels and will better support the 2,900 NLPS students.

At the classroom level, teacher referrals are one of the leading factors associated with high rates of suspension.⁶ Alternatively, using inclusive management practices to develop teacher–student relationships are associated with improved learning outcomes and more instructional time for at-risk students.⁷ At the school level, 60–65 percent of NLPS’s suspensions are for minor school policy violations (defined as disrespect, tardiness, and dress code violations).⁸ Peer mediation brings students back into the classroom, turning punitive policies into teachable moments. Additionally, manifestation hearings address disproportionate suspension rates for special education students and accommodate each student’s individualized education plan. Lastly, adjusting district-level policies to reduce the maximum length of suspension mitigates the negative impact of time away from school.⁹ To measure and respond to these policy changes at the classroom, school, and district levels, SWIS should be used to monitor disciplinary trends.¹⁰ All associated costs can be financed through the district’s Project Prevent Grant for school climate.¹¹

TALKING POINTS

- Suspension hurts both a student’s development and learning.¹⁶
- By definition, school policy violations are non-violent infractions and should be treated as teachable moments, not reasons for suspension.
- Some Connecticut schools have used inclusive strategies with success, but none have used all of the components of this framework.¹⁷

Next Steps

To galvanize stakeholders, a coalition should be formed with the New London Parent Advocates and the New London School Discipline Working Group, as both groups express concerns about this issue. This coalition should then present this proposal to the New London Board of Education. Pending approval by the board, a district committee would be responsible for creating a framework for inclusive disciplinary policy, and for hiring restorative justice specialists to train faculty, staff, and student leaders. Finally, NLPS could serve as a pilot to determine the success of this comprehensive framework to address school discipline at the classroom, school, and district levels.

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Reviving Our Roots: Reconnecting Teens to Agriculture

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The American farmer is growing older, the American agricultural system is unsustainable, and the American teenager is not interested in farming. High schools at the rural–urban interface should implement farmer development programs to address these nationwide issues while strengthening communities.

The Green Revolution of the 1940s–1960s focused U.S. agriculture on increasing yields by any means and technology necessary. Its legacy has encouraged farms to increasingly industrialize and consolidate, and it starkly disconnects farmers from consumers. Consolidation of farms means fewer large farms account for the majority of agricultural acreage, both a cause and consequence of fewer new farmers.¹

America’s largely urban youth grow up with no cultural attachment to farming, are agriculturally illiterate, and maintain misconceptions about agriculture.² This coincides with the urbanization of America, as 80.7 percent of the U.S. population currently lives in urbanized areas.³

The Rural–Urban Interface (RUI) is a confluence of ideas, people, and spaces, making it economically and geographically significant. Schools at the RUI should utilize it to restore intergenerational relationships, encourage teens to economically pursue agriculture, and foster potential for more sustainable forms of agriculture.

KEY FACTS

- The average age of the American farmer is currently 58 years old and continues to rise, and a quarter of today’s farmers will retire by 2030.¹¹
- People are abandoning rural areas for expanding metropolitan areas: 113 non-metro counties (accounting for roughly 5.9 million people) switched to metro between 2000 and 2010 in the United States.¹²
- Farms at the RUI can generate livelihoods and income for a variety of regional stakeholders.¹³ Proximity to dense population centers presents market potential.¹⁴

High schools in the Atlanta Rural–Urban Interface should implement young farmer development programs, providing both educational and apprenticeship opportunities. Students would learn about local agriculture, develop skills to grow food, and sell produce at local markets. Interactions with and lessons from local farmers and businesspeople will enhance students’ business savvy and farming knowledge while providing academic credit. Students will see how farming is interconnected, relating to practicable science, environmental sustainability, cooking, community building, and much more.

ANALYSIS

Studies suggest that developing policy to support agriculture at the RUI is warranted, and the “metropolitan farmer” is an increasing reality.⁴ A survey conducted by the National Young Farmer’s Coalition identified apprenticeships and local partnerships as the two most important factors that lead young farmers to join and continue the farming profession.⁵

The USDA recognizes the need to invest in new farmers. The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 designated loans specifically for beginning farmers, and the 2014 Farm Bill will directly invest \$444 million to beginning, veteran, and socially disadvantaged farmers over a 10-year period.⁶ These policies provide funding but fail to highlight the viability of farming as a career option for young people.

The USDA must recognize that farmers are motivated by social and cultural values, not singularly economic motivations.⁷ Such values are rooted in human relationships, which this policy fosters across geographical, generational, and economic gaps.

Historically, farms have passed down through families. Yet, concurrent push-pull forces of rural flight and urbanization leave farmers without heirs, which in turn decreases farmers’ emphasis on productivity.⁸ Interactions between first generation and multi-generation farmers would facilitate connections for future succession plans and transfer of knowledge that might otherwise be lost.

TALKING POINTS

- Development programs would address agricultural illiteracy and provide students with the skills to join an evolving agricultural sector.
 - Building sustainable regional food systems that exhibit environmental, social, health, and economic benefits can only begin with a new generation of farmers.
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A model Young Urban Farmer development program in Athens, GA demonstrates this potential; its students consistently start their own businesses, work for partnering nonprofits, and choose to pursue agriculture and nutrition-related disciplines in college.

Next Steps

This idea would be directed to the Atlanta Local Food Initiative (ALFI), a coalition of 91 organizations around the metro area committed to “build[ing] a local food system that enhances human health, promotes environmental renewal, promotes local economies, and links rural and urban communities.”⁹ ALFI’s previous five-year plan and related goals expired in 2013; this policy could become its future priority.

Communication with high schools would then be initiated, prioritizing particularly under-performing schools in Georgia, the majority of which lie in the metropolitan Atlanta area at the RUI.¹⁰

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