

# THE SCHOOLS ALL OUR CHILDREN DESERVE: THE PRINCIPLES THAT UNITE US

**We are parents and caregivers, students and community members. We are educators and school staff.** We have come together around a common commitment to public education. We believe that the only way to give every child the opportunity to pursue a rich and productive life, both individually and as a member of society, is through a system of publicly funded, equitable and democratically controlled public schools.

The principles below reflect our joint efforts to define our vision for public education and to distinguish our vision from that of the current corporate agenda. Now, more than ever, access to good public schools is a critical civil and human right. We are committed to working together to reclaim the promise of public education as our nation's gateway to democracy and racial and economic justice.

## **Public schools are *public* institutions.**

Our school districts should be guided by a commitment to provide *all* children with the opportunity to attend a quality public school in their community. The corporate model of school reform seeks to turn public schools over to private managers and encourages *competition*—as opposed to *collaboration*—between schools and teachers. These strategies take away the public's right to have a voice in their local schools,

and inherently create winners and losers among both schools and students. Our most vulnerable children become collateral damage in these reforms. We will not accept that.

### **Our voices matter.**

Those closest to the education process—teachers, administrators, school staff, students and their parents and community members—must have a voice in education policy and practice. Our schools and districts should be guided by *them*, not by corporate executives, entrepreneurs or philanthropists. Top-down reform doesn't address the real needs of schools or students.

### **Strong public schools create strong communities.**

Schools are community institutions as well as centers of learning. While education alone cannot eradicate poverty, schools can help to coordinate the supports and services their students and families need to thrive. Corporate reform strategies ignore the challenges that students bring with them to school each day, and view schools as separate and autonomous from the communities in which they sit.

### **Assessments should be used to improve instruction.**

Assessments are critical tools to guide teachers in improving their lesson plans and framing their instruction to meet the needs of individual students. We support accountability. But standardized assessments are *misused* when teachers are fired, schools are closed and students are penalized based on a single set of scores. Excessive high-stakes testing takes away valuable instructional time and narrows the curriculum—with the greatest impact on our most vulnerable students.

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## **Quality teaching must be delivered by committed, respected and supported educators.**

Today's corporate reformers have launched a war on teachers. We believe that teachers should be honored. Teaching is a career, not a temporary stop on the way to one. Our teachers should be well-trained and supported. They should be given the opportunity to assume leadership roles in their schools. Highly qualified teachers and school staff are our schools' greatest assets. Let's treat them that way.

## **Schools must be welcoming and respectful places for all.**

Schools should be welcoming and inclusive. Students, parents, educators and community residents should feel that their cultures and contributions are respected and valued. Schools that push out the most vulnerable students and treat parents as intruders cannot succeed in creating a strong learning environment. Respectful schools are better places to both work and learn.

## **Our schools must be fully funded for success and equity.**

More than 50 years ago, in *Brown v. Board of Education*, the U.S. Supreme Court acknowledged that African-American students were being denied their constitutional right to an integrated and equitable public education. We have not come far enough. Today our schools remain segregated and unequal. When we shortchange some students, we shortchange our nation as a whole. It is time to fund public schools for success and equity, for we are destined to hand off the future of our nation to all our young people.

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## A Call to Action

Our schools belong to all of us: the students who learn in them, the parents who support them, the educators and staff who work in them and the communities that they anchor. No longer will we allow ourselves to be divided. We have developed these principles and are committed to working together to achieve the policies and practices that they represent. Corporate-style reforms that disregard our voices, and attempt to impose a system of winners and losers, must end. None of our children deserve to be collateral damage.

We call on our communities, and commit the power of the organizations that we represent, to pursue these principles in our schools, districts and states. Together, we will work nationally to make this vision of public education a reality.

